

What Is Intercultural Sustainability?

A First Exploration of Linkages Between Culture and Sustainability in Intercultural Research

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Abstract

The sustainability of intercultural relations recently again has been identified as a central, but still neglected responsibility for intercultural research (e.g. Alexander et al., 2014a; Alexander et al., 2014b). This article identifies three different notions of sustainability related to culture in contemporary intercultural research: Egocentric uses focus on one single culture or organization. Utilitarian understandings argue that a sustainable care for intercultural relations may serve other sustainability goals. Allocentric notions ask for a global and equal dialogue on the concept. Complementing the authors above, this article argues for a stronger reflection and analysis of notions of sustainability in intercultural research.

Keywords: sustainability, intercultural research, normative orientations, global dialogue, ethnocentrism

1. Introduction

Asked about the role and function of intercultural communication research in our contemporary world, several authors in an e-mail discussion published in the *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* had claimed that sustainable understanding and peace across cultures are a foremost precondition for a fruitful and enduring development of mankind on a global level (Alexander et al., 2014a). Other authors in this debate warn that many of the contemporary ways of dealing with cultural dynamics is not at all sustainable, yet (Alexander et al., 2014a). And although the provocative hypotheses of Samuel Huntington in the early 1990s at that time soon had been put aside as being too simplistic and ethnocentric, even contemporary authors agree that there is a risk from cultural and interethnic conflict jeopardizing societies' sustainable development (Humphrey, 2013). Summarising this discussion, the authors (Alexander et al., 2014a) recur to Asante and Miike who even earlier had epitomized that "the sustainability of local community, let alone global society, through humanistic connection is the paradigmatic problematique of contemporary intercultural communication scholarship" (Asante & Miike, 2013). This is supported by Dutta and Dutta (2013) arguing for a culture-centred approach for a responsible and sustainable way of dealing with culture and intercultural communication.

However, these seminal remarks within the academic discipline hardly ever found their way into the wider political discourse on sustainable development. In this article, intercultural sustainability is introduced as a term that comprises any attempt of encouraging durable, long-lasting and resilient forms of intercultural communication and intercultural relations. Consequently, sustainability of intercultural communication and intercultural relations here are seen as an essential dimension of the discourse on global sustainability that comprises numerous dimensions from different fields of social activity. The notion of intercultural sustainability can help to sharpen researchers' consciousness for the responsibility and for the inevitable (social) normativity of their works without anticipating or prescribing the ways to reach these given goals – as debates on intercultural competence have tried to, frequently (for a very short summary c.f. Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

This article is out to encourage a future debate on the potential as well as on the pitfalls of the notion of intercultural sustainability by providing a rapid appraisal of to-date uses of the term sustainability in connection with aspects of intercultural communication and intercultural relations. This first overview is on the one hand open to any understanding of the terms under research in the fields of culture and sustainability. On the other

hand it seeks out to identify and to explore potential systematics and categorizations to describe potential linkages between culture and sustainability in research.

2. Sustainability Seen from the Social Sciences

As a very first sketch on the innovative topic of intercultural sustainability, this article will thus choose a textual approach checking in what ways the literal words *sustainable* and *sustainability* are used when related to culture. This approach surely has its strong limitations, and interpretive analyses will need to follow if intercultural sustainability may really be considered as a scholarly concept in future studies. To keep track of these present limitations for the time being, a few notes on the previous sustainability discourse as well as on hidden normative orientations underlying social research will precede the announced survey.

Parallel to the affirmative discourse on sustainability in organizational and management research, the social sciences shelter some critical and descriptive works on what is being done within sustainability discourse (for a complaint about the scarce contribution from cultural anthropology c.f. Singer, 2011). Discourse analysts in particular, emphasize that the notion of sustainability is by no means as unanimous and as goal-oriented as discourse may pretend. Instead, notions of the phenomenon are highly changeable and context-sensitive. However, large parts of contemporary discourse recur to a small number of initial documents. Accordingly, many authors (here e.g. Throsby, 2008) trace the hype on sustainability back to the 1972s statement by the Club of Rome on “The Limits to Growth” (Meadows et al., 1972). Subsequently, authors (here e.g. Axelsson et al., 2013) point at 1987’s *Brundtland Report* published by the United Nations’ *World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)* (WCED, 1987). The 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro is often seen as another important step in the development of the sustainability paradigm (Duxbury & Gillette, 2007). Here, some first steps on how to approach sustainability on a global level had been substantiated (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2006). The sociocultural dimension of the sustainability discourse can be seen as the result of a series of conventions including “the Mondiacult conferences in Mexico City (1982), Stockholm (1998), and the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001)” (Moosmüller & Schönhuth, 2009).

