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Climate change and the convergence between ENGOs and business: on the loss of utopian energies

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Abstract

The conflicts permeating the environmental debate since the 1960s mainly involve two actors: multinational companies and international environmental organizations (ENGOs). Today, there are significant signs that the antagonism is ending when it comes to co-operation, strategy, and organization. We argue that the convergence is no longer limited to specific joint projects, but is also prevalent at the idea and policy levels. This is an analysis of the expression of this convergence in some influential business and ENGO policy documents focusing on climate change and future energy systems. The study indicates that both corporate and ENGO actors have begun describing the most alarming environmental problems in similar terms, articulating the same goals and recommending the same solutions; such convergence offers considerable advantages in efforts to counteract climate change. The paper ends by reflecting on some political implications of the policy convergence; for example, conflicts of interest that arise when concrete action becomes necessary, declining citizen trust in ENGOs, risk of intellectually impoverished environmental and energy debates, and loss of alternate visions and values.

Keywords

ENGO, BINGO, oil industry, climate change, organizational environmental discourse

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, when environmental issues became the subject of explicit policy making, they have been characterized by urgency: acidification, eutrophication, and chemical contamination all demanded quick solutions to save endangered lakes, forests, and species. Laws and regulatory frameworks were amended to control toxic emissions and leakage, and certain chemicals were banned. Despite these result-driven responses, environmental issues have, according to German sociologist Ulrich Beck, the potential to induce deeper reflection on and problematization of modern industrial society. According to Beck's perspective, environmental issues have been a gift because they prompted the critical re-evaluation of contemporary society's relationships with nature, power, and political structures. Wisely dealt with, environmental problems might generate utopian energies that could constitute the foundation of the reflexive modernization and re-invention of the political beyond modern, industrial society's path-dependent technocracy, economic determinism, and pragmatism (Beck, 1997). This may be exemplified by the visions of a radically new society that emerged when the development of nuclear power was criticized in the 1970s. As an alternative to the

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technocratic, centralized, closely monitored, and resource-wasting nuclear society, an ideal characterized by ecological equilibrium, lay influence, decentralization, and zero growth was advocated. Amory Lovins, E. F. Schumacher, and other advocates of a lower-energy economy intimately linked renewable energy sources with a completely different society that was socially, environmentally, economically, and politically sound. In the eyes of these environmental pioneers, renewables definitely carried utopian qualities and promises of fundamental change (Anshelm, 2000).

The conflicts between divergent societal ideals that have permeated environmental debate since the 1960s have largely been dominated by two polarized actors: multinational companies (especially in the energy sector) and international environmental organizations (ENGOS). ENGOS have concentrated on criticizing environmental degradation and the over-exploitation of nature, both seen as closely related to industrial production and the profit orientation. Up to the 1990s, with few exceptions, business rejected such criticism and instead claimed that economic growth was a prerequisite for successfully handling environmental problems. Both ENGO and business actors have changed in several respects over time.

Previous research has uncovered significant signs of the easing of this antagonism. Collaborations and partnerships between NGOs and business have emerged and a shared belief has co-evolved, a belief in the importance of market-based solutions to environmental problems. This convergence, which several researchers have substantiated, indicates a new phase in the relationship between NGOs and business. NGOs have lent ethical and environmental credibility to specific joint projects, while businesses have financed the projects. NGOs and businesses have initiated joint projects because they *both* see them as supporting their official goals, even though these goals have been disparate: a perceived win-win situation (Bendell, 2000).

An event that attracted considerable attention and was key in changing strategies and perspectives in large co-operative projects was the 1995 conflict concerning Shell's plans to dump the old oil platform Brent Spar in the North Sea. These plans were heavily criticized by Greenpeace; it seemed, according to environmental researcher Peter J. Newell, as though two tribes espousing diametrically opposite ideas and values were in open conflict. The conflict had devastating consequences for Shell's international reputation, and the company became the target of extensive boycotts. As a result, Shell endeavoured to rebuild its reputation by officially accepting the principle of sustainable development. This marked a turning point for multinational corporations and, in the ensuing years, several of them declared their intentions to base their business on ecological concern. The Brent Spar conflict had shown that the price of neglecting environmental concern was nearly insurmountable. From now on, Shell and British Petroleum (BP) were among those corporations claiming to be forerunners in the quest for business resting on a win-win relationship between ecological concern and profits (Newell, 2000). Also van den Hove et al (2002) and Pulver (2007) have shown in their analysis of the climate policy of the oil industry that Shell and BP were among the first major oil companies to adopt a proactive strategy.

The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) 2002 report, *The 21st Century NGO*, which comprehensively investigates the NGO community, acknowledges the recent convergence between business and NGOs. The changes are described as resulting in "seismic shifts" in, among other matters, how NGOs operate and convictions about suitable strategies. As late as 1998, an earlier version of the study stated that North American NGOs commonly believed that their relationships with businesses were "nonexistent" or even "antagonistic".

These UNEP studies focused on the general level and covered approximately 200 NGOs of various sizes and geographical or interest areas. Furthermore, UNEP mainly scrutinized the forms of co-operation, strategies, accountability, and governance agendas of NGOs themselves (SustainAbility, 2003). The present paper argues that the convergence between large multinational businesses and NGOs is no longer limited to specific joint projects, but is also prevalent at the general policy level.

