



LUND UNIVERSITY

# Driving Towards a Greener Future

A qualitative study of Tesla owners' green practices in  
a Danish Context

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

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# Abstract

Almost half the Danish population report that they have undertaken action(s) with the main purpose to lower their personal greenhouse gas emissions within the last three years. It has become “in” to be green, yet certain practices are perceived as “better” than others although they do not necessarily result in a lowered environmental impact. Why is that? Data from seven semi-structured interviews describes which perceived green practices are undertaken by Danish Tesla owners and how these practices are influenced by the social context the interviewees are in. By applying concepts such as ‘distinctive practices’, ‘socially, organised denial’ and ‘Jante mentality’, the study finds that green consumption practices function as a means to broadcast environmental consciousness. However, the eco-friendly practices also contribute to the notion of ‘doing something’, although these actions may in fact exacerbate environmental degradation. The study further reports that the mechanisms of the Nordic ‘Jante-mentality’ which entails social conformity result in a flexible and pragmatic type of environmentalism in order to conform to the ‘big middle’. This may work as a way to justify harmful behaviours, yet the ‘Jante-mentality’ may also be used as a tool to encourage environmentally friendly actions through the wish to be within the ‘big middle’.

**Keywords:** distinctive practices, green consumption, electric cars, Tesla, law of Jante, Denmark, Human Ecology

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# 1. Introduction

I grew up on a farm on the island of Mors in Denmark. We never went outside of Jutland on vacations during my childhood. In 2012, straight out of the gymnasium I was ready to take on the world. I started out flying on vacation to Dubai. Later that year I flew to Stockholm and finally I ended my gap years with a long trip to New Zealand and a two weeks' stopover in Thailand on the way home. Along the way, I became more environmentally concerned. I did not understand why my family would not take the time to separate their waste more carefully, why meat was the basis of all meals, or why they drove cars so often (I was conveniently neglecting that it would often be in order to pick me up). My father would sometimes remind me of my frequent travels and I was therefore gently urged to reflect. At first, I was quick to blame some of the comments on the so-called Law of Jante - after all, we were located in the very surroundings of Sandemose's novel from 1933 where this fictional law was introduced<sup>1</sup>.

Lately however, I have been wondering why it appeared to be so easy to tackle the sense of guilt I experienced when faced with my own hypocrisy. A quick internet search would provide me with information on plenty of small tips for actions I could undertake to adopt a greener lifestyle. Most tips were similar to actions I knew my grandmother had undertaken, for example to eat foods in season. Nevertheless, they were introduced to the readers as somewhat new ideas (e.g. Hviid 2019). Were they in fact just old wine in new bottles functioning as a means to help me feel like I "did something"?

It was not until I read an article by Danish sociologist Rasmus Willig (2017) that I started to reflect upon how eco-friendly behaviour is portrayed and certain actions are considered "more" sustainable. In the article, it was reported that people were suspicious of how he travelled to Oslo by train (instead of plane) when for many, efficiency was more important than reducing carbon footprints<sup>2</sup>. However, I could not help but wonder why he failed to address his own - even in a Danish context - privileged position where he had not only the time but also the financial means for this type of "slow traveling"?

In 2018, a Danish survey on attitudes and behaviour connected to climate change was carried out by the green think tank CONCITO. It indicated that 88% of respondents consider climate change a serious problem, whereas only 1% answered that it is not a serious problem at all (Minter 2018:11). Thus, the survey depicts a broad Danish consensus on climate change as a problem to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, Danish households have the fifth highest relative carbon footprint in EU - almost 21% higher than the average EU-household (Ivanova et al. 2017; Jex 2017).

