



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Technological Seduction versus Waste Reduction

An Analysis of Swedish Waste Management Culture and Consumerism

Dalena Tran

Degree of Master of Science (MSc.) in Human Ecology: Culture, Power and Sustainability
30 ECTS

CPS: International Master's Programme in Human Ecology
Human Ecology Division
Department of Human Geography
Faculty of Social Sciences
Lund University

Supervisor: Sarah Kollnig
Term: Spring Term 2019

Abstract

Sweden is well known for having the world's most efficient waste management system. Mainstream evaluation of the waste management system generally focuses on economics or psychology perspectives using solely quantitative methods to examine recycling outputs but not waste inputs. However, a rising movement within scholarly literature as well as public discourse points out a need to focus on preventing waste in the first place. According to these perspectives, the highly advanced recycling scheme may be giving way to a certain technological utopianism that justifies excessive consumption with the idea that recycling is more than enough to compensate for resulting environmental degradation. As such, this study used a mixed-method approach featuring qualitative interviews and secondary quantitative data to investigate the ways in which Swedish waste management culture encourages and discourages waste generation and possible solutions for consumption reduction. Results indicated that individuals were actually already aware that recycling is not enough, acknowledging that their consumption was problematic. Many already actively sought to reduce their consumption, though the diverse ways in which this occurred and the degree of success met varied greatly depending on the emotion norms and structural possibilities within their lived contexts.

Keywords: waste management, Sweden, recycling, consumer behavior, anxiety, denial

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
List of Tables	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Background	6
2.1 Waste Management Systems in Sweden and the EU	6
2.2 Recycling and Behavioral Change	8
3. Methodology	9
4. Theoretical Framework	10
4.1 Ecological Modernism	11
4.2 Structure versus Agency	11
4.3 Local Cultural Scripts	12
4.4 Individual Lifestyle Change	12
5. Findings from Sysav and Statistical Data	13
6. Findings from Local Interviews	16
6.1 Sociocultural Norms	17
6.1.1 Recycling norms: I just hate the people who don't recycle	17
6.1.2 Consumption norms: The average amount is still too much, I guess	18
6.2 Individual Agencies	20
6.2.1 Recycling behaviors & attitudes	20
6.2.2 Consumption behaviors & attitudes	24
6.3 Behavioral Spillover	27
6.3.1 Factors leading to successful spillover	27
6.3.2 Factors with mixed results toward spillover	31
6.3.3 Factors preventing spillover	35
7. Discussion and Conclusion	36
7.1 Overview of Findings	36
7.2 New Readings of the "Recycling Myth" Narrative	37
References	39
Appendix A	43
Appendix B	44
Appendix C	46

List of Tables

Table 1: Household Organic Waste Recycling in all of Sweden. Page 14.

Table 2: Household Waste Collected for Recycling in all of Sweden (tons). Page 14.

Table 3: Household Packaging Collected for Recycling 1975-2017. Page 15.

1. Introduction

Although Sweden may boast one of the world's cleanest environmental reputations, the country's consumerist culture may also be hiding the dirtiest secrets. National environmental impact mitigation goals are inconsistent with emission growth in sectors such as avoidable food waste (Gössling & Hall, 2008, p.142). Moreover, Swedish household consumption and waste production have risen by 36% in the past 10 years (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2017). Applied to the waste management system, is the nation's highly successful and advanced recycling scheme improving environmental awareness and sustainable behaviors in all aspects of daily life, or does the system indirectly encourage waste-generating habits?

Many studies on waste management focus more on seeking technological fixes than addressing societal factors leading to waste production in the first place (e.g. Ammenberg et al., 2018; Rex et al., 2017). While a minority of studies document sociocultural norms influencing participation in recycling schemes (e.g. Hage et al., 2009; Berglund & Matti, 2006), few studies examine whether such participation encourages changes in garbage output (e.g. Thogerson, 1998; Petersen, 2018). Fewer still use methods beyond surveying (e.g. Stoeva & Alkrikkson, 2017). Such survey studies point out correlations between certain behaviors, but may not fully explain why such correlations appear. Moreover, economic perspectives dominate mainstream debates about consumer behavior and waste management, yet economics represents a very specific and limited scope of social science (Shove, 2014, p.416).

As a result of such a narrow scope, mainstream discourse often misrepresents not only individual motivations, but also inadequately bridges global and local contexts. For instance, Berglund and Matti (2006, p.550) point out how economists typically assume people are generally motivated to be more sustainable for personal financial gain. However, consumers themselves contradict expectations by valuing the moral importance of environmental responsibility instead. These arguments are what psychology and anthropology perspectives alike have proposed in discussions on the role cultural identity plays in Swedish recycling incentives (e.g. Wheeler, 2013). Yet politicians and business stakeholders crowd out the little (though budding) deeper analysis from diverse perspectives. Consequently, most waste management evaluation involves measuring material and energy flows within production systems, obscuring both environmental and social impacts beyond controlled conditions (Shove, 2014, p.416). The success of the waste management scheme thus largely concerns technological innovation rather than cultural implications of these advanced systems.

Filling such a literature gap therefore has significant implications for individual and societal sustainability efforts. Relationships between production and consumption are typically invisible (Corvellec, 2016, p.3). Qualitative analyses of waste, however, uncover underlying truths about consumption behaviors, social inequalities, evolving societal values, technological developments, and many more insights through treating garbage as cultural artifacts in specific sociomaterial contexts (Rathje and Murphy, 2001, p.11). Moreover, while having an efficient waste management system is laudable in itself, to be truly progressive and sustainable, recycling schemes must stop encouraging the very consumption patterns necessitating over-reliance on recycling advances in the first place.

This is because, as will be discussed throughout the study, the fundamental nature of consumerism values accumulation and ownership beyond the necessary. Such excess affects people, the environment, and even the meaning of commodities themselves. Furthermore, “green” consumerism is also essentially incompatible with the goals of social and ecological sustainability in ensuring a sufficient balance between people, institutions, and resource needs maintainable in the long term. Technological solutions are incapable of physically living up to their promises, as plastic alone can only be recycled 7 to 9 times whereas the material lasts for over 450 years (Treat & Williams, 2018). Thus, it is more worthwhile to investigate how collaboration between people and recycling structures can increase environmental engagement.

The purpose of this study is to understand seemingly counter-productive sustainability strategies embedded in a Swedish context. This project thus proposes an interdisciplinary, qualitative investigation of the interactions between the Swedish waste management system and individual consumption behavior by answering the following questions:

- 1) In which ways does the Swedish waste management system enable and discourage waste generation from the source?
- 2) To what extent do individual agencies both reproduce and challenge sociocultural norms concerning consumerism and recycling?
- 3) Under which circumstances might recycling participation spill over to more sustainable consumption behaviors and lifestyle changes?

2. Background

2.1 Waste Management Systems in Sweden and the EU

Sweden's unique institutional and cultural influences encourage specific forms of sustainability and consumerism. This section begins with an overall picture of waste management approaches in Europe and how popular frameworks such as the EU Waste Hierarchy and circular economy inform Swedish trash handling tactics. Next follows an explanation of the Swedish recycling scheme using a recycling plant in Malmö as an example. Finally, the logistical background information serves as a foundation to then explain how the recycling scheme has influenced Swedish identity.

One of the particularities of Swedish garbage treatment is the focus on the EU Waste Hierarchy, which ranks waste management methods. Prevention is the top priority, followed in order by reuse, recycling, energy recovery, and landfilling (Laurenti et al., 2018, p.2129). Despite the prevalence of this ordering scheme, many countries, including Sweden, overemphasize energy recovery (through incineration) or landfilling as a first or second choice (Plastics Europe, 2017). Less than half of the hierarchy's objectives focus on reducing waste at the source, and those that do focus primarily on individuals, whereas the bulk of the problem lies in industry. Furthermore, consumption reduction measures make up less than 1% of all waste prevention policies, addressing the issue of waste rather than consumption, even though waste is the symptom and not the problem (Johansson & Corvellec, 2018, p.323).

With a circular economy, the focus turns toward creating a system where waste is not disposed of, but rather recirculated into the economy with as little material leakage as possible (Laurenti et al., 2018, p.2129). The goal is to reduce environmental impact of waste rather than amounts, with some interpretations even promoting, "the more waste, the better" (Hultman and Corvellec, 2012, p.2417). Thus, circular economy reassures continued economic development alongside avoiding environmental degradation. Such promotion of "green" consumerism conflicts with the EU Waste Hierarchy in its refusal to limit consumption. Circular economy, however, justifies such dissonance by reframing consumption as a generative source for "new" material (Hultman & Corvellec, 2012, p.2420). In other words, with the perfect self-replenishing system, why decrease consumption rates if waste itself becomes a resource?

Returning to the Swedish context, during a facility tour on January 25, 2019, Rustan Nilsson provided a brief explanation of the waste management process at Sydskaånes Avfallsaktiebolag (Sysav), Skåne's main garbage company. Nilsson works at Sysav as an educator

giving talks, conducting workshops, guiding facility tours, among other outreach tasks. As he explains, the recycling process starts with at-home sorting before the municipality collects the material to send to Sysav facilities. Once arrived, collected items go to different streams depending on their category. Following the EU waste hierarchy, the first step in the waste management process begins with diverting objects from becoming trash in the first place. For example, nonprofits such as Rude Food redistribute “saved” food, and food unfit for consumption goes to biofertilizer or biogas production. Second hand groups receive textiles, appliances, home goods, and furniture. Unusable inventory is then processed into recycled plastic, metal, glass, or cardboard. Residual waste not fitting into such categories then undergoes incineration for waste-to-energy recovery, with the remaining ashes sent to landfills. Sysav promotes home sorting because not only does it reduce overall costs and quality by starting with cleaner waste, but sorting also increases individuals’ awareness of amounts of waste generated. As Nilsson asserts, improper sorting means worse material quality from contamination. As sorting improves, so will material purity as the waste-to-material stream gradually dilutes.

Another unique characteristic of Swedish waste management and consumerism is its environmental cultural identity. As Miliute-Plepeine et al. (2016, p.43) explain, in countries like Sweden with advanced recycling schemes, pro-environmental behavior is well-established, owing to strong national self-identity and a culture of moral environmental obligation. White and Hyde (2011, p.786) add that people want to see themselves in a certain way influenced by how they think others expect them to be. The fact that others will judge their actions thus prompts behaviors, e.g. recycling, they might not practice if nobody was watching or if they were in a different context. Thus, Wheeler (2013, p.705) introduces the concept of moral economy wherein moral norms frame institutions, economic activities, and the actions of agents within these structures. Moreover, she notes that, unlike in other cultures wherein recycling initiatives are promoted as saving public money, Sweden focuses on collective responsibility for public and planetary benefits. Such a lack of divergent (financial) interests means that the waste management system owes its cultural integration to trust in all levels of society to act in the public and in the environment’s best interest, as well as national pride. Yet, as Tröhler and Ideland (2015, p.204) add, the cultural production of “Swedishness” through collective environmental values also produces Otherness. Whereas successful integration of “Swedishness” involves being enlightened sustainability heroes, it also involves paternalism in tolerating or taming a problematic Other. Repulsion towards this Other may thus mean that although sociocultural norms have a positive effect on increasing recycling rates, such behaviors may be more about fitting in than cutting consumption in the first place.

