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INTERNATIONAL META-ORGANIZATIONS IN GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDIZATION
An Epistemic Governance Analysis of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)

ABSTRACT

The palm oil industry has sparked debates from multiple social actors: consumers, politicians, and nongovernmental organizations alike. They argue that palm oil plantations contribute to the destruction of the environment. While facing criticisms, palm oil businesses refer to its sustainable practices certified by international standards organizations, including the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). The RSPO is a palm oil multistakeholder international standards organization established in 2004 aiming to transform markets to make sustainable palm oil a norm. This attempt at social change puts the RSPO under the spotlight.

This thesis aims to study the RSPO's attempt at social change and to contribute to empirical studies on the RSPO with an organizational and sociological perspective. This thesis first introduces the RSPO in light of recent academic studies then examines the role of international standards organizations in a globalized world. When examining recent studies, international standards organizations, including the RSPO, seem to fit in a category of meta-organizations, and thus an attempt to explain the RSPO as a meta-organization was made. To study the RSPO's efforts at social change, an Epistemic Governance method was used in the analysis.

In RSPO's epistemic works, this study found that the RSPO attempts to create a sense of community through identifying actors as mutually being part of the sustainable palm oil agenda. Furthermore, despite the existing critics toward the idea of sustainable palm oil which evokes the imagery of competing blocs in RSPO's responses, the RSPO uses an imagery of modernization by stating its commitment to progress. The RSPO also portrays itself authoritative by referring to the four types of authority: ontological, capacity-based, moral, and charismatic, where internal and external bodies to the RSPO are mentioned.

While these findings provide a depiction of the RSPO as a social actor in the field of sustainable palm oil standardization, further studies should be conducted on the epistemic works of international standards organizations in other commodities to provide a bigger picture of the debates on sustainable practices. Moreover, when examining specific debates, on the topic of sustainable palm oil, for example, epistemic works on both sides of the debating parties should be analyzed.

Keywords: Epistemic Governance, international standards organizations, meta-organization, RSPO, sustainable palm oil, World Culture Theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

The use of palm oil and its derivatives (later generalized as "palm oil") has been widespread in a variety of products from foodstuffs and consumer goods, to biofuel. Despite its widespread use, the commodity is not free from criticism, notably in Europe. Opposition to the use of palm oil has come from multiple social actors: consumers, politicians, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) alike. When the French Ecology Minister in 2015, Ségolène Royal, boycotted Nutella chocolate spread for its use of palm oil contributing to deforestation and causing considerable damage to the environment (Brinded, 2015), Ferrero, Nutella's manufacturer, quickly responded by stating the company has vowed to use palm oil only from certified sustainable sources by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (Mathiesen, 2015), an international standards organization. The French Ecology Minister later apologized for her statement (Kirchgaessner, 2015).

Moreover, when a British retailer Iceland decided to ban the use of palm oil in all Iceland-brand products by the end of 2018, the retailer gained significant attention and praise from consumers online (Mackay, 2019). Quoted from Richard Walker, chairman of Iceland, the reason behind the ban was because of the destruction of tropical rainforests and wildlife, contributed by the demand for palm oil, witnessing the destruction himself from his trip to West Kalimantan, Indonesia in 2017 (Walker, 2018). Darrel Webber, the CEO of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), an international standards organization, disagrees with Iceland's move and stated that Iceland should work with the rest of the supply chain to promote the use of sustainable standards to guarantee their oils and fats sourcing not causing rainforest destruction (RSPO, 2018).

Similarly, when a nongovernmental organization Biofuelwatch criticized the Finnish oil and gas corporation, Neste, that its aviation fuel relies heavily on palm oil in their December 2018 report, Neste denied the allegations of its use of palm oil as a raw material for renewable

aviation fuel and further highlighted the significant role of sustainable biofuels to meet ambitious climate goals with their main R&D focus to find new waste and residue as sources (Neste, 2019). Only 20% of Neste's annual renewable raw material input is palm oil, which are 100% certified by International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC) System as well as the RSPO (Neste, 2020). Biofuelwatch's criticisms relies on palm oil as a leading cause of rainforest destruction, and that Neste still cannot guarantee that its palm oil is not sourced from illegal plantations inside a national park. Furthermore, the NGO claims that Neste's investment in Singapore is concerning due to the country's location between two world's biggest palm oil producers (Ernsting, 2019).

From these three examples of debates surrounding the use of palm oil in food, consumer goods, or biofuel, social actors criticizing its use justify their argumentation along similar lines: that the use of palm oil contributes to the destruction of the environment. Conversely, the responses made by social actors toward such criticisms of palm oil use also have a common justification in their arguments: they refer to its sustainable practices from sources certified by international standards organizations, such as the RSPO or the ISCC. The way social actors justify their arguments along similar lines to other social actors is interesting. If social actors, either an organization or an individual, are unique entities with different organizational goals and personal identities, why do they justify their arguments in the same way and the proponents of palm oil refer to international organizations standardizing sustainable palm oil? A sociological analysis which views social actors as an embedment of practices in the society as a result of works from knowledge-producing social actors seem to be relevant to answer this question.

This paper is interested in the ways a social actor in the palm oil sustainability field justifies its arguments and how it conveys itself as an authoritative actor in this highly debated industry. The social actor under the spotlight is an international standards organization, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), with more than 4,000 members worldwide uniting

stakeholders from seven sectors of the palm oil industry: oil palm producers, processors or traders, consumer goods manufacturers, banks / investors, and environmental and social NGOs (RSPO, 2021a). While there are other organizations standardizing sustainable palm oil, the RSPO was chosen because of its wide scope viewed from its membership base and resources, and its strong vision to transform markets to make sustainable palm oil a norm (RSPO, 2021c). It works by certifying member organizations in the palm oil supply chain adhering to sustainability practices according to the RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) (RSPO, 2021d).

Despite its ambitious goal to make sustainable palm oil a norm and the debates surrounding it, little research has been done on the RSPO or other palm oil sustainability standards organizations (Brandi et al., 2015, p.295). Moreover, there seem to be a lack of synergy and continuity among current RSPO literature from how the studies offer a variety of methods while asking similar questions, such as the RSPO's effectiveness as a sustainable palm oil international standards organization and its legitimacy. Because of this, this thesis offers a synthesis of selected RSPO literature and attempts to study the RSPO in their aim at social change to bring sustainable palm oil a norm. This is done by analyzing how the RSPO conveys itself as an authoritative sustainable palm oil standardizing actor using an epistemic governance approach. Furthermore, recent studies offer different labels for the organization, e.g., non-state market driven (NSMD) governance system (Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011); global voluntary agreement (Ruysschaert & Salles, 2014); voluntary sustainability certification scheme by a transnational private governance initiative (Brandi et al., 2015); a certifying Corporate Social Responsibility organization (Sabapathy, 2010, p.192; Paoli et al., 2010); and transnational civil society network – TCSN (Claydon, 2009). These variety of labels for the RSPO have a common theme which emphasize RSPO's self-governing and 'private' nature separate from civil society and national governments. Apart from that, when examining literature about international standards organizations and the RSPO, the RSPO seem to fit in a category of meta-organizations. Meta-organizations are organizations whose members are

not only individuals, but also organizations (Gulati et al., 2012; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008). By viewing the RSPO as an organization as other forms of organizations in the sustainable palm oil debates, it may provide a bigger picture of the palm oil sustainability issue, that all organizations are working in their attempt for social change.

This thesis is an attempt to contribute to the RSPO literature, by offering an alternative label viewing the RSPO as a meta-organization working their way to bring social change in sustainable palm oil standardization. The structure of this thesis is the following: in the next chapter, the RSPO is introduced in light of recent academic studies, then the role of international standards organizations in a globalized world is examined. The third chapter provides a conceptual framework containing the attempt to explain the RSPO as an international meta-organization and an introduction to the epistemic governance theory which will be used as a method to answer the research questions. The fourth chapter lists the dataset and scrutinizes the epistemic governance method being used in the analysis, while the subsequent chapters will be the findings of the analysis.

1.1 Research Questions

Sustainable palm oil is a contentious issue seen from opposition arriving from multiple social actors.

- How does the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) respond to mentions made by other social actors?

- In its response, how does the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) present itself as an authoritative international meta-organization in sustainable palm oil standardization?

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)

As was introduced in the previous chapter, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is an international standards organization which develops criteria for sustainable palm oil compiled in the Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Palm Oil Production – P&C. Sustainable palm oil production, according to the RSPO (2021d), is comprised of legal, economically viable, environmentally appropriate, and socially beneficial management and operations. The P&C was first developed by its founding members in 2005 with its first implementation in 2007 and is reviewed every five years. In September 2002, actors from different stages in the palm oil supply chain gathered at a roundtable in London for the first time to discuss the possibility of sustainable palm oil as a business initiative. The organizations represented included Unilever, Migros, Marks & Spencer, and the World Wide Fund for Nature - WWF (RSPO, 2002). The RSPO was then formally established in April 2004 (RSPO, 2021a). Since 2012, the RSPO has become an associate member of ISEAL Alliance, an international sustainability standards organization upon which RSPO's standards setting process is based and was approved as a full member in 2015 (RSPO, 2021a).

