

Democratising Climate Governance Through Discursive Engagement

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Introduction

The global governance of climate change represents one of the more profound and, to date, intractable set of problems confronting humanity. Participants in and observers of that governance (or effective lack thereof) are of course concerned with questions of effectiveness in solving the range of problems that climate change presents. But questions of legitimacy, accountability, fairness, and representation also pervade the concerns and communications of these actors and observers. These terms do of course also provide the basic vocabulary of democracy. Now, there are those who argue that effective response to climate change issues requires dispensing with democracy so that decision makers can get on with the serious task of implementing the measures demanded by climate science, guided by appropriate expertise concerning the qualities of particular policy instruments (see for example Lovelock 2010). That might be an acceptable prescription for states that are already authoritarian. It is not going to work within democratic states, where procedural legitimacy demands that even those who disagree with policy measures get a chance to participate in public deliberation. Still less can such expert-guided authoritarianism work at the global level. The international system remains highly decentralized, and the most effective central authority that does exist works only to smooth the operations of markets (in the form of the World Trade Organization). Effective

global climate governance must therefore be based on legitimacy and accountability in the context of a polycentric system, and if so we ought to think about the democratic qualities of global climate governance. In this paper we will explore one particular approach to these qualities that for good pragmatic reasons de-emphasizes the construction of more authoritative formal institutions, operating instead in the more informal realm of the engagement and contestation of discourses in global public spheres.

Approaching Global Democracy

There are a number of different ways to think about democracy in a global context, which is the object of an ever-expanding literature. Almost certainly the least productive way is to think in terms of global electoral democracy in the image of existing liberal democratic states, which is a non-starter in any foreseeable future. In this paper we will examine an approach to global democratization that minimizes the need to establish new formal institutions, or reform existing ones. It does so by operating in the informal realm of global public spheres and the discourses they contain. We should note straight away that the informal processes we stress in this paper could profitably co-exist with reformed public authority at the global level, and elsewhere we have explored how the public sphere (public space) and public authority (empowered space) might be conceptualized as together providing the foundations for a global deliberative system. When it comes to climate change in particular, this system is currently not in especially good shape (but on the other hand, neither is it irredeemable). Here, though, we shall bracket such questions. The present paper might therefore be read as providing a way to look at the prospects for democracy should the international polity prove completely resistant to the establishment of more effective formal institutions in empowered space.

This paper's respect for the fundamentally decentralized character of international politics should not be taken as absolute, but rather as a pragmatic response to contemporary conditions. The pragmatic appeal of such an orientation does however increase to the extent that the global governance of climate features failure at the peak centralized level, as epitomized by the Kyoto Protocol and subsequent United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). If comprehensive and effective global agreement proves elusive, it may be time to think in terms of a broader array of governance mechanisms (joined by states, international organizations, transnational networks linking public and private actors) – what Victor and Keohane (2010) call a regime complex, as opposed to a regime. But then the question arises as to what might coordinate such mechanisms, such that different bits of the regime complex do not fly off in contradictory directions and a mess of ineffectual action. Our answer is that diverse arrangements may be coordinated by shared discourses, which become especially important to the degree more formal coordination does not occur. And to the extent this kind of coordination holds, the essence of democracy can be sought in competent and dispersed engagement of discourses in transnational public spheres, though much turns on the conditions of this engagement.

Conventionally, one might enumerate the actors and interests that populate transnational public spheres (or global civil society), and chart their relationship to processes of

representation and accountability. But these actors and interests are the carriers of particular discourses, and another way of apprehending transnational public space (which also turns out to connect strongly to contemporary thinking about deliberative democracy) is to think in terms of mapping discourses and the conditions of their engagement and contestation.

A discourse can be defined as:

a shared set of concepts, categories, and ideas that provides its adherents with a framework for making sense of situations, embodying judgments, assumptions, capabilities, dispositions, and intentions. It provides basic terms for analysis, debates, agreements, and disagreements. Its language enables individuals who subscribe to it to compile the bits of information they receive into coherent accounts organized around storylines that can be shared in intersubjectively meaningful ways. (Dryzek 2006: 1)

Why focus in the first instance upon discourses rather than actors? Ontologically, there is no obvious priority. While liberals believe it is individuals who are the ultimate unit of action and concern (even when organized into collective actors) in international politics as anywhere else, post-structuralists would see individuals as in large measure the creations of the discourses in which they move. The truth is almost certainly somewhere between these two positions. People are conditioned by the discourses in which they move; but especially when they engage more than one discourse, space opens for individuals to reflect upon their relative merits. But the main justification for emphasizing discourses rather than actors and interests is the coordinating role that discourses play, especially when formal centres of authority are weak – the normal case in international politics. Discourses are consequential because they can coordinate the actions of large numbers of individuals who never need to deal with each other directly (so a discourse of market liberalism coordinates much of global economic affairs). If there is such a thing as international society (as the English School of international relations avers), then its social rules are made up of shared norms which in turn are the product of discourses. While the English School has for the most part seen international society as a society only of states, there is no reason why its membership cannot be extended to non-state actors (constituting what in the vocabulary of the English School would be “world society”).