2.2 Recycling and Behavioral Change

Current scholarly work on the societal implications of the Swedish waste management system indicate that it encourages increased consumption through influencing cultural narratives. Hultman and Corvellec (2012, p.2420) conducted an interview study with recycling company representatives wherein respondents did not see waste prevention as their responsibility or even a problem. This is because, under circular economy, waste generation becomes equivalent to material value creation. Meanwhile, the companies do not see themselves as able to influence individual behaviors owing to seeing themselves as the end of the road, despite their crucial role as “the most important station between what people do and what effect this has on the environment” (ibid., p.2421). Consequently, the kinds of attitudes held within waste management facility cultures lead to less motivation to decrease consumption, for which the burden becomes increasingly on the individual. Corvellec and Hultman (2012, p.308) additionally argue that garbage companies significantly contribute to cultural narratives owing to how possible structural actions within a system frame what a community understands as important. As the paper will discuss, this heavy focus on the individual built into the recycling scheme and the narratives surrounding it may likewise influence current literature and its examination of individual waste generation and potential for behavioral change.

Current research indicates that recycling participation has mixed and weak effects on reduced consumption. Sintov et al. (2019, p.79), for example, expected easy and convenient waste sorting to encourage people towards more advanced actions. However, in their case study of Californian suburbs, households did not significantly change waste output. Yet there was some weak positive effect among those composting as a more complicated activity. Interestingly, participants who composted did not reduce amounts of food wasted, but when change in measurement to separation rates, the results changed so that those who sorted their waste and composted more did cut down water and energy consumption. Xu et al. (2017) additionally found that, in a metropolitan Chinese city, introducing waste separation triggered minor electricity consumption reduction (again, not in waste), though only when combined with environmental education campaigns rather than monetary incentives. Projects such as these fit into larger patterns in consumer behavior research emphasizing the idea that recycling can foster environmental identities and norms. Yet, similar to the case with circular economy, waste generation might not reduce owing to such norms justifying continued material consumption with recycling. As such, the present study’s interests lie in norms and how people as individuals act within these structures.

3. Methodology

To study the extent to which participation in the Swedish waste management system is connected to reduced consumption, this project uses a mixed-method approach featuring two kinds of semi-structured interviews complemented with data from secondary statistical research. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate because they allow respondents to give detailed answers fully representing their thoughts and opinions without forcing participants to adhere to the interviewer's agenda. Other benefits include flexibility in asking for more and richer details, examining body language and tone, and establishing trust (Bryman 2016, p.246). Such information is then compared to secondary quantitative data collected by Avfall Sverige, a think tank collecting and processing Sysav's statistical data on consumption and recycling trends across the region. Avfall Sverige monitors waste industry activities in Sweden as well as worldwide. Adding qualitative methodology is advantageous because it allows for a more nuanced view of phenomena through the eyes of the people experiencing it, thus exposing conditions invisible to quantitative data collection methods alone (Bryman 2016, p.399).

An expert interview was conducted with Rustan Nilsson, an environmental educator from Sysav. He provides insight on not only the background of the system, but also on regional waste production and consumption patterns. 17 local residents were additionally recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. Each initial participant was targeted to procure as diverse a sample as possible, with participants encouraged to reach out to potentially interested parties preferably with differing beliefs so as to procure a sample population with as many views existing in the general population as possible. All responses are anonymous and confidential, and each participant is referred to using numbered codes, with LS# meaning local Swede and LI# meaning local immigrant. Swedes are defined as those who were born and grew up in Sweden, whereas immigrants are defined as those who moved to Sweden as adults.

Local interviews collected information on participants' faith in Lund's waste management system, levels of and reasons for participation in this system, logic behind consumption and disposal habits, and sense of responsibility for ecological issues. Lund is the commune that recycles the most according to Avfall Sverige's ranking ("Lund blev årets bästa avfallskommun," 2017). Whereas the national average for amount of recyclable materials collected per person is 70kg, Lund greatly surpasses the average with 90kg per person. Although Avfall Sverige explains such a difference with how Lund has invested the most in its infrastructure, a closer look beyond the numbers may complicate the picture. Moreover, domestic and international perspectives alike nuance Sysav's data because their contributions show the extent to which the success of a waste

management system's promotion of pro-environmental behavioral change depends on cultural, structural, and institutional factors differing between communities. The sample population was restricted to those living in the area for at least 1 year. This eliminates exchange students, who tend to be unfamiliar with Swedish culture. There was also an age restriction to age 18 and over to reduce the frequency of dependents, who have less individual agency over lifestyle choices.

Some limitations in data collection methods may have affected the study results. Firstly, the interviews were time consuming. This consequently limited the population because not everyone can afford to donate time to such a lengthy activity (Bryman, 2016, p.254). Accordingly, the study lost 2 participants owing to incompatible scheduling. Secondly, the sample is most likely disproportionately representative. As the outreach and study itself were conducted in English, the project excluded those uncomfortable in the language. Despite such bias, the project data are still generalizable because the information collected concerns cultural and structural factors affecting all candidates in their common *habitus*.

The examination method uses what Bryman et al. (2016, p.330) propose for thematic analysis wherein collected data is broken down into central themes and subthemes based on any recurring motifs. What the participants say about each theme is then analyzed through examining how responses reflect wider sociocultural attitudes, especially in relation to larger patterns and material evidence noted in current literature and by Sysav. Result interpretation also follows reflexivity, which calls for examining social phenomena through assessing dynamic relationships between “knowledge” and “the ways of doing knowledge” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2018, p.10). As such, the study keeps in mind that its produced knowledge is not a final truth but rather an interpretation of other interpretations that can be a model to analyze social practices.

4. Theoretical Framework

To see how Sweden's waste management system informs and is informed by consumer behavior and the moral economy, Hornborg's (2016) work on technological utopianism will provide larger macro-level concepts. These connect on a mid-level level to Bourdieu (1977, 2010) and Carfagna et al.'s (2014) work on *habitus* and to Norgaard (2011) and Weintrobe's (2013) work on environmental denial and anxiety on a local micro level. This in turn links to Thomas and Sharp's (2013) work on behavioral spillover on an individual micro level. A multifaceted approach is important because each layer, from global politics to sociocultural localized trends and to individual behaviors and attitudes, is interwoven and inseparable. In combination, these theoretical perspectives allow to provide a complex and dynamic picture of the various messy and

complicated relationships and contexts our trash obscures. Analyzing individual responses in the interview data with this framework in mind thus allows examination of how individual agencies both reproduce and challenge larger cultural and societal patterns.

4.1 Ecological Modernism

A global pattern Hornborg (2016, p.133) refers to as technological utopianism illustrates how mainstream discourse often frames environmental issues as engineering rather than societal challenges. More specifically, the Global North has a widespread delusion wherein reducing resource consumption is unnecessary as long as technological advances continue hiding any consequences. Rather than acknowledging “irreversible degradation” resulting from industrial processes, technological utopianism perpetuates the illusion that our industrialized spaces are self-sufficient in our focus on growth, production, and perpetual consumption (ibid., p.76). Moreover, this imagination makes it appear as if machines are more efficient than nature and can overcome physical limitations to infinite growth or resource extraction. Yet such a system is only possible owing to appropriation of resources and labor from other countries (ibid., p.126). Applied to recycling, thanks to environmental load displacement, Sweden can afford to use technology to make garbage disappear while also continuing economic growth. Although, the scope of this study does not encompass global material flows, it will use the concept of technological utopianism to understand the social implications of the Swedish recycling scheme.

4.2 Structure versus Agency

Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* may explain how objective social structures and institutions in the Swedish context structure individual behaviors and attitudes. *Habitus* refers to the unconscious mechanisms behind daily activities that are shaped by the specific contexts they manifest in (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72). Routine behaviors such as waste sorting or consumption thus reproduce social structures because such choices occur within the larger context of a core country steeped in ecological modernism. In other words, even if it is not always conscious, the *habitus* behind recycling and certain consumption patterns may reflect and reproduce the structures in Sweden (material conditions and socioeconomic positionality) making such practices possible and mundane. The *habitus* is therefore not just about individual agency, but rather a guiding force for social behaviors among community members (Jenkins, 1992, p.70).

In Bourdieu’s writings on *habitus* and consumption (2010, p.166), people distinguish themselves through consumption within a structure valuing certain behaviors. Building on this concept, Carfagna et al. (2014) propose the concept of *eco-habitus*, wherein people distinguish

themselves through “green” consumption and conspicuous environmentalism in a privileged, well-educated context that prioritizes the moral conceptualization of eco-friendliness. Not only might waste sorting behaviors be structurally possible and routine, but individuals may therefore enjoy making themselves look good doing so in a given socioeconomic context.

4.3 Local Cultural Scripts

Technologically utopian beliefs may also originate from an *eco-habitus* with particular cultural scripts for dealing with environmental anxiety. In Weintrobe's (2013) anxiety model, the diverse ways people deal with their anxieties affect how they respond to ecological stressors. Anxiety refers to the unconscious conflict between parts of ourselves simultaneously seeking and rejecting reality. Whereas our reality-fearing selves use quick fixes or denial to shelter ourselves from threats, our truth-obsessed selves attempt controlling damage caused by hiding from reality. Applied to environmental problems, because identities are so dependent on consumption in the Global North, the thought of giving up unsustainable lifestyles provokes anxiety. Yet because ecological crises are too obvious to deny, people might then cling harder to harmful habits or inaction (ibid., p.44). Conversely, hope or support transforms anxiety into action (ibid., p. 35). In the case of consumption and waste disposal, anxiety therefore informs participants' lifestyle decisions and willingness to confront their decisions' effects.

Norgaard's (2011) observations of denial may also apply to Swedish residents' relationships with waste. She defines denial as the refusal to accept the truth, with interpretive denial specifically referring to how people reinterpret facts rather than outright reject them to reduce anxiety (ibid., p.10). Countries such as Sweden widely acknowledge ecological issues. Anxiety arises from guilt over historical responsibility for environmental inequities conflicting with the desire to maintain positive national self-images as responsible world leaders (ibid., p.86). This interpretive denial then leads to the social organization of denial, whereby people collectively distance themselves from their stressors by using culturally normative coping strategies (ibid., p.71). Swedish recycling technology might thus enter public discourse as a tool to reduce guilt over excess consumption and disposal.

4.4 Individual Lifestyle Change

Individuals' irrational, diverse agencies within the larger contexts of collective denial, structural influences, and technological utopianism may follow a pattern Thomas and Sharp (2013, p.16) describe as behavioral spillover, wherein one simple action (such as recycling) becomes a gateway to increasingly advanced lifestyle changes (like waste reduction). Yet Crompton and

Thøgersen (2009, p.142) argue that spillover backfires if the actions are not environmentally motivated because people justify more severe harm (such as driving a car daily) with the belief that only recycling is enough. Applied to the Swedish collective identity as earth-conscious, White and Hyde (2011, p.788) argue that people thus reinterpret their unsustainable behaviors as still following societal environmental values according to the logic that consumption is a reward for sustainability efforts. Those with access to advanced waste technology might therefore fail to see the problematic nature of their consumption owing to feeling they have done enough to not fall out of line with normative behaviors, a psychosocial phenomenon particular to the Swedish context of collective denial and faith in technology.