For an organization to claim its use or production of Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO), it needs to join the RSPO as a member and have its activity audited by a third-party certification body (RSPO, 2021d). There are three membership categories in the RSPO: Ordinary Membership, Associate Membership, and Affiliate Membership (2021b), with each category being differentiated by the size of its involvement in palm oil. If an organization uses less than 500 metric tons of oil palm products per year, then it can apply as an Associate Member. On the other hand, interested organizations or individuals with no direct involvement in the palm oil supply chain can apply as Affiliate Members. Furthermore, smallholders, or farmers and growers whose planted oil palm area is less than 50 hectares, can form a group

with other farmers and assign a manager to then join as a member of the RSPO (RSPO, 2021e). Smallholders account for about 40% of total global palm oil production, with more than 3 million small-scale farmers making a living out of palm oil globally (ibid.).

Being a member of the RSPO means being involved in the RSPO annual General Assembly (GA), which allows members to propose resolutions and to be involved in decision-making processes. Voting rights in the GA belong to Ordinary Members, or members whose involvement in palm oil amounts to 500 metric tons and more. Furthermore, members of the RSPO must comply with the organization's requirements as described in the RSPO Membership Rules and commit to adhering to the principles set out in the Code of Conduct. Currently, there are more than 4,000 RSPO members worldwide representing all stages of the palm oil supply chain: oil palm producers, processors or traders, consumer goods manufacturers, banks / investors, and environmental and social NGOs (RSPO, 2021a).

When examining existing academic literature on the RSPO, different labels describing the RSPO were found. These labels were the following: non-state market driven (NSMD) governance system (Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011); global voluntary agreement (Ruysschaert & Salles, 2014); voluntary sustainability certification scheme by a transnational private governance initiative (Brandi et al., 2015); a certifying Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) organization (Sabapathy, 2010, p.192; Paoli et al., 2010); and transnational civil society network – TCSN (Claydon, 2009). While these studies have a common theme with regard to RSPO's self-governing and 'private' nature separate from civil society and national governments, none has analyzed the RSPO in its form as an organization that views business entities, nation states, and civil society organizations under the same category of 'organizations'. Because of this, my thesis will attempt to introduce the theory of meta-organizations to the RSPO literature, which will be scrutinized in the following chapter. Moreover, existing studies question the effectiveness and the RSPO's legitimacy using a variety of methods, and there seems to be a lack of continuity among the RSPO literature. My

next synthesis on recent RSPO literature will contribute to this while in the following chapter I will offer a sociological analysis of the RSPO's attempts at social change using epistemic governance theory.

To begin, one of the labels used for the RSPO is a non-state market driven (NSMD) governance system (Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011). Derived from Bernstein & Cashore (2007, p.349)'s conception of NSMD governance, Schouten & Glasbergen (2011) note that under NSMD governance, authority granted to NSMD systems originates from the market's supply chain (p.1892). This raises a question as to how legitimacy emerges in a non-state market driven governance (ibid.). NSMD governance emerges as a result of the lack of national regulations concerning the sustainability of imported products (Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011, p.1895). To them, this is because of the limited legal and political space for governments to impose trade barriers within World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements. Moreover, the WTO does not prevent NSMD governance systems from gaining recognition as international standardization bodies (ibid.). Despite the RSPO's legality as an NSMD governance standardizing sustainable palm oil through its formal relationship with the WTO and national governments, the authors criticize the RSPO's lack of enforcement for its members to adhere to the Code of Conduct, different to other NSMD governance systems who develop mandatory standards for actors who sign on to the system (Bernstein & Cashore, 2007 as cited in Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011, p.1895). Furthermore, Schouten & Glasbergen (2011) attempt to understand the legitimization processes of NSMD governance initiatives with a multi-dimensional approach emphasizing its legality, moral justifications, and acceptance from different audiences. In the case of RSPO's legitimization process, the authors highlight the tensions and trade-offs from the combination of its members reflecting a diversity of interests which results in the RSPO taking a pragmatic approach to sustainable change (ibid., p.1897). Noted examples are the tensions between producers who easily find markets without adhering to sustainability standards versus retailers who demand sustainable plantation, or the tensions between internal and external NGOs. While its multistakeholder

initiative to base decisions on consensus is crucial for RSPO's legality, they found this compromising for RSPO's moral justifications in laying down the terms of sustainable palm oil. This, as a result, lowers the acceptance from Tier II audiences, or external actors, such as different NGOs.

Meanwhile, Ruysschaert & Salles (2014) label the RSPO as a form of global voluntary agreement. Referring to Brouwer et al.'s 2003 definition of co-operative agreements, Ruysschaert & Salles (2014, p.438) lay four requirements for an entity to be accepted as a voluntary agreement: [1] established on a voluntary basis, [2] based on self-regulation among key participants, [3] involving suppliers, and [4] targeting a specific area or commodity. They argue that voluntary agreements have flourished for agricultural commodities and were first initiated for water and forest products by the Forest Stewardship Council – FSC (p.438). The RSPO suits the criteria of a voluntary agreement because palm oil stakeholders gather at the yearly roundtable and form sustainable palm oil 'Principles & Criteria' – P&C to be adopted by its members (ibid., p.439). However, because of its form as a voluntary agreement earning their legitimacy from social contracts made in the absence of the state, the RSPO should ensure that sustainability objectives are achieved in implementation (ibid.). In their article, the authors view the RSPO as a perfect application case of the Coasian bargaining model, a theory of environmental economics (Britannica, 2021); however, it has not been implemented properly, which results in the RSPO's five shortcomings to protect the orangutan habitat (ibid., p.440). When downstream firms (e.g., palm oil processors, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers) that are members of the RSPO demand its growers to preserve forests by implementing the guidance document, growers receive a financial compensation while keeping the transaction cost for the firms low. The authors found five shortcomings in RSPO's attempts to achieve conservation goals when applying the Coasian bargaining model: [1] too small growers' compensation in comparison to their economic loss, [2] imprecise guidance document, [3] postponing decisions on contentious issues, [4] non-integration of RSPO within the Indonesian context, and [5] lack of effective external control system.

For their part, Brandi et al. (2015) label the RSPO as a voluntary sustainability standard and certification scheme (p.295). The authors highlight that the RSPO functions as a voluntary sustainability standard initiative because of its Principles & Criteria and system of third-party verification (p.293). Furthermore, the authors highlight the RSPO as a private or non-state form of regulation—a governance initiative by actors outside of governments and international governmental organizations, namely businesses and nongovernmental organizations (p.295). Thus, following this line of thought, an entity is a voluntary standards initiative when the standards do not come from an external demand of national governments or international governmental organizations, but from within the private and nongovernmental sector. There is still a lack of research on sustainability standard initiatives for the palm oil sector, the RSPO, and the view to smallholder certification (ibid.). In answer, Brandi et al. (2015) provided an analysis of the integration of smallholders into voluntary certification schemes. The authors identify smallholders' main barriers to the adoption of the RSPO and their compliance challenge through a smallholder survey and interviews with various stakeholders. Barriers to the inclusion of smallholders in certification schemes can undermine the effectiveness of sustainability standards both from an environmental and economic perspective (2015, p.307). Their findings show that smallholders often lack the information, resources, and organization for certification under the RSPO. In addition, five major gaps concerning land titles, seedlings, pesticide usage, fertilizing, and documentation were found between standard requirements and current independent smallholder practices. By increasing smallholders' participation in certification schemes, it can create socio-economic benefits for them and make the palm oil sector more sustainable on a small-scale, such as through reducing the use of agrochemicals (ibid., p.308).

From the three articles discussed above, a common theme can be identified, namely that the RSPO is a self-governing initiative of the palm oil industry, where the standards for sustainable palm oil or P&C are developed by the RSPO and for the RSPO members themselves. The articles also question the effectiveness and legitimacy of the RSPO, each

with different methods and emphases: a multi-dimensional approach to the legitimization process (Schouten & Glasbergen, 2011), the Coasian bargaining model (Ruysschaert & Salles, 2014), and smallholders' barriers to certification (Brandi et al., 2015). On the other hand, in addition to the label of a self-governing initiative outside of national governments and international governmental institutions, there are also labels which accentuate on the distinction between businesses and civil society, such as 'corporate social responsibility' (Paoli et al., 2010; Sabapathy, 2010) and the transnational civil society network (Claydon, 2009).

Paoli et al. (2010, p.438) write that through corporate social responsibility (CSR), businesses aim to align their values with the needs and expectations of a broader range of stakeholders, outside those of investors and shareholders, such as environmental NGOs. Thus, in the palm oil industry, this entails taking responsibility for social and environmental impacts, often beyond what is required by law, to build social and environmental capital in pursuit of a local "license to operate" (ibid.). Multimillion-dollar contracts have been cancelled because of environmental NGOs' pressure to promote change throughout the palm oil supply chain (ibid., p.439). Companies then use third party certification standards, such as through the RSPO, as a popular tool to guide and monitor the impact of CSR programs. Meanwhile, the birth of CSR is because businesses have faced growing demands to address issues of societal concern and to be responsible and accountable members of global society (Visser, 2010, p.ix). Businesses in the food and beverage sector, specifically, are faced with health-related and globalization-related impacts. Globalization-related impacts are impacts directly affecting individuals who may not be consumers of the products at all (Sabapathy, 2010, p.193). For example, because of palm oil plantations being a key driver for forest conversion and the pressing global call for sustainably produced palm oil, stakeholders in the palm oil supply chain formed the RSPO (Visser, 2010, p.349). Despite its attempts, the RSPO still faces serious challenges to mainstream environmentally sustainable and socially responsible practices throughout the supply chain (Paoli et al., p.439). In their essay, reflecting their three years experience working with multistakeholder groups in the palm oil supply chain, the

authors highlight actions that must be undertaken by growers, the broader RSPO membership, and supporting organizations to accelerate the uptake of responsible practices throughout the industry.