1.2 Aim, methodology, and material

This paper analyses the convergence between ENGOs and business as expressed in selected influential policy documents dealing with climate change and the configuration of future energy systems. We do not investigate the forms of co-operation and strategies, for example, expressed in the UNEP study, but instead the problematization, goal formulation, and recommended measures emphasized by three leading international ENGOs and two multinational oil companies. We argue that the dominance of climate change in environmental politics in the late twentieth century and the apocalyptic aura in which it is embedded has fostered the conceptual convergence. We also tentatively discuss the possible consequences of this convergence. However, we do not aim to account for the intentions or causes of the convergence; this would constitute an intentional fallacy. We do not have access to secluded board rooms and it would be a mistake to reconstruct the organizations' intentions by interpreting their policy documents and concluding that the convergence is a result of profit optimization, the technocratization of ENGOs, and increased corporate responsibility or something else. To some extent, these issues have been addressed by previous research (Bendell, 2000; SustainAbility, 2003).

This will be done by comparing and analysing the explicit recommendations of three ENGOs and two multinational oil companies on how climate change should be dealt with and how energy supplies should be secured in coming decades. Unlike the UNEP study, this paper limits itself to a few large international ENGOs influential in climate change policy. Furthermore, potential explanations of this convergence will be discussed, as well as possibilities and problems to which they may give rise. We have chosen to analyse documents assembled by organizations representing radically different interests and that previously stood in opposition to each other. Moreover, the chosen organizations are among the most well established, influential, and globally leading organizations of their type. The studied ENGOs have repeatedly participated as among the few, and occasionally only, civil society representatives in important international political negotiations and policy processes dealing with energy and climate. The two oil companies are pioneers in several respects, not least because of their commitment to climate change issues and close co-operation with ENGOs, hence they were not chosen because they are considered as being representative for the industry (van den Hove et al, 2002; Pulver, 2007). Despite previous research into the radical shift of the environmental movement, the ENGOs' position as the *counterparts* to business is seldom publicly disputed, and public trust in ENGOs is still significantly higher than trust in companies, mass media, and governmental organizations (SustainAbility, 2003).

The documents, scenarios, and policy declarations analysed have been assembled by Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth (FoE), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Shell, and BP. The texts were chosen because they are extensive or are presented as important by the organizations themselves. We used comparative text analysis as our approach to the empirical material. Important and central messages in the individual texts were identified and related to

messages in the other texts. These texts are expressions of the public discourses at the organization's central levels. The texts were also analysed in light of general patterns to investigate inconsistencies, similarities, and differences in the logic of argumentation. The aim is to compare the problem formulations, aims, and recommendations presented in the texts, as well as ideas about society, nature, technology, and politics. Similarities and differences between recommendations for dealing with and understanding climate change are paid extra attention.

We must emphasize that we can only comment on the *ideas* found in the examined texts. We have not researched the organizations' actual behaviour concerning the issues of interest, nor have we investigated conflicts or heterogeneity within the organizations. Some of the organizations, such as FoE, have a flat organizational structure and statements opposing those identified here may be found. Nevertheless, the analysed texts are either officially supported or are central to the investigated organizations. A consequence of selecting a limited number of texts is that we cannot claim that the detected patterns are representative of ENGOs and business in general. Instead, the in-depth analysis of the texts lets us pose significant questions, illustrate some striking and profound similarities, and reflect on the problems the convergence raises in terms of policy issues. Furthermore, our empirical focus allows for analysing the public discourse at an organizational level only. Investigating whether or not the convergence is prevalent in decentralised levels and has implications for political decisions and practical implementations is beyond the scope of this paper. This would require a different empirical material and other methodological approaches, such as case studies or participatory research.

1.3 Two symbolic events: a background

Before we begin analysing the specific documents, we will first highlight two symbolic events that, at a general level, illustrate the convergence later analysed in detail. This is one way to gain insight into the historical context of the textual analysis.

The first event occurred in 2002 in Johannesburg at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. At the Summit, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD, which included both Shell and BP as key members) and Greenpeace appeared together at a plenary session about climate change. Together, the two organizations also called attention to a joint meeting with media. Since 1992, WBCSD had been attempting to convince multinational businesses to integrate the idea of sustainable development into their business strategies, explicitly justifying this by claiming that environmental issues were far too important to be left to politicians. WBCSD had rapidly become one of the most influential business international non-governmental organizations (BINGOs) and, according to its own account of its history, had been able to overcome reluctance to embrace pervasive environmental concerns in many multinational businesses. Despite this record, WBCSD views its Johannesburg appearance with Greenpeace and their joint climate change declarations as a peak in its history. Identifying common interests and building a bridge to one of the most aggressive and business-critical ENGOs in the world are described as remarkable successes. That fact that both organizations were heavily criticized within their communities for their actions was interpreted by WBCSD as indicating how revolutionary, symbolic, and important the event was. A boundary had been crossed, which would enable pragmatic co-operation in the future (Carpenter Sprungli, 2005; Timberlake, 2006).

