

# **Sustainability and the CA: an actors' based Public Choice Perspective**

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## Outline

- CA theory
- Public Choice: relevance of worst-case scepticism in SHD practice?
- Critical questions and empirics
  - Personal priorities and value of political engagement?
  - Self-interest or commitment driven political actors?
  - Potentials and drawbacks of altruism in groups?
  - SHD actors: perceived potential and actual contribution?
- Questions for further research

## CA theory

- Sustainable Development (Sen 2009: 249):
  - = enhancing effective freedom of human beings
  - Is an empowering process
  - Requires “the constructive agency of people engaged in environment-friendly activities” for SHD
- Agency = assessment of "what a person can do in line with his or her conception of the good (Sen: 1985b: 206, in: Alkire 2009: 457)
- CA's broad scope of agency is suitable to conceptualize SHD. It includes goals and motivational bases oriented at self-interest (own well-being, sympathy) or 'commitments'.

## CA theory

- **Self-interest (similar to mainstream economics and Public Choice)**
- **Importance**
  - „The advantage-based perspective is indeed important for social rules and behavior, since there are many situations in which the joint interests of...people are...better served by everyone following rules of behavior that restrain...from trying to snatch a little gain at the cost of making things worse for others“ ...environmental sustainability“ and the „preservation of shared natural resources“ are examples...“(Sen 2009: 202-203)
  - Self-Interest can be enhanced by own well-being but also by others' well-being (sympathy, antipathy...)
- **Limitations:**
  - distant people and generations,
  - endangered species etc.
- **Extension** of motivational assumptions **necessary** to cover SHD

## CA theory

### ■ Commitments

- Motivation to act as an agent on behalf of SHD issues that do not contribute to our own well-being:
  - e.g. humanity, justice, generosity, public spirit (Sen 2009: 191)
- Commitments may go beyond broader self-concerned motivations and address engagement for endangered species, distant people and generations, without any impact on our well-being
- Agency for and power asymmetries relative to others also create responsibilities (e.g. for endangered species; Sen 2009)

## Public Choice: relevance of worst-case scepticism in practice?

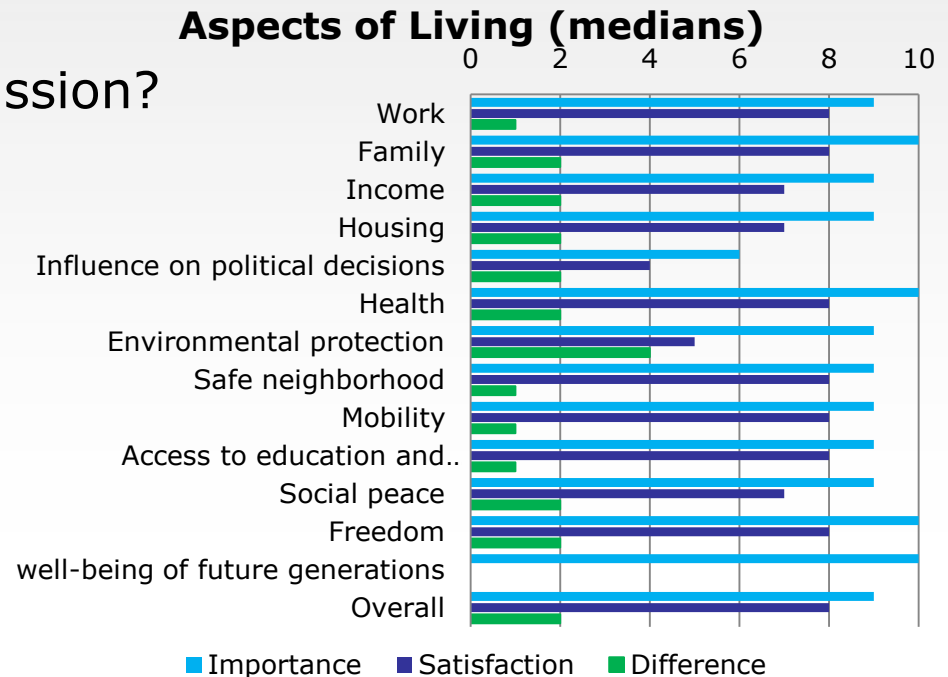
- Sen relates the idea of justice to democracy in the sense of „government by discussion“ and as „public reasoning.“ His CA is based on the comprehensive scope of agency motivations (above)
- The „Public Choice“ (PC) approach as an „economic theory of democracy“ restricts its motivational assumptions to concerns for own well-being and sympathy and relation-oriented behavior.
- PC can enrich the CA discussion by providing worst case scenarios to critically analyze the empirical existence, problems and feasibility of:
  - Democracy as applied public reasoning, and potentials or drawbacks of public reasoning
  - Incentive compatibility of dynamic political processes with respect to desirable and just SHD outcomes
  - Causes, consequences and remedies related to deficits in operationalizing SHD strategies