The next label is 'transnational civil society networks' (TCSN). Claydon (2009) links the RSPO to TCSN in its campaign over palm oil in Indonesia. In her thesis, she emphasizes that actors outside of civil society, such as businesses, can take part in a TCSN when they are involved in an issue within the civil society community, such as sustainable palm oil. In Claydon's 2009 analysis of the framing of sustainable palm oil plantation narratives in Indonesia, she describes the RSPO as a double construct of 1) a possible solution to improve growers' practices and to offer social protections such as the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples, and 2) a part of the problem because it weakens the struggle to oppose the palm oil plantation system that contributes to environmental degradation and injustices toward indigenous people (p.58). In spite of that, the RSPO is seen as a way to open up public space for civil society.

The existing literature on the RSPO sets a common theme that the RSPO is a self-governing initiative from stakeholders of the palm oil industry, outside of the national and international government institutions. Moreover, the alternative labels distinguish the RSPO as a business entity apart from civil society. What the literature has not touched upon is the form of the entity itself, the RSPO as an organization which possesses the same full formal characteristics as other organizations: hierarchy, constitution, membership, and autonomy (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.47). Therefore, it is appropriate to describe the RSPO using the organization theory of meta-organizations as the RSPO is an organization comprised of members which are also organizations; among them business entities, nongovernmental organizations, smallholder groups, and investors. By viewing the RSPO as an organization, it recognizes the RSPO as being on the same level as other organizations, while in recent studies the RSPO was viewed as being separate from other entities: national governments,

international governmental institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and civil society organizations. This way, other organizations experience the same challenges and legitimization processes as the RSPO because they are all organizations, which are all attempts in achieving their goals through the process of organizing.

Furthermore, while existing RSPO studies question the effectiveness and legitimacy of the organization with a variety of methods, none has analyzed the RSPO from a sociological perspective, that is to say that the RSPO, as an international organization, is a social actor which in turn is a knowledge producing actor in the global society as explained in the previous section. In this thesis, the epistemic governance theory is used to analyze the knowledge production that the RSPO attempts to create. This way, it can view how the RSPO conveys itself as an authoritative standardizing actor in face of the debates surrounding palm oil's sustainability. The subsequent chapter will discuss the theories relevant to my thesis, meta-organizations and epistemic governance.

2.2 International standards organizations in a globalized world

The RSPO is not the only organization standardizing sustainable palm oil, there are as well the Rainforest Alliance (RA), the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM) - Organics International, Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB), and the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC). Within national borders, there are national sustainable palm oil standards bodies, such as Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil (ISPO) and Malaysian Sustainable Palm Oil (MSPO) (Voora, Larrea, Bermudez, & Baliño, 2019). This brings to five the international standards organizations in the palm oil sector alone, in addition to many standards organizations for other agricultural commodities, for instance the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS), Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), or UTZ (merged with the Rainforest Alliance in January 2018) certifying cocoa, coffee, hazelnut, and tea. Moreover, many standards organizations belong to an umbrella organization, such as the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance with members including the RSPO, Fairtrade International, RA, RTRS, and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC); or the International Standard Organization (ISO) with 165 national standards bodies members from around the world (ISO, 2021).

This phenomenon of numerous sustainability standards organizations, even in the palm oil sector alone, is interesting and raises the question of why there is an increasing number of such organizations and how they are interconnected with other standards organizations in a form of membership. Not only for agricultural commodities, but there are standards organizations across all social sectors: education, human rights, labor standards, and many more. Furthermore, there are standardization actors that are involved in setting rules for non-members of the organization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.153). For example, the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC), another sustainable palm oil standardization actor, which operates by creating certification systems, do not require firms to become members of the ISCC Association in order to be a certified ISCC system user (ISCC, 2021a).

Members of the ISCC Association, on the other hand, hold voting rights in the General Assembly (ISCC, 2021). Despite not requiring membership for certification in some standardization actors, Ahrne & Brunsson (2018, p.153) argue that through standardization, it enables interaction over great distances. Much existing international trade and global commercial activities would be impossible without standards directed at firms and commercial life or by exposing actors to how well they measure to other global actors in complying with that standard (ibid.), thus, they argue, the process of organizing promotes globalization.

Not only in the form of standards organizations, the rise of organizing across a variety of sectors is observed in other forms of organizations as well, including nongovernmental organizations (Boli & Thomas, 1997). Institutionalist world culture theory has observed the rise of organizations, such as the transformation of traditional social forms into formal organizations (Meyer & Bromley, 2013, p.366). One example is to how family firms or charitable associations are now transformed into managed formal organizations and being labeled a 'nonprofit organization' (ibid., p.367). The rise of organizing is because of the widespread cultural rationalization, which is seen from the rise of scientism, rights and empowerment discourses, and widespread education (ibid.). Furthermore, a great deal of isomorphism or similarities in structures and policies across the globe can also be seen in nation-states as a result of their enactment of the world cultural order (Meyer et al., 1997, p.152). An example of this is to how all nation states members of the UN commit to the Sustainable Development Goals (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2018).

Why is it necessary to analyze an international organization to view the social change of sustainable palm oil? International organizations (IOs) have been observed to hold a role as a novel site of knowledge production (Zapp, 2018). Alasuutari & Qadir (2018, p.94) further emphasize that international governmental organizations' influence on the international community depends on their ability to affect people's conceptions of reality and the situation at hand. Because of their significance in knowledge production in the world society,

international organizations seem to be a suitable site of analysis when understanding the social change toward sustainable palm oil.

To conclude, the rise of organizations, according to institutionalist world culture theory is the result of globalization. Meyer & Bromley (2013, p.369) argue that widespread cultural rationalization in a global society characterized by scientism and other discourses resulted in the rise of organization. For their part, Boli & Thomas (1997, p.179-180) observed the rise of international non-governmental organizations as a dialectic between world polity and national-level organization following the World Wars, incorporating regions into the world economy and the interstate system, promoted by voluntary action to spread world cultural principles in the form of INGOs. Meta-organizations theory on the other hand argues that organizing is the key process to globalization (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.150), and the global expansion of meta-organizations lies in their capacity to create interaction within their own organization (ibid., p.151) by linking previously separated organizations through recruiting them as members (ibid., p.156). Therefore, globalization is the result of organizing. The following section will discuss meta-organizations a bit more.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter discusses the RSPO in the light of two different theories. The theories chosen are [1] an organizational theory of Meta-Organizations and [2] a sociological theory of Epistemic Governance. The latter theory will be a bridge toward the methodology used in the thesis' analysis.

3.1 Meta-Organizations

As was examined in the previous chapter, studies on the RSPO have provided different labels, and a common theme among the RSPO literature emphasize the RSPO as a private standardization entity separate from other organizations such as nation-states, NGOs, civil society networks, and international governmental organizations. This thesis, on the other hand, attempts to examine the form of the RSPO as an organization, specifically, a meta-organization. As claimed by Berkowitz & Bor (2018, p.204), the concept of meta-organization "overcomes the focus on manifestations and crosses various empirical and theoretical types of manifestations". Thus, collaborations among public, private, and third sector organizations are included in the labelization of meta-organizations (ibid.).

What is a meta-organization? The prefix meta- originated from the Greek language which signifies something beyond, or at a higher level, as in its use in the word metaphilosophy or metalinguistics (Dictionary.com, 2021). The word meta-organizations, following this etymology, would mean an organization beyond organizations, or an overarching organization for organizations. The label of meta-organizations was chosen to describe the RSPO from it being a multistakeholder initiative comprising of businesses in the palm oil supply chain, investors, and nongovernmental organizations as organizational members. This definition fits with the concept of meta-organizations by Gulati et al., (2012) and Ahrne & Brunsson (2008) that a meta-organization is an organization whose members are not only individuals, but are organizations. Among others, literature on meta-organizations has been written by Ahrne &

Brunsson (2004, 2008) and Gulati et al. (2012). Accordingly, Berkowitz & Bor (2018) differentiate two research communities of the study of meta-organizations: the European school of meta-organizations landing on Ahrne & Brunsson's work (2005, 2008) and the US-UK school based on Gulati et al. (2012).

The distinctive characteristic that differentiates the two research communities is the European school's emphasis on 'associations' (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018, p.204). While Gulati et al. (2012) emphasize on "firms" and "communities of individuals". Ahrne and Brunsson's work is centralized on how organizations are different from individuals and thus the different functioning of meta-organizations from individual-based associations. For example, organizations have more resources than individuals, and to create something as an organization, it needs to have four elements: members, hierarchy, autonomy, and constitution (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2018, p.45). Gulati et al. (2012, p.576), on the other hand, offer a taxonomy of four types of meta-organizations differentiated from their low / high hierarchical decision making and closed / open membership boundaries. Some examples of meta-organizations mentioned in the literature are Apple, Toyota, Wikipedia, Linux (Gulati et al., 2012); United Nations, World Trade Organization, European Union, Fédération Internationale de Football Association – FIFA, International Air Transport Association – IATA (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008); and International Association of National Public Health Institutes – IANPHI (Vähä-Savo et al., 2019).