The other illuminating event occurred in 1997 in the Climate Action Network (CAN), a worldwide network of 340 NGOs focusing on climate change issues. CAN's strategy is largely determined by Greenpeace, FoE, and WWF, and the organization has actively tried to influence international climate negotiations. At the beginning of the 1990s, the ENGO Environmental Defense, a CAN founder, began to work for the implementation of an emissions trading system. The other large organizations in CAN opposed this, arguing that emissions trading ought to be a limited complement to other measures. They feared that widespread emissions trading might lead to a situation where nations refrained from making substantial efforts to reduce emissions within their borders and instead bought themselves "dispensations". The market orientation that Environmental Defense represented led to the organization's withdrawal from CAN. Instead, it entered into collaboration with BP concerning emissions trading. This collaboration developed into the Partnership for Climate Action, a consortium of ten large businesses, among them Shell, that all claimed to be reducing greenhouse gas emissions from their facilities (Pulver, 2004).

Both events illustrate the increased collaboration and convergence between large businesses and ENGOs, phenomena related to the mutually identified need to take measures against climate change. The following section will analyse expressions of this convergence in policy documents written by Greenpeace, FoE, WWF, Shell, and BP.

2. Three environmental organizations and the need for measures against climate change

2.1 Greenpeace

At the beginning of 2007, Greenpeace together with European Energy Council published a scenario concerning the future global use of energy (Aubrey, 2007). This scenario, entitled *Energy [r]evolution*, covers the period from the time of publication until 2050. Its cornerstone is that powerful measures to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be taken immediately to stop global warming. The scenario declares that, while there is broad consensus on the need for changed energy use worldwide, there are still many different opinions about how this should be done. The suggestions offered by Greenpeace involve considerable investments in established renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency, combined heat and power (CHP) production, and phasing out fossil fuels. Nuclear power and technologies for carbon dioxide capture from coal power plant flue gases and subsequent geological storage (i.e., carbon capture and storage – CCS) are not considered appropriate alternatives, since they entail large risks and other uncertainties. It is stressed that the suggested investments will prove economically viable in the long term. Overall, the scenario emphasizes that it is technology that must change and develop, not society. This may be exemplified by the following statement:

Industrialised countries, which currently use energy in the most inefficient way, can reduce their consumption drastically without the loss of either housing comfort or information and entertainment electronics (Aubrey, 2007:18).

Henceforth, economic growth ought to be detached from fossil fuel use; growth is expected to slow gradually all over the world, but may continue and must rest on renewables. That

Greenpeace has put the letter “r” within brackets in the title of the scenario is consistent, since revolutionary change, according to the presented analysis, is neither necessary nor desirable.

However, to bring about the necessary technological changes, some political measures must be taken. All subsidies for fossil fuels and nuclear energy must stop. The external costs of these energy sources, for example, in terms of environmental damage, must be internalized. Legally binding goals for the development of renewables must be formulated. Businesses that invest in renewables need to be guaranteed stable profits. Furthermore, Greenpeace states that renewable energy must be given absolute precedence in electricity distribution networks. Finally, strict energy efficiency standards for all forms of energy consuming devices, buildings, and vehicles are advocated. A long-range objective presented in the scenario is that global energy consumption should be stabilized and not allowed to increase further over the next two decades. To make this objective achievable, a set of technological solutions presupposing a belief in the rationality of energy supply systems is suggested. Through optimization, increased efficiency, and the reformation of regulatory frameworks, technologies for the grand-scale supply of renewable energy are to be enabled to supersede environmentally unsound technologies. The whole scenario is permeated by a deep optimism concerning technology and a belief in rational planning, at the same time as market mechanisms are envisaged to give preference to what is comprehended as the most viable alternatives.

The emphasis on energy supply is very strong, although the significance of energy efficiency is mentioned several times. The old environmentally unsound energy supply should be replaced by a more rational, efficient, environmentally sound, and progressive energy supply. All this of course presupposes technologies that can exploit renewable energy sources. The enormous potential of solar power, wind power, biomass for heat and power production, and several other renewables together with increased energy efficiency is, it is argued, able to satisfy half of the energy needs of a global human population estimated to be almost nine billion by 2050. To illustrate the great potential of renewables, the scenario stresses that the sunlight reaching the earth’s surface is enough to provide 2850 times as much energy as is consumed globally today, that global wind resources can provide more electricity than humanity’s entire power demand, and that burning biomass can satisfy heat and power needs in many places all over the world. Several technological systems for exploiting these resources most efficiently are discussed in the scenario and compared with each other. On top of this, energy efficiency measures are also said to have “enormous potential”, especially in the household and transport sectors. A large part of the scenario is used to support these statements, with the help of technical descriptions, calculations, tables, diagrams, and explicit examples (Aubrey, 2007).

In conclusion, Greenpeace’s energy scenario strongly emphasizes solutions, supply issues, and technical alternatives that guarantee that energy demand can be met. Nothing indicates the necessity of any profound changes in social organization, our relationship with nature, or established ways of life. On the contrary, the main message is that it is possible to mitigate climate change with the help of existing technologies, without sacrificing comfort or living standards. The changes of the energy system will also be profitable and promote innovations and business, provided external costs are internalized.

2.2 Friends of the Earth

In March 2006, FoE published a policy document with similar content, presenting a scenario for the electricity sector under the title *A bright future* (Webster and Canzi, 2006). The scenario aims to show that the United Kingdom could achieve ambitious political goals concerning climate change while satisfying the nation's energy demand, without resorting to new nuclear energy. The proposed solutions were renewables, but FoE did not want to reject CCS completely. Unlike Greenpeace, FoE argued that fossil fuel generation plants should be made ready for CCS as an "insurance policy", in case any of the renewable energy technologies do not develop as assumed. Above all, however, the enormous unexploited potentials of renewable sources of electricity and of energy efficiency technologies were emphasized. These potentials were, as in the Greenpeace scenario, presented as an immensely important business opportunity for energy companies, due to opportunities to develop and export the needed technologies. In line with this FoE stated:

The aim of this modelling exercise was to create realistic and transparent scenarios for future development of the energy sector, using credible industry assumptions concerning the development of renewable technologies and the impact of policy on current major electricity generation methods (Webster and Canzi, 2006:3).