5. Findings from Sysav and Statistical Data

Statistical data from Avfall Sverige, as well as correspondence with expert Rustan Nilsson, indicate that though recycling is increasing, consumption is increasing even faster. This section of the results focuses on Sysav and the public discourse surrounding waste through a discussion of the ways in which these systems discourage yet also enable excessive waste generation. This begins with a look at why and how Sysav as a company promotes waste prevention through examining their communication strategies. Following up with the reality of the situation in numbers, the paper then analyzes how the system also promotes waste accumulation through comparing secondary quantitative data and the expert interview.

Nilsson explained in an interview on February 21st that, as a public organization (with municipality collective ownership and funding), “We (Sysav) communicate against our own business.” Losing profit through encouraging waste reduction means that its sustainability measures have high credibility. Public status additionally allows Sysav to voice unpopular opinions, such as Nilsson’s critical view of circular economy. As he explained, whereas circularity promises to fulfill “capitalist western dreams of owning a car” without ecological consequences, production infrastructure is simply not circular. Despite increasing discussion on such goals, the world is still only 9% circular, with “the global engine stuck in reverse. We are not increasing circularity, the trend is going backwards.” Why the ideal of the circular economy falls short is evident in the numbers behind waste management.

According to collected data, while recycling rates have steadily increased over time, amounts of waste produced in the first place remain high (Avfall Sverige, 2017). Between 2016 and 2017, energy recovery, the production of biofuel through waste incineration, quickly increased throughout Sweden by 6.1%, 50.2% of which came from household waste. Yet

household waste collected for recycling increased by 2.5% in merely one year since 2016. Such an increase amounts to 4,783,000 tons recycled in 2017. The average per capita impact was thus 467kg per person in 2016 and 473kg per person in 2017. Data in the supporting tables supports the notion that though waste-to-energy recovery and recycling rates are rising, so are the amounts of trash supporting this growth. In Table 1, amounts of energy produced increased by approximately 40% over those four years alone. Amounts of food waste have also gone up from 2,212,000 tons to 2,240,690 tons, or an increase of 28,690 tons (Avfall Sverige, 2017).

Table 1. Household Organic Waste Recycling in all of Sweden

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Material digested (tons)	945,550	1,226,990	1,616,080	1,614,920	1,562,210
Material composted (tons)	528,640	502,500	418,340	476,090	450,360
Biofuel produced (tons)	939,800	1,236,560	1,712,050	1,708,320	1,678,260
Energy produced (MWh)	567,630	665,570	856,810	941,330	975,680

Adapted from "Biologisk återvinning hushållsavfall 2013-2017," © 2017 Avfall Sverige.

Moreover, Table 2 shows that most of this trash comes from packaging. Not only does this indicate that industrial stakeholders need to cut down on packaging materials significantly, but this also shows potential for waste reduction from individual commodity choices.

Table 2. Household Waste Collected for Recycling in all of Sweden (tons)

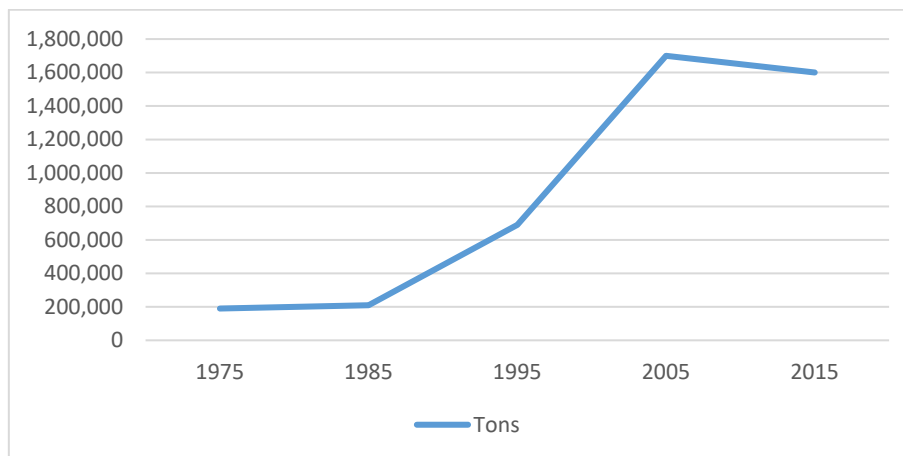
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Packaging (cardboard, metal, plastic, glass)	648,650	673,310	712,020	751,410	763,690
Paper	332,780	313,640	293,310	269,520	249,900
Non-packaging metal	153,030	156,060	160,850	165,400	161,900
E-waste/Batteries	156,240	158,470	136,300	132,350	127,610
Non-packaging cardboard	43,420	44,060	52,610	54,970	54,110
Non-packaging plastic	4,170	3,350	7,150	11,040	11,740
Textiles	-	2,320	1,760	1,830	2,240
Non-packaging glass	1,400	1,590	1,640	1,890	1,580
Other	99,150	60,960	37,810	31,320	38,060
Total	1,467,200	1,617,930	1,652,710	1,615,170	1,617,640

Adapted from "Insamlat hushållsavfall för materialåtervinning 2013-2017," © 2017 Avfall Sverige.

The incline in amounts of packaging waste collected from 1975 to 2015 in Table 3 is interesting because it aligns perfectly with the Sysav timeline. As Nilsson recounted during the tour, Sysav began in 1974 with the goal of minimizing amounts of waste going to landfills. Their efficiency improved to the point that now, only 2 to 3% of all waste is currently ending up in landfills. Yet while Sysav and the Swedish waste management system generally appear to be a

success story, the nearly 5 million tons of trash produced today is still a much larger volume than the 2.6 million tons of trash in 1975 (“Avfallshantering,” 2017).

Table 3. Household Packaging Collected for Recycling 1975-2017



Adapted from "Insamlad mängd förpackningar och returpapper från hushåll till materialåtervinning," © 2017 Avfall Sverige.

During the interview, Nilsson explained such patterns as coming from how “our consumption behavior of shopping more and faster has become so normalized we are blind to the speed we do things today. But because we talk so much about circular economy, we believe we are reducing our shopping but it turns out it is not the case. Maybe we are more aware, but not actually environmentally friendly.” Providing a further example, he explained that “reports say that people self-estimate that they spend 3% less today (on furniture, for example) than ten years ago, but the reality is we buy 20% more.” Therefore, although the system is very efficient, the sheer volume of input going into the system demonstrates that circular economy is not the right path to follow in its encouragement of boundless spending. Circular economy then becomes an excuse to cling onto unsustainable habits. The pathological nature of consumerism embedded within circular economy must change for it to work well, which Nilsson suggests solving by no longer “talking about this change, this lifestyle (reduced consumption) as a sacrifice. There are options that maybe can be as fulfilling but we don’t discuss it like that.” Such criticism of circular economy is very interesting and novel in its focus on the source rather than the aftermath, yet perhaps disproportionately focuses on individual behavior change rather than structural improvement, as will be further discussed in a later section.

Although Sysav’s public outreach aims to discourage waste generation, inadvertently, the success of their recycling technology and the circular economy dialogue sprouting around it often

enables excessive consumption. Such trends suggest Sysav's rising self-awareness, self-consciousness, and self-criticism as the publicly appointed face of ecological modernism resulting from their positionality as the physical infrastructure informing green consumerism. Sysav's self-criticism is evident in its communication eschewing profit for waste prevention to begin with as well as its representation of unpopular opinions such as those critical toward circular economy. This criticism likely comes from a combination of its status as a public organization that does not need to follow profit-chasing business models to survive as well as being the first to notice alarming patterns in statistical data gathered from waste collection.

Media coverage of the waste management system as well as Nilsson's commentary indicate a mismatch between Sysav's mission and the public's interest in shaping ecomodernist narratives. Despite the inconvenient reality that waste volumes are increasing, evaluating the system's success through amounts processed rather than amounts prevented creates a success story in public discourse (e.g. "Lund blev årets bästa avfallskommun" 2017). This measurement incoherence falls in line with technological utopianism. In focusing on volumes recycled, mainstream discourse confuses machines to be the productive force overcoming environmental constraints. Such fetishism distorts how the public views recycling by perpetuating the narrative that the more we use this technology, the more sustainable we become. Yet thinking that increased technological output indicates environmental progress obscures the fact that such increased usage comes from rising garbage input rather than improved sustainability. Consequently, the system becomes enough of a mythical success that there is no need to limit consumption as long as such technology keeps perpetuating the illusion that it can make consequences disappear.

6. Findings from Local Interviews

Findings from Sysav and Avfall Sverige indicate inconsistency between waste prevention goals on one hand and technological utopianism on the other. However, participant interviews reveal ambiguity in local attitudes and behaviors rather than a uniform aspiration toward green consumerism. This section of the results explores interactions between individual agencies and larger material and social structures as well as the potential for recycling to spill over to waste prevention through analyzing themes in interviewee responses. The section begins with establishing what the sociocultural norms are in the interviewees' specific localized contexts. Then, there is further analysis on how interviewees' behaviors and reproduce and challenge such norms. The section ends with examining specific cases where behavioral spillover from recycling to improved consumption sustainability was successful and which factors might be further explored in their potential for positive change.

6.1 Sociocultural Norms

6.1.1 Recycling norms: I just hate the people who don't recycle

Regarding recycling norms, all respondents unanimously voiced positive feelings toward the concept of recycling, and almost everyone agreed that recycling is important. Such attitudes may come from the local context's *eco-habitus*. When asked about waste management infrastructure, all but three interviewees had faith in the system, which is consistent with Nilsson's assertion that the company is highly credible owing to its lack of profit motive. As LS2 elaborated, "Because I live in Sweden, I have a relatively high level of trust in the government," genuinely believing that the state acts "in the interest of the overall well-being of the population." Indeed, interviewees generally reported that the sorting process was convenient, easy, and efficient, with several providing personal anecdotes witnessing pick-up workers properly handling waste. The three participants lacking total faith in the system either had unusual circumstances with accommodation companies' mismanagement (one person) or reported conspiracies about industry mishandling (two people) self-recognized as doubtful. Indeed, two participants agreed that, "by now, there are few reasons not to recycle" because not only is it "such a big thing here and people are pretty aware," (LS8) the convenience and accessibility make it "really stupid not to," (LI6).

Moreover, the strong moral and cultural aspects tied to waste sorting make it a means of distinction because recycling evokes feelings of pride and responsibility. As contextualized by LS1, a retiree, Sweden began promoting the slogan "Keep Sweden clean" in the 60s at schools, media, and in public campaigns. Steady reinforcement over generations is evident in statements such as "the basic element of Swedish culture that we have to take care of our nature" (LS3) or "Sweden has pride as the perfect environmental country" (LS8) to even feeling "some pride as a Swede since even pop stars like Robyn show off about [recycling] on TV (LS4). Immigrants additionally referred to Sweden having "a good reputation. We see it as Sweden is so innovative. I've always heard how good it is, they do a lot of stuff for the environment" (LI3). Such statements imply willing adoption of recycling behavior as part of a culture seen as superior.

On the other hand, not recycling is seen as immoral. 15 out of 17 participants mentioned shaming someone else or being shamed for not recycling properly. Even for interviewee LS6, a humanities master who does not personally believe in recycling's usefulness, they recycled anyway "partly because I feel that I have to and because I'll be told I'm bad if I don't." Further elaborated by LS8, "it's been pretty stigmatized not to recycle. There's definitely a cultural pressure." There are even participants like LS5, an engineer, who said, "The system is great. I just

hate the people who don't recycle." Combined with the aspect of Swedish culture in which "you don't wanna stand out, you wanna do the right thing like everyone else (sic)," as LS2 expressed, recycling is to a certain extent required for social inclusion and very noticeable when unfollowed. In a Bourdieusian sense, this moral policing is part of a socialization process (2010, p.168). Those in power shape social norms, e.g. through the educational and housing systems. If one does not adapt to the dominant *habitus*, one faces social exclusion.