When looking at the RSPO as a meta-organization, we may look at how the RSPO recruits its members. As members being an element of organizations, an organization is not complete without them. According to Ahrne & Brunsson (2008), recruiting members of a meta-organization is easy because from the meta-organization's point of view, the membership criteria are very specific, thus the potential members are limited and there are not a variety of organizations to look out for. The RSPO is a multi-stakeholder meta-organization whose members comprise of 7 sectors of the palm oil industry: oil palm producers, processors or

traders, consumer goods manufacturers, retailers, banks / investors, and non-governmental organizations (RSPO, 2021a). If an organization does not operate in one of these sectors, then they do not meet the criteria of RSPO membership. From the stakeholder's point of view, joining a meta-organization is equally easy because of the low cost and incentives from joining a meta-organization. However, closed boundaries meta-organizations require the approval of existing members for new organizations to join and a declared commitment to contribute is expected from new members (Gulati et al., 2012, p.576). The RSPO seem to function as a closed boundary meta-organization because joining the RSPO require for potential members to have their application approved through an internal review (RSPO, 2021b). Furthermore, in the RSPO Code of Conduct for members (RSPO, 2017a), it is stated that *"it is fundamental … that every member supports, promotes, and works towards … Sustainable Palm Oil. All members must act in good faith towards this and commit to adhering to the principles set out in this Code."* This shows the expected contributions from existing members for new members when joining the RSPO.

While there are standards actors whose certifications not only apply to members but also to outsiders as mentioned in the previous chapter, the RSPO is a membership-based organization (NTUC2017) and firms can only get certified sustainable palm oil according to the RSPO's Principles and Criteria once they become a member of the RSPO (RSPO, 2021d). This provides a distinctive label to the RSPO as a standards meta-organization. Within a standards meta-organization, members have access to every element of the organization, such as regular meetings with other members, having an opportunity to influence each other, and thus having the authority to create a binding rule for its standards within the meta-organization's membership (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2018, pp.154-155). Furthermore, public information about the behavior of members is one way to affect members' degree of compliance (ibid., p.127). This organizational behavior is also observed within the RSPO in their website that it publishes information when a member is terminated or suspended as a result of noncompliance. This is done regardless the size and influence of a particular member,

for example Nestlé's membership in the RSPO was suspended in 2018 because of its breaches of the RSPO Statutes and Code of Conduct (RSPO, 2018b).

On the other hand, it is easy for meta-organizations to expand their membership because of the incentive for members to belong to an established category (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, pp.71-72). By becoming a member of a meta-organization, organizations form an identity by acquiring a last name in addition to its original first name (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.93). As was demonstrated by Vähä-Savo et al. (2019, p.491) in an example of the former National Public Health Institute (NPHI) of Finland, through its membership in IANPHI, the Finnish NPHI may be viewed more authoritative in the eyes of policy makers after owning a special organizational identity as an NPHI in addition to it being part of a well-established group of state research institutes. On the other hand, the organizational identity entitled with the meta-organization results in a dependency relationship between members and its meta-organization, as now the member organization is labeled differently than before, and their identity is threatened by its membership in the meta-organization. Similarly, a meta-organization's identity is strongly dependent on its members. If a conflict arises in relation to the role and responsibilities of a member, then the meta-organization's reputation is affected.

Moreover, despite its expected financial contribution, it is not costly for organizations to join a meta-organization as a member (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.80). There are three membership categories in RSPO (2021b), and the membership fees between the three categories vary, which is a common characteristic of meta-organizations to differentiate membership fees fitted to the members' resources and size (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.81). Membership in the RSPO ranges from EUR 100 per year for Associates to EUR 2000 per year for Ordinary Members (RSPO, 2017b). This fee as an individual might be costly, especially if an individual belongs to several organizations, which organizations are often too. To give an example of a yearly membership fee for an individual-based organization, the Finnish Red Cross, their fee is EUR 20 per year. For those under the age of 29, the membership fee costs

EUR 10 per year (Punainen Risti, 2021). Conversely, when a meta-organization such as the RSPO charges its organizational members 2000 EUR for a yearly membership fee, that sum is not costly in comparison to the size of their operation.

The creation of a meta-organization according to Ahrne & Brunsson (2008, p.62) is the organizations' attempt to eliminate part of their environment. The organizational environment is seen as unpredictable because the environment has no clear boundaries (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.56) which makes it difficult to predict what events might come up. Similarly, according to Gulati et al. (2012, p.575), meta-organizations emerge when focal firms attempt to exercise control over external partners. However, as meta-organizations are all attempts, in parallel to other forms of organizing, they do not always succeed (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.155). This can be seen from the existing mentions and criticisms toward the RSPO, and studies on the RSPO have examined its effectiveness and legitimacy. RSPO's responses to mentions by other social actors will be analyzed using an epistemic governance methodology in the next chapter.

3.2 Epistemic Governance

From the literature examining RSPO's effectiveness and legitimacy in palm oil's sustainability, it shows how researchers are interested in RSPO's role as a sustainable palm oil standardization actor using the variety of labels being offered to study the organization. It reflects a ray of hope in the palm oil sustainability topic with the RSPO being an arena for social actors in bringing about social change. By addressing the topic of palm oil's sustainability and analyzing the actors involved with a variety of methods, studies might offer perspectives that might be useful for improving the works of RSPO in pursuing their objectives.

The RSPO in this thesis is viewed as an arena in which actors attempt to bring social change to the palm oil industry, that is to make sustainable palm oil a norm (RSPO, 2021c). In an epistemic governance approach, social change is "the sum total of all individuals leading their lives and pursuing their objectives" (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.5). While a social actor

may not always be aware in their attempts to bring about change, there are actors who intentionally seek support to achieve their objective from others in different arenas. This is an act of 'governance', or the intentional efforts to bring about social change, which whether we realize it or not, is not only done by policymakers or organizations (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.3). For example, an individual working as a face-to-face fundraiser for a charity organization does an act of epistemic governance in their job. When attempting to influence a student with no stable income to donate, the fundraiser needs to put themselves in the student's shoes and prepare a speech which is tailored to the student, for example by introducing a low donation sum lower than the price of a music streaming service subscription. The act of influencing the conduct of others through changing how they think about the situation is what is called as 'epistemic work', or "the techniques used by actors engaged in affecting views and hegemonic definitions of the situation at hand" (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.22).

It is important to emphasize the phrase "views of the situation at hand" because this is what it means for governance to be 'epistemic'. The etymology of the word 'epistemic' is an adjective form of the Ancient Greek word 'episteme', translated as 'knowledge' or 'understanding'. Epistemology in philosophy studies, for example, is the theory of knowledge (Steup & Neta, 2020). In this case, epistemic governance is defined as the governance related to knowledge. When writing about epistemic governance as a theory, Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.2) are not proposing a new type of governance different from other types, but instead proposing a framework with which it can be used to analyze the episteme of governance, or the *how* of actors' works upon people's conceptions of reality. Moreover, as what was stated in the previous chapter on institutionalist world culture theory describing the rise of international standards organizations in a globalizing world, the World Culture approach is viewed as lacking a detailed description when explaining the actual processes in which models are enacted (Syväterä, 2019).

In answer, Epistemic Governance theory provides a framework that unpacks the processes in which world cultural models are enacted, on the grassroots level viewed from the social actors' point of view, with a distinctive focus on knowledge, or the *episteme*. Moreover, according to Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.12), governance is always epistemic. They assert that all acts that aim to change the existing conditions in society are intertwined with people's perceptions and beliefs, albeit done by coercion or violence. Furthermore, they maintain that epistemic governance is not a replacement for preexisting power theories, but rather the culturally fundamental way of gaining influence, giving an analytical framework rather than solely answering the *what* and the outcome. The analytical framework was derived from empirical research of national policy making, and a unity among the results was found which led to a formation of an epistemic governance framework (ibid., p.23).

Alasuutari & Qadir's research found three dimensions in actors' epistemic work at social change, which are all dependent on how the actors think others perceive reality. The reason why actors take into account the others' perception of reality in an epistemic governance is because for social change to be approved, there needs to be sufficient support for the proposed change. Taking back from the previous example of a face-to-face fundraiser, a social actor needs to "put themselves in others' shoes" for their proposition to be approved. The three dimensions of epistemic governance are: [1] the objects of epistemic work, [2] the narratives or imageries of the social world, and [3] paying attention to others' appeal to authority. These three dimensions can be referred to when conducting a qualitative research analysis on actors' attempt at social change, which is what is being used in this thesis.

The first dimension is the objects of epistemic work, which are the components of arguments that social actors, agents of change use. The objects comprise of the construction of what the world is, who we are, and what is good or desirable. Similarly, [1] the ontology of the environment, [2] actor identifications, and [3] norms and ideals (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.21). These three objects of epistemic work appear simultaneously in arguments made by

social actors (ibid., p.22). In other words, when trying to construct an argument, there are three components in their argumentation when seeking social change: what is the situation at hand, to what community we are part of, and the action that should be done for the situation. When identifying involving actors in the situation, agents of change state claims about who they are, what community they belong to, and what other actors there are, in order to motivate legitimate action (ibid., pp.26-27). Common examples of this include identifying the audience as part of a nation with shared interests as depicted in Anderson's 1991 writing about imagined communities, or as part of the '*ummah*' (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.27) by Muslim political leaders.

Next, when attempting social change, actors strategically deploy the imagery that fits better in a particular situation (ibid., p.52). These imageries are formed from cultural and historical processes, namely modernization, competing blocs, and hierarchy. The imagery of modernization is the trajectory of development and progress, which is observed in the similar 'development' trajectory of nation states to suit functional requirements such as how laws and policies are renewed and reformed to suit societal change. More importantly, the idea of newness is seen as better than the old ones (ibid., p.45). The next imagery of the social world used in epistemic governance is hierarchy. It views the social world as if it is organized as a chain of command commonly seen in organizational charts (ibid., p.46). When viewing the social world hierarchically, those in the higher level are viewed as holding a greater capability, and thus often blamed for the current conditions (ibid., p.48). Furthermore, the spatial imagery of power divided into the global, national, and local level is also an imagery of hierarchy (p.46). Another social world imagery in epistemic governance is of competing blocs. This imagery is common in a realist view of international relations that nation states are continuously in competition with each other in an anarchic international system, such as the post-World War II division of the capitalist and communist blocs. With an imagery of social world as competing blocs, social actors create suspicion toward others and build team spirit simultaneously which

result in preemptive measures (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2018, pp.50-51) to protect its community in case of attacks or threats from the competing bloc.