FoE's recommendations to politicians, in line with their scenarios, implied that investments in different kinds of renewables must increase considerably, that CHP production must be expanded, that old coal-fired power plants should be closed and upgraded new fossil fuel power plants be made ready for CCS, that electricity production using biomass and biogas ought to be promoted, and finally, that measures for improving energy-efficiency in industry, the retail sector, and households should be implemented (Webster and Canzi, 2006).

It is noteworthy that Greenpeace and FoE, long deemed aggressive and confrontational ENGOs, choose in their scenarios a perspective strictly within the dominant paradigm and immanent system. The critical and system-transcendent perspective that had characterized the two organizations since the early 1970s has been left out. As they now present the problem, all parties concerned will gain both economically and ecologically from changing the energy system. The future that FoE foresees is "bright", both symbolically (i.e., prosperous) and literally (i.e., illuminated). The image of the good society is closely linked to secure electricity supply and the two meanings of the word "bright" are inseparable. It is noteworthy that the formerly so confrontational ENGOs refrain from applying a perspective of conflict when it comes to taking stands on measures to stop climate change. As climate change and solutions to the problem are presented in their scenarios and policy documents, all potential conflicts of interest, antagonism over goals, divergent opinions, and disputes over interpretations have been completely excluded. Neither within nor between countries do there seem to be any risks of conflict. All concerned parties seem to be united by the all-pervading problem.

This is remarkable considering that the two ENGOs have historically been highly critical of large corporations, especially in the energy sector, and of governments for not taking environmental issues seriously enough and for prioritizing short-sighted economic gain. The legitimacy of the two ENGOs has largely rested on precisely this critical approach. Accordingly, it is completely out of the question that the lack of conflict dimensions in the scenarios could have resulted from neglect or ignorance of the conflicting interests that permeate climate politics. Instead, the perspective of uniform consensus must be comprehended as an expression of a well-thought-out strategy and as a part of a rhetoric

intended to garner as much support as possible for the measures necessary to address energy and climate politics.

Not to raise questions of radical social change, not to problematize the view of nature on which established energy consumption rests, not to question models of linear growth or the profit motives of the energy companies, and not to point out how future generations or the global south are affected by the ecological footprints of the rich countries today, while focusing solely on the shift to alternative technology, is a way for the both ENGOs to limit the debate on energy policy and climate change to areas where the possibilities of winning support and establishing consensus are greatest. The scenarios and their recommendations are permeated with pragmatism and emphasize results. Previously, debate on alternative technology in the energy sector was intimately related to visions of an alternative society; that is no longer the case. The visions of an alternative society were characterised by the emphasis on: small-scale solutions, local democracy, laypeople's participation, zero-growth, adherence to the intrinsic values of nature, questioning over-consumption in the developed world and criticizing the over-exploitation of natural resources. Such issues appear to have deliberately been left out.

We believe that the alarming urgency of the threat of climate change explains this new pragmatism. Facing an environmental menace of apocalyptic dimensions, the practical results (i.e., decreased GHG emissions) become of paramount importance, together with developing the technologies for attaining them. That less urgent environmental issues, conflicts of interest, and differing basic values concerning society and nature should be put aside in the present situation seems appropriate and, as many would argue, necessary. Whether this strategy will prove productive in the long run and lead to the intended results, however, is uncertain. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the intentional omission of all possible conflicts of interest or disagreements is completely ignored in the two ENGOs' scenarios and policy documents.

2.3 WWF

Another influential ENGO that emphasizes consensus, to an even greater extent than does Greenpeace or FoE, is WWF. WWF claims to be one of the first ENGOs that recognized the "enormous dangers" of climate change and that tried to find lasting solutions to the problems. WWF has, like Greenpeace and FoE, dedicated considerable effort to convincing national governments to reduce GHG emissions and invest in renewables. Concerning collaboration with multinational businesses, WWF has been far more active than the other studied ENGOs.

Since 1998, WWF has collaborated with "farsighted" businesses to help them to reduce their emissions and develop products that use less energy. Eighteen multinational businesses have joined WWF's Climate Savers Programme and accepted the standards formulated by the organization. According to WWF, these businesses are demonstrating that considerable emission reductions are compatible with economic growth and increasing profits. WWF underlines that it is necessary to transform global businesses into a force in service of sustainable development, and has accordingly "teamed up" with multinationals such as Canon, Nokia, and Coca Cola. A conviction that permeates this collaboration is that the rich countries in the global north can shrink their ecological footprints through using renewables, without giving up the advantages of a "modern, mobile lifestyle". The technologies that may solve the problems of climate change are said to be already existing and functioning. WWF mentions the same technologies as do Greenpeace and FoE; unlike the former organization,

but like the latter, WWF recommends that CCS be developed as a “back-up technology” (Rietbergen, 2008).