## Public Choice: relevance of worst-case scepticism in practice?

- Problems and limitations related to „constructive SHD agency“
  - Low personal priority of self-interest or commitments towards SHD
  - Lack of information to take well-informed choices and action
  - Insufficient political interest, participation and public reasoning
  - Adapation to perceived lack of agency or injustice
  - Low personal value attached to active and passive political engagement
  - Dominance of self-interest over commitment driven SHD
  - Missing confidence in success of own or in the reliability of contributions by other decisive actors
  - Power asymmetries and dominance of other actors in enforcing SHD relevant changes

## Personal priorities and value of political engagement?

- Future generations, freedom, health and family perceived as most important well-being domains > environmental protection
- Environmental protection: valued like all other domains except:
- Political Influence  
Lack of governance by discussion?
- Environmental Protection
  - may be dominated by other domains
  - may not find engagement due to low value of political participation or
  - low satisfaction/adaptation

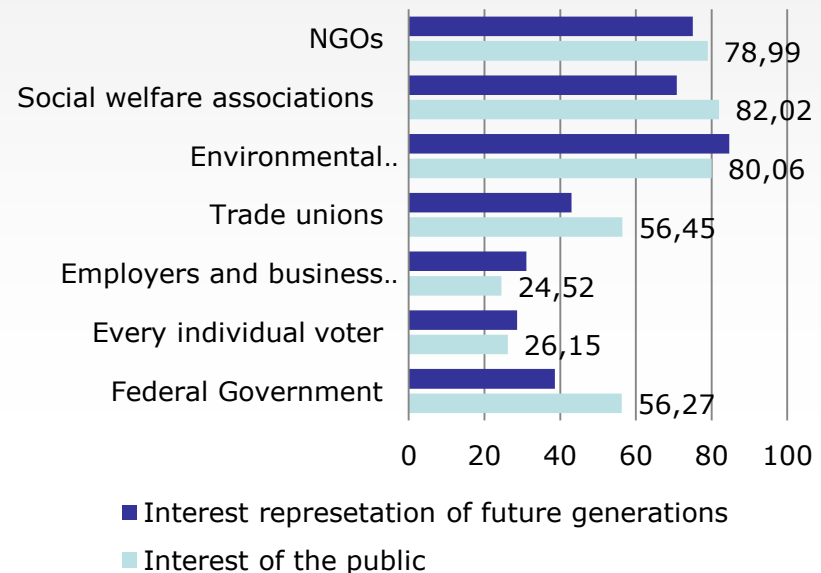




## Self-interest or commitment driven political actors

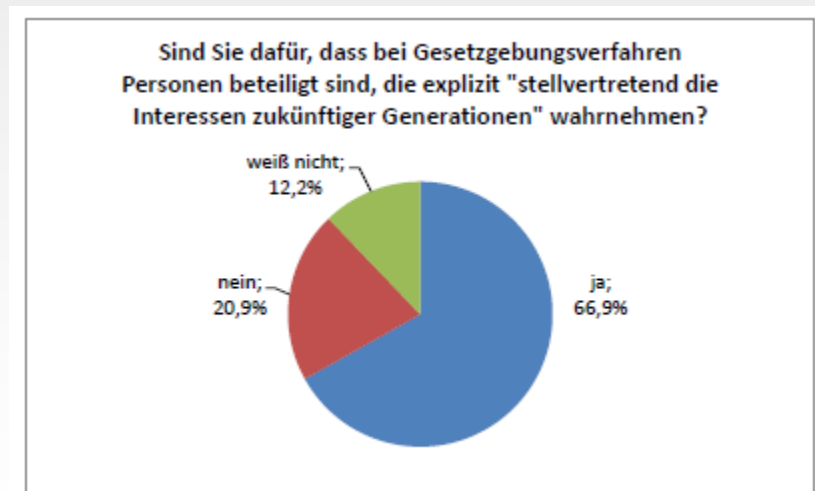
- Group agency of NGOs, social groups – partially – labor unions and government perceived to be more commitment oriented
- Employer associations and voters supposed to act in a more self-interested way
- Major political support for future generations not assumed for labor unions, employer associations, voters and the government
- Risk of a „motivation and responsibility gap“ for future generations despite the high value attached to them by the people?