Furthermore, the arguments for change made on the basis of such imageries rely on referring to sources that is believed will convince their audiences, or the appeal to authority, which is the third dimension of epistemic governance. There are four types of authorities found in epistemic works: capacity-based authorities, ontological authorities, moral authorities, and charismatic authorities. The examples of capacity-based authority provided by Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.62) are threat, acts of violence, wealth, mass demonstrations, or strikes. A distinct characteristic of using capacity-based authority is when its motive is to evoke respect or fear (ibid., p.60). Whereas ontological authority is the reference to scientific knowledge or expertise of a text, person, or organization to present a credible situation at hand. Charismatic authority is utilizing an extraordinary awe attached to an organization or individual, and a moral authority is employing prevalent conceptions about what is acceptable as a reference. A concrete example of using moral authority is referring to important persons, organizations, texts, or principles (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019 p.60).

Social change is done in sites, where the media (Qureshi, 2017; Ojala, 2017), parliaments, international organizations, social movements, and NGOs, are viewed as important arenas for social change in the modern world (Alasuutari & Qadir 2019, p.14). As the previous chapter explains the RSPO as an international meta-organization with seven sectors in the palm oil industry as organizational members, the RSPO may be seen as an attempt at social change of these actors in the arena of an international organization: the RSPO itself. What distinguishes international organizations with other sites of social change in an epistemic governance approach is to how crucial it is for international organizations to manage impressions from others toward them (ibid., p.92). Because of this, international organizations use authority as an epistemic capital, which can be accumulated by using different types of authority to have more influence on others' conduct (ibid., pp.60-61). Moreover, because of

international organizations' unlikeliness to use coercion or force, it holds an eminent role as an ontological authority, the actor who defines the situation at hand (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.88). International organizations, as was discussed in the previous chapter, is a novel site for knowledge production, with their staff being scientifically socialized and possessing a high level of academic qualification (Zapp, 2018, p.20).

Furthermore, an epistemic governance analysis on the authority of an international meta-organization has been studied by Vähä-Savo et al. (2019) studying the International Association of Public Health Institutes (IANPHI). They demonstrate that international meta-organizations assert its authority when recruiting new members through epistemic work (ibid., p.479). The authority is either of its own or through relying on others' (ibid., p.477), and international organizations' authority depends on its recognition by other actors such as how domestic policy makers use international organizations in policy making (ibid., pp.477-478), either by referring to it or pursue their national objectives through involvement in it. This thesis, along similar lines, conducts an epistemic governance analysis of an international meta-organization, the RSPO, in how it conveys itself as an authoritative actor in sustainable palm oil standardization by identifying its epistemic works and the types of authorities it tries to accumulate.

4. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Dataset

For the purpose of this thesis, data is obtained from the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil website: rspo.org. The RSPO's website is sufficient to be analyzed for the purpose of examining RSPO's attempts in bringing social change, as all RSPO standards and other key documents are available for download on the website. To answer the research questions which studies RSPO's responses when being mentioned by other social actors, RSPO's official response documents when being mentioned by other social actors about their members, certification, or the organization in general were searched. The keyword 'response' was used in RSPO's search tool. The search showed more than 3,000 results, but 18 results were seen as relevant, showing responses from year 2012 to 2020. These results are official responses made by the RSPO and not its members nor the CEO. According to the 18 official responses made by the RSPO, mentions toward the organization have rose from environmental NGOs (EIA – Environmental Investigation Agency, Greenpeace, POI – Palmoil Investigations, RAN – Rainforest Action Network); media (Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, Report show broadcasted on Rai – Radiotelevisione Italiana); human rights NGO Amnesty International; retailer NTUC Fairprice; investor Norges Bank and investor network Ceres; and the public. From the 18 different responses published in RSPO's website selected for this thesis, each of them is coded to facilitate referencing. The list of data and its labeling code can be viewed in the appendixes.

4.2 Methodology: Epistemic Governance

The reason why the epistemic governance method was chosen is how the method employs the frameworks of which people's knowledge and perception of reality are based upon, which might be useful in order to perceive how the RSPO justifies itself as an authoritative meta-organization in sustainable palm oil standardization. This framework is

rooted in the field of qualitative research method, where, according to Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.155), epistemic governance, is related to Foucauldian discourse analysis in the way that it views social change as discursive, or referred to as a change in talk. This process occurs in a site, an institution, with, according to Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.155), some sites of social change being more significant than others because of the wider scope and larger impact that the change can bring. Such sites which they mention as examples include international organizations, parliaments, and social movements. Thus, choosing a site of social change is the very first step in conducting an epistemic governance analysis, and the site of social change can be studied over a long period of time. There is no limitation as to the size of data as long as it is justifiable to the research question in place. The most important point when pinpointing a site of social change is to ask whether or not the processes in that institution are linked with the production of power and authorization of knowledge (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.157). In my thesis, the site of social change analyzed is an international organization, to be specific, an international meta-organization which aims to bring social change about palm oil sustainability certification. The power-knowledge couplet occurring in the organization is to how the organization acts as a sustainable palm oil knowledge producing actor, and the findings can be read in the following empirical chapters.

The next step in implementing an epistemic governance analysis is to identify the data. In the selected site of social change, where does the change of talk occur and where is it recorded? They can be in the form of debates, media publications, company profiles, or organizational reports. For my thesis, as was listed above, the data used in my analysis of the RSPO as a site of social change is the organization's profile information published on the website (company profile) and the organization's responses when mentions are made by other social actors (debates). The data was easily collected from the website as it was publicly available. According to Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.158), documentations in which the change of talk occurs are often publicly available data, because rules and assumptions in most sites of change can be observed in openly said and done things. The epistemic governance

method, as a result, do not analyze discreet motives that social actors may pursue because of the researchers' inaccessibility toward back-room conversations and discreet data. When observing organizations, this correlates with the notion of organizations that organizations do not have a personal sphere (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2008, p.113). Despite organizations having private discussions undisclosed to the public, organizations can only claim to be one actor on different occasions, because of the constitution and hierarchy comprising the organization. Because of the worldwide cultural rationalization, unlike traditional forms of organizations, modern organizations need to be accountable (Meyer & Bromley, 2013, p.383), and thus the availability of documentation for the public. However, before making the decision to analyze the RSPO in question as the site of social change in my thesis, I have encountered challenges to accessing specific organizational data. Nevertheless, the organization's decision to make some documents publicly available and some are not may be an epistemic governance decision.

According to their perceived imagery of the social world, that piece of information should not be accessible to the public. However, in order to discover which information is not publicly available, a direct demand to the organization for that specific information should be made, and researchers can only know when a specific piece of information is personal when the request is turned down. Ahrne & Brunsson (2008, p.77) claim that this also is a behavior of organizations; when it receives demands from the outside about its opinion on a certain issue, as an actor, organizations particularly meta-organizations, defend themselves against those demands for various reasons. Accordingly, this behavior could be considered as an identity object of analysis within epistemic governance, that an avoidance to deal with a specific issue could be an act of social change, preserving an identity of what the organization is and is not. However, for the data collection part of this thesis, RSPO's official responses toward mentions from other actors were easily accessible.

After identifying the site of social change and its documented (or undocumented) data, the third step is to identify the actor's justification for social change, coined by Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.160) as the "epistemic work", or the rhetoric in play. There are two levels of analysis when examining epistemic work, the first level is the paradigm and the second is the practicalities. The paradigmatic level is "what Foucault was [*sic*] most interested in: the episteme or the order of discourse" (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.160). However, this thesis will not discuss the paradigmatic level of epistemic work. The practical level, on the other hand, explains the way institutions create the discourse. In this thesis for example, a specific sustainability certifying actor is observed and how that actor creates the discourse of sustainability is being analyzed.

This thesis paper studies the epistemic works of the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil in how they justify themselves as an authoritative actor in sustainable palm oil standardization. In practice, I will highlight the words used by the RSPO in their documents and publications enough to answer my research question, rather than trying to collect a large dataset of how many times a word is used, highlighting their emphasis and significance in discourse, or creating a periodical timeline of the different keywords used by the RSPO when attempting social change. By doing this, it will provide a general understanding of the meta-organization's current epistemic works, without examining the change in discourse. Similar to the point made earlier about organizations turning down requests to provide certain information, sometimes organizations do this on their website by blocking access to that page, displaying a 403 Forbidden error or 404 Page not found message, even when a link to that information appeared in a Google search. In this case, all the possible collected data at this time is the most relevant information presently.

Finally, we need to understand the discursive assumptions of the actor in a site of social change. Alasuutari & Qadir (2019, p.161) offer a three-dimensional analysis of the rhetoric of change, where the thought process of how the three-dimensions come into being was

elaborated in the preceding theoretical framework chapter. An interpretation of these three dimensions is shown below in a form of a table, which hopefully can facilitate empirical researchers of epistemic governance in doing their analysis.

