Article

Following Gandhi: Social Entrepreneurship as A Non-Violent Way of Communicating Sustainability Challenges

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Abstract: In the context of the Rio Earth Summit numerous international regimes, national policies and organizational guidelines have appeared that help translate the normative demands of sustainable development into political reality. The implementation of these instruments, however, often runs into difficulties or fails entirely. An example is the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), a progressive approach for the conservation of freshwater that is very unlikely to be implemented by 2015, the target year. We examine in this paper how a recent variation of Gandhian non-violent communication within social entrepreneurship suggests one way to deal with this challenge. Non-violent communication, rooted in Gandhian social action, has long been part of environmental politics. It has undergone a new variation as a mode of communication in the hands of social entrepreneurship initiatives that address urgent social and environmental issues with new, practical ideas. In the conceptual part of this paper, we outline our approach to sustainability, non-violent communication and social entrepreneurship. In a further part, we present data from a trans-disciplinary experiment to illustrate and critically discuss social entrepreneurship as a mode of sustainability communication. The experiment looked at, which is based on French social entrepreneur Roberto Epple's idea of a *Big Jump,* is a collaborative campaign that invites young people to take action for water conservation in the context of the WFD.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship; Gandhi; non-violent communication; European Union Water Framework Directive; water conservation; Big Jump; strong sustainability; capabilities

1. Introduction

On 12 March 1930, thousands of people joined Gandhi in an almost 400 km long march from his ashram in Sabarmati to Dandi, a coastal town known for its salt deposits. The morning after his arrival, Gandhi went to the beach and collected a lump of salt in front of the crowd that had gathered around him during the 23 days of marching [1,2]. With this peaceful yet active gesture Gandhi created a powerful image that drew the attention of Indian and international media to the difficulties of meeting basic needs under British colonial rule. It communicated to a global public the injustice of the British taxation on salt, which made the collection and production of salt illegal and the purchase of salt expensive and thus unaffordable for the income poor [1,2]. The Salt March was an attempt to further the translation of the Indian declaration of independence, announced 26 January 1930, into political reality [2].

On 17 July 2005, 75 years later, about 250,000 people from 22 European countries celebrated the first European River Swimming Day [3,4]. People jumped into their rivers at the same time across Europe, and many jumps got very good media coverage with their river events. Roberto Epple, a fellow of the social entrepreneurship network Ashoka, created the Big Jump to gain support for river conservation across Europe. In 2000, the European Union (EU) set itself an ambitious goal with the Water Framework Directive (WFD). The directive aims at the good status of European rivers and lakes by 2015 [5] (Article 4 (1)). It is so far unlikely that this objective will be met [6].

Both Gandhi and Epple, in their respective contexts, initiated symbolic actions in view of social and ecological demands that were translated into declarations, policies and guidelines but were likely to run into difficulty or even fail when it came to practical implementation. This *implementation gap* is an obstacle for many of the attempts to translate the goals of sustainable development into practice. We examine in this paper how a recent variation of Gandhian non-violent communication within social entrepreneurship suggests one way to deal with this challenge and thereby contributes to sustainability communication.

To emphasize this, we highlight the Gandhian tradition in social entrepreneurship practice and theory. This tradition is presently in danger of being marginalized in social entrepreneurship discourse in favor of a focus on business models and earned income. Alternative roots of social entrepreneurship are in danger of being cut off, even if they are specifically relevant for sustainability, or so we aim to show. Following an introduction of sustainable development and the implementation gap (Section 2), we therefore introduce the discourse on social entrepreneurship (Section 3) and its Gandhian roots (Section 4). We then illustrate this strand of social entrepreneurship with the example of the Big Jump (Section 5), followed by a critical discussion of this strand as a mode of communication for sustainable development (Section 6).

2. The Goals of Sustainable Development and Sustainability Politics

There is broad consensus that sustainable development includes normative ideas: responsibility for the future, meeting needs worldwide, environmental protection, development as a matter of quality of life, integration of economy and environment, as well as participation [7]. However, the way in which these ideas should be conceptualized is a matter of contestation. Proponents of so-called *weak sustainability* argue that sustainable development requires keeping total investment constant across all

types of capital; proponents of *strong sustainability* argue that it requires keeping natural capital constant; critics question the possibility of framing the debate in terms of natural capital (for an overview see [8], for critics see [9]). In this paper we presuppose a conception of strong sustainability [10] and of inter- and intra-generational justice as a matter of meeting central human capabilities that are of universal importance yet are realized differently according to geography and culture [11]. In this conception, questions of equality, justice and development ought to be primarily evaluated according to their impact on central human capabilities [12,13]. These are doings and beings, such as "participating politically" and "being in good health". In terms of justice metrics this implies a shift from the utilitarian focus on outcomes (preferences, happiness states) and the liberal focus on inputs (such as Rawlsian primary goods) to a space between input and outcome. The focus is on the effective, as opposed to merely formal, opportunities of people to enjoy doings and beings. For example, not just the formal right to vote but also the cultural and economic preconditions required for making use of this right.