As part of their work against climate change, in 2004, WWF invited power companies to take part in the Power Switch! campaign. According to WWF, the electricity sector produces 37% of global carbon dioxide emissions, so the power industry must substantially reduce its contribution to global warming within two decades. Power companies that wanted to participate in the campaign undertook to switch to CHP production, invest in consumer use of energy efficient equipment, increase their share of renewables to at least 20% within a decade, support policies to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, increase the use of renewables, and, finally, not invest in new coal power plants or coal mining. The recommendations were similar to those of Greenpeace and FoE. WWF’s energy scenario, which was the foundation for Power Switch!, claimed that the recommended measures were highly efficient. It said that by 2020, EU power companies would be able to reduce their carbon emissions by 61% compared with business as usual and, moreover, that the “achievement of a carbon neutral power sector” was considered possible in the EU by 2040 if the recommended measures were taken (Harmelink, et al., 2004).

Notably, WWF’s campaign in no way implied changes in political power relations, as the name Power Switch! might indicate, but solely changes in power production technologies. WWF consequently argues that it is crucial to focus on the possibilities of new technology, rather than just seeing climate change in relation to problems and risks in the business world. According to WWF, the emphasis on problems and risks that has pervaded the environmental debate has meant that businesses have been unable to “see environmental questions as part of core business”; WWF now sees great prospects to transform climate change into business opportunities. Businesses must actively respond to climate change, making it a driving force for innovation and profit. From WWF’s perspective, the ICT sector has a special opportunity and responsibility to play a leading role in this respect, and could well become a winner “in a low-carbon economy”. There are several areas of potential application, and WWF points out some of them, for example, lighting and heating control, and transportation and production planning. However, WWF claims that every company that recognizes the necessity of reducing carbon dioxide emissions has the opportunity to be a winner. These companies will not only have the opportunity to work together with political decision makers to create the rules that will shape future market conditions, but will also be able to attract employees anxious to be part of the solution rather than the problem (Pamlin and Pålman, 2008a; Pamlin and Pålman, 2008b).

If Greenpeace and FoE advocate a consensus perspective that excludes conflict, WWF goes several steps further and expresses the conviction that collaboration between politicians, ENGOs, and companies is *necessary* to bring about real change. While Greenpeace and FoE stress the need for political regulation and state investments as key measures to make change happen, WWF places considerably more trust in market mechanisms. These standpoints are not irreconcilable, but they do put different weights on different measures. According to WWF, large reductions of carbon dioxide emissions will first be possible when multinational companies recognize that measures benefiting the climate also promote business. In line with this view, the organization’s policy documents do not emphasize conflicts of interest, different goals, disagreement, or diverging basic values. Instead, any questions that could lead the reader’s thoughts in such directions are avoided, at the same time as only solutions that presuppose consensus are presented.

3. Two oil companies and their climate policies

In 2005, WBCSD, in which Shell and BP are key members, published an overview of various ways to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, entitled *Pathways to 2050: Energy and Climate Change*. Later, the vice president, Odd Gullberg, made several important statements, mirroring the organization's policy. He declared that sustainable development and social responsibility were profitable for multinational companies and that environmental factors ought to be considered for the sake of long-term profitability. According to Gullberg, several of the most famous multinationals in the world, including BP and Adidas, had come to understand this. These companies had for some years been involved in dialogue with what were regarded as "constructive and engaged NGOs", to deepen their knowledge of environmental issues, develop strategies, and establish priorities. Gullberg claimed that interest in developing action-oriented partnerships with NGOs was steadily increasing among multinational companies. His statements were well in line with what WWF had suggested, and their shared opinion was that co-operation was necessary in order to manage the challenges facing the global community. Different actors had different competencies, but Gullberg stated that none of them could handle the threat of climate change by itself: multinational companies had the capacity but lacked democratic mandate and trust; governments had the required mandate, but were not powerful enough; finally, NGOs had the trust, but no democratic mandate and insufficient resources. Accordingly, the solution was co-operation where the different actors complemented each other, and according to Gullberg, this was increasingly taking place with WBCSD support. However, Gullberg argued that it was crucial that greater clarity and consensus be reached concerning the role of multinational companies in managing global environmental questions, especially climate change (Carpenter Sprungli, 2005, Gullberg, 2008).

Since the mid 1990s, multinational companies have increasingly been taking the path recommended by Gullberg. The following section will analyse the officially declared and sanctioned opinions of two major oil companies, Shell and BP, on measures for managing climate change. Our intention is to compare their policy documents with the previously analysed policy recommendations of Greenpeace, FoE, and WWF.

3.1 Shell

In 2008, Shell published two extensive and important documents, *Responsible Energy: The Shell Sustainability Report 2007* and *Shell Energy Scenarios to 2050*. The former describes how, since 1997, the company has striven to satisfy its energy needs so as to take environmental issues into consideration. A point of departure for this work is that there is no incongruity between long-range profitability and sustainable development. On the contrary, Shell declares that it is necessary for the company to exploit the business opportunities that the call for sustainable development creates. Due to the importance of changing energy systems, Shell claims:

we have stepped up our advocacy effort with governments. Advocacy for some may suggest companies lacking change or advancing their own narrow interests. But we are calling for *change*, lending our expertise and working cooperatively with governments, companies and other partners [ENGOS] in society (Shell, 2008a:1).