Today, the many facets of the notion of sustainability are said to lay the ground for its “constructive ambiguity” (Robinson, 2004). Beyond this, the constructivist nature of the sustainability movement may comprise some hidden dimensions. German philosopher Siegfried Timpf (2003) analyses the sustainability movement in the lights of Foucault’s dispositive theory (cf. “dispositions”, Foucault, 1984 [1969]). According to Timpf, the idea of sustainability suggests that the narrowness of ecological resources is something that can be successfully managed. This treatment by management has become an option after that discourse had replaced the notion of nature (which is not manageable in the end) by the notion of environment (which does not have any point of origin and which therefore can be managed). Sustainability from this perspective allows a rhetoric according to which mankind has the chance to fully keep control over its future. Considering the use of the sustainability paradigm in intercultural research it may thus be asked to what extent its use here too may bring along the risk of trivializing the issue at hand.

3. Method: A Literature Review

Since the question of interrelations between intercultural research and sustainability discourse is a recent and pioneering issue, this article will lay a first ground by means of a review of the existing literature that can be fruitful to this undertaking. For the same reason, and to present an overview that is as all-embracing as possible, several different approaches have been chosen to identify relevant works:

Firstly, a general Internet search on academic work on sustainability and culture has been carried out. Secondly, a more in-depth search confined to academic and up-to-date publications in intercultural communication has been added. Finally, the most relevant international academic journals that explicitly relate to intercultural research in their titles have been analysed in more detail. Here, the full text online archives of the selected journals have been searched for the words *sustainable* and *sustainability*. Articles from the hit list have been omitted when the search items did not appear but in the article’s references or when the word *sustainable* had not been made use of but as an adjective in a general meaning outside the focus of the research at hand. Similarly, mentions have been left out if they relate to development fields other than culture without taking into account culture as any form of contribution to this goal. Also, mentions of the term within book reviews have been omitted. This search has distilled the following titles:

The *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* (JIIC) of the (U.S. based) *National Communication Association* is published with Taylor and Francis. Its online full text archive dates back to its first issue in January 2008. Here, eleven articles have been identified as relevant (Alexander et al., 2014a; Alexander et al., 2014b; Anguiano et al., 2012; Broome & Collier, 2012; Collier, 2009; Dutta & Dutta, 2013;

Fraser et al., 2011; Herakova, 2009; LaFever, 2008; Ojwang, 2008; Sekimoto, 2012).

The *Journal of Intercultural Studies* (JIS) is maintained by the *Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation at Deakin University*, Australia, and it is also published with Taylor and Francis. Its online archive dates back to the journal's first volume published in 1980, and here, 21 articles have been selected (Ambrosini & Boccagni, 2015; Boese & Phillips, 2011; Busbridge & Winarnita 2015; Castles, 2013; Catney et al., 2011; Collins, 2013; Dahinden et al., 2014; Dawe, 2007; Downman, 2012; Gvion, 2014; Humphrey, 2013; Jakubowicz, 2011; Kesten et al., 2011; Khan, 2014; Kubal, 2013; Mansouri & Pietsch, 2011; Mondain & Diagne, 2013; Muñoz, 2011; Poucki & Bryan, 2014; Poynting & Mason, 2006; Stolle-McAllister, 2013).

The *Journal Language and Intercultural Communication* (LAIC) held by the *International Association of Languages and Intercultural Communication* (IALIC) and published with Taylor and Francis has been searched in its online full text archive from 2001 until September 2014. Six articles have been identified here (Bartlett, 2004; Stibbe, 2004; Gu, 2010; Tange, 2010; Henderson, 2011; Briel, 2013).