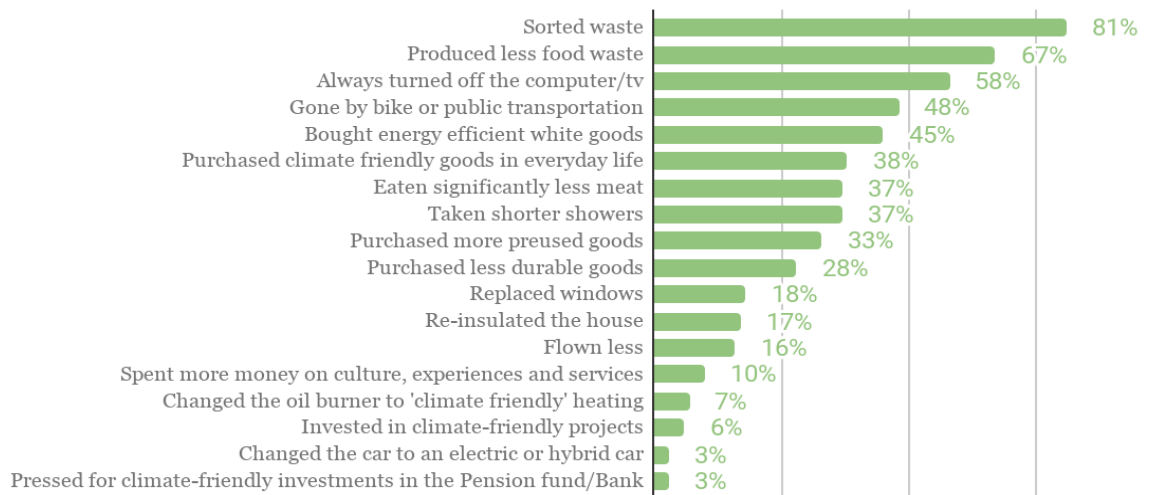
This ranking may seem to contradict the narrative of an environmentally friendly country in the lead in concerns of wind power, consuming organic foods, and cycling (Danish Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate 2018:4; FiBL 2017; Carstensen & Ebert 2012:38). In 2015, Denmark took part in the Paris Agreement working to keep the global temperature

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<sup>1</sup>An introduction to the Law of Jante can be found in section 2.3.

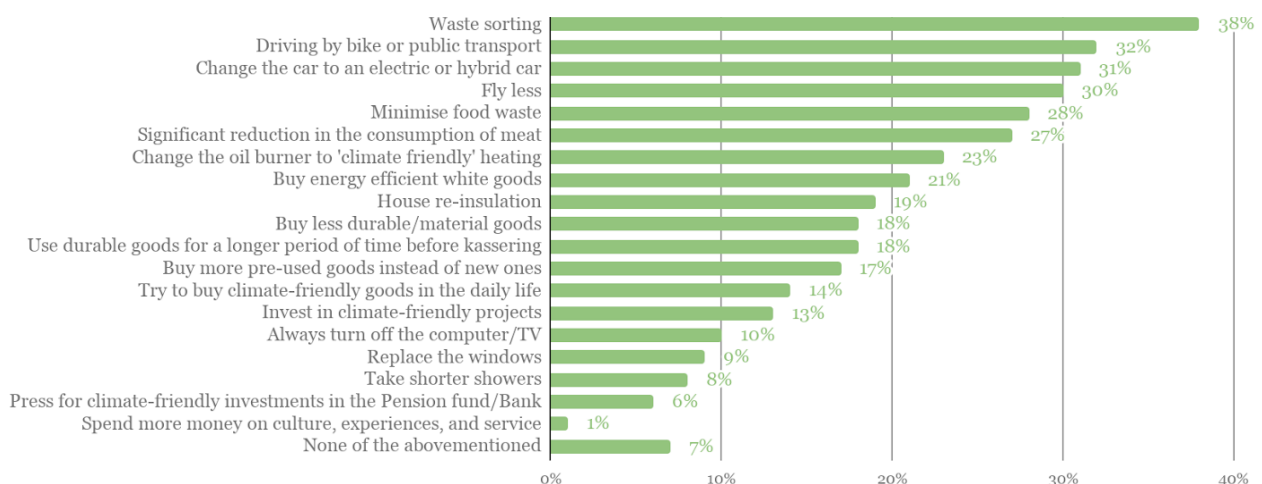
<sup>2</sup>n.b. the carbon footprint measure does not account for the complete environmental impact of human activity.

rise well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels (United Nations 2015). In agreement with the eco-friendly narrative, the CONCITO-survey finds that 47% of the respondents affirm that they had personally done something within the last three years with the main purpose of lowering their carbon footprint; this is almost a 25% increase since 2015 (Minter 2018:36). But which actions have the Danish people undertaken?



**Figure 1.** Actions undertaken by the respondents to reduce greenhouse gas emissions within the last 3 years (Minter 2018:37, my translation).