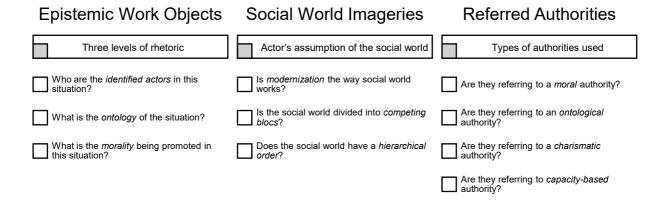| Epistemic Work Objects	Social World Imageries	Referred Authorities
☐ Three levels of rhetoric	☐ Actor's assumption of the social world	☐ Types of authorities used
☐ Who are the *identified actors* in this situation?	☐ Is *modernization* the way social world works?	☐ Are they referring to a *moral* authority?
☐ What is the *ontology* of the situation?	☐ Is the social world divided into *competing blocs*?	☐ Are they referring to an *ontological* authority?
☐ What is the *morality* being promoted in this situation?	☐ Does the social world have a *hierarchical order*?	☐ Are they referring to a *charismatic* authority?
		☐ Are they referring to *capacity-based* authority?

Table 1 Methodology : Three dimensions of Epistemic Governance Analysis

5. FINDINGS

The dataset is categorized into the three objects of epistemic work: Actor Identification, Ontology, and Morality. Since every epistemic work contains all three objects (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2018), the data findings are presented in this way. This categorization of the dataset and its direct quotations related to each object of epistemic work could be viewed in the appendixes. This chapter discusses the epistemic works of the RSPO in light of the three dimensions (objects, imageries, and authority) observed from RSPO's official responses toward mentions from other social actors.

5.1 Objects of Epistemic Work in RSPO's official responses

Social actors take into account their audiences' picture of reality in three dimensions of epistemic work and build their arguments around those objects, which are ontology, actors, morality (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2018, p.37). In other words, when trying to construct an argument, there are three components in social actors' argumentation when seeking social change: what is the situation at hand, to what community we are part of, and the action that should be done for the situation.

5.1.1 Actor Identification

Actor identification is the component in the agent of change's argumentation that identifies the role of the audience, the agent of change, and others in a situation. From the official responses made by the RSPO toward different social actors, the RSPO created a sense of community with their interlocutors as mutually being part of the sustainable palm oil agenda, by identifying them as equally accountable and transparent actors, and agents for change toward a sustainable palm oil supply chain. Among the social actors being referred to as part of the sustainable palm oil agenda are investors, as observed in RSPO's response to investor network Ceres and investor Norges Bank. When responding to Ceres in data CER2015, the RSPO write: *"It is encouraging to see that more and more actors today are willing to play an active role in moving towards a sustainable palm oil supply chain, and share RSPO's vision*

of making sustainable palm oil the norm." The RSPO further highlights the critical supportive role of investors as part of the sustainable palm oil agenda, viewed in data NOR2015: *"The RSPO is encouraged to see the more active role that financial institutions are playing in helping the industry move towards a sustainable palm oil supply chain."*

When creating a sense of community among sustainable palm oil agents with criticizing actors, the RSPO acknowledged the criticisms being reported, and emphasized that the RSPO is on the same page as the NGOs and others in their mission for sustainable practices, including their stance against deforestation practices and that the RSPO has been working on the issues raised in the reports over the past years (RAI2015). For example, when responding to Greenpeace in data GRE2016, the RSPO writes: *"Transforming the palm oil industry and minimising tropical deforestation is mission critical to the RSPO. … This means that many more companies will also need to take their first steps and are glad that Greenpeace sees the RSPO as part of those first steps."*

On the other hand, besides creating the sense of community among agents of change in sustainable palm oil or referring to them as part of "us", there are a few identifications of "us vs them" when identifying organizations that are credible and not. In RSPO's response to the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), the RSPO underlines inaccuracies in EIA's report and that "RSPO continues to be informed by scores of credible research organisations" (EIA2019). Conversely, when the interlocutor attempts to create an "us vs them" in their mention about the RSPO, the RSPO on the other hand try to bring the interlocutor together, as viewed in data RAI2015. Report, a broadcasted TV show by an Italian television network RAI suggested to substitute palm oil with other vegetable fats as a potential solution for the Italian market. The RSPO responded by mentioning the number of Italian members of the RSPO which have collaborated in RSPO's share standard and principles and criteria (RAI2015).

5.1.2 Ontological

The ontological object of epistemic work is a social actor's claim about reality, or what is the current situation at hand. The ontological objects of epistemic work in debates could be seen as a battle of facts, where each contender presents its claims about reality. When examining RSPO's official responses, the RSPO claims that it takes criticisms and matters very seriously (PUB2012, WSJ2015c). As a result, the RSPO claims that the organization is an easy target because of its transparency (EIA2019). From the selected dataset, topics being mentioned by other social actors are related to palm oil alternatives, forest fires, human rights and labor practices, and deforestation. In this battle of facts, the RSPO claims that opposing social actors have misunderstood the methods and tools being used by the organization, for instance for hotspot monitoring and fire detection (GRE2019). In data GRE2013, the RSPO claims that the majority of fires are occurring outside of palm oil plantations, and the most significant source of forest fires to be within the pulp and paper plantations. When being mentioned about alternatives of palm oil, the RSPO argue that palm oil cultivation will not lead to a greater demand for land and deforestation in comparison to other alternatives because of palm oil's much higher yield per hectare (RAI2015). The RSPO claims that deforestation and carbon stock loss is due to the expansion of intensive agriculture in carbon rich areas such Latin America, subtropical Asia and Africa is driven by palm oil, soy, and cattle grazing (EIA2018). When being mentioned about forced labor, the RSPO argue that such practices are not permitted in its Principle & Criteria (WSJ2015).

Furthermore, when examining its ontological object of epistemic work, the RSPO also makes claims about how it is as an organization. The RSPO reinforces the organization as to being a *"…multi stakeholder, membership based, non-for-profit organisation. …committed to the standards outlined in their Principles and Criteria and to maintaining and improving transparency in standards related claims and communications"* (NTUC2017) and that *"the RSPO in its multi-stakeholder nature has a commitment for inclusivity and the RSPO standard is agreed upon through a consensus process. The RSPO and its members share within the*

RSPO Principles, a commitment for continuous improvement". When a breach of practice has been reported by another social actor, the RSPO claims to acknowledge the existing problems, such as when being mentioned about problems in the protection of workers and human rights (AMN2016) and that an investigation is being held such as through a deliberation of the RSPO Complaints Panel (WSJ2015b). The RSPO also claims to be *"committed to continuous improvement and self-reflection on what's working and what's not"* (EIA2019).

5.1.3 Morality

A morality object of epistemic work is the component of agents of change's argumentation which mentions about the action that should be done for the situation. When being criticized on their standards, the morality object of epistemic work shows that the RSPO directs the audience to send a report to the Grievance Panel (PUB2012). When the RSPO Certification Bodies were being criticized, the RSPO stated to *"give cause to the Complaints Panel to request the RSPO Secretariat to conduct an independent assessment of RSPO Certification Bodies"* (WSJ2015b). A further investigation is then directed to an external audit body, Assurances Services International – ASI *"to perform audits focused on assessing compliance to the aspects of the RSPO Principles and Criteria standard that are related to Human Rights"* (WSJ2015c&d). To improve the effectiveness of how the RSPO checks on compliance, the RSPO *"welcomes a constructive dialogue with all interested parties in the framework of the RSPO Assurance Task Force"* (AMN2016, POI2016).

As was portrayed in the previous actor identification object of epistemic work, the RSPO identifies their audience as a part of 'us'. This is also shown in the next observed morality object of epistemic work that the RSPO invites other market initiatives *"to come together, dialogue and collaborate"* (RAN2013). Furthermore, the RSPO invites environmental nongovernmental organizations such as Greenpeace to *"collaborate to address the situation at hand rather than using media sensationalism"* (GRE2013). Furthermore, when facing the urgency and challenging process of transforming the palm oil industry and minimizing tropical

deforestation, the RSPO asserts that *"much more needs to be done by all players, …across the board and not just to a selection of large companies. This means that many more companies will also need to take their first steps"* (GRE2016).

For the sake of transforming the market to make sustainable palm oil the norm, besides inviting support from other stakeholders to achieve market transformation (CER2015, NOR2015), the RSPO also offers its own support for companies wishing to be certified (NTUC2017). RSPO claims that market transformation is a shared responsibility and common solutions to issues within the industry need to be found (EIA2018). The RSPO also suggests social actors to "*put forward a deeper reflection on the real effects of palm oil's substitution at a global level and to promote sustainable production and consumption patterns in other parts of the world*" (RAI2015). The RSPO, when referring to itself, claims that the *organization "must remain transparent and present only the facts"* (EIA2019).

5.2 RSPO's selected imageries of the social world

When examining RSPO's official responses, the imageries of the social world being used are the imageries of modernization and competing blocs. While acknowledging the presence of competing blocs, the RSPO attempts to unite them in the sustainable palm oil agenda through developing the criteria. The competing blocs identified are the stakeholders in the palm oil supply chain interested in transforming the market to create sustainable palm oil the norm, which are members of the RSPO, committed to transparency and progress, versus the opposition, those attempting to find alternatives to palm oil (RAI2015) and uncredible research organizations (EIA2019). Despite of that, the RSPO attempts to bring competing blocs together within the RSPO framework, viewed from the morality objects of epistemic work which invites stakeholders to come together, dialogue and collaborate.

Furthermore, despite the criticisms toward RSPO's standards and reports of breaches within its members, RSPO selected the imagery of modernization by committing to improve. The imagery of progress and development is explicitly stated in some of RSPO's official

responses, such as *"the RSPO and its members share, within the RSPO Principles, a commitment for continuous improvement"* (CER2015); *"The RSPO has always been committed to continuous improvement and self-reflection on what's working and what's not"* (EIA2019).