6.1.2 Consumption norms: The average amount is still too much, I guess

As for consumption norms, when asked to guess how much trash they produced on a regular basis, a startling 16 of 17 participants self-reported that they waste less than the average person no matter the amount they claimed to make. One implication of this finding is that everyone generally assumed that consumption beyond basic needs is common. In the words of participant LI7, "I think I consume less waste than other people because I don't like to throw a lot of things and I know other people get tired or change their things and throw the old away, especially with food." Other respondents similarly observed that family, peers, public observations, and media show how normal it is to rapidly purchase and dispose of goods.

It is important to note, however, that many of the respondents were also not very sure of the strength of such claims owing to how many trash-producing behaviors are private. Even LS2, the sole exception in admitting that she likely produces "more than the average amount, probably," referenced how powerfully normative high consumption patterns are. Although she and her environmentalist partner were actually producing a little less trash than others self-reported, she said that "the average amount is still too much I guess ... that's kind of sad because somehow it just bothers me to think that so much is just going to lay somewhere." In that sense, no matter their self-reported trash production levels, most respondents were aware of how problematic consumption patterns tend to be in the Global North. As LS8 elaborated, despite self-reporting "less than average" waste amounts owing to having "a pretty good conscience about not consuming a lot of things," "[The amount of trash I make] is a lot even considering my position and demographic. The average student in Sweden of course makes a lot more waste if compared to anyone in some other country." The respondents' self-images as more conscious than the average may also be a way to seek distinction within the local *eco-habitus*. Not only does this illustrate the strength of consumer culture in Sweden, but it also opens up interesting discussions on environmental privilege.

8 out of 17 participants brought up Sweden as being a context of privilege, which may explain high consumption levels being the reported status quo. This idea was most strongly expressed during LS8's interview, as he is "part of a privileged country and was fortunate to grow up under circumstances under which consumerism is a normal thing. In the Swedish middle class, we do a lot thinking that it's normal but it's only like that to our demographic. As a person in a rich country, I'm not directly threatened by the consequences." His reasoning follows what Park and Pellow (2011, p.15) call environmental privilege, in which certain demographics have "economic, political, and cultural power" giving them exclusive access to scarce resources and high-status lifestyles that also protect them from environmental consequences. The implicit message within LS8's confession might therefore be that such distancing from social and ecological damages means rarely questioning consumer culture. LI5 echoes this in saying that "stores bring in food from another place so we can buy it without feeling how our resources are in danger." LI2, as someone who grew up outside of this context, pointed out that "the difference in income in this society makes it much more capitalist so you consume, consume, consume. The amount of waste is astronomical because the income is higher." In describing their imagination of the average Swedish consumer as one who is an excessive spender, participants, no matter their background or status, thus unanimously agree that frivolous spending patterns are the consumption norm. Moreover, these sentiments highlight the local *habitus*. Without actively being conscious about it, interviewees' social positions frame their routine choices within a consumerist structure. Yet recognizing the origin of such a norm as coming from a context of privilege also makes for another interesting link to guilt.

Another implication of the finding that respondents near-uniformly self-identify as producing less waste than average is that widely recognizing heavy consumption as a norm sparks guilt and denial. When asked to self-estimate amounts of garbage produced regularly, no matter where the participant was on the spectrum of least to most trash among the sample population, they still thought it was less than average. For example, whereas participants LI6 and LI8 live together and produce a standard-size shopping bag of trash every other week, participant LS1, who lives with her adult son, produces two or three bags of trash every 3 days. Other participants, in comparison, set out an average of one bag per week. Not everyone can thus be considered as "less than average," but the fact that nearly everyone wanted to see themselves this way reflects an *eco-habitus* in having environmental ideals and seeking distinction through downplaying consumption.

Interestingly enough, several interviewees used the exact same wording of “pretty average, maybe a bit less” despite not being even remotely connected. Such phrasing implies that these participants, as people who want to see themselves as environmentally responsible and thus good people, might not want to fully admit the extent to which they follow patterns recognized as unsustainable and immoral. As Norgaard (2011, p.86) wrote in a discussion of environmental guilt, people feel guilty because they know how their choices contribute to larger patterns of climate change and global injustice. To deal with such guilt, people want to maintain a positive self-image through a denial strategy Norgaard (2011, p.163) calls perspectival selectivity. In this method, people deflect their guilt by referring to people whose actions are worse than theirs. Many of the interviewees did follow this pattern. Perhaps wanting to adhere to the archetype of a good person as an environmentally conscious, respondents reinterpreted the situation so that no matter how much waste they did contribute, it was not as much as that of a problematic Other. Therefore, to manage their shame, respondents admit to strong consumer culture as a sociocultural norm while also separating themselves from that norm, which, in itself, also becomes a normative strategy for collective denial of environmental responsibility.

Such a combination of moral recycling and strong consumer culture thus might appear to be the ideal foundation for technological utopianism. Recycling is a socially conspicuous marker of moral superiority or alienation owing to a strong cultural push to be seen as ecologically conscious on both an individual and national level. Moreover, such a desire to perform the illusion of sustainability through recycling is fostered alongside rising consumerism as evident in data from Avfall Sverige. As Sysav and emerging scholarly interests indicate, it is normative to believe in a “recycling myth” in which recycling negates any resource challenges so there is no need to change unsustainable behaviors (Nilsson, 2019, February 21, interview; Corvellec & Hultman, 2012). Such a recycling myth may explain how moral environmental policing can coexist with rampant overconsumption. Perhaps “feeling ashamed” of consumption is part of following cultural scripts for pseudo-environmentalism. As will be further discussed in the next section, diverse participant agencies within these norms further complicate such theories.

6.2 Individual Agencies

6.2.1 Recycling behaviors & attitudes

Regarding recycling, though all respondents except one participated in the recycling scheme, there was still a continuum of how much they followed it and major diversity of motivations behind their participation. It is first important to acknowledge that data collected on

how strictly people adhered to the recycling system may not be accurate and thus will not be discussed in detail. Rathje and Murphy, anthropologists who compared what people say to physical evidence from waste audits, stated that people hardly know what their own patterns are and very inaccurately judge their own disposal habits (2001, p.24). Moreover, interview data from previous sections already indicate a tendency for this sample population to over- or under-estimate their trash production. Thus, participants may have misrepresented their recycling habits, whether that is to pander to the study or genuine unawareness. Yet given that the recycling scheme is already well-documented as high-performing and generally uniform, it is not how strictly people follow the sorting that is as important as how people talk about their habits and their underlying motivations. This is the data that will give the most insight into participants' lived experiences surrounding consumerism and the recycling myth.

Most participants followed sociocultural norms surrounding the moral economy of recycling. 14 of 17 participants reported being primarily motivated to recycle properly for environmental reasons. Corvellec (2016, p.394) describes moral agency as a performative approach to sustainability wherein people subjectively differentiate sustainable and morally right practices from unsustainable and ethically wrong ones. This moral agency appears in many of the respondents' sentiment that environmentally-conscious people are conscientious, responsible, and worthy of planetary resources. For instance, LI3 expressed, "In my opinion, people who recycle are more mindful because when we recycle, we have in our mind how much trash we have. The trash cannot disappear by itself, so if you want to stay longer in this Earth, you need to be good and think twice about not being efficient." In this statement, describing recyclers positively as "mindful" and equating "thinking twice" about resource use with "being good" emphasizes the notion of environmentalism as a moral imperative. Further on in the interview, LI3 added, "I'm environmental. I get a little bit mad when I see people throw things away wrongly because I think of all the resources spent making that stuff that's now wasted." In distinguishing herself as an environmentalist, and implicitly, a good person in comparison to other wrong-doers, she asserts the kind of identity rewarded in the Swedish *eco-habitus*. Therefore, in the Swedish context, perhaps participants seeking to exercise moral agency recycle because it feels like the ecologically responsible and thus ethical course of action.

In contrast to the recycling myth narrative wherein it is assumed that everyday people believe recycling to be the best and only thing they need to do for the environment, among those in the sample population who reported feeling environmentally motivated to recycle, all but two added that recycling was important yet also not enough. To start off, LI8 said that he "always

think[s] about how much energy it costs to produce [new materials] ... there is also direct pollution from incineration producing emissions and also indirect pollution from the energy spent on producing new things. It is not possible to continue without [recycling].” Yet this emphasis on recycling’s importance did not mean they thought of recycling as a solution to the consumption problem. In the words of LI7, “in Sweden, I understand that they’re going to make very good stuff from this recycling ... but still, it is not so good, of course, when compared with not consuming.” Therefore, there was not as much faith in circular economy as anticipated

Some interviewees defied recycling norms out of laziness, yet their expressed guilt indicated that their attitudes were still consistent with the same value system. LS4, a social work bachelor’s student, confessed, “I’m really bad ... It’s super easy to go to the recycling room 15 meters away, but sometimes I throw some plastic in the ordinary bin because I don’t want to leave [my room or the kitchen].” LS4 added that when she throws recyclables in the mixed bin, “I think, I should have recycled that. That was stupid. Then I do feel guilty.” This mismatch between knowledge, intention, and action possibly adds Norgaard’s (2011, p.141) interpretive denial as another layer to the participants’ *eco-habitus*. Inaccurate sorters recognize their behavior as wrong owing to being in a context which defines the behavior as irresponsible and inconsistent with cultural environmental values. However, environmental privilege shields them from experiencing any consequences of such improper behavior and there is no tangible incentive to maintain the act when not in public. Interpretive denial may thus justify sorting laziness owing to the bounty of excuses one can produce.

As for other norm-breakers, not only did some people not sort accurately, but they also did not see recycling as an environmental priority and thus challenged the norms. LS9, a social worker whose clients are refugee youths, developed her perspective more concretely in saying, “I don’t like to recycle and I don’t feel bad. We have too big of a focus on recycling versus other stuff ... when I talk with friends, for example, they judge people who don’t recycle, but they don’t reflect on other things they’re doing that are even worse, like flying a lot.” In this case, her guilt was not primarily environmentally rooted and thus inconsistent with the sociocultural norm. Moreover, as someone whose profession concerns social justice and “having studied econ, people always talk about African countries where they have a lot of trash in a negative way, like oh those countries are so bad they don’t recycle and it’s mostly in some way about making Sweden or themselves look better than other people.” Unlike the previous participant, this cannot be classified as interpretive denial. She was still concerned for environmental justice, but did not prioritize this method, which she felt impeded actual progress.

In some cases, respondent behaviors might initially appear to defy norms, but turn out to be particular manifestations within them. For instance, as LS7, an architect from the countryside, explained, “We pay apartment fees, and part of that is the fee for garbage collection so I should also make use of my right to throw garbage ... I do recycle, but if I know that I haven’t thrown a lot in the bin then I can be confident [when disposing of unsorted trash] because I haven’t used my quota of garbage bin space ... I don’t feel ashamed.” Although there was no actual enforced quota, the participant had a tendency to arbitrarily frame many aspects of her life in terms of how much each person is allowed to perform a behavior that breaks sociocultural norms. Having the recycling scheme did therefore encourage this particular individual to increase her waste production because that was the outcome of the interaction between this structure and her life philosophy of wanting to maximize quotas for acceptable behavior. Therefore, she does not question the recycling scheme or moral economy norm, but rather incorporates them into a logic of efficiency nestled comfortably within one dominant capitalist system.