### Interest representation



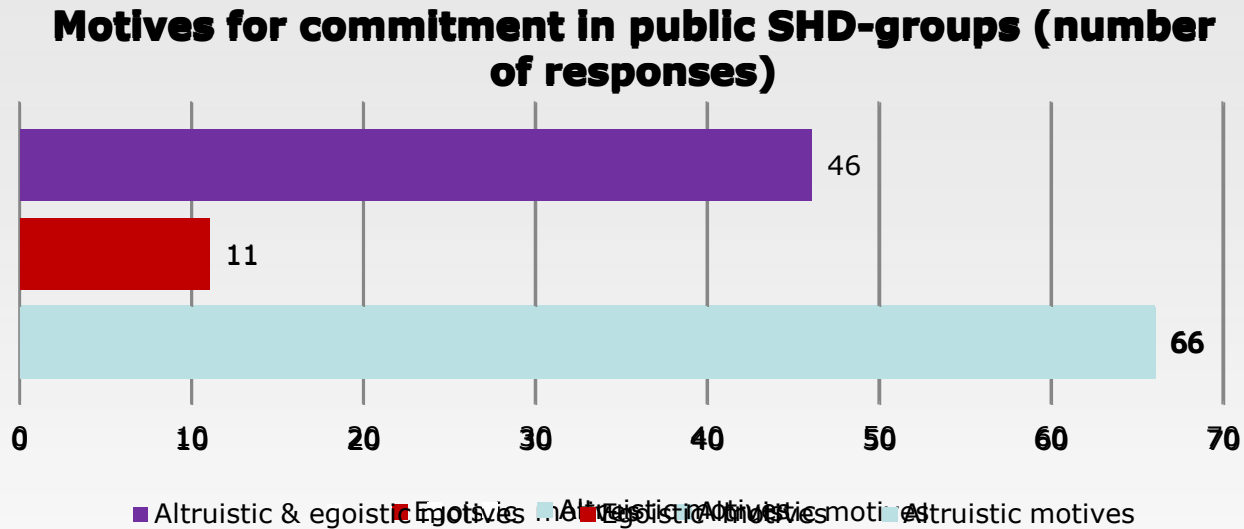
## Self-interest or commitment driven political actors

- Two of three respondents favor the introduction of an ombudsman to represent future generations' interests in political decision making processes to overcome this gap



- Power?
- Legitimation?
- Limitations?

