Imaginaries of Ownership and Sustainability: A Corpus-Assisted study

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Paper Abstract

In recent years, public discussion on economic change or, rather, a deliberate transformation of the economy, has become increasingly common. This study examines the idea on ownership in the context of these discourses of economic change. In particular, the study focuses on how the role of ownership of material property is shaped in relation to "futures of sustainability" (Adloff & Neckel, 2019; Degens, 2021) and other imaginaries of future good life.

The corpus of this study was formed by retrieving both news texts and social media texts from a large collection of Finnish online textual materials aggregated by the company Legentic. The search term used was *omistaminen* ('ownership') and it was also required that the text mentioned a word referring to economic change, namely *kiertotalous* ('circular economy'), *jakamistalous* ('sharing economy'), or *alustatalous* ('platform economy'). The search terms were treated as lemmas. The final corpus totals approximately 426,000 running words and spans the years 2015-2023.

This study takes a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach (e.g. Ancarno, 2020; Mautner, 2016), analysing keywords, as well as n-grams and collocates related to ownership and the new economy concepts.

In this way, this study sheds light on, among other things, who we talk about as owners in Finland, what are essential things to own, and how the social meaning of ownership is described. The focus is on what kind of change is being talked about in the context of these dimensions of meaning and how change is linked to sustainability. There is a broad consensus in the data that ownership is and will become less desirable and will be replaced by services, sharing, and other forms of co-use. In the corpus, the importance of ownership for sustainability is seen narrowly, as mainly related to the ownership of goods, whereby real estate, land and financial property, as well as new forms of property such as carbon quota are excluded.

Keywords: corpus-assisted discourse studies; discourse; future; imaginary; ownership

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