In international relations, those who have emphasized the power of discourses such as realism or market liberalism have, especially under the influence of the thinking of Michel Foucault, often treated them in hegemonic terms (George 1994; Walker 1993). Constructivist analysts for their part, while deploying a somewhat different vocabulary, have often traced the history of dominant understandings. While understandings of key concepts such as sovereignty can change with time, at any one time a single dominant understanding often underwrites international interaction (see for example Reus-Smit 1999). However in today’s world, contestation across discourses rather than hegemony is more pervasive. Perhaps the last hegemonic discourse to fall was the kind of market liberalism that dominated international financial affairs until the global financial crisis of 2008. This shift from hegemony to contestation can be understood as a key aspect of modernization. Accompanying

modernization is increased awareness of discourses other than those in which one has been socialized. Giddens calls this ‘de-traditionalization’ (see Beck et al 1994), which can apply not just to religion and other pre-modern legacies, but also to modern traditions such as industrialism, in which the content of economic growth and technological change were once unquestioned. If such processes are accompanied by reflection, openness to alternative understandings, and critical questioning, then we can speak of reflexive modernization. If they are accompanied by angry rejection of alternatives and retreat into the familiar by people who now understand the nature of the threat to them, we can speak of reflexive traditionalization (Dryzek 2006: 20-22), which can generate (for example) religious fundamentalism and radical nationalism.

Reflexive modernization and reflexive traditionalization alike mean that the grip of hegemonic discourses is loosened, and some space is opened for the configuration of discourses to be itself influenced by the reflective choices of competent agents. To the extent this capacity becomes dispersed and inclusive, there is potentially good news for democracy here. In this light, introducing democracy into international politics has nothing to do with the familiar liberal assemblage of competitive elections, constitutions, and the specification and protection of political rights. Rather, it can be conceptualized in terms of aspirations for inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity. This reflexive capacity is not unlimited: if it were, discourses would cease to have any ordering power at all. Discourses (like social structures in general) both enable and constrain communication. The actions of individuals and other actors may normally reinforce and help constitute but sometimes they can destabilize a prevailing discourse. The reflective choices of competent agents then ought to be able to affect both the content and relative weight of discourses (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001: 400). This in turn is consistent with the idea of discursive democracy, which is grounded in competent and dispersed engagement of discourses in the public sphere, whose outcome can affect collective decision making (Dryzek 2000).

How, then does the global governance of climate change look in this light? What discourses are present, what is their relative weight, and what is the condition of their engagement? How consequential is the interplay of discourses in the global public sphere?

Climate Discourses in the Global Public Sphere

Global governance of climate change is characterised not by an overarching hegemonic discourse, but rather contestation across a number of discourses. As we have demonstrated elsewhere (Dryzek and Stevenson 2010), climate governance discourses in the global public sphere can be classified on two dimensions: one broadly economic and the other broadly political. The economic orientation can be understood as either reformist or radical in relation to the parameters of the existing liberal capitalist international economic system. Reformists accept these basic parameters. From a radical perspective, existing economic objectives and values are themselves deeply implicated in the problem of climate change and ought to be the focus of more transformative action. The political orientation of climate discourses can be understood as either conservative or progressive. The conservative position envisages that

strategies to address climate change will be designed and enacted within the parameters of existing institutions and power structures. The progressive position is that the existing distribution of power is inadequate and inappropriate. Authority for designing and enacting strategies should thus be shared with, or transferred to, presently disempowered actors at global, national, or local levels. The resulting four categories of climate discourse are depicted in Figure 1.

		Economic Orientation	
		Reformist	Radical
Political Orientation	Conservative	Mainstream Sustainability	Limits
	Progressive	Expansive Sustainability	Green Radicalism

Figure 1: Classifying Climate Discourses (Dryzek and Stevenson 2010)

The discourses captured in this typology are those that accept the hypothesis of anthropogenic climate change as valid and thus engage with the debate of how the international community should respond to the problem. In the background there is a persistent discourse of climate change denial and another that assumes that economic growth and recovery are higher priorities than climate policy irrespective of the validity of accumulating scientific knowledge.