5.3 RSPO as an authoritative sustainable palm oil standardization actor

As claimed by Alasuutari & Qadir (2018), international organizations accumulate authority to get their points across. Authorities can be evoked by referring to itself or to other social actors. In this dataset of 18 official responses by the RSPO, the authorities observed are ontological authority, charismatic authority, and moral authority. While a capacity-based authority, which is often characterized by the motive to evoke respect or fear (Alasuutari & Qadir, 2019, p.60), was not found in this dataset, other documents on the website being used earlier in this thesis paper evoked a capacity-based authority, such as threats to suspend or terminate membership in case of breach written in the Code of Conduct (RSPO, 2017a) and public announcements on the RSPO's website when members are suspended or expelled (e.g. RSPO, 2018b)

When referring to an ontological authority, the RSPO refers to external certifying bodies such as ASI – Assurance Services International (WSJ2015cd). Furthermore, the RSPO refers to its membership in ISEAL Alliance (EIA2019), an international standards body with members including Fairtrade International, Rainforest Alliance, Round Table on Responsible Soy, and the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). The RSPO also refers to its most comprehensive GIS technologies uptake among members and ISEAL communities (EIA2019). Moreover, the RSPO brings up internal bodies within the RSPO that holds different functions, such as the Assurance Task Force, Complaints Panel, Grievance Panel, and the Secretariat. These

internal and external bodies were thought to possess the authority to convince other social actors when mentioning the RSPO.

The moral authority conveyed by the RSPO refers to its transparent and accountable practices and RSPO's commitment to transparency. This is viewed in almost all of the responses in the dataset. In POI2016, for example, the RSPO states that RSPO certification can be rightly questioned, and its members can be challenged on non-compliance, which makes a platform for transparency. The value for transparency is also mentioned for RSPO's monitoring tool, in data GRE2019, the RSPO claims that GeoRSPO is a transparency tool that is built on Global Forest Watch Map Builder. When referring to the value of accountability, the RSPO mentions its complaints system (POI2016). The final authority being referred to is the charismatic authority. The RSPO took pride when it was featured as a solution for saving rainforests in Sir David Attenborough's Seven Worlds, One Planet series on BBC (EIA2019).

6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to understand the dynamics of international sustainability standards organizations in a globalizing world by studying the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). Studying international standards organizations seemed important because of the rise of the numbers and its scope encompassing almost every social sector. Neoinstitutionalist world culture theory has observed the expansion of organizing as a result of the widespread cultural rationalization. When taking a closer look at these international standards organizations, despite the variety of sectors and commodities it standardizes, they seem to be interconnected with each other under an umbrella standards organization. The theory of meta-organizations was thought to explain well this phenomenon. Moreover, studies on the RSPO have not yet examined the RSPO in its form as an organization nor has it looked at the knowledge production the RSPO attempts to create as a social actor in sustainable palm oil standardization. Moreover, with the topic of sustainable palm oil being contentious viewed from opposition arriving from different actors, the RSPO needs to convey themselves as an authoritative actor in the industry. The RSPO's website seemed to be the perfect source to examine the organization because of its attempt to be accountable and transparent. This is supported by the findings which views the RSPO's epistemic works to be referring to transparency and cooperation. Furthermore, despite oppositions to the idea of sustainable palm oil which evokes the imagery of competing blocs in RSPO's responses, the RSPO attempts to unite all stakeholders interested in sustainability and commits to progress to improve its standards, which is an imagery of modernization. The RSPO also portrays itself authoritative by referring to the four types of authority: ontological, capacity-based, moral, and charismatic where internal and external bodies are mentioned.

With this thesis, hopefully it can contribute to the empirical literature on the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) by offering a different perspective through examining the RSPO in the level of organizations, particularly in the form of meta-organizations and with a

sociological analysis of epistemic governance. This research only analyzed the epistemic works of the RSPO and not the other social actors taking part of the debates in the sustainable palm oil issue. As a result, the findings are limited and only offer a perspective from one actor of the debate. Furthermore, for the practicalities or a succeeding implementation of this research, more studies need to be conducted on other social actors' epistemic works, particularly the social actors being responded by the RSPO in its website. This way, the epistemic works of the other actors in RSPO's environment may be understood, and the RSPO may use this information when trying to pursue its objective. Besides analyzing the epistemic works of RSPO's organizational environment, it might be useful to compare the epistemic works of other standards organizations. While the introduction briefly portrays social actors' tendency to use the same epistemic works due to the isomorphism and worldwide cultural institutionalization explained in world culture theory, examining other standards organizations' epistemic works might provide a bigger picture of sustainability debates, while viewing organizations as social actors attempting to pursue their objectives as what other social actors are doing. Unfortunately, due to the time constraint and the lack of financial resources to extend this research project, these further research ideas could not be incorporated in this thesis.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 1 Official responses dataset

No.	Publication date	Page title	Code	URL
1.	03 November 2019	RSPO RESPONDS TO EIA REPORT	EIA2019	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-responds-to-eia-report
2.	05 November 2019	RSPO RESPONDS TO GREENPEACE REPORT	GRE2019	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-responds-to-greenpeace-report
3.	19 November 2020	PRESS RELEASE: RSPO RESPONSE TO ASSOCIATED PRESS ARTICLE ON ABUSE OF WOMEN	AP2020	https://www.rspo.org/news-and-events/news/press-release-rspo-response-to-associated-press-article-on-abuse-of-women
4.	30 November 2016	RSPO response to Amnesty International report "The great palm oil scandal: Labour abuses behind big brand names"	AMN2016	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-response-to-amnesty-international-report-the-great-palm-oil-scandal-labour-abuses-behind-big-brand-names
5.	02 June 2015	RSPO Response to CERES letter from institutional investors and brands	CER2015	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-response-to-ceres-letter-from-institutional-investors-and-brands

6.	03 August 2015	UPDATE RSPO response to the report titled "Palm-Oil Migrant Workers Tell of Abuses on Malaysian Plantations", published by The Wall Street Journal on 26th July 2015	WSJ2015b	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/update-rspo-response-to-the-report-titled-palmoil-migrant-workers-tell-of-abuses-on-malaysian-plantations-published-by-the-wall-street-journal-on-26th-july-2015
7.	24 July 2018	RSPO's Response to EIA on the adoption/adaptation of HCSA into RSPO standards	EIA2018	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/announcements/rspos-response-to-eia-on-the-adoptionadaptation-of-hcsa-into-rspo-standards
8.	17 June 2017	RSPO STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO CLAIMS MADE BY NTUC FAIRPRICE	NTUC2017	https://www.rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-statement-in-response-to-claims-made-by-ntuc-fairprice
9.	07 March 2016	RSPO's response to "Cutting Deforestation out of the Palm Oil Supply Chain" report by Greenpeace	GRE2016	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/announcements/rspos-response-to-cutting-deforestation-out-of-the-palm-oil-supply-chain-report-by-greenpeace
10.	07 May 2015	RSPO response to "What kind of world would it be without...", broadcast on 3	RAI2015	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-response-to-what-kind-of-world-would-it-be-without-broadcast-on-3-may-2015

		May 2015, by the editorial team of Report.		
11.	27 December 2016	RSPO's Response to POI Position Statement on the RSPO	POI2016	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspos-response-to-poi-position-statement-on-the-rspo
12.	14 August 2015	2nd UPDATE RSPO RESPONSE TO THE REPORT TITLED "PALM-OIL MIGRANT WORKERS TELL OF ABUSES ON MALAYSIAN PLANTATIONS", PUBLISHED BY THE WALL STREET JOURNAL ON 26TH JULY 2015	WSJ2015c	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/2nd-update-rspo-response-to-the-report-titled-palmoil-migrant-workers-tell-of-abuses-on-malaysian-plantations-published-by-the-wall-street-journal-on-26th-july-2015
13.	21 October 2015	3rd update rspo response to the report titled "Palm-Oil Migrant Workers Tell of Abuses on Malaysian Plantations", published by the wall street journal on 26th July 2015	WSJ2015d	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/3rd-update-rspo-response-to-the-report-titled-palmoil-migrant-workers-tell-of-abuses-on-malaysian-plantations-published-by-the-wall-street-journal-on-26th-july-2015
14.	08 March 2012	RSPO response to public allegations of non-sustainable practices	PUB2012	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-response-to-public-allegations-of-non-sustainable-practices
15.	19 August 2015	RSPO RESPONSE TO NORGES BANK DECISION TO EXCLUDE	NOR2015	https://rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-response-to-norges-bank-decision-to-exclude-two-rspo-members-from-the-government-pension-fund-global

		TWO RSPO MEMBERS FROM THE GOVERNMENT PENSION FUND GLOBAL		
16.	28 July 2015	RSPO response to the report titled "Palm-Oil Migrant Workers Tell of Abuses on Malaysian Plantations", published by The Wall Street Journal on 26th July 2015	WSJ2015a	https://www.rspo.org/news-and-events/news/rspo-response-to-the-report-titled-palmoil-migrant-workers-tell-of-abuses-on-malaysian-plantations-published-by-the-wall-street-journal-on-26th-july-2015
17.	July 15, 2013	RESPONSE STATEMENT FROM RSPO ON COMMENTS FROM GREENPEACE PERTAINING TO FIRES IN SUMATRA	GRE2013	https://www.rspo.org/file/haze/RSPO-RESPONSE-CommentsFromGreenpeace.pdf
18.	September 12, 2013	RESPONSE STATEMENT FROM RSPO On Report by Rainforest Action Network entitled 'Conflict Palm Oil: How US Snack Food Brands are contributing to Orangutan Extinction, Climate Change and Human Rights Violations.'	RAN2013	https://www.rspo.org/file/RSPOResponsetoRANreportSept12th2013.pdf