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit marks the beginning of continuing efforts to translate the core ideas of sustainable development into policies on an international, national, regional and local level. Following Agenda 21, which was officially signed by 178 nations at the summit, sustainability strategies were developed on the national and sub-national level, and numerous activities emerged to adopt Agenda 21. Important policies and guidelines were agreed upon, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) and the Biodiversity Convention. In the EU, sustainable development came to be recognized in the general EU policy process (see the Lisbon process 2000, [14]) as well as via the development of theme-specific policies such as the WFD. However, with the sustainable development policies adopted across the world on all political levels, a new challenge followed: to move from the adoption of policies to their implementation [15].

Political scientists have studied the difficulties of implementation, particularly in regards to the implementation of EU environmental policy, and have pointed out that for policy implementation adoption in a sense of policy transposition is only one aspect; interpretation, application and enforcement are also needed to achieve effective implementation [16,17]. Difficulties occur with respect to all these aspects of the implementation process, and in many cases result in an implementation deficit [16,18]. Here we use *implementation gap* to refer specifically to policies that have been transposed from international or transnational treaties and directives into national regulations but that are still not fully applied or enforced.

An example for an implementation gap in the case of EU sustainability policy is the integrated WFD. It has been widely welcomed as a progressive example of the translation of sustainability demands into regional policy. The WFD seeks to protect water as a heritage for present and future generations; to this end it aims at good ecological and chemical status of European surface waters by 2015 [5] (Article 4). The ecological objectives of the WFD are very ambitious. "Good ecological status of surface waters," for example, refers to a status that can be considered as natural for the respective water body [5] (Annex 5 (1.2.)); if a river or lake has been heavily modified and cannot be restored at reasonable cost, the WFD aims at "good ecological potential" [5] (Article 4). The WFD requires that EU member states analyze the *status quo* in their rivers and lakes and set out the results and objectives in river basin management plans [5] (Article 8, 11, 13). Cooperation is required regionally and in some cases internationally (depending on the location and extent of water bodies), along with the participation of citizens in the planning and implementation process [5] (Article 13, 14). The directive

seeks to encourage participation, even with respect to a frequently technical subject such as water management. In practice, the strategies to meet the objectives of the WFD are elaborated by the respective administrative units of the EU-nation states, and much depends on methods of classification and costing. It is almost certain that the EU will not achieve its goals for rivers and lakes by 2015.

From the literature, we know that implementation problems due to structural misfits between policy levels are only a part of the explanation for implementation difficulties; other reasons for implementation difficulties can be found in the belief systems and preferences of actors, in particular policy preferences and choice of policy instruments of actors on the respective levels, which effect transposition, interpretation, application and enforcement [18,19]. This finding regarding the role of actors and their ideas is very important for our topic. Sustainable development, even at the vague level of a contested concept, suggests a general (but not arbitrary) belief system, which various actors conceptualize in their own way. As Jacobs has pointed out, one element of this general belief system is participation as a constitutive element of the concept of sustainability [7]. In our strong sustainability conception, we take on this point via an emphasis on the importance of participation as a central human capability. Consequently in our perspective, the effective opportunity of individuals to get involved and the ways of activating their participation capabilities are a constitutive element of thinking about and practically dealing with the implementation gap. Specifically, we propose Gandhi's non-violent communication and its recent uptake by one strand of social entrepreneurship as a way to deal with (though not necessarily solve) implementation challenges in a participatory way that takes the perspective of individual citizens and affected individuals more seriously.

We suggest that complementing the discussion of structures and strategic advocacy coalitions in this way is particularly important for dealing with the implementation gap. It helps to avoid a basic and long-term policy fatigue and a general *moral corruption*—a term coined by Gardiner [20] in regards to climate change and in our view of more general relevance for sustainability challenges. If inconvenient truths are seen and acknowledged by many, yet there are insufficient practical changes, if national and international conferences state and restate policies, yet the implementation of these policies appears at risk, then moral corruption is invited in the form of denial mechanisms such as distraction and procrastination, complacency, unreasonable doubt, selective attention, delusion, pandering, cynicism and hypocrisy [21]. Many may diagnose a simulation of sustainability politics and green-washing, and practically turn their attention away from advancing sustainability goals.

Dealing with the implementation gap is as important as it is challenging. If policies and laws are not enforced and if monetary resources to compensate ineffective legal measures with financial incentives are frequently missing, then soft instruments become especially important. Sustainability communication belongs to the soft instruments, which seek to convince, not least via an involvement of the respective public [22]. As the implementation of policies is hardly achievable without societal support, soft instruments that involve the public in the process of implementing and further adapting the normative demands of sustainable development are called for. This is why we want to take a closer look at communication strategies that target implementation problems. In particular we examine a recent variation of Gandhi's non-violent communication as promoted by social entrepreneurship initiatives. Does this suggest a mode of sustainability communication that can help contemporary societies deal with the implementation gap?

3. Social Entrepreneurship

Since the early 1980s "social entrepreneurship" has become a more widely used expression (this section is based on [23]). The term is associated with the pursuit of social and ecological goals by entrepreneurial means. Minimally, an explicit social mission is required, which in many cases is substantiated by a focus on needs in relation to poverty reduction and is frequently accompanied by visions of radical social change. For example, the world's most famous social entrepreneur Muhamad Yunus illustrates the goal of his microcredit approach with the image of museums of poverty; poverty, and not just a proportion of the poor, is to be made a matter of the past. This explicit social mission suggests a difference to primarily profit-oriented or self-interested business. Social entrepreneurship research pioneer Gregory W. Dees [24] argues that this is the core that distinguishes social entrepreneurs from business entrepreneurs. In addition, entrepreneurship minimally requires the production of some good or service, such as the microcredits offered by Yunus' Grameen Bank. The production of goods and services suggests a difference to social activism, which may advocate for or against a cause but need not produce a good or service. Last but not least, the production of goods and services also suggests a difference to government, which sometimes provides (public) goods and services but is ultimately responsible for the regulation of goods and services. These are only first differentiations with blurry borders. We now turn to the level of more specific conceptions.