Interviewee LI7 also uniquely interpreted recycling norms. He explained, “No one can know if I recycle or not because I live alone and I can mix everything if I want, but I have my system in my life to make everything the right way.” This “system” and “right way” refers to how he enjoys living every aspect of his life according to rules. Upon moving to Sweden, recycling became another set of rules he adapted into his systematic lifestyle, providing satisfaction from orderliness rather than environmental guilt reduction. Such satisfaction may originate from desires to suppress anxieties triggered by waste as matter out of place. Moore (2012), adapting Mary Douglas’ writings on dirt, elaborates that waste’s contemporary definition is a gross, dirty obstruction causing disorder by destabilizing sanitary or “proper” spaces. Furthermore, emotional triggers cause people to stigmatize objects designated as trash regardless of its actual state of cleanliness or dysfunction, thus manufacturing a need to constantly buy and replace. Therefore, as was the case with LS7, some recycling behaviors may initially appear to defy norms within a *habitus* wherein people follow moral and ecological imperatives to recycle. Yet deviance may actually emphasize particular aspects of this capitalist *habitus* such as efficiency and order. Such variations of dominant narratives thus indicate that people are less predictable than expected. More importantly, if we are to break away from the accumulation-based capitalist backbone of current waste management trajectories, we must understand how deeply pervasive capitalism has been in Sweden’s *eco-habitus*.

6.2.2 Consumption behaviors & attitudes

Perhaps because consumption is more conspicuous, the sample population had even more variety in consumption agency. Unexpectedly, every participant unanimously thought that consumerism was bad for the environment. Moreover, 13 out of 17 interviewees were actively trying to reduce their consumption. 5 participants whose consumption motivations were primarily ecological adhered to moral economy norms. As with recycling, these respondents took the stance that good and responsible people restrict consumption to reduce environmental damage. For instance, LI5, the finance worker, said, “If I go shopping, I never go without thinking about consumption. I think, should I buy that if it’s in this or that packaging? Or I might avoid something from Spain where I know the work conditions are bad and they overuse water ... especially when you’re vegan it’s really hard to find a good balance.” In that sense, she and other like-minded participants actively shaped their shopping habits to be the least impactful as possible owing to not wanting to “ruin the environment or conditions for people in some way, because it’s what we can and should do.” Such attitudes may be strongly influenced by Weintrobe’s (2013, p.34) environmental anxiety. These interviewees may have come to gradually accept and confront the reality that consumerism cannot go on as always. Their recognition of its limits then leads to anxiety in action towards attempting damage control. The choices they make in pursuing this goal are in turn framed by the *eco-habitus* they live within. While sustainable lifestyle changes might look to LI5 like being vigilant in the grocery store, these changes might be completely different for someone in another context.

Regarding economic reasons specifically, 5 participants recognized their consumption patterns as lowering their ecological footprint. However, they performed such actions mainly out of concern for saving money. For instance, LS8, the bachelor’s student from a rural context, reported “biking instead of owning a car but it’s not like I could afford one anyway so it’s not a huge effort. Maybe if I had money I would, but here, there’s no reason to ... it’s still good for the environment, though.” LI4, an early-career human rights lawyer from a developing country, similarly stated, “I walk a lot here because it helps me to save money and it also helps the environment ... I also eat less meat, but not because I’m environmentally conscious but because of the price.” The external circumstances these interviewees lived in thus shaped their lifestyles to become coincidentally more sustainable because the choices that were most appealing to their wallets had additional benefits. Such patterns may result from these respondents originating from contexts less concerned with the high-class *eco-habitus* established in Lund, as the *habitus* in their hometowns may reflect pragmatism in preferring what is affordable.

Some participants defied *eco-habitus* norms through lack of concern over environmental consequences of their consumption patterns. For example, human rights lawyer LI4 said, “If I buy a flight, I will never think about the environment.” Rather than expressing guilt, there was a stronger sense of denial. Regarding her reasoning behind her choices, she continued, “This is the worst part. Yes, we have to take care of the environment because of climate change, but I’m not going to be here and I don’t want to have children so it’s even easier for me.” When following up with these statements, it seems like this is an obvious case of denial. Elaborating, LI4 said, “We had a warm winter and then I think that objectively it is related to climate change, but then maybe next year it’s not going to happen.” This is what Norgaard (2011, p.10) refers to as interpretive denial wherein the facts are reinterpreted to something more convenient. The interviewee sees such information as isolated occurrences rather than a serious and accelerating progression that will affect her lifetime. Norgaard’s (2011, p.10) concept of implicatory denial is also present when she says, “Maybe I am selfish and unconscious, but I’m also not interested in buying new things constantly ... I think that’s important in my case because especially as someone from a developing country I contribute much less to environmental impact. I am not like a Donald Trump.” Here, she acknowledged a reality that may be too disturbing to fully absorb. To cope, she instead minimizes the moral implications of her involvement in the situation. Moreover, although she is the only one in the sample population who rejects the idea that environmentalism is what defines a good person, she still does not follow expected narratives because she asserts her anti-consumerist positionality while living in a new context of environmental privilege. In that way, her assertions are an active expression of an agency she developed within her hometown’s more pragmatic *habitus* carried over to what is possible in a new *eco-habitus* where she experiences increased financial strain and cultural alienation.

In contrast to people’s conscious understanding that consumption is problematic, 4 participants also reported guilt and anxiety toward their unwillingness to change consumption patterns as well as both individual and collective denial to cope with such feelings. Early-career sociologist LS2 says, “I feel good about myself that day [when I buy something new], but also guilt because I already know that I have everything I need ... I still think that I consume too much even though I try to be conscious ... but I want to feel good and that’s what’s a little bit justified when buying more stuff like clothes.” She admits that, because they are unnecessary and unsustainable, her consumption habits defy norms within an *eco-habitus*. When referring to feeling good “that day,” LS2 also implicitly recognizes the short-lived nature of this satisfaction. As such, she is aware that she adheres to high consumption norms in the general Swedish context even though these are the same norms she recognizes as something she should feel guilty about.

Consumerism is thus deeply ingrained in her identity, which Bourdieu (2010, p.24) defines as the place one believes they occupy in social space. Her identity is her sense of “Swedishness” where she relates to environmentalism while also relating to the symbolic value of conspicuous consumption. As someone who additionally has distinction as a highly educated well-off citizen, the structures she lives in change possibilities she sees for herself. She as an agent negotiates how to maintain symbolic capital between environmentalism and consumerism. This dissonance is further elaborated upon when she says, “I also have this problem where I wish it was accepted that people have only 3 shirts for example, because it would just be easier to not have to worry about what they wear and save resources. But I guess I’m not the person to take that initiative.” In that sense, she follows a guilt pattern Norgaard (2011: 195) describes wherein those unwilling to give up luxuries experience guilt for not being able to avoid participating in a particular social system. Therefore, her guilt primarily comes from her awareness of how her actions lead to environmental consequences within a *habitus* where environmentalism is the norm yet structures make it difficult to avoid consumerism.

Such guilt as a reaction to the conflict between her various structurally embedded identity-building choices may also explain why, for these 4 participants, such culpability also led to green consumerism. LS2 quickly added that to reduce her consumption impact, she tries “to buy locally produced and organic things ... or even other things like that too like buying cotton makeup pads that you can just wash instead of buying new ones.” According to Norgaard (2011) and Weintrobe (2013), a possible explanation might be that their anxiety and guilt might lead people to deal with their stress by focusing on easier “quick-fix” solutions requiring little sacrifice or change. The part of ourselves that rejects reality thus takes over in maintaining problematic illusions to protect us from the changes threatening life as we know it. It was thus perhaps easier for our environmentally aware respondents to buy greenwashed products and participate in green consumerism as a seemingly inconsequential change obscuring inconsistencies in familiar frameworks of capitalism and Swedish identity.

Although it turns out that most participants indeed did not believe the recycling myth, there were some who still believed that the waste management system justifies consumption. In a duo interview between LI3, a foreign architecture student, and her partner LS5, a local engineering student, LI3 mentioned feeling some guilt. She said, “Recently I’ve been using plastic a lot, which I don’t need. But I just feel like buying stuff from the Arab store. There, they always give you plastic and I will always take it.” In response, LS5 said, “Yeah, but as long as you just recycle stuff it’s fine.” Here, LS5 dismisses LI3’s guilt owing to his belief in circular economy. This falls

in line with Hornborg's (2016) technological utopianism in that he does not believe that his partner has to change lifestyles if current technology is already compensating for excess consumption. Interestingly, LS5 also spoke out against consumerism. He said, "Maybe it's because I live in a corridor and I can see how wasteful other people are, but I am strongly against buying stuff you don't need and just throwing it away as soon as you get bored. I think it's very good to hold onto stuff until you absolutely cannot use it anymore as it is intended." This however, is perhaps explained when LI3 points out that he is "so proud of himself for producing less garbage," but perhaps more because "he is a hipster who doesn't like following the norm [proliferate consumerism]." Instead of completely following the general Swedish *habitus* of privilege, he instead distinguishes himself according to the rules of an *eco-habitus* in which consumption is no longer something to be proud of. Overall, no one in the study was proud to adhere to high consumption norms, and most participants also underreported their consumption. These findings indicate that consumerism is no longer a positive status indicator in the *eco-habitus*. This however does not add up with the statistical data and current literature suggesting that waste production has gone up with a strong tendency for people to view advanced recycling technology as a way to maintain the precious consumerism keeping their lifestyles comfortably and happy. To further investigate such a discrepancy between anti-consumerist attitudes within an *eco-habitus* and material evidence suggesting excess consumption, it is thus necessary to look at actual consumption and disposal performance.

6.3 Behavioral Spillover

6.3.1 Factors leading to successful spillover

Among the study population, behavioral spillover had mixed success. However, this does not mean that the population was prone to single action bias either, and their motivations and agency show that consumer behavior is not as simple or linear as we thought. Unexpectedly, none of the participants were profligate consumers who justified their actions with the recycling myth. For 6 respondents, participation in the recycling scheme was the first step toward increasingly advanced environmental behaviors. One of the most powerful factors influencing successful spillover from recycling to other environmentally conscious behaviors was emotional connection. For example, LI1, a refugee, hospice worker, and repairman, recalls:

Why I recycle is because I worry about animals. I don't want to see them dead.

Sometimes people leave everything and don't care about nature. Something happened to my leg one time at the beach. I was walking in the night and someone drank a beer and he broke it. I didn't see this and I had an accident and there was much blood. So sometimes I

take everything left from people because it happened to me once, but it happens to nature every day ... Recycling is important because everyone must place everything in a good way, but after we start that, we must keep going to the best way.

As the interviewee explains throughout the rest of the interview, “going to the best way” involves making personal lifestyle changes beyond simply handling waste responsibly to prevent waste from existing to begin with. Spillover is thus evident in this case owing to his dedication to increasingly advanced sustainability efforts and not stopping with single action bias.