Shell's declared aim is to participate actively in developing sustainable energy systems of the future. As part of this, the company has formulated scenarios for alternative futures, the one Shell advocates simply being called "Blueprint". In this scenario, "a global policy framework" is developed that implies, among other matters, the existence of a global price on carbon dioxide emissions. It is assumed that such a measure will stimulate innovation and energy efficiency, while limiting the global warming consequences of increased energy demand. In "Blueprint", wind and solar power increase considerably after the year 2030, while CCS plays a major role starting in 2050. In the transport sector, the increase of second-generation biofuels is substantial, while highly efficient electrical vehicles will reduce the demand for liquid fuels after 2030.

Shell's point of departure is that the evidence for anthropogenic global warming is convincing enough for the company to build its long-range business strategy on the assumption that the problem must be managed. According to Shell, four different measures are of special importance. First, the company must convince policy makers to promptly establish binding rules for carbon dioxide emissions and an efficient pricing mechanism for these emissions, to guarantee no distortion of competition. Second, it is important that second-generation biofuels be developed through the company's increased investments. Third, the company must strengthen its capacity to implement CCS on a grand scale within a decade. Fourth, Shell must generate electricity while emitting less carbon dioxide, through investments in production that enables cleaner combustion of natural gas and in methods for lowering the costs of renewables.

Shell claims to be the only oil company that intends to lower its total GHG emissions, but does not believe in voluntariness. That is why the company calls for state regulation to promote energy efficiency and energy sources with low carbon dioxide emissions. Notably, the company argues that market mechanisms alone cannot manage climate change and emphasizes its willingness to co-operate with companies, governments, and NGOs.

If carbon dioxide emissions are to be reduced through increased electrification, Shell believes this will necessitate considerable growth in the power sector. The company stated that at least three times more electricity will be needed in 2050 than in 2007. Growth of such magnitude will require large investments in renewables, which the company expects to produce 60% of electrical power by 2050. Much of this electricity is expected to come from wind and solar power; accordingly, Shell declares its intention to use considerable resources to make them commercially competitive. However, Shell argues that achieving the necessary electricity production will require vigorous efforts to develop CCS and the cleaner combustion of natural gas. If this is not done, it will be impossible to reach the political goals connected with climate change. Even transportation demand, according to Shell, will increase considerably, perhaps doubling between 2007 and 2050. Considering the large proportion of carbon dioxide emissions originating from transportation, it is crucial to develop transportation fuels that emit substantially less carbon dioxide than those used today. Shell's strategy is thus to become the world leader when it comes to second-generation biofuels (Shell, 2008a; Shell, 2008b).

To conclude, Shell argues that electricity consumption and transportation will increase along with world population. The two Shell scenarios implicitly accept the inevitability of growth: there is no questioning of social structures, consumption patterns, or society as a whole. Solutions that do not presuppose expansion within prevailing social and economic structures appear out of the question. Technology will develop according to the logic of the market and with the help of politics. Political regulations and ENGO opinions are important as pertains to

what technology is allowed to develop; however, their influence is restricted to the choice of technology. Obviously, Shell does not take into explicit consideration in the text that nature has limits or that natural resources are finite. The scenarios do not discuss natural catastrophes or the exhaustion of natural resources that could force change. That climate change is controllable according to an instrumental rationality and that nothing unexpected will occur are taken for granted in all the opinions and suggestions the company makes. However, on several aspects of energy policy and climate change, there is a remarkable and explicit congruity between the Shell and the ENGO scenarios and policy documents. The proposed energy policy measures are similar, as are their assumed profitability. One difference is that Shell puts much more emphasis on increasing future demand for electricity. The energy alternatives for the future, however, are essentially the same, though the views on CCS constitute an important exception: Shell declares that the technology is absolutely indispensable in the long run, FoE and WWF admit that CCS needs to be developed as a complement, while Greenpeace strictly rejects it, since they find it too hazardous. However, the key difference, which also explains the diverging opinions concerning the need for CCS, concerns the estimated energy demand in 2050, not the production methods. While the ENGOs declare it is possible to stabilize energy consumption at the present level by 2050, Shell assumes a large increase in electricity consumption and energy used for transportation. Despite this, there is an overwhelming congruity in the views on technological development and political regulation.

3.2 BP

In 1997, BP, another of the most influential oil companies in the world, also declared its conclusion that the possibility of anthropogenic climate change was serious enough to enforce measures for reducing carbon dioxide emissions (Browne, 2007). Ten years later, BP gave an account of the measures implemented and of its plans for the future in its *Sustainability Report 2007*. The new strategy of the company was summarized in the Introduction of the report:

Our aim is not to abandon fossil fuels, but to produce and use them more efficiently, while scaling up and investing significant resources in the new technologies we need for the transition to a low-carbon future. This is what we mean by going “beyond petroleum” (Browne, 2007:1).

BP mainly focuses on informing the public about its own projects and strategies. Unlike Shell, the company does not formulate scenarios in order to influence other companies, politicians, and NGOs. As early as the end of the 1990s, BP implemented a program for reducing its GHG emissions by 10% through increased efficiency of internal processes and production methods. In 2007, it was still important for the company to draw attention to its great ambitions when it came to stopping leakage, reducing flaring, and reducing fuel consumption in shipping, to demonstrate its willingness to produce ongoing emission reductions. These operations have taken place in close co-operation with NGOs at the local and global levels. The NGOs have acted as consultants in specific projects or in relation to specific issues, such as climate change. As the group Chief Executive Tony Hayward declared: “we value partnership with governments, NGOs and others” (Browne, 2007: 1).