## Self-interest or commitment driven political actors

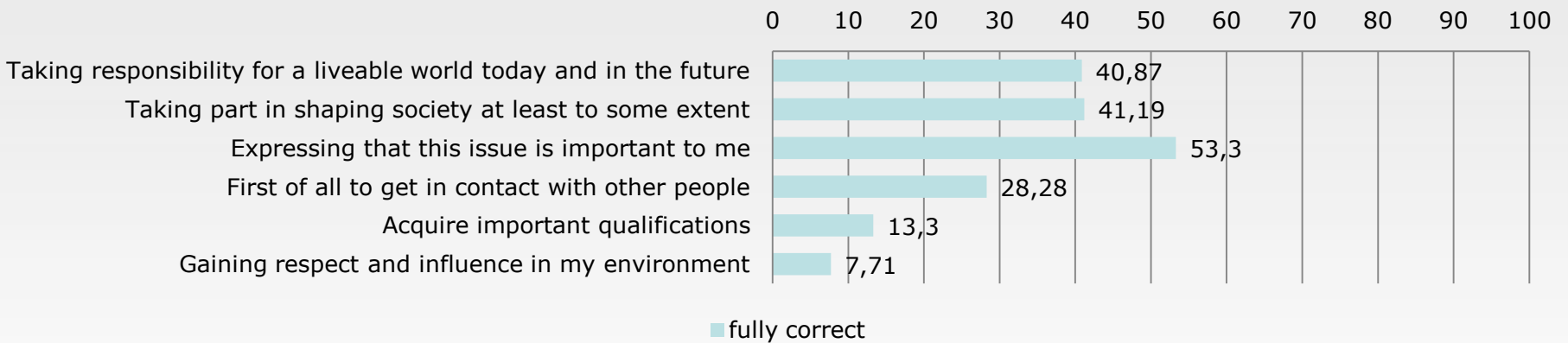


### ■ Motivations:

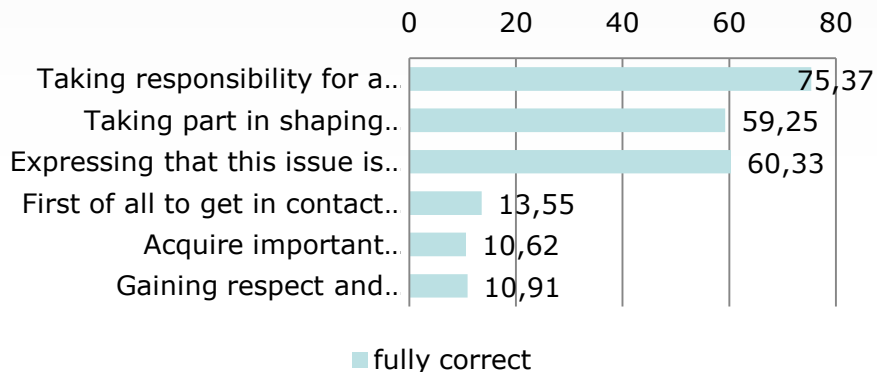
- egoistic: get into contact with others, acquire qualifications, gain respect and influence
- Altruistic: Responsibility for a livable world today and in the future; taking part in shaping society to some extent

# Self-interest or commitment driven political actors

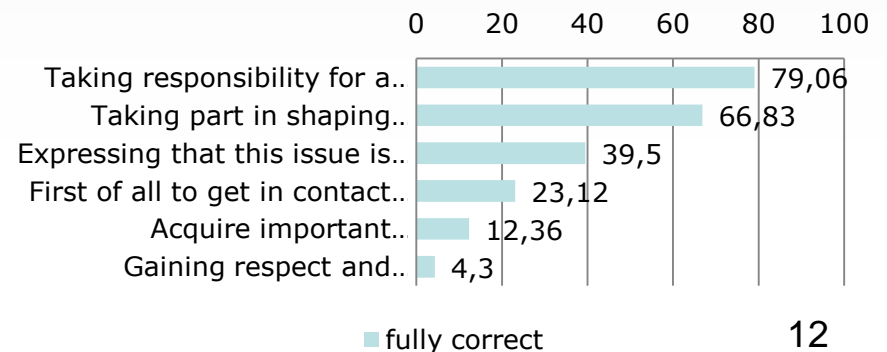
## Motives for commitment (trade unions, employer & business associations)



## Motives for commitment (Environmental organisations)



## Motives for commitment (NGOs)



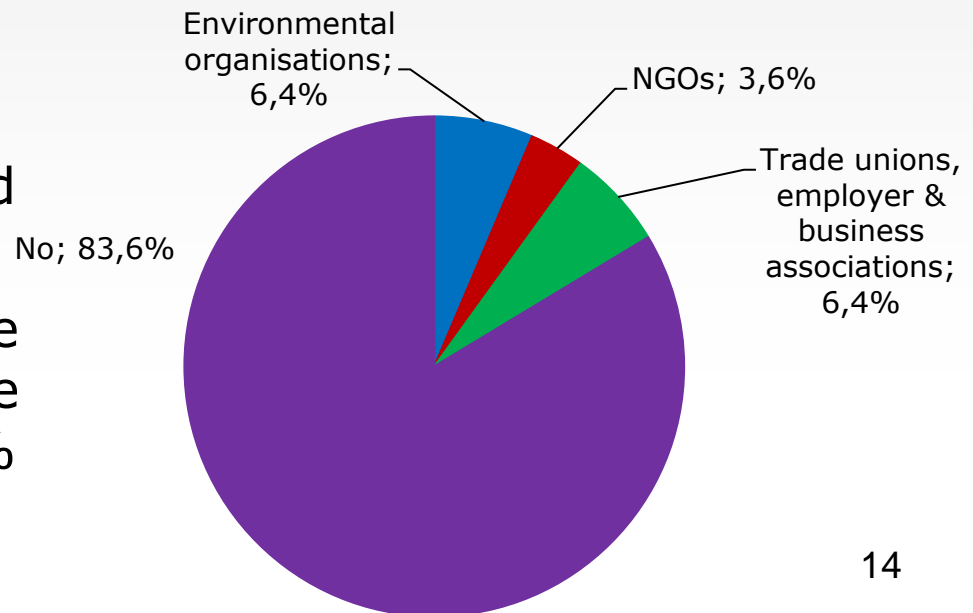
## Potentials and drawbacks of altruism

- Andreoni:
- Impure altruism: motivation by own well-being and sympathy
  - Not challenged by free-rider problems
  - But: risk of effectivity problems
  - Also: „selfish social behavior“, e.g. and „solidarity benefits“  
e.g. respect, influence, contacts, personal relations, identity
- Expressive benefits: personal satisfaction by explicit emphasis and publicity of own engagement
- Pure altruism: Motivation by commitment: independent of own well-being
  - Theoretically effective
  - But: public good and free-rider problems

## Potentials and drawbacks of altruism

- The high importance of commitments to be found among environmental and social group members can be decisive to enhance SHD for distant people and generations or for endangered species – provided that:
- The collective good and free rider problem associated with altruistic motivation by economics and Public Choice can be overcome, ensuring a broad public engagement and reasoning in these groups.
- 16 % are engaged in all three groups, 10 % engage in more altruistic groups. 84% - 90 % remain passive – free riders?