As presented in Figure 1, the five most common actions, undertaken by respondents to lower their personal emissions, are: sorting waste, producing less food waste, always turning off lights and electronic devices, preferring bike or public transportation to private cars, and buying energy efficient domestic appliances<sup>3</sup> (Minter 2018:37). More than 80% of the respondents who have changed the behaviour state they sort their waste - almost 20% increase since 2015 (Ibid.). Waste sorting is also believed to be the most effective action individuals can take to lower their personal carbon footprint, as illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Actions believed to be the most effective to reduce personal greenhouse gas emissions (Minter 2018:38, my translation)

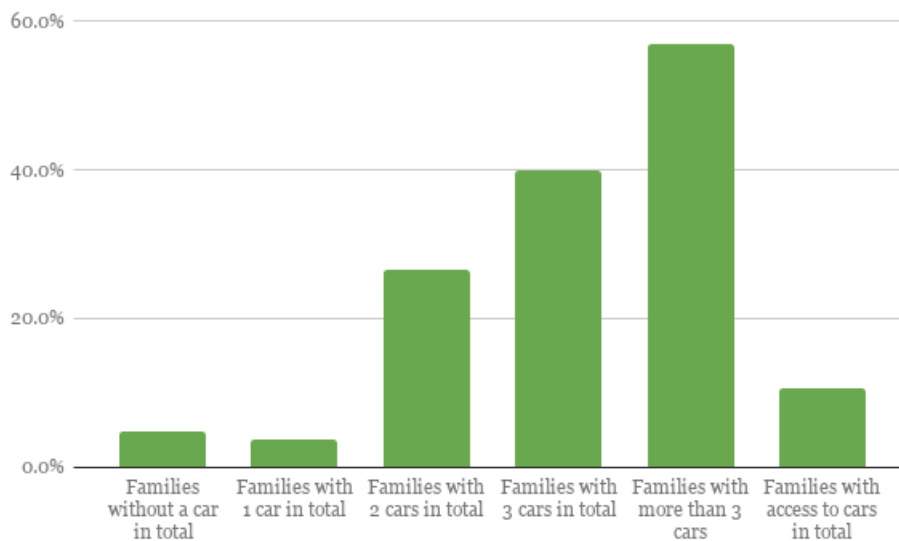
<sup>3</sup>The answers are based on respondents' attitudes and own perceptions of their actions which might differ from actual behavioural changes. In addition, gradual changes such as "produced *less* food waste" and "taken *shorter* showers" are subjective estimations.

Waste sorting is followed by biking/public transportation, switching to an electric/hybrid car, flying less, and minimising food waste in said order (Ibid.:38). Nevertheless, the number of departing passengers from Danish airports has increased by more than a third in the years 2007-2017<sup>4</sup> and the number of families having access to a car has increased - especially the amount that have access to more than one as depicted in Figure 3 (Danmarks Statistik 2018a; Danmarks Statistik 2018b). How does this connect to the green narrative?

### 1.1 Cars in Denmark

Tesla has, besides being perceived as a technological innovative, luxury car, been presented as the “green” alternative to the fossil fuelled cars (Brisman 2009:353; Taffel 2018:176). In this section, I will briefly justify why Tesla owners have been chosen as the focal point of my thesis.

Cars are not just cars. They are a means of transportation, they are symbols of freedom and autonomy (Huber 2013:xv). However, the fossil fuelled vehicles are also unequivocally connected to ecological deterioration (Nieuwenhuis 2011:2).



**Figure 3.** 2008-2018 Increase in Families’ Access to Cars in Percent (Data retrieved from Danmarks Statistik 2018b)

In 2018, more than 60% of Danish families<sup>5</sup> had access to a car<sup>6</sup>; an increase of more than 10% since 2008 as illustrated in Figure 3. Almost 17% of the families who had access to a car had access to more than one in 2018, an 28% increase since 2008 (Danmarks Statistik 2018b). However, access to cars is not evenly distributed throughout Danish society; 90% of

<sup>4</sup>An increase of approximately 4.4 million departing passengers from Danish airports (Danmarks Statistik 2018a). N.b. this is not necessarily only Danish passengers traveling from Danish airports. Similarly, Danish passengers do not necessarily travel from Danish airports.

<sup>5</sup>A family is considered one or more people living together and sharing a household.