Jacques Defourny and Marthe Nyssens [25] identified the emergence of two schools—the earned income school and the social innovation school. The *earned-income school* defines social enterprise as "any earned-income business or strategy undertaken by a nonprofit to generate revenue in support of its charitable mission" [25] (p. 41). In terms of elements for a definition, the focus is on the earned income of organizations while the "social" tends to be associated with the production of goods and services for a market. Innovation is not central for this approach.

The *social innovation school* analyzes entrepreneurship centrally in terms of innovation, an approach that has its classic roots in Schumpeter's theory of development [26]. Unlike an invention, an innovation has to be put into practice, it has to be carried out. Like an invention, an innovation has to be novel, at least relative to its time and place. For example, Grameen's microcredits were novel in the context of post-independent Bangladesh, even if historians can point to earlier instances of microcredit uses in the Middle Ages and in early industrialization. There is a primary focus on outcomes and impact rather than on incomes. Frequently, there is a focus on individuals, presumably due to the strong linkage between new ideas and persons at least at an early stage of an innovation. In terms of elements for a definition, there is a focus on innovation, frequently (though not necessarily) a focus on individuals, and finally a focus on the social in a wide sense of outcomes, *i.e.*, it is not tied to market production as an outcome or necessary prerequisite. Earned income here is a question of means and not central to the phenomenon.

The school of innovation resonates with the understanding pursued by William Drayton (born 1943), who envisioned social entrepreneurs as "idea champions or entrepreneurs" [27] (p. 19). Drayton was one of the most influential persons for the emergence of social entrepreneurship in the 1990s. His organization Ashoka provides funding and support for social entrepreneurs from all over the world [28]. It is worthwhile to understand Drayton's intellectual influences, specifically for our sustainability context and also more generally because these intellectual influences tend not to receive much

attention in the contemporary literature on social entrepreneurship. As noted in our introduction, social entrepreneurship is not a monolithic phenomenon drawing on one source only. In particular the business perspective currently has a strong influence on the further development of the field. We claim that revisiting and clarifying the Gandhian source of social entrepreneurship is important to critically appreciate one of the roles of social entrepreneurship for sustainable development; this does not define social entrepreneurship as such, but stands for one important strand in social entrepreneurship.

During his time as a student, Drayton was influenced by and contributed to the American civil rights movement. For example, he organized student support for picket lines in front of businesses operating on racist principles [29]. Like the key figures of this movement, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Drayton was influenced by Indian independence leader Gandhi's strategies of symbolic action. Drayton went to India in 1963, where he joined Vinoba Bhave, an Indian social reformer and disciple of Gandhi. During a trip with Bhave's group of *constructive workers* [29] (p. 51), Drayton had the opportunity to learn more about the Gandhian repertoire and his ethics of non-violence. Drayton was not only inspired by the Indian tradition of non-violence and by the success of the Gandhian repertoire in different struggles for societal change, he was particularly fascinated by the central role of individuals who in difficult situations acted courageously and whose motivation to actively engage themselves was based on their empathetic understanding of the situation (as opposed to some laws or rules that they could simply apply [29] (p. 48)). About 20 years after his travel to India, Drayton founded the organization Ashoka (which in Sanskrit means the "active relief of sorrow") and adopted Gandhi´s demand to fight violence and injustice by individually taking action as Ashoka's guiding vision: "everyone a changemaker, as a world where each individual has the freedom, confidence and societal support to address social problems and achieve change" [28,30].

Like Gandhi, Drayton sees everyone in everyday life as a potential changemaker and looks for ways to encourage people to make use of this potential [31]. To this end, according to Drayton, an education based on empathy, teamwork and leadership is required [30]. He offers a specific education approach towards the achievement of a central theme of the capabilities approach: justice and sustainability is not just a matter of providing people as "moral patients" with adequate means, rather it is primarily about empowering people as "moral agents" [13] and creating equal opportunities to participate in civic, community and family decision-making.

The work of Ashoka concentrates on those who have achieved real mastery in promoting and encouraging social change. According to Drayton and his organization, these "social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems. They are ambitious and persistent, tackling major social issues and offering new ideas for wide-scale change. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and solve the problem by changing the system, spreading the solution, and persuading entire societies to take new leaps" [32]. Ashoka supports fellows according to a selection procedure that focuses on "the new idea, creativity, entrepreneurial quality, social impact of the idea and ethical fiber" [33]. There is a focus on individuals; Ashoka has selected more than 3,000 fellows from 80 countries and typically supports these fellows with a three-year stipend as well as network support. Other organizations have adopted similar approaches [34].