Within the four broad classes of climate discourse identified above, quite a high level of diversity emerges when we look to the spaces in which they are articulated. In the following, we describe the interplay of discourses in five recently prominent settings; four are organized spaces for discussion and one is more diffuse and de-centred.¹

1. *Klimaforum09* was an open forum established alongside the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009. It was designed to provide an open space for people, organizations, and social movements to gather, learn, and exchange ideas and experiences related to climate change. The organizers estimate that approximately 50,000 people from 95 countries visited the forum over two weeks (Eriksen *et al.* 2010: 3). While ostensibly open to all, a political platform was put in place with the effect of delimiting participation (though perhaps not

¹ The task of identifying distinct discourses is based on the discourse analytical approach outlined in Dryzek 2005. Mapping the constitutive elements of discourse: ontology, (basic entities recognized or constructed); assumptions about natural conditions and relationships; agents and their motives; and key metaphors as represented in specific texts, posters, and/or performances allows the analyst to identify patterns and discreet discourses.

attendance) to those articulating certain discourses.² Key elements of the platform included: a rejection of technological fixes to the climate crisis; the importance of locally based solutions for sustainable societies; the mobilization of civil society; the need to reduce consumption and production and thereby build a balance with nature; a critique of global society's exploitation of nature and its belief in economic growth; a reorganization of society, new cultural values, and new ways of thinking (*ibid.*: 49). The forum comprised 342 activities. A discourse analysis of a sample of these activities reveals the overwhelming dominance of Green Radicalism in this space.³ Green Radicalism is defined by the assumption that unconstrained material growth cannot be reconciled with a safe climate and sustainability; a fundamental reorientation of economic development is required. Such changes demand a redistribution of power away from presently dominant authorities. Concerns relating to human rights, justice, and equity are prioritised over short-term economic concerns. Green Radicalism focuses on the political and economic structural causes of climate change but differences emerge on the nature of these structural causes and/or the most appropriate vision for an ecologically sustainable and equitable order. At Klimaforum09, the most commonly articulated Green Radical discourse was new globalism, which avers that an effective and just response to climate change will only be possible if the presently unequal international system is transformed into an equitable global community, featuring a low-carbon economy that is socially and ecologically sustainable. For some, this implies a spiritual collective awakening. Basic human needs should be prioritised over material wealth. Governance within a new global community ought to be democratic and foster cooperation between individuals, cultures, nations, social movements, and NGOs. Existing institutions are clearly unable to deliver such a fair and sustainable economic and political order; instead, citizens and civil society can drive the transition.

Also prominent in this space was radical decentralisation, which identifies the structural cause of climate change in a model of development that privileges industrial-scale production, which therefore needs replacing by small and local scale production. Carbon markets and offsetting are rejected because they shift responsibility and accountability away from the local level. Decision-making processes also need to be de-centralised to allow for genuine participation by marginalised and affected peoples.

A Green Radical discourse of ecofeminism, connecting climate injustice and gender injustice, was present at Klimaforum09 but it was only articulated in a small number of

² In their evaluation report, the organising committee claims that '(a)t no time was it required that the participants of Klimaforum09 agreed with the platform' (Eriksen *et al.* 2010: 8), but it did provide a basis for accepting and rejecting proposed activities. Moreover, people wishing to participate in a pre-summit online debate as part of the Klimaforum09 Declaration drafting process were indeed required to pledge their support for the political platform.

³ Two concerns informed the selection of a sample. First, given the time-consuming nature of discourse analysis, the entire program of activities could not be analysed for our present purpose. Second, although activities were conducted in Danish, French, Spanish, and English, we could only use information that was available in languages in which one of us is proficient. Therefore, the sample comprised activities that (a) took place in the first week of the forum; and (b) offer textual information in either English or Spanish. Documents associated with forty-two activities were analysed. Given that the program description of each activity was very brief, documents reflecting the theme of each activity were sourced from organisers' websites.

activities. Ecofeminists observe that institutions are overwhelmingly dominated by masculine interests, concerns, and rationality. Existing governance arrangements tend to marginalise women and their concerns and experiences, including their increased vulnerability to both climate change and mitigation measures. Adequately responding to climate change requires fundamental transformation of patriarchal institutions.