Appendix 2 Data Findings: Actor Identifications object of epistemic work

1. PUB2012   RSPO and the public as accountable actors

2. GRE2013   Stakeholders sharing mutual agenda on sustainable palm oil

3. RAN2013   Stakeholders sharing mutual agenda on sustainable palm oil

4. RAI2015   RSPO & Italian actors interested in palm oil's sustainability

5. CER2015   Actor moving towards a sustainable palm oil supply chain

6. WSJ2015abcd   The Wall Street Journal did not agree to share more information nor
                   the actual location of where the report's evidence was gathered = The
                   RSPO and the WSJ as transparent actors (RSPO's commitment to
                   transparency, WSJ2015d)

7. NOR2015   RSPO & Norges Bank as a financial institution having a role in helping
                   the industry toward a sustainable palm oil supply chain & transparent
                   actor

8. GRE2016   Actors minimizing tropical deforestation

9. AMN2016   Accountable actors (reports)

10. POI2016   RSPO & POI as actors supporting certified sustainable palm oil

11. NTUC2017   Actor transforming the market to make sustainable palm oil the norm

12. EIA2018   Accountable actors (reports)

13. EIA2019   RSPO & credible research organizations vs EIA

14. GRE2019   Accountable actors (reports)

15. AP2020   Transparent actors (to report to RSPO complaints system)

Appendix 3 Data Findings: Ontology object of epistemic work

1. PUB2012   The RSPO takes all assertions very seriously in order to safeguard the overall integrity of the Roundtable and its certification system and inquires with members about public complaints insofar published evidence permits.

2. GRE2013   80% of the fires are occurring outside of palm oil plantations. The pulp and paper plantation have been identified as having significantly more fires than the oil palm plantation.

3. RAN2013   Focusing on leading consumer goods manufacturers is an effective approach to steer market transformation as they play an exceptionally critical role in motivating the production of sustainable palm oil from 'ground to shelf'.

4. RAI2015   The search for viable alternative is complicated and that oil palm has a much higher yield per hectare than other alternatives, which lead to greater demand for land and deforestation. The RSPO certification is not a simple "façade". Without a market demand for CSPO there would be no incentives to embark on a sustainable production path.

5. CER2015   The RSPO in its multi-stakeholder nature has a commitment for inclusivity and the RSPO standard is agreed upon through a consensus process. The RSPO and its members share within the RSPO Principles, a commitment for continuous improvement.

6. WSJ2015a   No forms of forced labour are permitted in RSPO members' plantations, as specified under Criteria 6.12 of the RSPO Principle and Criteria (P&C). Moreover minimum wage requirements shall be met at all times under Criteria 6.5, whether or not workers are employed directly by the

RSPO member company or through third party labour providers/contractors.

7. WSJ2015b The RSPO Complaints Panel have met on Wednesday 29th July and deliberated on the Wall Street Journal article's findings.

8. WSJ2015c The RSPO takes this matter very seriously and will seek for a thorough assessment of any alleged non-compliance and prompt clarification on this case. In the case of any breach of the RSPO standard being identified, this will be dealt with through the accreditation programme process. More importantly, we aim for this assessment to serve as a way to improve the implementation of RSPO Social requirements on the ground in the future

9. NOR2015 RSPO is proud to act as a facilitator to third party monitoring of this progress, by remaining committed to transparency and requiring our members to submit detailed reports on their progress towards the sustainable transformation of their palm oil production. This transparency allows companies to be benchmarked against their sustainability commitments, and evaluated in their performance in achieving sustainability.

10. WSJ2015d The publication of this report represents RSPO's commitment to transparency and reinforces RSPO expectations that our standard is rigorously audited and that performance of Certification Bodies is closely overseen by our accreditation body, ASI.

11. GRE2016 RSPO launched RSPO NEXT in February 2016, a set of additional and advanced criteria for sustainable palm oil production to assist companies

who wish to exceed current RSPO criteria and implement zero deforestation commitments.

12. AMN2016   The RSPO fully acknowledges the existence of serious problems in the protection of workers and human rights in the global intensive agriculture sector, including the oil palm sector. These problems are exacerbated when linked to poverty, weak law enforcement and the presence of legislative gaps - as underlined by Amnesty itself - contributing to the challenge of making agriculture and specifically the oil palm sector truly sustainable.

13. POI2016   Since its formation in 2004, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has always had the underlying goal of promoting the uplifting of environmental, social and economic standards through the supply chain of oil palm products. This has been done in large part through RSPO member's support of certification, using transparent principles, criteria, indicators and guidance. This support has come from all RSPO members, including NGO members who have played a significant role in encouraging more companies to become members of the RSPO.

14. NTUC2017 As a multi stakeholder, membership based, non-for-profit organisation, RSPO is committed to the standards outlined in their Principles and Criteria and to maintaining and improving transparency in standards related claims and communications.

15. EIA2018   Deforestation and carbon stock loss in carbon rich areas such as Latin America, subtropical Asia and Africa are mainly caused by the expansion of intensive agriculture. Palm oil, soy and cattle grazing are among the top drivers behind this expansion.

16. EIA2019   The RSPO has always been committed to continuous improvement and self-reflection on what's working and what's not. We also realise that by being transparent, the organisation is an easy target for groups that are not actively trying to solve the problem, and instead, are trying to bring down those that are.

17. GRE2019   Greenpeace misunderstood the methods and tools that the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) uses for hotspot monitoring and fire detection.

18. AP2020   The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) strives to ensure that human rights are recognised and protected under our standard, be it for men, women, or children. Certified plantations commit to going beyond what is required by the law and have committed to a level of transparency that has helped us have a more open conversation on what is required to change the palm oil industry for the better.

Appendix 4 Data Findings: Morality object of epistemic work

1. PUB2012   Use the organization's grievance procedure and make all evidence available to the RSPO's Grievance Panel in case of a breach

2. GRE2013   Collaborate to address the situation at hand rather than using media sensationalism to address such a critical environmental dilemma. Greenpeace to apply the same rigor of watchfulness in the pulp and paper plantations

3. RAN2013   We must endeavor for the numerous initiatives in the market that advocate sustainable palm oil to come together, dialogue and collaborate.

4. RAI2015   To also put forward a deeper reflection on the real effects of palm oil's substitution at a global level & promote sustainable production and consumption patterns in other parts of the world

5. CER2015   We are and will continue taking all constructive comments on board. With a commitment to continuous improvement and with the support of all committed players we will be able to achieve market transformation.

6. WSJ2015a   The RSPO will escalate this case to the RSPO Complaints Panel, for discussion during the Panel's next meeting on Wednesday 29th July, and will issue further updates on this matter following the Panel's deliberations.

7. WSJ2015b   This report gives cause to the Panel to request the RSPO Secretariat to conduct an independent assessment of RSPO Certification Bodies competency in identifying non-compliances related to worker and human rights issues.

8. WSJ2015c   The RSPO Secretariat has decided to engage Accreditation Services International (ASI) to perform audits focused on assessing compliance to the aspects of the RSPO Principles and Criteria standard that are related to Human Rights.

9. NOR2015   The RSPO is encouraged to see the more active role that financial institutions are playing in helping the industry move towards a sustainable palm oil supply chain

10. WSJ2015d   Further to the report, an integrity audit of the oil palm industry in Malaysia, aimed as a check on overall compliance to the RSPO requirements, will be carried out by ASI.

11. GRE2016   Transforming the palm oil industry and minimising tropical deforestation is mission critical to the RSPO. It is urgent work and a challenging and complicated process. Much more needs to be done by all players, and this should apply across the board and not just to a selection of large companies. This means that many more companies will also need to take their first steps.

12. AMN2016   To further strengthen its assurance framework and deliver the credibility demanded by stakeholders, RSPO welcomes a constructive dialogue with all interested parties in the framework of the RSPO Assurance Task Force, which aims at improving the effectiveness of how RSPO checks on compliance.

13. POI2016   To further strengthen its assurance framework and deliver the credibility demanded by stakeholders, RSPO welcomes a constructive dialogue with all interested parties in the framework of the RSPO Assurance Task Force, which aims at improving the effectiveness of how RSPO checks

on compliance. RSPO is a membership organisation, and we encourage members to respond to allegations against them in the interest of transparency.

14. NTUC2017   RSPO is always happy to support and engage with any company wishing to become certified under RSPO Certification and we remain open to assist NTUC Fairprice to take the necessary measurements to verify these claims, and in transforming the market to make sustainable palm oil the norm.

15. EIA2018   We have embarked on a journey to make market transformation a shared responsibility and to find common solutions to issues within the industry. This is mirrored in the governance structure of RSPO, through its multi-stakeholder representation, and through the review process of its Principles and Criteria (P&C).

16. EIA2019   RSPO, however, is an organisation that must remain transparent and present only the facts.

17. GRE2019   The IMU actively followed up with each member where a hotspot was detected, to verify whether there was an occurrence of fire (and if so, what efforts are being made to extinguish the fire). Certifications Bodies will also be conducting additional independent on-ground investigations at the direction of the RSPO Secretariat.

18. AP2020   We strongly encourage any organisation or agency that has additional information about these allegations, or any violations of this nature found on RSPO member plantations, to submit a confidential complaint through our Complaints System or use our Human Rights Defender Hotline.

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