The *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (IJIR) is the journal of the *International Academy for Intercultural Research* (IAIR) and it is published with Elsevier. A search in its online archive from 1977 until September 2014 has identified 15 relevant articles, here (Cushner, 2005; Woods et al., 2011; Davidheiser, 2005; Kealey et al., 2005; Kelman, 2005; Marsella, 2005; Salzman, 2008; Cvajner & Sciortino, 2010; Buddenhagen & Baldwin, 2011; Nijhuis et al., 2011; Rivers, 2011; Dunne, 2013; Rienties & Nolan 2013; Kuchenbrandt et al., 2014).

The *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* (JICR) is the journal of the *World Communication Association* and it is published with *Taylor and Francis*. JICR's online archive has been searched from its beginning in 2006. Here, five articles have been identified as relevant to analysis (Pearson et al., 2010; Tamam, 2010; Hoover, 2011; Takahashi & Meisner, 2011; Johnson & Callahan, 2013).

The web-based *Journal of Intercultural Communication* (JIC) (www.immi.se) has an archive dating back until 1999. A similar search has been carried out here identifying two articles (Stier, 2006; Wei, 2009).

Interculture Journal (IJ) is another web-based (www.interculture-journal.com) journal on the issue. Its articles are published partly in German language, partly in English. In this case, the German language equivalents to the English search items have been included into the search taking the adjective *nachhaltig* [sustainable] and the noun *Nachhaltigkeit* [sustainability]. Ten articles have been found here (Nazarkiewicz, 2003; Rathje, 2003, 2006; Strewe, 2007; Hennecke, 2008; Scheible, 2009; Kriegel, 2010; Bolten, 2011; da Silva & Drawert, 2011; Waibel, 2012).

4. Results: Egocentric, Utilitarian and Allocentric Understandings of Culture and Sustainability

Considering culture, intercultural communication and intercultural relations, authors in this field present diverging visions on how these phenomena may be managed to best contribute to global peace, to constructive living together and to a general sustainable development of societies. Focusing on the question of how sustainability goals are supposed to be reached, the literature review suggests a systematics distinguishing between egocentric approaches focusing one side of participants in intercultural contact in particular vs allocentric approaches striving for an equal consideration of all sides in a dialogic manner. Furthermore, utilitarian uses of cultural and intercultural sustainability will be identified in literature seeing intercultural understanding as a tool to support the sustainability of other social dimensions.

4.1 Egocentric Uses of the Sustainability Paradigm

4.1.1 Pleas against Sustainability

There are almost no clear pleas against sustainability aims. However, some authors mention that striving for sustainability may impede the accomplishment of competing goals. Briel (2013) (LAIC) for example cites a complaint according to which strives for ecological sustainability slows down the use of mass media for building a stronger civil society. Kealey et al. (2005) (IJIR) report on a development project that could not be continued in a sustainable way because competing issues of environmental protection had been ignored. Conversely, Collins (2013) (JIS) critically reports that some speakers in Australia are concerned about increased immigration as a challenge to the country's ecological sustainability.

4.1.2 Ethnocentric Notions of Culture Do Persist

Even within cultural research, ancient notions of culture impeding intercultural dialogue still persist in some fields. Sekimoto (2012) (JIIC) as well as Dahinden et al. (2014) (JIS) here remind us that not only cultures but also understandings of culture can be seen as ideologies that perpetuate themselves. Social and mass media

discourse reinforce the persistence of essentialist and static notions of culture that originally had been developed by research and that may impede intercultural relations and constructive dialogue and exchange (Rathje, 2003) (IJ).