A minority of activities at Klimaforum09 diverged from the dominant pattern and understood the issue of climate change within a Limits framework. Economically radical but politically conservative, a discourse of reorienting society questions the viability and/or desirability of existing neoliberal development, criticising unconstrained economic growth, population growth, meat consumption, and profligate material consumption. But although the economy needs to be radically reorganised, this does not require a redistribution of power. Changes can be implemented either under the guidance of existing authorities or by non-authoritative actors voluntarily modifying their own behaviour.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the political platform of Klimaforum09, a small number of economically reformist activities made their way into the program. Specifically, one activity reflected the Mainstream Sustainability discourse of ecological modernization, which is based on the premise that economic development and climate change mitigation can be mutually supportive. Within this discourse, reducing greenhouse gas emissions presents an opportunity for efficient and productive economies in which green technologies become the motor of economic development. Recognising that “pollution prevention pays” will spur a shift away from emissions-intensive production towards technologies such as renewable energy, biochar, and carbon sequestration. But market forces alone will not propel this modernisation process. In the absence of appropriate policy and regulation, climate-friendly technologies and services will not be able to compete. Governments thus have a vital role to play in enabling ecologically as well as economically rational decisions from the private sector.

Another four activities articulated an Expansive Sustainability discourse of equitable modernisation, which also posits a compatible relationship between climate change mitigation and economic growth and development. Unlike ecological modernisation, though, the objective should not be simply decoupling profit and pollution within industrial economies; instead, modernisation should serve human rights and needs while evening out inequalities between industrialised and developing countries. Moreover, a wider range of actors should be drawn into decision-making. Thus this discourse recognises the potential agency of (for example) local communities, indigenous peoples, forest-dependent populations, youth, and non-government organisations. Mobilising their agency requires a shift away from traditional decision-making processes that favour distant authorities in favour of mutual learning and capacity building among many actors at different levels.

2. The People’s World Summit on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights was convened by the Bolivian government in the wake of inconclusive UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen. Held in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba in April 2010, the summit was designed to allow dialogue among ‘peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth’s defenders ..., scientists, academics, lawyers and governments that want to work with their

citizens' (PWCCC 2010). An estimated 35,000 attended the summit, about three-quarters of whom were Bolivian with others coming from 140 countries (Morales 2010). Like Klimaforum09, the People's Summit was ostensibly open to all but the framing of the call for participation effectively delimited participation to those already sharing a discourse of Green Radicalism. The following excerpts serve to illustrate this framing:

Confirming that 75% of historical emissions of greenhouse gases originated in the countries of the North that followed a path of irrational industrialization;

Noting that climate change is a product of the capitalist system;...

Confident that the peoples of the world, guided by the principles of solidarity, justice and respect for life, will be able to save humanity and Mother Earth....

The World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth has as objectives:

1) To analyze the structural and systemic causes that drive climate change and to propose radical measures to ensure the well-being of all humanity in harmony with nature....

3) To agree on proposals for new commitments to the Kyoto Protocol and projects for a COP Decision under the United Nations Framework for Climate Change that will guide future actions in those countries that are engaged with life during climate change negotiations and in all United Nations scenarios....

6) To define strategies for action and mobilization to defend life from Climate Change and to defend the Rights of Mother Earth (*Ibid*).

The People's Summit was organised around seventeen working groups corresponding to the various themes under discussion in the UNFCCC negotiations, as well as self-organised events. Like the conference call, the working groups' agendas were framed in such terms that would resonate with those articulating Green Radical discourses. While it is possible that a range of people may be attracted to the idea of engaging in dialogue with 'peoples of the world, social movements and Mother Earth's defenders', this representation of the problem will most strongly resonate with those articulating discourses of Green Radicalism. As such, the resulting 'People's Agreement' reflects Green Radicalism but assumes the continued relevance of multilateral institutions guided by the will of the people.

3. *The World Business Summit on Climate Change* was held ahead of the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen to enable more than 500 invited 'global leaders from business, policy, civil society, and science ... (to engage) in dialogue on the road to a low-carbon future and the recommendations for an ambitious new climate change framework' (Copenhagen Climate Summit 2009: 3). A discourse analysis of a large sample of the Business Summit program suggests that the interplay of discourses in this space was limited almost exclusively to a single class of discourse, Mainstream Sustainability.⁴ In fact, the majority of the

⁴ The sample comprised most panel discussions, interactive debates and working groups. Special addresses, keynote speeches, and opening and closing ceremonies were excluded. A total of seventy documents were analysed. As in the discourse analysis of Klimaforum09, documents were sourced from contributing

contributors interpreted the issue of climate change in ecological modernisation terms, diverging occasionally on the question of scale (namely, whether policy frameworks should focus primarily on the metropolitan, national, or supranational levels). Optimism was widely expressed in the capacity of business to take the lead on ambitious climate action; support policymakers; and build cooperative relationships with environmentalist organisations. Such optimism was shared among business leaders and environmentalist representatives (Greenpeace and WWF International) alike.