<sup>6</sup>Access to a car is defined as owning or leasing a new or pre-used car, or having access to a company car in the everyday life (Danmarks Statistik 2017).

the families in the decile<sup>7</sup> characterised by largest disposable income had access to a car, whereas this only applied for 12% of families in the decile with lowest disposable income (Danmarks Statistik 2017).

As illustrated in figure 2, changing from a fossil fuelled car to an electric one is believed to be one of the three most effective actions individuals can undertake to lower their emissions of greenhouse gasses. Nevertheless, only 10.000 of the 2.6 million passenger cars in Denmark are electric vehicles today (Nielsen 2019; Werge 2018).

One of the most popular electric car manufacturing companies is the American Tesla, Inc.; in the period 2003-2016, more than 75% of the electric vehicles sold to Danish households was Tesla Model S<sup>8</sup> (Danmarks Statistik 2016:2). Along with other electric vehicles, Tesla displays “a green, environmentally responsible image” (Nieuwenhuis 2011:5). However, acquiring a Tesla is not for everyone. According to Tesla’s Danish homepage, the prices for a Model X<sup>9</sup> start from 749,000 DKK<sup>10</sup> and for the Model S the prices begin from 703,000 (Tesla 2019). The recently introduced Model 3 which has been described as “affordable” and a car for “the masses” starts at 376,000 DKK on the Danish market (e.g. Andersson 2019; Nielsen 2017; McCann 2019; Tesla 2019). In contrast, the Danish average disposable income was 229,900 DKK per capita<sup>11</sup> in 2017 (Danmarks Statistik 2018c).

For this reason, I have chosen to examine Tesla owners’ perceptions of eco-friendly behaviour within a Danish context. This choice has been made because driving a Tesla insinuates that one has the means to maintain a certain degree of freedom of choice in one’s consumption habits. Moreover, the Tesla brand, as previously stated, displays a green image and environmental concern. However, previous studies have shown that people with a high sense of environmental concern are not necessarily the ones with the most eco-friendly behaviour or lowest carbon footprint (e.g. Olofsson & Öhman 2006:780; Bradley 2006).

It has become “‘in’ to be sustainable” in Denmark, Danish sociologist Anders Petersen argues (2018, my translation); green actions are often associated with the individual’s consumption practices or lifestyle changes (e.g. Wynes & Nicholas 2017). A frequently used phrase seems to be “nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something” when taking the first step towards lowering one’s carbon emissions (Wenneberg 2018). The phrase is often followed by a set of tips to small changes and the notion that moderation is key to the good life. But how does the notion that you can be a bit greener by switching to a bamboo toothbrush or changing your mode of transportation affect Danish society? Even though, it

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<sup>7</sup>A decile is used to categorise the distribution of a given variable divided into ten groups. It represents 10% of a data set.

<sup>8</sup>This however may be related to the Danish tax policies. Until 2016, electric cars had been exempted from registration taxes. In January 2016 a 20% registration tax on electric cars was implemented in Denmark, with a scheduled annual increase until the full registration tax 2020 (Skatteministeriet 2015). The EV sales boomed (especially Tesla sales) in the last months of 2015 and in total 4,300 new EVs were registered (Danmarks Statistik 2016:1). In 2016, only 1,265 cars were registered which led to an extension of the 20% tax until 2019 (DR 2017). Yet another extension of the 20% registration tax followed along with a tax-free allowance increasing from 10,000 DKK to 40,000 DKK until 2020 (Skatteministeriet 2018).

<sup>9</sup>All prices are for the standard models without added features. VAT, document -, delivery and registration fees included. No registration fees on Tesla Model 3.

<sup>10</sup>100 € converts into ~750 DKK.

<sup>11</sup>Persons over 14 years, who have had an address in DK all year (Danmarks Statistik 2018c)



is considered “in” to be sustainable, some changes are considered greener than others although they do not necessarily result in a lowered environmental impact. Why is that?

## **1.2 Aim and Research Questions**

The aim of this thesis is to understand how green consumption and certain practices are perceived and legitimised as eco-friendly. To be more specific, I seek to illuminate this by providing examples from a Danish context. This is done to contribute to previous research on green consumption. The purpose of this research is to help uncover how green consumption influences the collective failure to act to the global environmental crisis we are faced with. In doing so, the research provides a contribution to the globally important issue of a continuous business-as-usual growth.