4.1.3 Supporting the Persistence of Cultures (and Thus Diversity)

Cultural identity and cultural diversity are by many authors seen as valuable goods worth of being sustained. First of all, cultures have their internal mechanisms ensuring their sustainability, per se. Mondain and Diagne (2013) (JIS) show that even those parts of migratory societies that stay at home may develop a strong sustainability since they have transformed into parts of a transnational (migratory) network. However, certain conditions also may threaten the sustainability of cultural groups (Mondain & Diagne, 2013), and thus, Austrian philosophers Heintel and Krainer (2010) focus on ways to encourage the creative force of cultures. If culture can produce cohesion for a given community, people should develop strategies for a systematic seizure of these positive effects. Thus, Heintel and Krainer argue for a controlled process of becoming aware of one's cultural visions. Especially in contexts of strong asymmetries of power, the sustainable preservation of identities of minority groups may turn out to be a desirable issue, as can be seen with the Roma in Eastern Europe (Herakova, 2009) (JIIC) or with tribal communities in Northern Thailand (Downman, 2012) (JIS). At the example of the Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia, LaFever, (2008) (JIIC) adds that minorities' sustainability may also be strengthened by means of stable relationships with the majority group. On the basis of an empirical study, Johnson and Callahan (2013) (JICR) outline the far-reaching impact of social media for the empowerment of cultural minorities. Ploner (2009) (LAIC) adds that a promotion of regional tourism can sustainably foster regional cultural identities. Gvion (2014) (JIC) specifies that even forms of constructed authenticity in the display of cultural heritage may help to foster identities. From a more critical perspective, Dawe (2007) (JIS) warns that the development of a region's touristic attractiveness will require a lot of caution if sustainable regional development is aspired.

Cultural planners confirm the value of cultural diversity in its own right. Duxbury and Gillette (2007) promote culture as an important pillar in the range of sustainability goals. In the example of Sweden, Axelsson et al. (2013) even propose quantitative methods to measure a region's cultural sustainability. In another vein, Pearson et al. (2010) (JICR) reveal that a strong family communication cohesion will strengthen ethnic and cultural affiliation. Both attitudes will contribute to sustainable community building and civil society. Conversely, from this perspective, ethnic diversity can be seen as a threat to cultural sustainability. Catney et al. (2011) (JIS) criticise this view that is often promoted by politically conservative discourse. Instead, they say that there is no immediate interrelation between homogeneity vs. diversity and sustainability. In contrast to this, Fraser et al. (2011) (JIIC) see a real challenge in the unequal distribution of international support for (economic and ecological) sustainable development. Minority groups and societies from developing countries continue to be disadvantaged in this (allegedly) global movement.

4.2 Utilitarian Uses: Organizational and Corporate Success

Cultural sustainability efforts may serve both cultural community-building as well as economic growth. However, some approaches still narrow their focus on cultural sustainability as being a tool for economic growth at first place. Kealey et al. (2005) (IJIR) for example report on the egoistic orientation of many organizations, even those in the development sector. Throsby (2008) contrasts that so far, only ecological sustainability has been acknowledged as a key condition for long-term economic growth and success. Cultural sustainability, according to him, has a similar impact but people's awareness of these effects will still need to be raised. For the level of local communities, Muñoz (2011) (JIS) points out that a care for people's religious identities may strengthen a community's general social sustainability and cohesion. Anguiano et al. (2012) (JIIC) report that in some cases, the distribution of ecological and environmental resources is tied to ethnic or racial belonging. This is illustrated at the example of Latino communities in the U.S. where a sustainable intercultural dialogue may help to implement a more just and equal distribution of environmental resources.

A strong corporate culture may support a corporation's internal conflict management capacities. According to Kriegel (2010) (IJ), internal conflict is one major obstacle to sustainable economic success. Conflict may be even more challenging in international settings, and Rathje (2006) (IJ) adds that consequently, organizational cultures should be sustainably taken care of since they are a core part of employees' identities. Intercultural training may be of help here, and even more, it may be an indirect supporter of economic growth. Scheible (2009) (IJ) states that intercultural training may sustainably improve the employees' intercultural competence, and this again may support economic sustainability. Wei (2009) (JIC) supports this view for the transnational level of entire nations. Accordingly, countries will always be interested in the maintenance and the growth of sustainable

communicative relations with other countries to ensure their economic growth. Even more, Castles (2013) (JIS) reminds us of the fact that permanent immigration (of people from other ethnic cultures) is a precondition for sustainable economic growth in most of the first world countries.