Whereas many of Sysav’s communication strategies as well as mainstream economic or even psychological writings on recycling behavior mainly make appeals through institutional logic backed up by statistical data (e.g. Nilsson, 2019, January 25, lecture; Hope et al., 2017), perhaps this kind of appeal does not adequately encompass the argumentative triangle of logos, pathos, and ethos and is not as accessible to as many people as it could be. Such participants’ emotional reactions ensured recycling was not merely a routine, but a moral imperative informed by environmental. This intrinsic motivation brought them beyond recycling towards more impactful changes. Such is in line with Crompton and Thøgersen (2009) who wrote on the importance of environmentally-centered motivation if spillover is to work. Without keeping the bigger purpose of environmental protection in mind, the danger for recycling to lead instead to detrimental consumption behavior as a reward for participation drastically increases. However, critical attention must be kept in making sure these emotions do not seek technological utopianism as an outlet. As LS3, an engineer and father to teenagers, retells about his own childhood formative experiences:

I grew up at the seaside, so I could clearly see the environment deteriorating. When I was in my teens, the sea was really nice with sand and some plants and a looooooot of fish ... Now if you go out, the ocean is dead ... I work in a manufacturing company producing products in metal. We talk a lot about circular economy, and how you can reuse most metals as many times as possible. It’s not polluting too much. That’s why I think recycling is so important. Caring for the environment is the main driver.

Although he is strongly environmentally motivated, unlike LI1, he does not see personal responsibility outside of a recycling structure that he believes will fix ecological issues. Throughout the rest of the interview, he does not reflect on how he could personally reduce consumption and thinks that the imperative for change comes from other, “less educated or lazy” people or technological adaptation. The difference in outcome may be attributed to the emotion norms presented to them in their respective *habitus*. Emotion norms are the socially acceptable and standard ways in which people steer their cognitive dissonance (Norgaard, 2011, p.92).

Whereas LI1 managed grief through engagement in the consumption-focused *eco-habitus* around him, LS3 coped with environmental anxiety through a technological utopianist form of denial collectively encouraged in his workplace. When making emotional appeals to encourage spillover, much attention must thus be paid to the approaches used in communicating with diverse demographics and their worldviews.

Another significant factor influencing behavioral spillover was the presence of close interpersonal connections with those who acted as environmental stewards and positive influences. As LS2, the early-career sociologist, retells, “My partner is more environmentally conscious than I am with the sorting. Then when I saw that he avoid plastic bags, it started to change me.” Even though LS2, as a local Swede, grew up sorting recyclables, it did not progress beyond thoughtless routine before meeting her foreign partner. Being impressed with and quick to adopt the recycling scheme, he took further initiative to reduce waste output. Such eagerness then showed the previously uncritical LS2 that the waste management system is part of a lifestyle that made a statement against waste. Her spillover thus began as he continued to show her more ways that being eco-friendly was not a sacrifice imposing on convenience or taste. This emphasizes the point that Weintrobe (2013, p.35) makes with anxiety. Unpleasant realities provoke anxiety because of the potential threat to survival, and this anxiety can manifest in many unproductive ways. However, supporting anxiety with love provides a positive outlet for such nervous energy and encourages people to do whatever they can to repair the damage that ignoring reality has caused before. Living with environmentalist partners thus provides a steady source of support that can turn reality-avoidant anxiety into anxiety-into-action.

The nature of long-term live-in relationships may be key here. In the case of LS9, the refugee youth social worker, the personal connection actually backfired. As she recounted, “My best friend talks about zero waste a lot and she even has a blog about it. Now I’m more aware of the amounts of waste we create but a lot of what she does feels unnecessary. I haven’t done anything actively to change. Nobody sees me when I throw the trash [without sorting].” Living with someone means you cannot avoid compromising with their lifestyle, which may make a huge difference in how much incentive someone has to change their attitudes and behaviors. The added intimacy also increases levels of trust critical for the other person to not feel judged or policed. Moreover, being around someone so much when living together means that there is the constant support there to consistently ensure that environmental anxiety does not stray from wanting to make a difference to feeling apathetic, hopeless, or pushed away from the negative emotions that environmental realities provoke in the way that LS9 did when confronted with the reality of the

garbage situation by her friend. While strong interpersonal support seems to work very well for some participants with one-on-one ties to environmentalists, the same may also work even without the presence of one very close guiding force.

Not everyone may have consistent figures in their life to give them one-on-one support turning anxiety into action, but in the case of several participants, overall community support made the difference instead. As respondent LI7, the aspiring social worker and refugee, said, “In Lund, everyone is doing the same with a good feeling. It encourages me not to just follow but to love it. In another part of the world where no one is recycling and I am the only one I would feel small. But because everyone is doing it here I feel we are getting results and learning what more to do for respecting our city and nature.” When the interviewee moved to Sweden, one of the first steps in his integration was learning how to sort his garbage. Following the behavioral spillover model Thomas and Sharp (2013) proposed, his lifestyle changes snowballed toward environmental engagement as he was continuously supported and encouraged by community members around him, who incorporated him into an *eco-habitus* wherein environmental consciousness was already the norm. Combining Weintrobe’s (2013) concept of love as a solution to the anxiety model with the moral economy in Sweden, the interviewee thus perhaps never allowed his growing anxiety to discourage him as he became more aware of ecological issues. Instead, the network of people around him who were teaching him about these issues also empowered him to act through their encouragement, and thus his anxiety remained at the truth-seeking stage where he sought to fix what he could. Furthermore, he was able to validate himself and obtain distinction within an *eco-habitus* encouraging such behavioral changes.

The importance of a supportive network in uniting people toward spillover from recycling to increased environmental engagement is particularly emphasized in the cases of respondents who did not have such social support. For LI2, the current environmental student and former refugee, significant barriers to spillover occurred in the form of social discouragement. As he expressed,

Where I came from, people think it is very strange to think about these things and they are also associated with snobby Westerners. In my social circles, people just throw plastic bags right into the ocean ... My mom doesn’t care at all. I tried to scare her about getting fines for throwing mixed garbage and that worked for a while, but nobody gave her trouble so she just blends everything. It’s extremely frustrating trying to make people understand the problems that creates.

Such sentiments were echoed by LS7, an architect working in a rural area, as she said, “At my workplace, we have recycling, but we don’t use it. The whole mentality is different here, and they don’t get the point. It’s a challenge in a group that’s more conservative because you don’t dare to have opinions.” Whether or not the infrastructure for it was already there, not only were these participants discouraged from recycling in the first place, but it was also particularly challenging for them to bring up broader environmental concerns beyond waste sorting. This unreceptiveness also made these participants themselves believe that their actions did not matter. Consequently, they did not go out of their way to do much beyond recycling. Their anxieties, left unsupported, instead fell into their social groups’ socially organized denial. Norgaard (2011, p.9) explains this as how a group of individuals collectively distance themselves from uncomfortable environmental realities through existing cultural scripts and strategies. This could also have to do with socialization into a *habitus* leaving little room for critical debate. In that sense, perhaps the norms of how to feel, how to talk, and what to talk in these respondents’ peer groups minimized opportunities to process important concepts that would lead to spillover from recycling as a chore or nuisance to recycling as important and then to consumption reduction.

6.3.2 Factors with mixed results toward spillover

Certain factors’ influences on behavioral spillover were mixed, indicating intersecting complexities requiring further understanding in order to encourage sustainable rather than unsustainable habits. For instance, demographics had some influence over whether recycling participation led to further commitment to consumption reduction. Out of all 7 participants who did not spill over, only one was international, whereas out of the remaining 10 who did spill over, most of them were not domestic. A possible explanation for such a trend is that many of the participants who immigrated to Sweden later in life did not grow up recycling or in a context where environmentalism was the norm. Being taught to recycle upon moving to Sweden was thus often their first engagement with the practice that then opened horizons for more advanced action. This was the case for interviewees such as LI3, an architect from a developing country whose partner is Swedish. She recounts, “Of course I changed a lot because I didn’t know how to recycle at first. Since coming to Sweden I already knew about the recycling system and how strict they are about it here. I just wanted to try it at first and after that I felt like doing more good things to the environment and I’ve reduced now my impact I think.” In contrast to her partner, LS5, who “started recycling before [he] was born,” and did not question the structures already in place around him, recycling was not natural to LI3 and thus was something she had to have an intention or reasons to start. The factor for success here was successful outreach on several levels from

casual social interaction to official housing company communication in persuading her to adopt environmental rationales. Thus, not only was recycling most evidently the beginning of her environmental engagement, but the recycling system as an entry point for raising awareness also increased her environmental incentives.

International backgrounds can also lead to increased apathy toward recycling and consumption reduction instead of a linear and universal trajectory toward spillover. LI5, a former environmental student, reported many frustrations encouraging her live-in partner to adopt waste sorting behaviors. She explains, “He didn’t grow up with recycling in his home country. It could be from how he grew up. He directly understood why it’s important, of course, but if I didn’t push him he wouldn’t have changed. He prioritizes other problems and doesn’t deeply feel their connection to the waste issue I guess. Either it comes naturally or you don’t learn.” Continuing the same pursuit of distinction does not function well when uprooted to a new culture with a different *eco-habitus* in this case. Such difficulty in adopting new behaviors and attitudes may be an anxiety-induced reaction to this newly unpleasant awareness.

On the other hand, for domestic Swedes such as LS5, who take the system for granted or sort without questioning, were already immersed in an environmental culture that felt natural, and as such, did not gain much more from being aware of amounts of garbage produced and therefore did not display as much spillover. As such, being there for the development of the recycling scheme and growing up in a context of privilege could also mean that local Swedes grew up with various technofix ideologies such as the recycling myth. Although LS5 reported reduced consumption anyway, he also had much faith in the recycling system’s ability to de-problematize trash. As LS5 expressed, “I have faith in technology as the main solution. In general, we can invent anything that makes stuff environmental, there only needs to be some incentive to do it.” Such attitudes are perhaps very specific to the *habitus* of the Swedish context, and would have been difficult for someone like LI3 to develop in her own context. What appears to be supportive of typical narratives of the naïve green consumer is, however, further complicated by his anti-consumerist sentiment that “It is wrong to replace things unless they are broken.” There may thus be an additional layer to the moral economy of recycling influencing some people. His explanation of his frugality stems from his family’s influence as they had traditions of handing down goods and repairing them for as long as possible owing to legacies of hardship experienced by ancestors.

Levels of participants' relative knowledge of and engagement in ecological issues similarly had mixed results for behavioral spillover. While it might be easy to assume that the more educated someone is about the environment, the more actively they will engage in environmentalism, such was not the case for the sample population. Interestingly, it was not the level of previous knowledge itself that affected spillover outcomes, but rather what people did with the knowledge they have. The strongest behavioral spillover was indeed found amongst those with the least formal education or training in environmentalism, such as LI1, a refugee and caretaking assistant. While explaining his motivations to recycle, he said, "I don't know more, but I just care more. I don't learn this thing before, not so much school. But we must care about Earth ... If we care about everything and put it in the right place and in the right way, the bad bacteria I think will not go to the air and then in the body." Similarly, LI7, another refugee and aspiring social worker, said, "I don't have a lot of information yet. But I feel very responsible, especially because I love the sun and trees and flowers. We don't need lots of information, everyone on earth should have something inside of us to feel wanting to do something bigger." Despite not having clear understandings about how recycling and consumption are connected to environmental degradation and injustice, both were strongly motivated to make sustainable lifestyle changes. In a context where widespread information has not affected action, perhaps this is an indication that outreach strategies might consider focusing more on emotion.