Against the background of Gandhi's approach to change, a noteworthy feature of Drayton's vision of social entrepreneurship is the focus on innovation and impact, especially innovations that can

change systems. This builds a bridge between civil society, the business sector, and innovation-oriented policymakers [27] (p. 19). Via the language of innovation and entrepreneurship, social initiatives become accessible to new audiences. The contributions of such initiatives may be much more readily recognized by business and politics, if they are framed in terms of *innovation* for sustainability and the green economy or of *impact* for development co-operation. This point is particularly relevant for the capitalist philanthropists, like the business entrepreneurs of Ebay, Microsoft and others, who have been ready to put their resources into social entrepreneurship. At the same time, the language of innovation and impact highlights an aspect that was already present but not central in the Gandhian approach—is an idea for a protest spreading as required for the strategy? Does the strategy have the impact it was meant to have? In social entrepreneurship practice and theory there is much emphasis put on accounting for and demonstrating impact. In this way the Gandhian approach is further developed via social entrepreneurship.

While the focus on individuals, innovations and impact is noteworthy, it needs to be considered carefully. Drawing on our prior research on this strand of social entrepreneurship, we question the idea of system change that is achieved independently from government and business sectors [35]. We also cannot assume that the social of social entrepreneurs is simply "good" and automatically contributes to sustainable development. We thus take an evaluative perspective of human capabilities and strong sustainability as a necessary complement to discuss the complex issues addressed by social entrepreneurship initiatives. In this spirit, we understand these initiatives as pioneers who develop and aim to spread novel ideas in collaboration with others for the public good, and also partly succeed in doing so. "Ideas for the public good" in the sustainability context refers to relatively new, practical solutions to challenges regarding strong sustainability and central capabilities. As we will see in our case study (see Section 5.1), these ideas usually come with an attempt to reconfigure problem perception with a view to central capabilities and environmental sustainability. "Pioneer" here refers to the development and testing of new ideas and processes, as well as making efforts to create or change political, economic and cultural conditions in regards to the respective social mission.

4. The Gandhian Repertoire

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948), a social reformer and independence fighter, was a grandmaster of communication and symbolic action [1]. The Salt March described in the introduction is a particularly well-known example of the collective action campaigns with which Gandhi supplemented his speeches, letters of protest and negotiations to achieve his goals of independence, justice and equality for the Indian society [2]. Behind his wide repertoire of practical forms of discourse and action stood the conviction that with words alone it is difficult to unleash the energies for social change [2]. Drawing on his moral beliefs and his experiences with non-violent actions, which Gandhi experimented with during his earlier years in South Africa, he shaped a program of moral action that became world famous under the name of *Satyagraha* [36]. Satyagraha can be translated as the insistence on truth or as truth-force. While Gandhi held that absolute truth is not attainable for human beings, he argued that we should still strive for truth [37]. He put central emphasis on the investigation of moral truth in practical life; in fact, he called his autobiography the "story of my experiments with truth" [38]. He held non-violence to be an appropriate way to act in regards to each individual's

limited access to truth, and he saw self-suffering as the acknowledgement of non-violence. The struggle for truth becomes an inner struggle to overcome negative emotions and to bear suffering in the cause of truth. During this struggle people gain confidence, commitment and inner strength. Gandhi's non-violent action is grounded on this personal empowerment: a Satyagrahi involved in a conflict offers their inner strength, their truth (*i.e.*, their Satyagraha) to the cause. Non-violent action is thus generated as a powerful positive force [39].

As Merriam [2] puts it: "Satyagraha embodied a method of persuasion which used moral means to achieve moral ends" (p. 291). Persuasion here does not aim at the defeat of an opponent but at shared understanding that is achieved by leading the opponent to new insights or a change in attitude. Gandhi advised his followers not to use direct symbolic action as a substitute for rational debate but rather as complementary to it [2]. In her discussion of the capabilities approach, Martha Nussbaum approves of Gandhi's way of dealing with opponents. She notes that Gandhi defined Hinduism as the pursuit of truth by non-violent means and developed a critique of social hierarchy drawing on voices from within the tradition of Hinduism [11].

Gandhi´s non-violent communication is based on an idea of moral action following a maxim of non-injury. This traditional moral restraint is not only acknowledged in the religious traditions of the Eastern world such as Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism, it is also familiar to Christian traditions [2,40], as expressed, for example, in the phrase "turning the other cheek" [41]. For Gandhi, non-injury is a way of respecting the value of the welfare of all beings, an idea he found expressed, among others, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a central philosophical dialogue within the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. The *Bhagavad Gita* can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of each individual being`s right to self-expression, the identification with others and consequently the realization that violence to others is violence to oneself [2,37,40].

Gandhi demands that people rely on constructive rather than destructive forms of discourse and action. Nevertheless, the requirement of non-violence is not accomplished by avoiding conflict; the ethics of non-violence demands actively resisting violence and injustice [37,40]. To this end it distinguishes between the act of violence and the violent actor: "Gandhi believed that unjust rules, laws, and institutions must be reformed or abolished. That sin, corruption, injustice must be made visible and condemned without condemning the sinner or oppressor" [1] (p. 105). To face an opponent this way, in particular from an inferior position, requires self-respect, a feeling of power and strength and not least an awareness of one's rights [1,37]. Non-violent communication not only requires constructive strategies aimed at the opponent's willingness to negotiate and to cooperate, it also demands powerful methods of empowerment. As Gandhi started his struggle for freedom and independence under circumstances where the majority of Indian society suffered from poverty and marginalization, resignation and self-contempt were certainly some of the greatest challenges to accomplishing his goals. Gandhi's forms of discourse and symbolic action focused on the increase of self-respect, the creation of individual and collective feelings of power (one's Satyagraha) and the awareness of fundamental rights among Indians as a precondition for their willingness to actively engage in the struggle for independence (to offer their Satyagraha) [1,2,37]. In this way Gandhi's approach activates central human capabilities of participation, social affiliation and practical reason. The approach also promotes these capabilities where they are only morally recognized but not (yet)

fully encoded in constitutional or other state laws let alone practically applied and enforced, a highly relevant point in relation to the implementation gap of many sustainability challenges.