“Sustainable”, “green”, “eco-friendly”, and “environmental” are often considered interchangeable, but they mean different things (e.g. Edwards-Schachter 2016:209; Elliott 2013:295). In my thesis, I use the terms “green” and “eco-friendly” to indicate behaviour and products that are perceived as environmentally friendly (cf. Elliott 2013:295). It is beyond the scope of the thesis to conclude if in fact practices and products are sustainable based on their environmental impacts.

In order to achieve the aims stated above, I will address the following research questions:

- (1) In addition to owning a Tesla, which perceived green practices do Tesla owners undertake within a Danish setting?
- (2) How are these practices influenced by the social context the Tesla owners take part in?

## **1.3 Structure of Thesis**

In brief, I will lay out the structure of the thesis to provide the reader with overview of the research.

The subsequent chapter 2. Theoretical Framework provides a brief introduction to theoretical perspectives applied in earlier studies on conspicuous and green consumption. Furthermore, it lays out an introduction to the concepts applied throughout the thesis. This is followed by Chapter 3. Methods which covers the choices made to collect the interview data and conduct the analysis. These choices include the method of sampling and construction of the interview guide. Moreover, a brief presentation of the informants will be provided in the final part of the chapter. Chapter 4. Analysis is divided into four different sections. This is done to unfold the themes derived from the empirical material that are found useful to provide a thorough answer to the Research Questions. Subsequently, the findings will be discussed in Chapter 5. General Discussion which is followed by suggestions to future research, and finally, the findings will be summarised in Chapter 6. Conclusion.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will present a brief introduction to theoretical perspectives applied in previous studies that have focused on conspicuous and green consumption. Next, I will introduce the theoretical concepts and thoughts that are found relevant to answer my research questions. Bourdieu's (2010) work on 'distinctive practices' will provide the foundation to examine which practices are undertaken and perceived as green. To further understand how these green practices are influenced by the social context, I will introduce the concept of 'Jante law' and Norgaard's work on 'denial' (2011).

### 2.1 Theory in Previous Studies on Conspicuous and Green Consumption

The Norwegian-American economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen coined the term 'conspicuous consumption' to describe a deliberative display of luxury or expensive goods as a way to signal status (Veblen 1994 [1899]). Previous studies have adopted this concept in the attempt to identify ways in which green consumption functions as a means to signal one's social status; a "status seeking motive" for green consumption (e.g. Griskevicius et al. 2010; Agerup & Nilsson 2016; Johnson et al. 2018). Veblen's theory has been critiqued for focusing too much on a 'trickle down' effect of desirable goods through social classes and not capturing a decrease in the "ostentatious behavior [carried out] by the rich and high-earning middle class" (Trigg 2001:103).

Sexton and Sexton (2014) elaborated upon this and presented the term 'conspicuous conservation' which is characterised by the increased environmental concern that promotes "austerity rather than ostentation" (Ibid.:303). Examining two American states they find that people are willing to pay several thousand dollars extra for their cars to display environmental consciousness (Ibid.:316). This is in accordance with a study which claims that "status motives increased desirability of green products especially when such products cost more (...) relative to nongreen products" (Griskevicius et al. 2010:399). The authors of that study concluded that purchasing green products communicates altruism and, furthermore, signals that people can afford this altruistic act.

Trigg argues that Bourdieu's work on 'distinctive practices' "provides a contemporary development of the theory of conspicuous consumption" (Trigg 2001:104). Trigg finds that rather than presenting an alternative direction, Bourdieu clarifies that signals are often sent unconsciously because of preferences, which Veblen did not make clear (Ibid.:113).

Informed by Bourdieu, Brisman (2009:341) examines how environmental consciousness and behaviour is used as a tool to "separate and segregate, rather than include and incorporate individuals into more responsible living" in an American context. He argues that the interest in green consumption has increased. It has, however, become exclusive. Using vehicle choices and food choices as examples, he argues that the green consumption is used as a distinguishing practice to express that the individual cares. This 'environmental do-

goodism', he concludes, may result in alienation of "those without the economic means or cultural capital to purchase the latest, greatest, eco-friendly items or engage in the coolest green practices" (Ibid.:363).

Elliott (2013), who adopts a Bourdieusian theoretical framework, nuances the above mentioned "status motive", in the examination of social desirability of green consumption in an American context. Employing a more structural approach, she finds that "the social desirability of green consumption does classify" the consumer (Ibid.:312). However, this is not necessarily a matter of conspicuous and deliberative social differentiation, but rather because of tastes and preferences (Ibid.:295).