In contrast, lack of environmental awareness backfired for participant LI4, who used her relative ignorance as an excuse to avoid further engagement with harsh realities in saying, "I don't have the clear picture about the environment. A lack of information is the point here. All my bad acts are because I just choose the easiest way and I don't want to think about the consequences." A possible explanation for such discrepancies in outcome between her and the two refugees may be the presence or lack of support for anxiety. As she recounts, "We have a recycling guide with 6 different categories, but many of the containers don't match and just said 'waste residual.' Everything is racism because [the international student-only housing company] thinks we are too stupid to use it. If I'm supposed to know how to recycle, why don't they fix it?" Moreover, she reports, "My neighbors are all in the same situation. I could see how frustrated they got because we don't have the bins so none of us learned to do it the proper way and none of us care also." Whereas the two refugees had strong social support not only from peers but from a well-functioning structure around them, LI4 had a very different negative experience where her concerns were regularly invalidated and those around her consequently did not have any options to confront their dysfunctional system. As a result, her anxiety manifested in unproductive ways sheltering herself from truths that were too difficult for her to bear alone.

On the other hand, extensive previous knowledge about the environment also had contrasting outcomes. Among those who had formally studied environmental issues and thus presumably had the most knowledge about them, there were generally one of two patterns. Respondents such as LI5, an environmentalist who graduated from her programme several years ago, were highly motivated to adopt recycling behaviors and cut down consumption. She recalled, “When I was still studying, I learned a lot about mass production and I was so shocked and felt so bad. I took a wider view on where products come from and labor rights violations and what the story behind consuming is ... now I want to do useful things and cut my consumption a lot. Then I felt it was so connected to things I was doing before like recycling.” In this case, she did not follow the linear path from recycling as a first step to consumption reduction as a more advanced commitment exactly. Although LI5’s previously discussed statements indicate that she grew up recycling, her sentiments here show that perhaps, as it was for others who grew up with a certain *eco-habitus*, it did not take on more profound environmental meaning until her awareness increased. Moreover, she described putting her anxiety from such increased awareness to action when saying, “I don’t get depressed. Sometimes I’m upset or irritated with people who don’t see the links, but it’s not so much linked to personal emotions. I approach problems more rationally, trying to get as much facts as possible and figuring out what mechanisms I can use to make changes.” In this case, the combination of her practical attitude and her pursuit of a degree in a more practical environmental field gave her an increased sense of agency and empowerment to confront reality and deal with her anxiety productively.

In contrast, for participants such as LI2, a final year masters student in an environmental field, heightened awareness somewhat backfired. As he explained, “I study this so I’m pretty much fed a lot of environmental stuff and I’ve been aware since youth. But the responsibility is more or less on the system. It shouldn’t be cheaper to buy stuff than to fix it, and everything comes in plastic. I don’t overconsume, but I’m not going to stop how I am now.” Furthermore, he indicated some interpersonal exasperation when saying, “Most people around me have no mindset for the environment or being conscious. Even the people I know who are extremely environmental conscious consume a lot and go to work by car every day. They say it’s not good but they do it. We all do it. Everyone’s a hypocrite, especially ‘environmentalists.’” This may perhaps be linked to unaddressed anxiety. In a programme where not as much emphasis was put on solutions and while also surrounded by peers whom were inflexible to change and open discussion regardless of whether or not those people claimed the environmental moral high ground or not, the interviewee perhaps felt hopeless, doubting that extra effort would make a difference.

6.3.3 Factors preventing spillover

One of the strongest barriers against spillover was diffusion of responsibility. Participants with ambivalent or negative spillover reported sentiments ranging from blaming to helplessness to apathy within a *habitus* making waste avoidance difficult. LS6, a humanities master, stated, “I do a lot of damage for being a person from the Global North, but I think companies make bigger problems than I do. I have no idea how good recycling is but anyway, it’s the responsibility of companies that produce the products and the government to fix the waste problem.” Many members of the sample population lamenting their consumption habits agreed, especially when on the topic of plastics in food packaging. Rather than deal with anxiety over which commodities to trust, respondents such as LI2 seek green consumerist quick fixes or turn away from the problem entirely, as she said, “What can I do when even the organic eco produce is wrapped in plastic? Sometimes I just want to give up.” Many participants shared the same sentiment as LS9, saying, “In an ideal world, I’d want to take action, but I feel like individuals aren’t going to make change no matter how much we recycle or reduce. We need the state to actually go in and make it expensive and force people to change.” Although the diffusion of responsibility appeared to reduce spillover motivation, this is not indicative of individual failure as much as structural inadequacy. Regardless, by not acting, these interviewees were still complicit with the system.

Other key factors limiting behavioral spillover are collective denialism and lack of faith. LS9, the refugee youth social worker, said, “Swedes have always wanted to see themselves as environmentally friendly and ahead of everybody else. But Swedish people also deny we have problems. Nothing is true. We are so proud but we don’t actually get much done.” In a country where the *eco-habitus* is very strong, sustainable lifestyle changes may be more motivated by seeking distinction than genuine environmentalism, especially in a place so far removed from the bulk of ecological degradation. As Norgaard (2011, p.90) explains, people want to feel good about themselves, but when confronted with unpleasant realities threatening positive self-image, people manipulate their thoughts to resolve the dissonance. Within the Swedish *habitus*, people may thus be socialized to manage their feelings to fit what they perceive as the cultural norm for how people should feel. Consequently, LS9’s statements perhaps indicate that Swedes have learned to cope with environmental anxiety through a form of collective denial wherein the focus is on particular technological fixes in a society that socializes people to ignore more pressing environmental concerns. Such collective denial inhibits behavioral spillover owing to not seeing the need for more action. Moreover, such awareness and dissatisfaction with this cultural pattern may explain LS9’s general apathy, frustration, and lack of recycling throughout her interview owing to her understanding that the tools given to her in this context are unproductive and insincere anyway.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Rising waste management discourse perceives people as using technological utopianism to avoid deeper commitment to transforming trash producing habits. As Thøgerson (1999, p.85) explains, such a narrative generally follows the lines of people adopting minor behavioral changes (such as recycling) to excuse themselves from more radical lifestyle changes. Material evidence from waste management statistics as well as an expert interview seem to confirm such recent trends in rising garbage production along with increased technological development. However, a recurring finding throughout the project was that the sample population was much more aware and thus skeptical of this “recycling myth” than anticipated. Thus, both current literature and statistical data did not fit the sample population’s lived realities. As such, this final section revisits previous findings, then offers a new reading of theoretical and material evidence, expanding upon it to further nuance the recycling myth narrative.

7.1 Overview of Findings

Although the sample population did not strictly follow anticipated behavioral patterns of high recycling justifying high consumption, such a narrative is not false but rather can be expanded to include Lund’s unique *eco-habitus*. This *eco-habitus*, arising from a context in which green national identity and ecological modernism are strong, structures behavioral expectations that the interviewees established as sociocultural norms. Firstly, responses indicate that recycling is widely regarded as trustworthy and efficient, giving no excuses not to sort waste. As such, recycling is a moral activity wherein good people sort waste and shame immoral others for not doing the same. This general logic also applies to consumption norms. An *eco-habitus* thus emerges in privileged contexts with a highly educated populace such as Lund, wherein conspicuous consumption gradually becomes less prestigious owing to ecological paradigm shifts leading people to instead distinguish themselves through justifying themselves through technological utopianism, green consumerism, or claiming to reject consumerism altogether.

The sample population’s diverse exercises of agency within such an *eco-habitus* indicate that the ways people negotiate these sets of norms affect the extent to which their recycling behavior spills over to consumption reduction. Regarding individual agencies, a majority of people did follow norms in feeling that their waste sorting and waste avoidant behavior makes them ecologically responsible and thus good people. A large subset of them also recognized that recycling is not enough, leading to successful spillover. This willingness to recognize recycling’s low impact and the imperative for more serious change typically came about through various forms of strong emotional support such as live-in partners or community reinforcement. Following

Weintrobe's model for turning anxiety into action, the social support within this *habitus* enabled them to address environmental anxieties they faced in becoming more aware of ecological realities from emotional connections or from interpersonal interactions.

Participants failing to adhere to these norms, either out of laziness or out of belief that waste sorting and consumption restriction are inconsequential, were ostracized in this *eco-habitus* either through self-guilt or through social shaming. Resorting instead to different forms of denial as another common emotion management norm present in the general Swedish *habitus*, these interviewees experienced limited behavioral spillover. Much care, however, needs to go into ensuring that emotion norms do not encourage faith in circular economy as a way to deny consumption realities while maintaining illusory environmentalist self-identities. *Habitus* even explains seemingly ambiguous or bizarre findings, as the *habitus* people find themselves influences the directions they take with their own specifics such as national origin, level of environmental awareness, religion, or love for quotas and orderliness. As such, some individuals' agencies are still limited by what is possible for them structurally, owing to factors such as financial constraint, difficulties avoiding excess packaging, or persistent conspicuous consumption norms. Among the sample population, the *eco-habitus* has thus encouraged sustainable lifestyle change by defining environmentalism as moral, but it is also important not to marginalize those who have not yet pursued it, lest they resort to counterproductive and unsustainable coping strategies. There must therefore be strong collaboration between institutions and communities to make sustainability accessible to all.

7.2 New Readings of the "Recycling Myth" Narrative

Current literature and communication from Sysav focus heavily on individual behavioral change to resolve the garbage crisis, yet perhaps in this context, such an approach does not completely capture the steps needed to move on. The huge trust the sample population has in the waste management system, as well as Nilsson's claims that Sysav is honest, transparent, and genuinely functioning well, leads to public discourse doubting consumers much more than the system. However, given the study outcomes, this section thus proposes an adaptation to the current narrative wherein people are aware that recycling is not enough, and deal with resulting anxiety in diverse ways shaped by the emotional tools available to them within their *habitus*.

Mainstream discourse ignores larger structures limiting options in a society brainwashed into not seeing possibilities to change these structures instead of easier, smaller changes such as which commodities they choose (Stilwell, 2002, p.313). Such a focus on inconsequential choices

may explain where recycling naïveté or green consumerism might come from if these are the only paradigms offered to people to cope with their anxieties. As repeatedly found throughout the present study, individual agencies do not necessarily contradict or act outside of norms, but rather add layers of different complexities within these norms.

A possible explanation for why the sample population's data does not match up with physical evidence indicating that Lund residents produce more garbage input as recycling develops is that emotion and behavior norms in these contexts might resist or reinforce consumerism, but ultimately, are constrained by it. As such, respondents may be prevented from waste reduction when possibilities for change are physically and socially limited. For example, many participants bring up difficulties in avoiding excessively packaged commodities, and this is reflected in Avfall Sverige's (2017) statistical data wherein the largest proportion of garbage output is packaging—not from preference, but because that is what is available. Emotion norms may also make them genuinely believe they have reduced consumption, owing to the increased effort and thought that must go into consumption restriction in an increasingly consumerist society despite actual garbage output proving otherwise.