Within the well-known example of the Salt March, Gandhi targeted the implementation gap in regards to the Indian declaration of independence first of all by targeting the British monopoly on salt. The repeal of the Salt Act was not only more within reach than the greater goal of independence, it was also a simple yet powerful example of the continuation of colonial rule and its unequal effects. "Salt was a naturally-available commodity essential for human survival, and one that the poor—who toiled in the fields—needed it most and could least afford" [1] (p. 103). The march as an action contributed to a collective feeling of strength created by people walking together [2]. Last but not least, the gesture of picking up salt from the beach created a powerful image and a call to active resistance, which invited the entire nation to disobey by collecting and producing one's own salt [2]. Empowerment through self-reliance played a decisive role in the Gandhian repertoire and contained, besides the mental strengthening of individuals through the inner struggle for truth (the Satyagraha), economic strategies as well (the strengthening of local production). During the noncooperation movement of 1920–1922, he promoted spinning and weaving as domestic forms of cloth production with the help of techniques affordable even to the poorest of the poor. Gandhi made the spinning wheel a symbol for the well-being of the poor and set an example by spinning daily himself and by wearing traditional Indian cloth instead of British textiles [1,2]. To fight resignation by motivating people to take action with simple yet powerful means is a central aspect of Gandhian non-violent communication. Gandhi's call for producing one`s own salt and for "spinning one's way out of poverty" [1] (p. 104) no doubt resonates well with contemporary calls in sustainability debates for new models of wealth and more regional and self-sufficient ways of living [42]. This point has been recognized within the capabilities approach. Nussbaum has highlighted the way in which the Gandhian tradition has helped the empowerment of women via economic self-help groups in India, and she also uses these social enterprises as an example of how those who claim promoting central capabilities has an exclusive "Western" origin, especially political participation and democracy, are simply blind to such counter-examples [11], pages 15f and 67.

Throughout the long Indian struggle for independence, Gandhi's repertoire repeatedly proved to be very effective in the encouragement and motivation of large numbers of people to actively engage in the process, thereby capturing the awareness of regional, national and even international media. Through non-violent action, demands for justice and equality were communicated in a way that made them simple to grasp. The powerful image of picking up salt on the beach, for example, exposed the repressive dimension of colonial rule and the resulting difficulties of meeting basic needs. It received recognition worldwide, including Britain. Non-violent action helped to gain support for Gandhi's goals, thereby targeting the implementation gap for the Indian declaration of independence. Tiwari [43] observes in regards to the Salt March, "the extensive media coverage furthered the Indian independence movement and resulted in the Round Table Conferences between 1930 and 1932" (p. 13).

Gandhi's ethics of non-violence drew on a diversity of philosophical and religious sources, and in turn it inspired a diversity of others. Beyond the social enterprises for the empowerment of women noted above, environmental activists also took on the Gandhian repertoire. Within the environmentalist movement, the co-founder of the deep ecology movement Arne Naess was strongly inspired by Gandhi. Naess aspired to unify diverse movements, groups and individuals around a platform of shared

principles and values, where environmentalists with different religious and philosophical worldviews could agree based on their own deeply held convictions. In this way, Naess attempted to unify environmental action beyond a merely "shallow ecology", as he defined approaches that focus only on technological improvement and modified growth, and towards "deep" approaches that engage with questions of value for nature and justice [44,45].

The axiology, epistemology and ontology of the personal philosophies of deep ecologists, such as Naess' *eco-philosophy T*, are famously controversial (for an overview see [46,47]). Nevertheless, independent of ultimate value choices of some deep ecologists, the way in which deep ecology draws on the Gandhian repertoire to shape a program of moral action for environmental and sustainability politics provides helpful further clarification of the continued importance of the Gandhian approach for current sustainability politics and communication. In particular, Naess went to great length to analyze and spell out the implications of non-violence for environmental action [48]. In his analysis, Gandhian direct action is focused on the core of the problem or conflict in a way that seeks to overcome the conflict via the intervention of autonomously acting individuals. "Act in group struggle, and act, moreover, as an autonomous person in a way conducive to the long-term, universal reduction of violence" [48] (p. 148). The action of the autonomous person here is in contrast to action in terms of social roles of government, business or civil society representatives. The primary focus is on the person who gets involved as an individual in a conflict, who experiences emotions and has personal needs that can be articulated to others. With this bottom-up civic perspective that takes participation seriously, a discussion of normative demands and their translation into policies can be initiated beyond the frequently merely "shallow" focus on structural misfits and strategic advocacy coalitions when implementation challenges occur. The Gandhian focus is not on blaming others but to propose a constructive way forward, together. In a nutshell: to make one's basic needs known and gather one's own salt. The goal is to directly and publicly communicate with opponents, to explain the goal of action, and to have an empathetic attitude aimed at reducing violence. The goal is to tackle problems, not persons. The focus is on the structure, not on the individual. Moreover, the focus is long-term—aim at the campaign, rather than an isolated event. With the help of these further clarifications, we can conclude this section with three key points regarding the uptake of the Gandhian approach in one strand of social entrepreneurship.