Technological advance is another major field besides from economic growth that receives attention in sustainability discourse. Again, cultural sustainability may be added to support this aim. While De Beukelaer and Duxbury (2014) present practical examples from cultural planning projects in Canada, Hawkes (2001), Khan (2014) (JIS) as well as Mansouri and Pietsch (2011) (JIS) do so for Australia. These thoughts become even more crucial considering the general insight that any technological advance is based on culture-specific assumptions and visions. This general impact of culture on sustainability goals even has been acknowledged by the United Nations: Ban Ki-moon, its Secretary General, has summed up in June 2013 that when the UN had formulated their Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for the period from 2000 to 2015, they had neglected the central role of culture for the pursuit of sustainable development goals (Ban Ki-moon, 2013). Since then, the General Assembly has published two resolutions on culture and development in 2010 and 2011. In 2013, another UN conference took place in Hangzhou on “Culture: A Key to Sustainable Development” (Ban Ki-moon, 2013). Here again, culture still seems to be understood as an add-on that may support sustainability goals in other fields. If the role of culture for general sustainable development is that decisive, a culture of sustainability therefore may be the most precise solution, say Parodi et al. (2011) in their edited volume.

4.3 Allocentric Uses of the Sustainability Paradigm

Allocentric notions of the sustainability paradigm will consider all cultures as equal and as equally valuable. Cultures here should be preserved to ensure a sustainable cultural diversity as well as a sustainable peaceful living together across cultures.

A number of mentions in literature point at the importance of peaceful intercultural coexistence for general global sustainability aims. This concern is supported for example by Oetzel in the discussion summed up by Alexander et al. (2014b) as well as by Yin in the same discussion (both JIIC). Additional exemplary mentions can be found in Dutta and Dutta (2013) (JIIC) as well as in Busbridge and Winarnita (2015) (JIS). Conversely, Humphrey (2013) warns that intercultural conflict may endanger sustainable development. Consequently, Marsella (2005) (IJIR) argues for designing cultures themselves in ways that encourage intercultural understanding and peace. Jakubowicz (2011) (JIS) defines multiculturalism as an approach in cultural policy that tries to reconcile egocentric and allocentric understandings of sustainability. Accordingly, sustainable multicultural societies build upon cultural organizations and institutions that strengthen these particular cultural identities and that at the same time initiate contact with neighboring groups. Similarly, Kubal (2013) (JIS) recommends that a country's local law should be designed in a way that it is compatible with the understandings of law and justice of local migrant groups to ensure a sustainable livelihood in place. Canada and Australia in particular here are known for their early efforts of establishing sustainable local communities by introducing concepts like multiculturalism the actual specifications of which are under permanent discussion since then (Mansouri & Pietsch, 2011; Poynting & Mason, 2006) (both JIS). Bolten (2011) (IJ) instead specifies that sustainable intercultural relations will need to base upon reciprocal interpersonal relations, and Morris (2010) adds that an understanding of cultures based on boundary-making and on mutual evaluations will impede the implementation of sustainable societies. What is needed instead is a widespread promotion of non-exclusive and non-judgemental notions of culture.

Sustainable intercultural relations will not emerge by themselves, Stier (2006) (JIC) argues. Instead, societies will need to deliberately avow themselves to sustainability goals (Mendoza, 2010). Ambrosini and Boccagni (2015) as well as Boese and Phillips (2011) (both JIC) point out that the local community level may be the most immediate entry point for ensuring intercultural sustainability.

Besides from these general concepts, education may be seen as the field of application in which the notion of sustainability plays the most prominent role. Here, many authors agree that sustainable intercultural relations are ensured best the more people deeply internalize this goal in their worldviews. Specifying this aim, Woods et al. (2011) (IJIR) recommend that university students should be taught to become global citizens. Similarly, Crosbie (2014) (LAIC) argues that sustainable democracy as well as sustainable living together on a global level cannot be reached but through global citizenship which is based on cosmopolitan attitudes. Regarding education as a process, Tran (2009) (LAIC) reminds us of the fact that learning processes are largely based on individual and subjective constructions and re-constructions and that concepts for sustainable intercultural relations should be grounded here.

Foreign language teaching may be seen as a special field in education that seems even more suitable for the

promotion of allocentric ideas of sustainable intercultural relations (Rivers, 2011) (IJIR). Especially in the field of higher education, there is still a large potential that is unused, say Coperías Aguilar (2009) and Saraceni (2009) (both LAIC).