Also present was the economically reformist and politically conservative discourse of climate marketisation, based on the premise that all aspects of global climate governance can effectively be brought under the logic of the market. Emissions can be reduced most efficiently through cap and trade schemes. Carbon emitted through deforestation can be reduced by creating market mechanisms that make it more profitable for landowners to keep their trees in the ground rather than fell them. Emissions-intensive industries and environmentally-conscious individuals can then purchase offsets that negate the impact of their emissions - the environment benefits and nobody loses. One of the most important points of divergence between these two Mainstream Sustainability discourses lies in the perceived role of governments; whereas ecological modernisation posits governmental regulation and policy as crucial for fostering a low-carbon transition, climate marketisation limits the role of governments to the initial construction of markets.

Less prominent, though still present at the World Business Summit were contributors articulating an equitable modernisation discourse. In this context, the importance of reducing poverty and global inequality through technology transfer mechanisms was salient. However, only eight contributors reflected the assumptions and concerns of equitable modernisation. More marginal again, though surprisingly still present, were two contributors articulating a Limits discourse of reorienting society. In one such case, the shortcomings of consumerism, growth, and GDP were recognised. In the other, a supportive relationship was posited between good human and economic health and voluntary or legislated lifestyle changes. Just one contributor strayed outside the typology of climate discourses outlined above by cautioning that climate change remains an agenda of the developed countries whereas for poorer countries there are other more pressing priorities in the short- and long-term.

4. *The Business for the Environment Summit* convened in April 2009 to discuss and ‘learn how to identify and manage the risks posed by climate change and explore the commercial and political benefits of investing in a green economy’ (B4E 2009). Discourse analysis points to the overwhelming dominance of a single class of discourse in this setting also; the overwhelming majority of the discussion was articulated in terms of Mainstream Sustainability.⁵ As in the case of the World Business Summit, the discourse of ecological

organisations’ websites because coverage of specific contributions is not available. While these documents may not convey the precise contribution that each organisation made at the Summit, they do allow us to see which discourse governs each organisation’s thinking on climate change which in turn would be reflected in their Summit contributions.

⁵ This event was well documented for public access with written summaries of speeches and panel contributions as well as videos of panel discussions, including Q&A. A total of 46 contributions were analysed and questions

modernisation was reflected in the vast majority of contributions; less emphasis was placed on climate marketisation. Particularly salient here were assumptions that profitable business opportunities can be found in economic and ecological crises; governments need to provide clear and stable regulatory frameworks to support and encourage business investment; and consumers are primarily motivated by cost-saving, thus effort needs to be directed towards making climate-friendly technology and products more affordable. Just two contributors approached the issue from a more politically progressive position. In one case a discourse of equitable modernisation was presented by highlighting the importance of decentralising sustainable development and empowering poor and illiterate rural women and communities to roll our solar energy projects. The other politically progressive contribution was articulated in terms of a natural integrity discourse, which accepts ‘sustainable growth’ but insists that strategies for addressing climate change while promoting ‘green capitalism’ should aim as far as possible to maintain the integrity of the natural world and to empower its advocates. The natural world provides services that ought to be valued as an alternative to artificially manufactured strategies and products. Manipulating natural processes through genetic engineering or the displacement of organic products for synthetic ones may yield unexpected adverse consequences due to the inherent complexity of ecosystems. In the setting of the Business for the Environment Summit, attention was drawn to the value in learning from nature through ‘nature-inspired innovation’: biomimicry as opposed to biotechnology.

Present but marginal were three voices conveying the economically radical and politically conservative Limits discourse of reorienting society, which, as outlined earlier, assumes that although the economy needs to be radically reorganised, this does not require a redistribution of power. Changes can be implemented either under the guidance of existing authorities or by non-authoritative actors voluntarily modifying their own behaviour. Here these assumptions were communicated somewhat surprisingly by a former chief economist of the OECD; the royal prince of the Kingdom of Jordan; and a working group on Innovating New Business Models for a Changing World. Common threads running through these disparate contributions were the need for institutionalising new measures of wellbeing; cultivating sustainability values in society; reducing overall consumption levels in the developed world; and a critique of GDP as a measure of progress, which was described in one instance as capable of measuring ‘everything except that which makes life worthwhile’.