First, social entrepreneurship stands for a constructive strategy of taking action. Rather than merely raising a problem, social entrepreneurship initiatives offer new ways of dealing with it. Such constructive proposals can be ideas that reduce the complexity of a sustainability challenge to their central needs and capabilities aspect, thereby making the issue more accessible and increasing the willingness to participate and cooperate. The focus on central capabilities is also a way of re-framing what may have appeared before as a technical issue for experts only (see also the example discussed in the next section).

Second, the focus on ideas for systemic change implies a focus on a long-term structural change. Innovations—be they disruptive or incremental—always need to be carried out, replicated, imitated or adapted. With a focus on public issues, achieving change is typically a long-term project of achieving change in attitudes, laws and routines. The innovative event or product always needs to be situated in a larger context, and accordingly also evaluated in these terms. The success or failure of a single event or of a product or service in a specific context is of interest in this larger context.

Third, there typically is a strong focus on persons and their ethical and practical qualities, as opposed to established social roles and functions. This can make social entrepreneurship discourse difficult for those expecting a specific type of organization (an innovative NGO or a social business). By contrast, in the non-violent communication tradition, the focus on persons and their actions as individuals is precisely what is emphasized. Individuals, if they want to achieve something, strongly depend on communication for the advancement of collective action with others. This communication is problem- and context-dependent, and accordingly social entrepreneurs typically seek to communicate with actors from civil society, business and government. The goal is to fight antagonisms not antagonists; there is thus a strong emphasis on communication with all involved. To illustrate and further understand this mode of constructive communication, in the next section we report our results of an experiment with a collaborative campaign on water conservation inspired by French social entrepreneur Roberto Epple.

5. The Big Jump Challenge—A Collaborative Campaign that Aims to Close the Implementation Gap in Sustainable Water Policy

In 2007 Ashoka recognized Roberto Epple as a senior social entrepreneur for his innovative approach to the conservation of rivers in Europe and the creation of a bottom-up network [3,4]. As the core part of a campaign to promote the implementation of the WFD, Epple introduced a simultaneous bathing event. The inspiration for his idea came from the river Elbe. Heavily polluted during the Cold War and politically divided due to the Iron Curtain, the water quality of the Elbe improved considerably following German reunification and the sustained efforts to restore the river. Nonetheless, Epple observed that the perception of a polluted, even disgusting and alienating, river persisted in many minds. In this context, a simultaneous jump into the Elbe at different places was meant to celebrate restoration progress already achieved and to reconcile people with the river and each other after the end of the Cold War period. Epple's hope was that the collective and embodied celebration of what had already been achieved would lay the foundations for further and broader engagement in restoration efforts.

The success of the first International Elbe Swimming Day in 2002—with over 55 swimming places along 1,000 km, from the spring in the Czech Republic to Hamburg, and 100,000 participants—reinforced the intention of the initiators to contribute to the restoration of water bodies all over Europe. Epple anticipated the challenges of implementing the WFD. From the very beginning he identified people's motivation to actively participate in the process as crucial and dealt with this challenge by organizing a European river swimming day. The idea of the Big Jump was born. As the WFD was adopted in December 2000 with the goal to achieve good ecological and chemical status of European rivers and lakes by 2015 [5], accompanying European Big Jump campaigns were planned every five years. The first Big Jump took place in 2005, the second in 2010 and the last will be in 2015. Additionally there were and will be local Big Jumps in the years in between. The key message of the bathing actions is to celebrate the already achieved restoration of rivers and to call for further action where necessary.

5.1. The Big Jump Challenge—A Collaborative Campaign

The Big Jump Challenge was conducted as an experiment for human capabilities and environmental sustainability in the context of a social-ecological research project (see Acknowledgements) on the contribution of social entrepreneurs and their innovations to a sustainability transformation in the water sector. We wanted to learn more about the mode of constructively dealing with sustainability challenges and about how constructive approaches make sustainability issues more accessible for new groups. The human capabilities in focus were political participation, play, education and a concern for the environment [35]. As noted above, while the WFD demands participation, in practice this is difficult to achieve, particularly in a context where people may feel disgusted and even alienated from their rivers, as Epple had observed. Concern for the environment is a further central challenge, along with the education challenge of learning to deal with complex water governance issues.

Inspired by our case study on Roberto Epple [3], whose Big Jump seeks to bring the above capabilities together in a novel way—namely via a focus on play and joint celebration—and following an analysis of collaborative competitions for social entrepreneurs [49], we decided to design and carry out a collaborative campaign together with partners from civil society, Grüne Liga e.V., Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V., Viva con Aqua de St. Pauli e.V., Global Nature Fund, betterplace lab and Epple's European Rivers Network [50]. The Big Jump Challenge specifically targeted young people in the implementation process, a target group that had so far not been specifically aimed at by the European Rivers Network's Big Jump.