4.3.1 Plurality of Languages Instead of Hegemony of English

Considering the role of languages, authors have different visions on how to ensure sustainability for a global living together and intercultural relations. Gu (2010) (LAIC) for example argues in favour of a stronger promotion of English in China. Internationalization here is seen as a way to sustainably consolidate international relations. Other authors, like for example Tsuda (2010) see the spread of English and the corresponding internationalization processes as results of a Western ethnocentric worldview neglecting cultural diversity. In practice, Ojwang (2008) (JIIC) says that linguistic diversity in Africa contributes to societies' general sustainable development since neighboring languages very often can be mutually understood by their speakers. This closeness may result in a much stronger common identity than the enforcement of an external language as a lingua franca. The same argument is supported for intercultural exchanges by means of artistic literature (Adejumobi, 2008) (LAIC).

Guilherme (2007) (LAIC) suggests a compromise for a sustainable seizure of global English, which should not be seen as a lingua franca but as an international language. Doing so, Guilherme wants to promote a cosmopolitan attitude: English may be promoted as long as it helps and enriches international communication. In parallel, linguistic diversity is supposed to be preserved to avoid ethnocentrism (e.g. Bruen 2005).

4.3.2 Student Exchange Research

International student exchange projects have become the sine qua non tool for the promotion of international understanding over the last decades. On the basis of these numerous individual encounters, sustainable peace and positive intercultural relations are supposed to be ensured on the macro-level of societies.

However, exchange research raises the question of the sustainability of attitude changes from short-term exchanges. While reliable solutions to this question are hard to find, numerous authors confirm the aim of sustainability (e.g. Kuchenbrandt et al., 2014) (IJIR). Rienties and Nolan (2013) (IJIR) as well as Dunne (2013) (IJIR) specify that interpersonal friendships from exchange programs should be made sustainable. In contrast to this, for da Silva and Drawert (2011) (IJ) students' mobility is the core aspect that should be made more sustainable. Henderson (2011) (LAIC) clarifies that participants of exchange programs should consciously understand that their attitude changes and their new friendships should be sustainable. Waibel (2012) (IJ) and Furcsa (2009) (LAIC) add that intercultural contacts and individual intercultural friendships can also be tied via virtual networks.

4.3.3 Internationalization at Home

Intercultural contact can even be experienced at people's local workplaces as well as in their everyday surroundings, since international and intercultural mobility and migration are omnipresent in today's globalized world. However, this potential very often remains unused or it is not used in a systematic way, as Tange (2010) (LAIC) criticizes. For the example of school teachers, Tange thus argues for the implementation of a "sustainable teaching practice", i.e. that teachers in the first place will need to be enabled to provide their classes in English language.

4.3.4 Intercultural Training

Although intercultural training in its traditional form is normally seen as an educational measure that is used in corporations and professional organizations (for sustainability as a training goal see Kealey et al., 2005), its effects do not necessarily have to be confined to institutional benefits. Trainees will also profit from intercultural trainings on an individual basis and they will thus be able to better contribute to the establishment of sustainable intercultural relations in general (Cushner, 2005). Nazarkiewicz (2003) (IJ) reminds us that culture in general can be seen as a tool for social orientation of individuals. Intercultural training may thus influence the core components of individuals' orientations, and intercultural training can contribute to forms of behaviour that support sustainable intercultural relations. However, it cannot be taken for granted that any intercultural training will have sustainable effects (Collier, 2009) (JIIC). Thus, similar to research on international exchanges, research on intercultural trainings has one central question: How can intercultural trainings be designed in a way that the training has long-term effects, i.e. that its effects are sustainable (Strewe, 2007; Bolten, 2008)?

4.3.5 Cultural Planning on a Community Level

The sustainability of the livelihood of local communities with people of diverse cultural identities can become an

issue of systematic cultural planning (e.g. Kesten et al., 2011) (JIS), and Stolle-McAllister (2013) (JIS) emphasize that this form of sustainability should be ensured equally for any groups at any place. Khan (2014) (JIS) analyses policy documents on cultural planning in Australian suburbs. Interestingly, she does not find any mention of culture as a term here. Instead texts on cultural planning tend to speak about sustainability in general. However, from the context, Khan interprets that what is actually meant by sustainability here can be specified as cultural participation. So in this case, Khan reveals that intercultural sustainability is frequently seen as the core dimension of sustainability on a community level in general. Poucki and Bryan (2014) confirm the urgent need for measures to ensure sustainable livelihoods on a community level since otherwise, even serious threats as for example human trafficking may emerge across cultural boundaries.