BP embraces the precautionary principle and, in its *Sustainability Report 2007*, emphasizes above all the measures taken in product development to counteract climate change. BP Alternative Energy is presented as a business operation that contains considerable investments

in wind power, solar power, hydrogen, CCS, and biofuels. The declared intention is both to foster public opinion favouring decreased GHG emissions and to provide “low-carbon energy”.

According to BP, the overarching goal must be to stabilize GHG emissions through long-range reductions: stabilization at a sustainable level requires that global emissions peak within ten years and be reduced by 50% by the year 2050 compared with present levels. To reach this goal, it is necessary both to make established technologies more efficient and to develop new “low-carbon technologies”. The explicit message is that companies and governments must co-operate to create guidelines and regulations that contribute to economic growth and energy security, while guaranteeing considerable emission reductions. BP’s declared mission is to optimize its internal energy efficiency, create “low-carbon products”, and contribute to informed energy debate. In this context, BP advocates emissions trading “*to enable the economies to adjust to a carbon-constrained world*” (BP, 2008).

BP diverges from Shell in putting so much effort into accounting for its activities in all relevant areas. Investments in wind power or biofuels, for example, are reported in exact sums, while the emission reductions are shown in per cent each year. While Shell is trying to create credibility through presenting and advocating scenarios, to show how the world could be saved from the approaching climate change, BP tries to gain trust by showing in detail how it takes responsibility for its own operations, reaches its emissions targets, and contributes to transforming the energy system through specific projects. Unlike Shell, BP does not formulate scenarios and the company’s discussions of problems concerning global policy issues are relatively modest. Hence, BP does not take a stand on whether CCS and nuclear power are preferable alternatives, or settle the pace at which the use of renewables must increase. Despite these striking differences, the studied companies and ENGOS all advocate the very same technological, legal, and commercial approaches to managing climate change. Moreover, both BP and Shell try to strengthen their trustworthiness by emphasizing that they co-operate with ENGOS. Like the ENGOS, both oil companies refrain from mentioning in their policy documents that there could exist conflicts of interest, opposing goals, differing opinions, and incompatible basic values; absolute consensus is simply assumed. It is remarkable that in some respects there appear to be greater similarities between how Shell and the ENGOS address the threat of climate change in their policy documents than between the two oil companies’ documents. This clearly illustrates the convergence that permeates the official standpoints of these actors.

4. The loss of utopian energies: a concluding discussion

Although the empirical material analysed here is limited, the pattern detected indicates that the increasing dominance of climate change issues in the environmental debate has led to convergence. Actors that at an earlier stage espoused opposing opinions and understandings have now begun to describe the most alarming environmental problem in similar terms, to articulate the same goals, and to recommend the same solutions. The convergence appears despite the fact that climate change is more complicated and open to more different interpretations than many of the problems that triggered previous environmental controversies. Accordingly, climate change hypothetically ought to have led to several and, in many ways, fundamentally different solutions. This, however, is not so. Despite our limited empirical material, and in light of our analysis and previous research into co-operation

between business and NGOs, if we assume that convergence characterizes the problem descriptions and recommended solutions in climate policy, some important questions appear.

Before turning to these questions, however, we must state that the convergence means some immediate and considerable advantages in efforts to counteract climate change. The possibility of taking strong and urgent action definitely increases if the most influential actors – i.e., governments, multinationals, and ENGOS – can agree on common goals and co-operate to achieve them. An actor might even, like WBCSD, like to claim that such agreement is an absolute precondition for bringing climate change under control. The obvious advantages of the convergence should certainly not be underestimated, and UNEP's conclusions present no alternatives to it. Alternatives are accordingly neither possible nor desirable. It is only the market that provides solutions and leads to win-win situations. Hence, NGOs must conform to the market logic and develop their "business models", "branding", and "market intelligence". It is remarkable that almost none of the 200 NGOs analysed by UNEP expressed dissenting opinions (SustainAbility, 2003). As late as 1996, Greenpeace expressed worries that the kind of alliances depicted by UNEP might transform ENGOS from "watchdogs" to "lapdogs". Such worries seem more or less disregarded today (Stafford and Hartman, 1996) and might be explained by the notion of NGOs' participation in setting agendas. However, we wish to conclude this paper by discussing some problems related to the convergence, since these problems have not been emphasized by UNEP or in earlier research.

First, there are strong reasons for asking what happens to the established consensus when specific and practical measures are about to be taken. The demonstrated convergence appears powerful, since there is strong consensus on the necessity of powerful measures to manage climate change in the long run. The long-range goals are common, i.e., stabilizing the climate and building an energy system dominated by renewables, and in the reports and policy documents there are no concrete trade-offs between different technologies or alternative measures. This could imply that the consensus reached at a general level erodes when the value-grounded standpoints are about to become concrete political decisions, for example, on choices of technology, fuels, regulations, organizational form, and forms of civic influence. Moreover, controversies may arise concerning how to prioritize different measures. Conflicts of interest, antagonism concerning goals, and differences in opinion between ENGOS and business organizations may well revive when powerful action with far-reaching consequences becomes necessary. Two current examples illustrate this.

