

Sustainability as a meaningful vision and an activity

This section covers the insights of the ethnographic team based on analyzing the data. Therefore, notable concepts emerged in the interview transcription and coding process before the data scientists and ethnographers applied SSNA visualization and reduction techniques. These insights, combined with visualizations, help us holistically understand our informants' discourses and perspectives. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods achieved by combining the ethnographic insights with code visualization can offer us either validation or deepening of the ethnographic insights through the visualizations, or can reveal a divergence between ethnographic insights and emergent visualizations, which can indicate complexities and contradictions not detected by ethnographers in the first instance, and/or point to the opportunities for further refining the ethnographic research methods, e.g. iterating the interview questions to explore such divergences. Each insight reviewed below is also situated within relevant anthropological / cultural studies scholarship for a more robust context.

The first ethnographic insight considers sustainability a meaningful vision and activity, centring it as a visionary human-made product. Our informants recognise sustainability as a concept that occurs in everyday processes and procedures, which they experience and help shape. They can carry out sustainable practices in everyday life. As a result, sustainable activities are repetitive and practised in different ways and to various degrees. On the one hand, people determine the spectrum or intensity of sustainability. This makes people a subject capable of acting, whose agency, i.e. empowerment to act, determines the nature and behaviour of an individual. In the social sciences, this approach is known as theory-in-practice. Renowned representatives are Bourdieu (1977 [1972]; 1998), Giddens (1984), Foucault (1977), and Ortner (1984; 2006)), who placed the autonomous significance of a person and their actions at the centre of their works. For example, one informant responded to the question of how he would exercise sustainability in everyday life with the following answer: **„(...) that I don't fly too often, try to travel by train a lot, and also to inform myself a bit professionally about why it's important.“**

Reflections and ways to apply the forms and values of sustainable actions on an individual and societal level: action- and present-orientated, focus on concrete examples and activities in everyday life of sustainable acting. It also includes one's own level of knowledge or the acquisition of knowledge to (actively) acquire and implement information about sustainability through education and practice and to use it for oneself and one's own purposes. Sustainability in practice is anchored in the present but tends to look prescriptively into the future. The two areas, "private-public", merge in sustainable visions, as sustainability becomes a lived everyday practice.

The vision has an ideological perspective that includes various approaches and combines tasks and problems relating to the environment, resources and energy sources that need to be tackled today and in the future. This consists of the self-chosen career choice, which has something to do with sustainability in the narrower or broader sense but with which one strongly identifies and which one also transfers to other situations in life. Based on the field research data, the code "Companies as sustainable Actors" shows a strong tendency to integrate and pursue a sustainable approach in everyday working life. The subsequent statement from an informant illustrates this:

“I already do it through my work by supporting sustainable technologies and also showing how companies can become more environmentally neutral. You shouldn't always say climate-neutral, but rather environmentally neutral.“

Visionary sustainability also includes one's own level of knowledge or the acquisition of knowledge to (actively) acquire and implement information about sustainability through education and practice and to use it for oneself and one's own purposes. We observed that the informants were often somewhat torn as to the extent to which sustainable living can also be implemented in practice, as the following statement underlines:

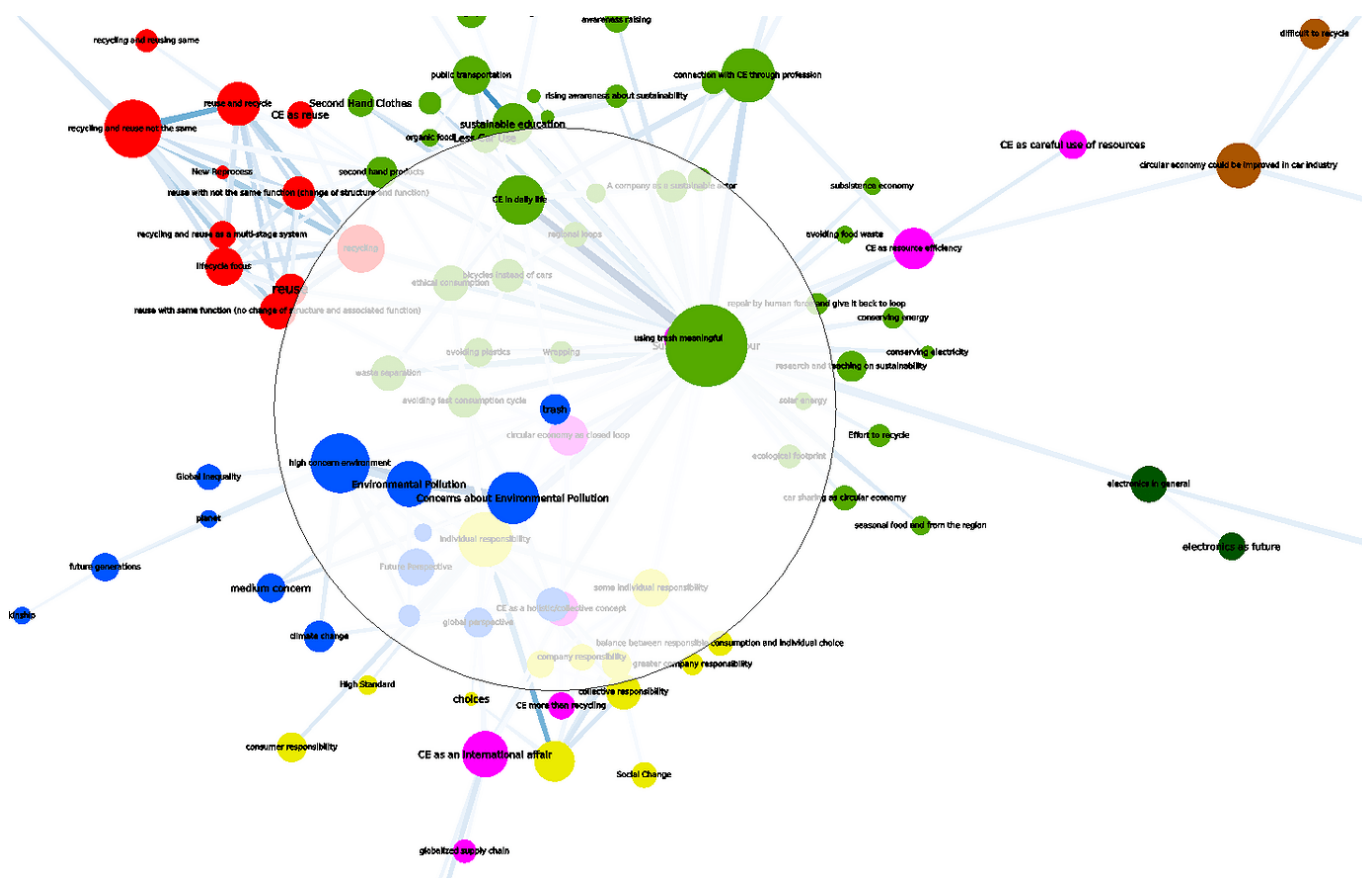
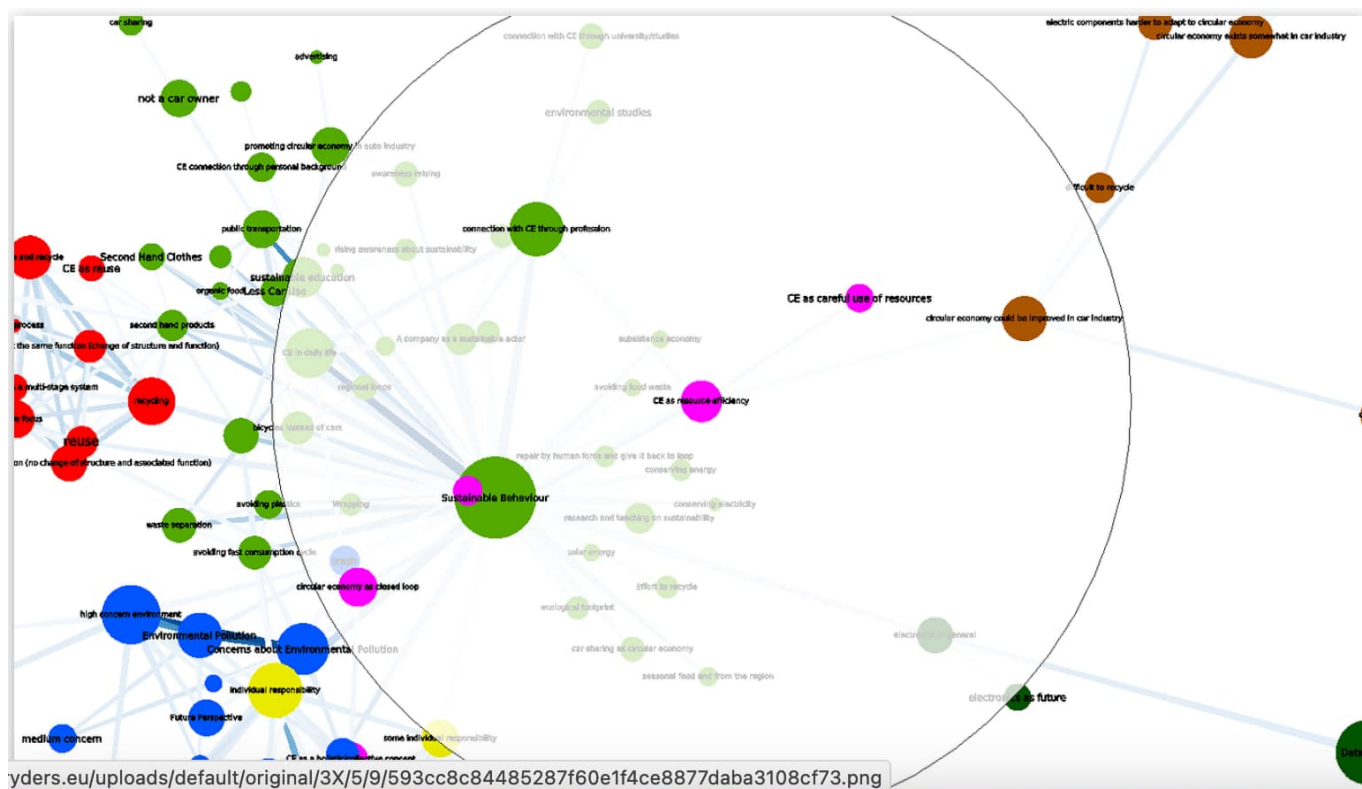
„Well, I first of all, I try to live consciously, not perfectly. You can't. I try to teach my children. Um, I take often decisions in my consumption to more sustainable products. And I work in the field of sustainability, which is also quite, quite a big step.“