4.3.6 Politics and International Conflict Management

Political action, and the field of diplomacy in particular, may aim at the establishment of sustainable intercultural relations, but they will normally pursue egocentric goals even if they may be announced as allocentric in public. However, it is generally hard to verify whether intercultural relations are considered as an aspect of sustainable living together or whether they are seen as a basis for hegemonic claims.

International conflict studies from a political science perspective generally seek for ways of sustainable peace-building (Kelman, 1998, 2005). Here, Broome and Collier (2012) (JIIC) argue for a stronger and a more explicit commitment of intercultural communication scholars in efforts on sustainable intercultural peace-building. Davidheiser (2005) (IJIR) presents ethnographic data from The Gambia showing that in this case, sustainability is considered as one of the primary criteria for good conflict resolution and that it is shared as a goal even beyond Western cultures. Salzman (2008) (IJIR) turns our attention to the challenge of religious conflicts and religious fundamentalism. These lines of conflict on an international level very often are seen as more or less intractable and hard to mediate. In these cases, Salzman assumes that sustainable solutions cannot be reached but if people manage to coordinate their actual needs instead of insisting on their fundamentalist attitudes.

4.3.7 Development Aid

In a similar vein, sustainability is one of the major goals in the field of development aid: The effects of development projects are supposed to persist and to continue after a project has been closed. Nijhuis et al. (2011) (IJIR) confirm this goal in the example of aid projects in the field of educational curriculum development in Ghana. Buddenhagen and Baldwin (2011) show in the example of development projects in Tanzania that even the project workers themselves have internalized sustainability as a primary aim of their work.

Hennecke (2008) (IJ) points out that people from different cultures have different approaches to the use of technologies. If cultural particularities are neglected, even technological developmental aid will lack sustainability. Also, the subfield of development communication promotes the aim of sustainability. Cvajner and Sciortino (2010) (IJIR) in the example of Kenya present a cultural learning approach to the sustainable management of social problems and social conflict.

5. Discussion

The literature survey on the use of the notion of sustainability in recent publications on intercultural research has shown that the mentions found can best be divided into three major functional categories. Egocentric approaches aim at a promotion of the sustainability of one single culture or organization. Normally, this is the culture or the organization the authors themselves belong to. Utilitarian approaches argue for a sustainable care towards culture and cultural relations for the sake of a goal that is outside the thematic field of intercultural communication or intercultural relations. In most cases, intercultural sustainability here is seen as a tool to strengthen the sustainability of economic or political success of a corporation, an organization or even a nation. Finally, allocentric approaches see the sustainability of intercultural relations and peaceful and constructive cohabitation as a core value that has to be encouraged. Central to this notion is a dialogical approach including all sides concerned into the intercultural interaction process in an equal and egalitarian way. Peaceful and constructive intercultural relations all over the world can be seen as a very basic pre-condition for the sustainable development of any other social fields. If peaceful development is interrupted by conflict on a global scale, economic, political and ecological sustainable development can experience serious setbacks.

However, this literature review confirms some of the fears raised by Alexander et al. (2014a) that had been taken as its starting point: Allocentric concepts of intercultural sustainability are needed, but in many fields of action, they are not much more but a vision, so far. They can be found in a few fields of education and cultural planning at a community level, at best. In other fields like for example business management, allocentric notions of

intercultural sustainability are hard to find.

6. Limitations and Questions for Future Research

The results of this article confirm the call of Alexander et al. (2014a) for a more conscious and responsible research on intercultural communication and intercultural relations considering sustainability needs and goals in this field. The distinction between egocentric, utilitarian, and allocentric understandings of intercultural sustainability here may help to focus on the precise effects of the underlying goals of studies at hand. Although intercultural sustainability may be agreed upon as a desirable goal for intercultural research, some more pitfalls may need to be researched and taken care of:

Concepts of intercultural sustainability run the risk of being essentialised (for an example e.g. Vachon, 2010) and – as a consequence – as being formulated from one single culture-specific perspective. Stibbe (2004) (LAIC) has revealed this dilemma at the example of environmental sustainability. To ensure an allocentric and dialogic orientation in intercultural sustainability research, its concepts will need to be open to permanent discussion and re-negotiation (e.g. Bartlett, 2004) (LAIC), and they will permanently need to be brought back into researchers' consciousness by means of analyses and descriptions (e.g. Takahashi & Meisner, 2011) (JICR). Here, Hoover (2011) (JICR) warns that even notions of dialogue tend to be culture-specific. Even more, reflecting upon the sustainability of a given action thus will always be led by a moral judgement: Those actions that are assumed to be sustainable are good, other actions are bad. Since notions of sustainability can be culture-specific and since they are products of social discourse, these moral judgements may be deliberate to some degree. The question of whether the behaviour of a given group, a culture, or an individual is sustainable or not, can thus be used as an argument and as an instrument in conflict discourse.