Opportunities for challenging the discursive dominance of Mainstream Sustainability also came during question and answer sessions. Although the majority of questioners conformed to the discourses of ecological modernisation or climate marketisation, a small number raised concerns that resonated with discourses of natural integrity (for example, the potential impacts of carbon sequestration technologies), equitable modernisation (for example, per capita pollution permits/cap-and-share), and reorienting society (for example, is there a limit to efficiency in production and consumption?) To the extent that such questions induce critical reflection on the part of those articulating more mainstream discourses, this type of

from the audience which diverged from the dominant discourse were noted. This sample comprised all special addresses, panel discussions, and three of the six working group summaries.

exchange may be crucial for reflexive modernisation. However, if challenging questions are met with a re-statement of the original discourse the reflexive potential is lost. It is difficult to empirically gauge the actual level of reflexivity but in the B4E setting we can observe instances of both discursive reinforcement (for example, per capita permits are unnecessary if new businesses emerging in the South are smarter than those in the North) and discursive reflection (for example, efficiency does have its limits so communities will ultimately need to be designed to enable lower consumption).

5. *Avaaz, TckTckTck, and 350.org* are three decentred means through which interested citizens have issued common demands to global leaders to take action on climate change. The importance of these networks lies in the impressive capacity to focus the attention of millions of the world's people on the climate issue and remind democratically elected leaders that their citizens are watching. Less certain is their potential for enabling citizens to deliberate on the complex economic and political dimensions of global climate governance. This potential limitation arises from the slogan-centred, petition-based nature of these networks. Avaaz and TckTckTck joined forces throughout 2009 to push global leaders to negotiate a FAB (fair, ambitious, binding) deal. This demand was broadly articulated in terms consistent with a discourse of equitable modernisation:

FAIR: for the poorest countries and people that did not cause climate change but will suffer most from it.

AMBITIOUS: enough to leave a planet safe for us all.

BINDING: with real targets that can be legally monitored and enforced (TckTckTck 2010).

For its part, 350.org was formed under the leadership of popular climate scientist, Bill McKibben, to raise awareness and rally support behind the figure of 350 (parts per million of carbon dioxide equivalent in the atmosphere). According to the movement's organisers, the 350 symbol 'contains, rightly understood, the recipe for a very different world, one that moves past cheap fossil fuel to more sensible technologies, more closely-knit communities, and a more equitable global society' (350.org 2009). Like the FAB deal demanded by Avaaz and TckTckTck, the 350.org demand most strongly resonates with an equitable modernisation discourse. Certainly no explicit critique is made of the existing liberal capitalist international economic system, only the fuel that drives the neoliberal model of development.

Since the Copenhagen round of negotiations failed to secure the outcome desired by these civil society and citizen-based networks, both TckTckTck and 350.org have begun to develop in ways that more closely reflect a Green Radical discourse of radical decentralisation. Rather than directing attention and demands exclusively to negotiators and political leaders, these networks are beginning to redirect energy towards grassroots transformation (while still maintaining pressure for policy change). Illustrative is the 350.org Global Work Party scheduled for 10/10/10, which will mobilise communities to take local action including diggin

their own community gardens, installing solar power panels, and constructing bicycle paths (350.org 2010).

Engagement of Climate Discourses

It is clear from this discussion that there is no discursive hegemony in global climate governance. Instead, a plurality of discourses informs different understandings of the nature of the problem and appropriate governance measures. This contestation is important for democratisation. But democracy in the terms we advocate in this paper ultimately hinges on inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity. The question then is whether the present conditions of discursive engagement foster such capacity. Our answer to this question is, not quite. There are positive aspects of the existing engagement of climate governance discourses, but certain requirements are found to be lacking. What we observe in the global public sphere are discrete settings dominated by a specific class of discourse; these settings come quite close to deliberative enclaves. In settings described earlier, voices diverging from the dominant discourse were very few and thus likely to be of limited consequence. There is certainly a place for enclaves in democracy, but only as a place for creating competence prior to engagement with other discourses. Democratic theorists including Fraser (1992), Mansbridge (1996), and Karpowitz et al. (2009), have persuasively argued that in stratified societies (like the international society) relatively disempowered and subordinated individuals may only be able to ‘formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs’ by retreating into enclaves with like-minded others (Fraser 1992: 123). Without deliberative enclaves, then, ideas may not coalesce into different discourses thereby creating the conditions for discursive hegemony to take hold.

But we also know that discursive enclaves have their problems and limitations. Perhaps the most obvious is that if discourses are articulated only in protected settings they are not exposed to necessary critique and challenge in the wider global public sphere and groups outside of the enclave are not exposed to competing assumptions that might stimulate their own reflexive capacity. As Mansbridge notes, when people communicate only in enclaves ‘they encourage one another not to hear anyone else. They do not learn how to put what they want to say in words that others can hear and understand’ (1996: 58).