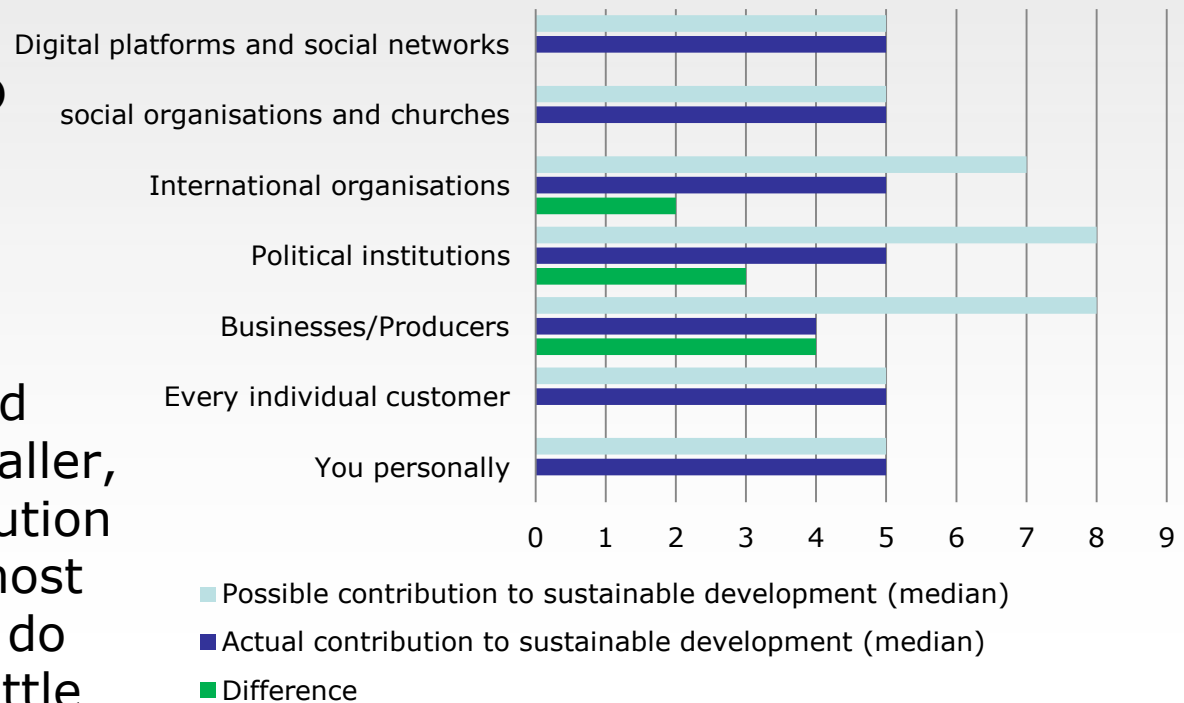
### Are you engaged in one of the following organisations?



## SHD actors: perceived potential and actual contribution

- Companies, political institutions and international institutions are said to be able to contribute most to SD
- Individuals, also as consumers, social networks and social organisations or churches are supposed to be capable of a smaller, still moderate contribution
- People feel that the most important institutions do contribute relatively little
- This can cause frustration and free rider problems; particularly as the perceived underperformance is on the side of those shaping national and global SHD governance

### Contribution of stakeholders to sustainable development



## Questions for further research

- Low priority of political influence: lack of “government by discussion” as “applied public reasoning”?
- Environmental protection at risk of being dominated by dimensions that people value more
- Very high priority attached to future generations but:
- Not in the focus of more short-run or self-interested voters, government, business and labor unions
- Though voters act rather self-interested in elections, altruistic motivations play a considerably larger role for those who participate in SHD groups (environmental and social SHD groups, labor unions)
- Findings indicate that altruistic motivations for joining groups are challenged by free-rider problems.
- The latter may worsen as the actors that are perceived to have most impact on SHD are also said to underperform substantially: neglect of responsibilities as a reason for frustration and political passivity?
- SHD-Deficits due to a lack of informed, critical political engagement (Sen 16 2009: 48).