The campaign focuses on young people between the ages of 14 and 21. Local jump organizers were invited to contact their local authorities so as to encourage those mandated by the WFD to involve the public in their efforts to fulfill the WFD requirements. They asked for information about the status of their rivers and lakes, as well as about the implementation stage of the WFD. They then released the results online along with a rating of the reply (if they received one). This allowed them to challenge the authorities in a friendly way regarding the WFD implementation, and it also better informed them for the preparation of local jumps. This collaborative aspect gave the campaign its name Big Jump *Challenge*.

The Big Jump Challenge was launched in March 2012 with an online platform [50] that allowed participants to register, post their ideas and comment on those of others. The platform also includes background information and teaching materials on water conversation and the WFD, assistance for contacting local water authorities, as well as the possibility to upload and comment on the answers provided by the authorities. The online design and provision of materials was made with a view to the target group. The Big Jump of students took place on 17 June 2012, the last weekend before the summer vacation in German schools. There were 55 groups across Germany that participated. The experiment remained focused on Germany, as costs would otherwise have exceeded our capacity (not least due to the difficulty of overcoming language barriers).

The best jumps were selected by an independent jury according to the following criteria: originality of the jump, contact with local authorities, number of participants in the jump, publicity created in terms of media attention, and local integration of the jump (for example with the municipality, local associations *etc.*). The jump organizers were then invited to a final river parliament on 17 October 2012 in Berlin, where they presented their results, requests and recommendations to members of Parliament.

5.2. The Big Jump Challenge as A Social Entrepreneurial Mode of Communication for Sustainability

In this section we discuss the Big Jump Challenge in terms of the Gandhian approach to social entrepreneurship. The two main sources of data are the information gathered via a feedback survey conducted after the Big Jump day and via a media analysis of articles about the Big Jump Challenge between March and July 2012. Invitation to participate in the online feedback survey was sent to participants via the jump co-ordinators after the Big Jump. There were 48 people who participated in the survey; of these, 21 were jump co-ordinators (for further information see [51]).

It is not difficult to detect the constructive approach of the Big Jump. Like the Salt March, the Big Jump creates a positive simple image of basic human capability—to enjoy oneself swimming in rivers and lakes. This image is associated with a simple and clear goal: rivers and lakes should be so clean that we as embodied, living beings can swim in them. It translates water conservation, which is frequently dealt with in an expert-only way that excludes the general public, into something that can be easily grasped and experienced in a joyful manner. In the Big Jump Challenge, survey participants were asked to rate their enjoyment of the Big Jump on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being an activity that one really does not enjoy and 10 as one's most preferred personal activity. Respondents rated the Big Jump 8.5 on average. The jump thus constitutes a fun activity in a natural environment. About 85% of all participants said that they would jump again. The playful aspect of the Big Jump, according to the participants, is linked to their concern for the environment. Participants were asked whether following the jump, rivers and lakes had become a more frequent topic of conversation with friends and whether they followed reports on water conservation in the media with an increased interest. About three quarters of all participants (74%) agreed that this was the case. According to their self-assessment, their environmental knowledge on average also increased. About 65% of students participating in the jump rated their increase in knowledge as average (12% as low, 23% as high).

The Big Jump as a collective action makes the individual experience part of a larger campaign focused on a major, long-term sustainability goal—the restoration of European rivers and lakes and the implementation of the WFD to that end. For this, media attention is important to carry the symbolic action from the specific place to a more general public. During the Big Jump Challenge, more than 70 media reports about local jumps appeared in newspapers (and their online platforms) as well as on local TV and radio. The majority of these reports clustered on the Big Jump Day. Creative jumps such as a "dry jump" in the form of a flashmob next to the Alster in Hamburg—an actual jump had been prohibited by the authorities—received special attention. About 80% of jumps were announced or reported on in the media. Our media analysis shows that the topic of water conservation was covered in all reports; the WFD was explicitly referred to in about 60% of all reports. About 45% of those articles published prior to the jump also referred to the collaboration with authorities. In short, there is evidence that the simple event of river swimming was perceived in a way that linked it to the more general, systemic issue.

Another aspect of this constructive but systemic approach is the collaboration with responsible authorities. The authorities were not targeted as opponents who failed to implement the law, but rather were invited prior to the jump to share their information about the current state of water conservation. They were also informed about the goals of the campaign and invited to participate (as some of them in fact did). In the Big Jump Challenge, 30 of the 55 registered groups contacted their local

authorities—not a typical activity for youths between 14 and 21. Of those 30 groups, 23 received a response from their authority, thereby activating their right to get informed about the state of the water conservation implementation at their river. In some cases, there was active exchange between jump organizers and authorities in the form of face-to-face meetings, additional information provision and help with the organization of the jump. The campaign not only mobilized collective action for exercising the rights to a clean environment and information about public matters, it also facilitated the cooperation between the general public and the authorities.

Third, the Big Jump Challenge draws on the ideas of social entrepreneur Roberto Epple, who is associated with civil society organizations but in his own view focuses mainly on a network of people. It is the individuals and their experiences and contributions to sustainable change that are the focus of his approach. Participants were encouraged by a combination of factors, including the engagement in group struggle (being part of a German-wide campaign) and the individual experiences of personally meeting the authorities, of getting informed about one's local river and last but not least, of splashing into the water. In the survey, of those participants who according to their own assessment had not been involved in nature conservation prior to the jump (about 40%), more than a third (37%) stated that they would further engage in water conservation after the Jump. Based on these findings from our Big Jump experiment, we now turn to a critical discussion and conclusion.