A critical observation of intercultural research considering sustainability may also raise the question of whether culture-essentialist approaches in general will always impede allocentric sustainability goals since they cannot but re-confirm the incommensurability of cultures as Holliday (2010) and Dervin (2014) (LAIC) criticise. Furthermore, future research may attempt to specify more clearly, what sustainable intercultural relations may look like. This may be done by firstly tracing dialogue and negotiations on this actual question, but also for example by descriptions and evaluations of best practice scenarios. Furthermore, the notion of intercultural sustainability will need to be sharpened in its relations to neighbouring concepts: In what way does intercultural sustainability exceed the existing concepts of intercultural dialogue, and in what aspects does it differ from existing concepts of intercultural competence? The potential of intercultural sustainability in contrast to intercultural competence may be searched for in its radical basic openness refraining from the temptation of promoting solutions at a too early and too general stage.

7. Conclusion

This article has analysed the use and the potential of the notion of intercultural sustainability for the research field of intercultural communication. The analysis has been based on three assumptions: On the one hand, some authors (e.g. Alexander et al., 2014a; Alexander et al., 2014b) warn that sustainable intercultural understanding will be a pre-condition for a general and global sustainable development of societies. From this, there is a growing responsibility on intercultural research to consciously analyse and focus on this potential which currently is neglected by societies as well as by academia. On the other hand, the notion of sustainability is considered by quite a number of academic works in the field, already. However, sustainability in most cases lacks further specification. Third, although sustainability aims can be derived from research on intercultural communication, this thematic field is not included in the official dimensions of sustainability discourse, yet.

On the basis of a first and exploratory literature review, this article has suggested a distinction of three different notions of the interrelation between culture and sustainability. Egocentric uses of the sustainability paradigm are based on a one-sided perspective on intercultural relations. According to traditional notions of intercultural competence, these approaches reflect upon the potential of creating sustainable intercultural relations from the view of one single actor. These approaches normally are based upon ethnocentric assumptions on cultural and intercultural theory. This category includes approaches that are simply ethnocentric, but also those approaches that are written from the perspective of or in favour of a single organization, corporation, group or person.

Utilitarian uses of the sustainability paradigm see culture and competent ways of managing cultural diversity as an instrument to support the achievement of sustainability goals in other sectors of social action. For example, many approaches see cultural sustainability as a necessary contribution to economic and/or corporate success. Sustainable positive intercultural relations are not ascribed a value of themselves, though. In theory, utilitarian approaches can be based upon egocentric as well as upon allocentric understandings of sustainability.

Allocentric uses of the sustainability paradigm acknowledge the necessity of having all sides concerned participate in a mutual dialogue on what intercultural sustainability is and how it can be reached. As a consequence, these approaches do not suggest definitions of or roadmaps for intercultural sustainability. Instead, they argue for the salience of the idea and they promote forums to initiate intercultural dialogue on intercultural sustainability. Currently, these approaches primarily can be found in research on education, esp. foreign language education, as well as cultural planning on a community level, foreign aid and politics.

Besides from this categorization, this article has revealed a number of pitfalls arising from reflections on intercultural sustainability. One major concern lies in the permanent risk of essentialising the notions of the term. Concepts from discourse theory may show that large parts of social research are more or less bound to society's normative orientation irrespective of a work's descriptive or analytical character.

Research on intercultural communication and intercultural relations has the chance of becoming much more transparent as well as efficient when its normative goals as well as its potential orientations towards intercultural sustainability will be discussed and reflected in an open forum. Even more, research on intercultural communication can make a significant and necessary contribution to the global discourse on sustainability and sustainable development.

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