Similar to this, Carfagna et al. (2014) use qualitative case studies along with quantitative survey data of self-described "conscious consumers" in USA to explore a class dimension of "conscious consumption". They find that people with high cultural capital distinguish themselves through green practices, and the authors conclude that "such practices are hardly individualized solutions to collective problems. They are collective, albeit relatively elite strategies of consumption – what [they] have termed an 'eco-habitus'." (Ibid.:175). These findings are in line with the critique of the environmental movement as an elitist project (for more on this, see e.g. Morrison & Dunlap 1986; Dauvergne 2016).

Horton (2003), through his study of environmental activists located in England, identifies 'green distinctions' which are routinely performed through materialities in the sense that preferences, values, and practices are embodied in consumption of perceived 'sustainable' goods, e.g. organic, locally produced food, and conspicuous non-consumption of 'unsustainable' goods such cars.

Marshall (2016), partly informed by Horton, examines green distinctions in a Swedish setting with a focus on sustainable eating. By examining how people practice sustainability, she uncovers a 'lagom-ideal' among the participants - a Swedish term which refers to something being moderate or "just right". This is somewhat of a pragmatic approach to sustainability, where the participants distinguish themselves "from both a vast majority who do not yet understand or practise sustainability, and from 'fanatics' who they perceive to take sustainability in an unsound and extreme manner" (Ibid.:227).

## **2.2 Distinctive Practices**

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) took an interest in how society is made up of interrelated relationships between social agents, who are subjects to social structures (Rosenlund & Prieur 2006). In *La Distinction* (first published in 1979), he focuses on the variations in cultural consumption and attitudes in France, and finds that what are believed to be individual preferences (taste) and choices are closely connected to social background (Bourdieu 2010; Rosenlund & Prieur 2006:115).

In *La Distinction*, Bourdieu argues that people - or social agents - take up different positions in a multidimensional, non-geographical 'social space'. These positions are, however, continuously being negotiated in relation to positions held by other people (2010:xxix). According to Bourdieu, people who hold similar social positions make up constructed groups or classes on paper which only exist in relation to other groups and only because of agents'

similarities, distinctions, and composition of capitals (2010:100; Järvinen 2005:357; Rosenlund & Prieur 2006:134). Capital in the Bourdieusian sense is understood as accumulated resources which can be used to strengthen the agent's position in society (Bourdieu 2010:xxv; Järvinen 2005:357).

Bourdieu argues that underlying power structures legitimise certain preferences and behaviours, which thereby transcend the individual's will (2010:107). However, neither these structures, nor the positions agents employ are to be considered permanent. Rather, there is an ongoing competition for legitimising goods and practices that are used to uphold or advance positions (individually and collectively) in social space (Ibid.:94;153). In this competition, the dominant groups' practices and dispositions (taste) are considered legitimate and 'desirable' and are used as means to classify and differentiate the agents and groups in relation to each other. Furthermore, how a person *perceives* these practices and dispositions and how she/he *acts* in regards to them also distinguishes the person; as Bourdieu states: "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (Ibid.:xxix). The link that ties the position occupied in social space to the agent's practices and dispositions is the 'habitus'.

In a Bourdieusian understanding, habitus is a set of durable dispositions, be it beliefs, experiences, or social norms etc., which the agent has internalised (Ibid.:166; Prieur 2006:39). Individuals are therefore perceived as social agents who have internalised social structures, yet have the agency to act. In relation to that, the habitus functions as a framework which the social position is transformed to behaviour and preferences which characterises a certain lifestyle, without the agent having to actively reflect on the distinctions she/he makes (Bourdieu 2010:166; Järvinen 2005:358). Bourdieu states that habitus "consist[s] in the set of unifying principles which underlie such tastes and give them a particular social logic which derives from, while also organizing and articulating, the position which a particular group occupies in social space." (2010:xix). Habitus thereby structures practices and the perception of practices on the basis of the dispositions, which function as a set of possibilities and impossibilities for the agent to act and react from (Ibid.:166). This results in a relative homogeneity of dispositions among people - or agents - who occupy similar positions within social space (Ibid.:104-106). Although, it does not mean that the dispositions are identical nor determined a priori, since the individual's habitus is based on experiences, for example.