One of them concerns the development of a specific technology, the other policy making. Few ENGOS oppose CCS; Greenpeace is one of the exceptions. There is a widespread though, in some cases, reluctant conviction among ENGOS that CCS is unavoidable in the long run. In the short run, however, for example, concerning whether and how CCS should be included in the flexible clean development mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto protocol, there are several intense controversies about the north-south problem, intergenerational responsibility, and the security and ecological soundness of CCS technology. CCS researcher Heleen de Coninck (2008) argues that the resistance to inclusion of CCS in CDM is related to more fundamental issues, however, which have their origin in different beliefs and convictions. All the ENGOS studied here oppose including CCS in CDM, while most of the energy industry is in favour. Under the auspices of the Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, WWF, FoE, and Greenpeace in a joint statement addressed to UNFCCC declared that CCS in CDM was unacceptable since it implied "exporting risks and uncertainties to the developing world and diversion of investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy" (de Coninck, 2008, p. 932). This example illustrates that it is easier to reach agreement on long-range goals than on

immediate concerns, and that there are still conflicts of interest that come to the fore when concrete technological implementations and policies are to be determined. Our second example concerns the processing of a policy document on the EU Climate and Energy Package. The document approved by the European Parliament in December 2008 describes in detail the actions the EU will take against global warming up to 2020. The first draft of the document, presented in January 2008, was heavily criticized and the target of lobbying from much of the energy and oil industry, including Shell. The criticism was mainly directed towards the energy industry's obligations, which were described as too demanding and likely to lead to lost profits for EU companies. The original formulations concerning when and to what extent industry must participate in carbon dioxide emissions trading were softened after the lobbying, being made acceptable to the main part of the energy and energy-consuming industries in the EU (Oxfam, 2008). In contrast, WWF, FoE, and Greenpeace heavily criticized the modified, final version of the document. They argued that the carbon dioxide emission reduction targets were too low (20% instead of 30%), that the document had too many "loopholes by off-setting external credits", and that the proportion of free emission allowances was too large. They did not, however, criticize the ideas of market efficiency or emissions trading systems, rather specific details of the system, especially the auctioning, the relationship with external trading schemes, and emission caps (CAN, 2008).

Second, it is unclear what will happen to public trust of ENGOs if they no longer scrutinize and criticize the activities of multinational businesses, but instead express opinions similar to those of the actors they had earlier made it their task to monitor and scrutinize. The political legitimacy of ENGOs rests largely on their ability and willingness to perform this task and on the condition that they are perceived as independent of party politics and commercial interests. Their self-appointed task is primarily to represent the environment. If it becomes hard to tell the difference between ENGO and corporate opinions or if companies incorporate the ENGO opinions, the ENGOs will likely suffer from a lack of trust. Their role will become unclear and in the long run it may be asked whether they have achieved their mission by making large companies incorporate their agenda. The distribution of work between governments, companies, and ENGOs that, for example, WBCSD and WWF advocate is likely to end if all involved parties largely express the same opinions when it comes to crucial questions about the future of the planet. Who is going to carry out the scrutiny, independent of party politics and commercial interests, if goal-oriented pragmatism permeates all influential statements on climate change and the configuration of future energy systems?

Third, this may lead to intellectual impoverishment of the environmental and energy debates. If the diversity of voices and perspectives disappears, it will not only imply that the democratic dialogue has become poorer, but that its critical potential will be exhausted. Thereby the ability to generate new ideas, stimulate the growth of radically new perspectives, and enforce the reconsideration and improvement of established standpoints will be severely damaged. WBCSD argues that a new environmental voice has emerged in the most recent decade, that of big business, enriching the environmental debate. This may be true, but if its emergence has led to a corresponding silencing of the unique voice of the ENGOs, it is reasonable to ask whether the voices participating in this crucial debate really have become more numerous. If the all-important mission to immediately find powerful and effective measures to counteract climate change leads to convergence and consensus, the loss of diverse voices may turn out to be less important than the greater number of strong actors working towards a common goal. However, the loss of critical voices is more likely to lead to single-minded and superficial debate, which in the long run may jeopardize the possibility of reaching the common goal.

A fourth problem – though some actors might argue it is less important – is that the convergence might lead to what Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus have called “the death of environmentalism”. They describe how the “technical policy orientation” of ENGOs has brought about nearsightedness, implying a search for immediate benefits, but not for farsighted and fundamental changes of society in terms of “alternative visions and values”. Transformative politics that rest on conflicts and controversies have plainly been pushed aside to enable concrete and measurable goals to be reached. Accordingly, difficult discussions about the necessity of fundamental changes in society’s relationship with nature have been avoided (Shellenberger and Nordhaus, 2004). If they are right – and we emphasize “if” – the convergence might mean that influential ENGOs refrain from questioning the relationship with nature in contemporary society. This could mean that environmental issues will no longer concern, for example, the ecologically sound use of nature’s intrinsic values, the rights of future generations, or the global distribution and use of resources, but merely technical solutions to problems divorced from all questions related to views of life and morality. If this comes about, the environmental question will be completely drained of its political potential to bring about change in society. What Ulrich Beck sees as the environmental question’s gift to humanity, its emancipatory power that enforces both self confrontation and deeper reflexivity, may be wasted. The political project tied to the environmental question may instead be directed towards technological change and simply conserving established societal structures and power relations. In such a project, renewables that previously were intimately linked to the vision of an alternative society based on a different view of nature will be seen as guaranteeing the continued existence of current conditions. This is what happens in the policy documents analysed in this article, regardless of whether they are presented by leading ENGOs or large oil companies. Whether this is part of the price that must be paid to save the world from the horrors of climate change or whether there is any other way out is a question seeking an answer.

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