Moreover, even drastic reduction on the individual level does not make as much impact as mobilizing collecting efforts to change larger structures. If the sample population can be seen as a microcosm for the general public, at least in Lund, most people are beyond the point of catching up on ignorance. As LS9 stated, "We already know about recycling. It's integrated in every Swede, and by now, it's about going to the next level. Okay, we recycle, but what can we do more?" Rather than pursuing a linear path in nagging individuals to change and then spread that change to others, perhaps the way forward is to instead open up structures to provide people more agency toward genuinely sustainable lifestyles in rewriting emotion norms and lifting institutional factors limiting behavioral possibilities.

References

- Avfall Sverige. (2017). *Avfallshantering* (pp. 1-38). Malmö: Avfall Sweden.
- Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. (2018). *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE
- Ammenberg, J., Anderberg, S., Lönnqvist, T., Grönkvist, S., & Sandberg, T. (2018). Biogas in the transport sector—actor and policy analysis focusing on the demand side in the Stockholm region. *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, 129, 70–80.
- Berglund, C., & Matti, S. (2006). Citizen and consumer: the dual role of individuals in environmental policy. *Environmental Politics*, 15(4), 550–571.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Distinction*. London: Routledge
- Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carfagna, L., Dubois, E., Fitzmaurice, C., Ouimette, M., Schor J., Willis, M., and Laidley, T. (2014). An Emerging *Eco-habitus*: The Reconfiguration of High Distinction Practices Among Ethical Consumers. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(2), 158–178.
- Corvellec, H. (2016). A performative definition of waste prevention. *Waste Management*, 52, 3–13.
- Corvellec, H., & Hultman, J. (2012). From “less landfilling” to “wasting less”: Societal narratives, socio-materiality, and organizations, *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 25 (2), 297–314.
- Crompton, T. and Thøgersen, J. (2009). Simple and Painless? The Limitations of Spillover in Environmental Campaigning. *Journal of Consumer Policy*, 32(1), 141–163.
- Gössling, S., & Hall, C. M. (2008). Swedish Tourism and Climate Change Mitigation: An Emerging Conflict? *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 8(2), 141–158.

- Hage, O., Söderholm, P., and Berglund, C. (2009). Norms and economic motivation in household recycling: Empirical evidence from Sweden. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 53(3), 155–165.
- Hope, A., Jones, C. R., Webb, T. L., Watson, M. T., & Kaklamanou, D. (2017). The Role of Compensatory Beliefs in Rationalizing Environmentally Detrimental Behaviors. *Environment and Behavior*, 50(4), 401–425.
- Hornborg, A. (2016). *Global Magic: Technologies of Appropriation from Ancient Rome to Wall Street*. (Palgrave Studies in Anthropology of Sustainability). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hultman, J., & Corvellec, H. (2012). The European Waste Hierarchy: From the Sociomateriality of Waste to a Politics of Consumption. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 44(10), 2413–2427.
- Jenkins, R. (1992). *Pierre Bourdieu. Key Sociologists*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Johansson, N., & Corvellec, H. (2018). Waste policies gone soft: An analysis of European and Swedish waste prevention plans. *Waste Management*, 77, 322–332.
- Laurenti, R., Singh, J., Frostell, B., Sinha, R., & Binder, C. (2018). The Socio-Economic Embeddedness of the Circular Economy: An Integrative Framework. *Sustainability*, 10(7), 2129–2130.
- ”Lund blev årets bästa avfallskommun.” (2017). Retrieved April 3, 2019, from <https://www.avfallsverige.se/aktuellt/nyhetsarkiv/artikel/lund-blev-arets-basta-avfallskommun/>
- Miliute-Plepiene, J., Hage, O., Plepys, A., and Reipas, A. (2016). What motivates households recycling behaviour in recycling schemes of different maturity? Lessons from Lithuania and Sweden. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 113 (1); 40–52.
- Moore, S. A. (2012). Garbage matters: Concepts in new geographies of waste. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36(6), 780–799.

- Norgaard, K. (2011). *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Park, L.S. & Pellow, D.N. (2011). *The slums of Aspen: immigrants vs. the environment in America's Eden*. New York: New York University Press.
- Petersen, S. (2018). *Biowaste Non-Sorters – Who Cares: Examining Arguments and Factors from Citizens Not Sorting Biowaste in Copenhagen and Recommendations for a Way Forward*. Retrieved from Lund University Publications: Student Papers. (Accession No. 2018027)
- Plastics Europe. (2017). *Plastics – the Facts 2017. An Analysis of European Plastics Production, Demand and Waste Data*. Brussels: Plastics Europe.
- Rathje, W., & Murphy, C. (2001). *Rubbish! The Archaeology of Garbage*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Rex, E., Rosander, E., Røyne, F., Veide, A., & Ulmanen, J. (2017). A systems perspective on chemical production from mixed food waste: The case of bio-succinate in Sweden. *Resources, Conservation & Recycling*, 125, 86–97.
- Shove, Elizabeth. (2014). Putting practice into policy: Reconfiguring questions of consumption and climate change. *Contemporary Social Science*, 9, 415–429.
- Sintov, N., Geislar, S. and White, L. V. (2019) Cognitive Accessibility as a New Factor in Proenvironmental Spillover: Results From a Field Study of Household Food Waste Management. *Environment and Behavior*, 51(1) 50–80.
- Statistiska centralbyrån (2017). “Number of Inhabitants.” Retrieved February 20, 2019, from <http://www.scb.se/en/>.
- Stilwell, F. (2002). *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Stoeva, K., & Alriksson, S. (2017). Influence of recycling programmes on waste separation

- behaviour. *Waste Management*, 68, 732–741.
- Thøgersen, J. (1999). Spillover processes in the development of a sustainable consumption pattern. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 20, 53–81.
- Thomas, C. and Sharp, V. (2013). Understanding the normalisation of recycling behaviour and its implications for other pro-environmental behaviours: a review of social norms and recycling. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 79, 11–20.
- Treat, J., & Williams, R. (2018, May 16). “We Depend On Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It.” Retrieved February 10, 2019, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/06/plastic-planet-waste-pollution-trash-crisis/>
- Tröhler, D. & Ideland, M. (2015). Calling for Sustainability: WWF’s Global Agenda and Educating Swedish Exceptionalism. In *Trajectories in the Development of Modern School Systems: Between the National and the Global*, 199–212. New York: Routledge.
- Weintrobe, S. (2013): *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Hove: Routledge.
- Wheeler, K. (2014). Nice Save: The Moral Economies of Recycling in England and Sweden. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 32(4), 704–720.
- White, K. and Hyde, M. (2011). The Role of Self-Perceptions in the Prediction of Household Recycling Behavior in Australia. *Environment and Behavior*, 44(6), 785–799.
- Xu, L., Zhang, X., & Ling, M. (2018). Spillover effects of household waste separation policy on electricity consumption: Evidence from Hangzhou, China. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 129, 219–231.

Appendix A

Expert interview guide: Rustan Nilsson

- 1) Why is the idea that recycling is enough such a popular myth? What are the cultural, structural, or other factors that led to this belief becoming so widespread?
- 2) What is Sysav's role/strategy in encouraging people to recycle? How does their public discourse encourage or discourage certain consumption behaviors?
- 3) What is the relationship between recycling participation and ecological awareness?
- 4) How do recycling rates and consumption patterns vary across southern Skåne? Is there a relationship between the two?
- 5) What are your thoughts on circular economy and what is Sysav's stance on it?

Appendix B

Local resident interview guide

Brief introduction:

This interview is part of my master's thesis about relationships between the Swedish waste management system and individual consumption behavior. The type of questions in this interview are general questions about your attitudes toward the Swedish waste management system as well as about your consumption and garbage-related habits. There is a premade list of questions, but depending on the flow of our conversation, I may skip some or ask follow-up questions. No specific details are necessary, and all of your responses will be both confidential and anonymous. If you do agree to participate, you may also withdraw from the study at any time or skip questions. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Questions:

1. Where do you live and how long have you lived in this area?
2. What is your housing situation like and how many people do you live with?
3. What are your thoughts on recycling?
 - a. How important is it?
 - b. What motivates you to recycle (or not)?
 - c. How trustworthy is the waste management system?
4. What are your disposal habits?
 - a. How often do you take out your trash and how full is it? Are you self-conscious about the amount you make?
 - b. Under what circumstances would you ever skip sorting thoroughly? How often does that happen?
5. Did you grow up recycling or was there some point where you started hearing about it?
6. Have you ever been shamed by someone else for not recycling, or have you ever shamed someone else?
 - a. Do you think that everybody is as recycling-conscious as yourself?
7. Besides recycling, what are some other things you do to help the environment?
 - a. If you were to rank what you do to help the environment in order of highest to lowest impact, where would recycling be?
 - i. What is the most important thing you do in terms of impact?
 - ii. Is what you currently do for the environment enough?
8. If you were to rank what you do that is bad for the environment in order of highest to lowest impact, what are the worst things that you do?

- a. What motivates you to do this activity/make this choice?
 - b. To what extent would you say recycling helps with that or helps you feel better?
9. How often you talk about climate change or environmental issues in your daily life?
- a. How often?
 - b. With whom?
 - c. In what situations?
 - d. How does it make you feel?
10. How does your level of knowledge about environmental issues affect your daily life?
- a. Does it influence how positive or negative you are about the earth/humanity's future?
 - b. How do you go on with your daily routine when thinking about such feelings or knowledge?
11. What do you usually think about when you are buying something or planning a purchase? What are your criteria?
12. How much of your consumption would you say is avoidable versus unavoidable?
13. How has Swedish culture influenced your recycling habits? How about consumption?
- a. Has recycling influenced you to do other environmental things too?
 - b. *immigrants: Did moving here and starting to recycle get you to adopt other pro-environmental behaviors too?
14. Does having this system help you feel better/affect how you feel about your consumption?
- a. Do you find yourself noticing a bit more how much garbage you produce?
 - b. Has the amount of trash you create changed since recycling?
15. How much responsibility do you feel for environmental issues and the garbage problem?
- a. How much of that influences the actions you take?
 - b. Where should most of the responsibility be?

Appendix C
Table of local interviews

Respondent	Date	Duration	Profile	Residence location	Residence duration
LS1	26.02	18:02	Retired volunteer	Tuna	17 years
LS2	03.03	46:05	Early-career sociologist	Stadsparken	2 years
LI1	03.03	25:40	Refugee, hospice & IT worker	Linero	2 years
LS3	04.03	37:17	Middle-aged engineer & dad	Nearby village	11 years
LI2	04.03	21:24	Former refugee, environmental master	Stadsparken	3 years
LS5 & LI3	05.03	48:21	Local engineering & foreign architecture student couple	Ulrikedal, Norra Fäladen	5 years, 2 years
LS4	05.03	43:03	Social work bachelor	Vildanden	2 years
LS6	05.03	40:22	Humanities master and podcaster	Ulrikedal	3 years
LS7	07.03	49:00	Rural architect	Nilstorp	9 years
LI4	10.03	68:08	Early-career human rights lawyer	Klostergården	2 years
LI5	14.03	51:02	Environmental alum, accountant	Esplanaden	3 years
LI6	15.03	37:58	European math teacher, LI8's partner	Norra Fäladen	5 years
LS8	15.03	51:14	Humanities bachelor	Ulrikedal	2 years
LS9	21.03	37:15	Social worker for refugees	Nearby village	5 years
LI7	25.03	57:16	Refugee, aspiring social worker	Norra Fäladen	3 years
LI8	26.03	51:18	European physicist, LI6's partner	Norra Fäladen	5 years