6. Critical Discussion and Conclusion

Our Big Jump case illustrates that there is evidence of one strand of social entrepreneurship that follows the Gandhian approach in creative new ways. In this strand, the focus is on constructive approaches to social causes proposed by individuals as a mode to engage in the communication of sustainability challenges officially recognized in global declarations, directives and other policies that encounter implementation obstacles. Complementing the focus on structural misfits and strategic advocacy coalitions when dealing with implementation gaps, this approach puts the focus on the active inclusion of individuals in line with our conception of the constitutive element of participation in sustainability. One of the contributions of social entrepreneurship discourse is to adapt the non-violent communication approach, via the language of entrepreneurship and innovation, to the current discourse on sustainability, with its prevailing focus on the green economy and innovations for sustainable development [52]. Nevertheless, this adaptation needs to be carefully scrutinized. For example, in the case of Epple there is no business model or earned income from the market. Instead, the Big Jump as an innovation for living rivers draws on working with people, primarily from civil society and local authorities. Uncovering this mode of non-violent communication helps to critically appreciate this strand of social entrepreneurship, rather than the more typical search or call for business plans. Upon reflection, it is unsurprising that for issues of the public good, business approaches have no or only a limited role to play. In a research project on social entrepreneurship in the water sector, we found many social entrepreneurship initiatives with innovations in civil society and politics [23]. This observation is supported by innovation theory; Joseph Schumpeter, the classic theorist of entrepreneurship and innovation, emphasized that the carrying out of new ideas can be studied in civil society and politics just as much as in the economy [26]. While the capitalist market and its credits system are a particularly dynamic way of creating space for the testing and carrying out of innovations,

innovations also take place within other social spheres and across social spheres. The strand of social entrepreneurship that draws on Gandhian roots shows one way in which innovation originating from civil society can be carried out for sustainable development. While the discourse on social entrepreneurship makes actors and ideas visible that may otherwise not receive the same attention, a critical discussion must also note the inverse effect of this visibility—an expectation on civil society organizations to become more entrepreneurial, now in the sense of having a business plan and making a profit. Precisely for this reason, highlighting the Gandhian roots is helpful to acknowledge other strands of social entrepreneurship and their relevance for sustainable development.

Careful attention to social entrepreneurship, as we show with the Big Jump case, reveals a contribution to sustainability communication that can draw on a venerable tradition adapted to a new context. The civic quality of this mode can span from personal experiences to the general public spheres via, *inter alia*, the media and collaborations. The idea of an innovator such as Epple can thereby creatively obliterate social differences in action. For example a local newspaper reported with article and picture on environmental ethics professor Konrad Ott, who lectured prior to the jump in swimming trunks [53].

This takes us to the normative dimensions of sustainability and its communication. The innovations of social entrepreneurship initiatives, however brilliant and inspiring, are contributions to a discussion that is controversial and contested in regards to the goals and processes of sustainable development (see Section 2). As the discussion of limits ("to growth", or "of ecosystems") on the one hand, and basic needs on the other hand, is always also an evaluative matter, participants in this discussion have to make explicit the normative aspects of their own conceptions of sustainable development—be it for practical purposes or for theoretical work. Here we have drawn on the theory of strong sustainability and human capabilities. From this perspective, the policy goals of the WFD are contributions to the restoration of freshwater as a natural capital. This restoration effort is important for central human capabilities in the present and future as a matter of outcome but again also as a matter of process. This is why in our Big Jump case we specifically reported on the capabilities of youth participants linked to getting engaged (participation), having fun (play), being informed (education) and being concerned for the environment.

Our case suggests some lessons and limitations. Our approach underlines the importance of a focus that draws the attention to people personally getting involved. While the focus on the individual is important, it should not be seen as one side of a dichotomy, with group action as the (excluded) other part. To the contrary, in our experiment local jumps where frequently organized by local environmental, sports and developmental groups, even if no group claimed the entire collaborative campaign as "theirs". The initiative of individuals does not stand in contradiction with using networks, engaging friends and collaborating [54].

Moreover, the adaptation of the innovation to the respective context is important. An innovation is not a standardized product that is replicated in different places, rather it is adapted to its context (rivers and brooks, deep and shallow, clean and polluted, in rural and urban areas *etc.*). It is a challenge to balance the space for the particular place and its people with the organization of a joint campaign (in the experiment we did this via a country-wide Big Jump competition, and the most creative jumps presented their claims in the national parliament). This requires capacities for the co-ordination of collaborative action.

While media attention could be fostered further through more professional public relations, an attractive idea works quite some way to raise awareness. In our view what is more challenging for participants is to engage in constructive dialogue in a highly regulated environment with much expert knowledge and guidelines. Collaboration in practice is challenging as there are typically different responsibilities across different authorities (for water quality, for safety, for public events *etc.*) and organizations. Accordingly, there will be many people who are not responsible, or not responsible for this specific issue; it is demanding to stick to a constructive, forward-looking and even playful approach that at the same time really engages others. While the opponent is clear in the classic example of Ghandi and Indian independence, responsibilities are frequently fragmented in contemporary sustainability challenges. Accordingly, much here depends on the facilitating quality of the social entrepreneurship initiative to co-ordinate the collaborative effort. Creative ideas as well as support and encouragement are required for participants to unfold their potential to *be the change* in their individual way and as part of a greater effort.

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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