

From companionship with nature to green consumerism: A conceptual analysis of competing beliefs on human nature in Finnish and German green parties 1980-2002

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Abstract

The German green party Die Grüne and the Finnish Vihreä liitto underwent significant ideological changes during the 1990s. Earlier their political thinking revolved mostly around radical ideals of recognizing human-nature companionship over economic liberties, demanding the rundown of market-based policies for the sake of ecological balance, and a radically altered understanding of well-being. A contextual conceptual analysis reveals that by 2002, both parties had replaced these radical standpoints with the moderate ideals of 'ecological modernism' and 'sustainable development', which combined ecological thinking with green consumerism and green economic growth.

Methodologically, this paper examines the interconnectedness between the environment, political discourses and beliefs. Beliefs regarding human self and human-nature relationships turn out to be vital elements of environmental political discourses. They provide the framework for answering such questions as how to solve environmental problems: whether by emphasizing individual liberties through consumer-citizenship as means for ecological consumption, or communal responsibilities and industry regulation over economic liberties. This paper argues that analyzing these beliefs in political language helps to understand environmental discourses more thoroughly also in the 2020s.

Author information

Risto-Matti Matero (MA, M.Soc.Sci) is a 2nd-year doctoral student at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. He is working on his dissertation on competing beliefs on human nature in the history of Finnish, German and Swedish green parties 1980-2002 through contextual conceptual analysis of environmental political discourses. He is interested in better understanding the interconnected nature of beliefs, political cultures and the environment, and his goal is to integrate aspects of political discourse analysis, environmental history, and history of ideas and beliefs on a transnational level through his research.

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