Educational and awareness-raising work is another measure for actively shaping sustainability in everyday life. One informant described this below:

“[I want to have a] [h]igh impact on my kids and their friends and in a company. We have, for instance, installed photovoltaic panels to recharge the battery cars. Although I'm not driving any, there are enough people driving them around, so that would be my personal footprint and impact.“

On the other hand, however, we must remember the structure that is needed to shape and determine sustainability actively. The structure here involves an interaction between norms, values, institutions and cultural aspects that define and influence the actions and behaviour of human actors. Against this background, structures are legal or economic provisions that stipulate sustainability as a regulation, guideline or measure. For example, this can be expressed in legal norms, i.e., legislation on how companies in the automotive industry produce more sustainable cars in terms of resources, energy consumption, and working conditions. An example would be this quote from an

interview: "So they're already doing something. I still think they have their [recycling systems]. I mean, we have recycling systems in our company, and they will have that, too."



Circularity as a continuous result in circular economies

The second insight shows that circularity in the automotive industry, electronics, and environmental contexts is deemed economically feasible when it acts as a closed system to the outside world. Completing a "cycle" or enhancing current cycles requires changes or expansions within individual structures or functions of the entire system. Circularity, thus, represents an ongoing process outcome. Components such as "reuse" and "recycling" evolve constantly based on input and strategies. This encompasses sustainable actions, changing human behaviors, and evolving perspectives towards sustainable practices. For example, an informant invoked the idea that **"(..) [y]es there is a whole spectrum of ways to reuse our products. Recycling is undoubtedly not the most sustainable, but it has shifted to reuse."** It's a theory-in-practice process where not only self-defined definitions of specific procedures or processes are crucial but also moral imperatives that can influence technologically or anthropologically determined epistemological insights. Here, the circle connects descriptive action-based elements with prescriptive future-oriented ones. Sustainability serves as a driving force to close the loops. For example, one of the interviewees explained: "After all, the circular economy is more than just recycling." Another informant weighed in: **"(..) thinking and acting holistically, starting with myself, from eating to consuming to working, to inspire as many people as possible. With my being, with my existence, I want to inspire other people to live the same way."** Circular economy is a widely used concept in social sciences rooted in the Kula trade (Malinowski XXXX) and Mauss' gift perception (XXXX). It represents a give-and-take exchange as an altruistic form of trading with each other. The concept contrasts with the ideological notion of the neoliberal market economy, which aims to maximize the interests of and benefits to the market within the limits of the law and normative order, excluding any forms of gradual commitment such as loyalty, kinship, or friendship. The concept has been criticized, reinvented, and redeveloped, particularly by Edward P. Thompson (1980) on moral economy. Based on reciprocal giving and receiving, the concept is linked to obligations and agreements. One party exchanges services with another under the conditions of a reciprocal gift. The services are only received if there is mutual benefit, which emphasizes the receiver as the primary driving force of the agreement. Therefore, such an altruistic form is grounded in moralities such as beliefs, values, and norms and imbued with an understanding of and desire for justice. The moral economy embodies a particular corpus of norms, duties, responsibilities, and values. Its moral message can mobilize forces to act. Thompson discussed the concept of moral economy, describing the rise and growing need of the working class, a labour force needed in the industrial economy. At the centre of the analysis were the ideas of legitimacy and basic assumptions of a good and just life, which led to protests by the working class. It dovetails with our gained data material about moral ideas as a prospect regarding environmental and social changes, as the following statement shows: **"(..) this [circular economy] is the way to solve many problems in our world."** This convergence of the circular economy concept with moral economy underscores how ethical principles such as justice and moral values can be integrated into economic frameworks. It presents a promising approach to addressing both ecological and social challenges, hinting at a pathway where the circular economy can tackle numerous issues in our world. By embedding the concept of the circular economy within a moral context, it offers a comprehensive perspective on sustainability and social change.