A further problem is what Sunstein has called ‘ideological amplification’ (2007) and ‘group polarisation’ (2003), which refers to the oft-observed tendency for individuals to reinforce their commitment to existing convictions when the majority of others support these same convictions. Similarly, regardless of the plurality of perspectives privately held, groups will become more polarised in the direction of the majority of publicised perspectives. Homogeneity tends to replace diversity. This means that reflexive capacity is actually diminished in settings where like-minded individuals deliberate among themselves. Sunstein offers three possible explanations for this phenomenon (2007: 275-276). The first emphasises the association between repetition and persuasiveness. If arguments are repeatedly articulated in terms of a single discourse with relatively few arguments articulated in competing terms, the information that informs individuals’ understanding of a problem is disproportionately

associated with a single discourse. If a change of individual perspective occurs, then, it is likely to change in the direction of the majority.

The second explanation is social comparison, which suggests that due to a general desire to be perceived favourably by others, people will tend to adjust their positions to align with the publicly stated majority position. Important to this explanation is Noell-Neumann's theory of the 'spiral of silence' (1984), which suggests that those who perceived themselves to be in a minority will refrain from voicing their perspective. This theory finds support in our earlier discussion of the specific settings in which discourses are articulated. For example, in interviews with thirty participants of the Klimaforum09 declaration drafting process, one individual admitted to withholding his true views because of his perception that it wouldn't be well received by the majority of other participants. In this case, his position reflected a more economically reformist discourse that provided the scope for considering cost-effective technological solutions to the problem of climate change. His expressed perception was that this would not find favour within a group of anti-technology NGOs.⁶ This sentiment was echoed by another individual who participated in the online component of the declaration drafting process; this participant admitted to withholding his own views on technology while waiting for others to positively broach the subject, which did not happen.⁷ Similarly, one of the authors randomly surveyed participants at the Cochabamba People's Summit and found that dissent from the dominant anti-capitalist stance was present yet such sentiments were never publicly shared in the numerous forums and workshops observed at the Summit.⁸ One of the most prominent features of the People's Agreement resulting from this gathering was the ostensible consensus that capitalism is indeed the key structural cause of climate change.

Sunstein's third explanation for ideological amplification concerns the association between confidence, corroboration, and extremism.⁹ He writes: 'On many issues, people are really not sure what they think, and their lack of certainty inclines them toward the middle. As people gain confidence, they usually become more extreme in their beliefs. Agreement from others tends to increase confidence, and for this reason like-minded people, having deliberated with one another, become more sure that they are right and thus more extreme' (2007: 276).

Given the evident problems and limitations of enclave deliberation, it is clear that developing inclusive, competent, and dispersed reflexive capacity is dependent on establishing connections between enclaves (or discursively dominant spaces) to allow for more genuine inter-discursive engagement. What is less clear is how such connections can be established. The Internet is perhaps an obvious tool for enabling communication across discourses. However, this too has potentially insurmountable problems. Research into online

⁶ Anonymous interview conducted by Hayley Stevenson. Copenhagen, December 2009.

⁷ Anonymous telephone interview conducted by Hayley Stevenson. Canberra, February 2010.

⁸ Forty-nine participants were surveyed. Of these only 41 responded to the question pertaining to this point. Four disagreed with the statement that 'Capitalism is one of the principal causes of climate change'. One respondent indicated that they didn't know if they agreed or disagreed. Three others stressed that while it is a cause it is not the only cause.

communication suggests a tendency towards homogeneity in communication because users can filter through the mass of information to engage with likeminded others. This finding is contested by some, however, who suggest that people are indeed encountering different people and arguments that they would otherwise not encounter in the outside world (for a summary of these arguments see Dahlberg 2007). It is unclear which side of the debate carries more weight but this research should perhaps serve as a caution against relying on the Internet to establish connections between discursive enclaves in global climate governance.

The second problem emerges from organised climate change denialism. Hamilton (2009a, 2009b) has documented this phenomenon and its impact in the Australian context but of course the problem extends beyond Australia. He notes that '(w)hile the internet is often held up as the instrument of free speech, it is often used for the opposite purpose, to drive people out of the public debate' (2009a). Anyone who has scrolled through the comments posted on news articles about climate politics or climate science, for example, will be aware that a denialist discourse occupies space entirely disproportionate to its relative weight in society. Such contributions are more often than not offensive or personally insulting to the author and other commentators. The effect of this is to undermine the possibility for fruitful deliberations on global climate governance via the Internet.

Another potential mechanism for facilitating an exchange of discourses by connective enclaves is the Side Event program that runs alongside the annual UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (and often other meetings throughout the year). Existing research suggests that participants and organisers expect side events to serve four main functions: capacity building, sharing information, introducing potential negotiation items and interconnecting people and policy areas (Hjerpe and Linnér 2010: 176). There is clearly a variety of discourses articulated in side events (our climate discourse typology was developed on the basis of applicants to the COP-15 side event program, see Dryzek and Stevenson 2010), but what remains unclear is whether there is a genuine exchange of these discourses during side events, or whether people continue to congregate with likeminded others. This is a question for empirical research.

Conclusion

To the extent effective central authority in a system of governance is lacking, what remains are multiple locations in which decisions get taken. When it comes to climate change, these locations might exist in states, subnational governments, international organizations, markets, transnational corporations, financial networks, even individual consumers. What coordinates decisions and actions is often the discourse that spans them.

In a decentralized political setting of the kind that currently characterizes the global governance of climate change (especially in the wake of peak global level failures), there is a tension between two roles that discourses can play. One role is coordination of the actions of large numbers of actors. The second is grist for contestation in the public sphere of the sort that

⁹ Sunstein stresses that 'extremism' 'is defined solely internally, by reference to the group's initial dispositions' (2003: 83). Thus, no negative judgement of the content of any particular position is implied in our use of the term here.

offers glimpses of democracy in the absence of state-like central authority and its accoutrements such as elections and constitutions. There is a tension between these two roles. On the face of it, coordination benefits to the degree that the number of discourses is small: indeed, it may be most straightforward when matters are dominated by a single discourse. Such was the case for the global governance of economic affairs prior to 2008, dominated by neo-liberalism and associated assumptions about efficient and self-correcting markets. It is in such cases that the consequences of a discourse are most easily demonstrated. But this financial case also illustrates a democratic failure that existed precisely because of the hegemony of neo-liberal discourse. This case also shows that the absence of competing discourses meant that deficiencies in the operation of the financial system that in retrospect were glaring were never corrected.

The situation when it comes to climate change is very different. We have charted a multiplicity of discourses in public space. That sheer multiplicity might seem to work against these discourses playing a role in the coordination of governance; it certainly makes it much harder to demonstrate the consequential nature of discourses than when there is hegemony of a single discourse. But the real problem when it comes to impeding coordination is the degree to which particular discourses flourish in particular enclaves such as the Klimaforum or World Business Summit on Climate Change. Absent is very much in the way of engagement across competing discourses of a sort that would break down the barriers between enclaves. We should not expect such engagement to somehow produce a “super-discourse” that would subsume all others, and henceforth coordinate global affairs. The range of issues that the climate change heading covers is so large and complex that any such hegemonic super-discourse would almost certainly have major blind spots. It would take climate governance into a situation more like that of global finance prior to the 2008 crash.

Now, it could be argued that all that is likely in any near future will be islands of transnational coordination, each stabilized by a particular discourse or set of discourses. One such island might be constituted by business networks concerned with climate change (as opposed to businesses that seek to keep the issue off the agenda, or impede action). Another (less consequential) might be constituted by social movement activists in alliance with post-neoliberal governments such as Bolivia. It is much easier to demonstrate the consequentiality of a discourse (or interacting set of discourses) within such an island than it is to demonstrate the more global significance of that island. We can, for example, see that a discourse of climate marketization is becoming increasingly prominent in coordinating various emissions trading and offset schemes. It is less easy to judge how consequential such developments are in the global scheme of things, though Paterson (2011) believes that the global governance of climate change more generally is increasingly dominated by climate marketization.

Looking ahead, there are several different futures that could characterize the global governance of climate change. One would involve the construction of more effective formal institutional arrangements at the global level in a comprehensive regime that embodied effective public authority. To the extent that is accomplished, it is profitable to speak in terms of a deliberative system spanning public space and empowered space. To the degree the future

remains much more polycentric, it becomes helpful to think of the roles played by discourses and their engagement as aspects of both effective and democratic global governance. If that polycentric future features islands of governance within which different discourses prevail, there is still a democratic case for better engagement of discourses within each island.

It is also possible to imagine a polycentric future in which the engagement of discourses is not confined within such islands, such that we could speak with more confidence of the *global* governance of climate change. Both effective governance and democratic ideals could benefit from such broader engagement. For example, if climate marketization is becoming as dominant as Paterson (2011) suggests, it would be perilous for it to proceed while ignoring the implications of markets for social justice of the sort highlighted by Green Radical discourses. Such perils would involve both the ultimate effectiveness of markets in limiting or offsetting emissions; and the democratic legitimacy with which any global outcomes were generated.

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