Through the habitus, agents with or without intention "distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" (Ibid.:xxix). These distinctions are based on the degree of distance from necessity. In that sense, groups differentiate themselves through the accumulation of resources, a higher volume of capitals indicates an ability to choose (Ibid.:244). Related to the informants in my thesis, they choose to drive Tesla, however, this choice requires the means (economical capital) to buy a Tesla in order for it to be a distinctive practice; "choosing" not to drive a Tesla is not a distinctive practice if a person does not have the financial means to make the actual choice to do so.

The dominant group's position is neutralised and legitimised through symbolic violence, a means to maintain a consensus of what is considered desirable behaviour and good taste. Symbolic violence is not recognised as violence, but instead, it is an embodied social

acceptance of certain groups' superiority which is taken for granted as natural (Järvinen 2005:356; Bourdieu 2010:469; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:140).

### 2.3 Conforming to the 'Big Middle'

The fictive law of Jante (JL) was introduced as a latent code of conduct by Dano-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose in the novel *A Fugitive Crosses his Tracks* from 1933. Sandemose describes the shared mentality and relations in the society of the fictionalised town Jante, based on the town Nykøbing located on the island Mors, Denmark (Sandemose 1933; Cappelen & Dahlberg 2018:419). The society has internalised a set of ten commandments or social norms, which have “profound influence on attitudes and behaviors” (Cappelen & Dahlberg 2018:421). These commandments are ubiquitous in Scandinavia and the ‘Jante-mentality’ can be understood as a tool used to encourage modesty and humility in the sense that one should not consider oneself ‘better’ than others or ‘show off’<sup>12</sup> (Ibid.:421; Gopal 2000:23). The ten commandments are as stated:

1. You shall not think you *are* anything special.
2. You shall not think you are as good as *us*.
3. You shall not think you are smarter than *us*.
4. You shall not imagine that you are better than *us*.
5. You shall not think you know more than *us*.
6. You shall not think you are more important than *us*.
7. You shall not think *you* are good at anything.
8. You shall not laugh at *us*.
9. You shall not think that anyone cares about *you*.
10. You shall not think you can teach *us* anything.

(Sandemose 1962 [1933]:10, my translation, emphasis in original)

The law functions as a set of social norms to nurse ‘justice’ and a uniform ‘equality’ in society (Gopal 2000:29). The ‘Jante-mentality’ is continuously reproduced by individuals, who are socialised to not only be subjects to the commandments through internalised norms that guide their own behaviour through informal social sanctions. The internalised norms of the JL also guide their attitudes towards the behaviour of others. The JL thereby becomes of a tool of informal social control (for more on informal social control, see e.g. Emerson 2006).

Sandemose originally described the JL as a destructive mechanism that frowns upon “individuality and success” (Cappelen & Dahlberg 2018:421). However, Cappelen and Dahlberg argue that the JL can also be interpreted as a positive tool that “maintains and encourages harmony, social stability, and uniformity” (Ibid.).

The JL feeds into the egalitarian worldview, where social relations are characterised by their non-hierarchical form and everyone belonging to the ‘big middle’ (Gopal 2000:29; Weijo 2019:37). However, social barriers between individuals and different groups “do not

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<sup>12</sup> However, the phenomenon is not to be considered unique to Scandinavia. Similar folk concepts include the English “tall poppy syndrome” and “the nail that stands out gets hammered down” in Japan (Cappelen & Dahlberg 2018:435).

disappear, they become more subtle and hidden by the use of distinctions and avoidances”, according to Gopal (2000:30, my translation). This leads to somewhat of a “muted display of consumption” (Weijo 2019:34), where distinctive practices are performed, without bringing too much attention to them.

The ‘Jante-mentality’ contains an aversion towards people who ‘stand out’ from conformity, and in small communities where this is the case, such as in Denmark, “every difference seem to be exaggerated” (Gopal 2000:41, my translation). People are noticed, when they do not comply with the social norms, and are penalised through the public’s resentment, criticism or envy. However, the JL works in both directions; in the name of egalitarianism the mechanism of the JL also pulls up the people who are not “keeping up with common standards of taste” (Weijo 2019:36). It pulls people towards the rather conform middle. As Weijo suggests an addendum to the JL could be: “You shall not imagine that you are better than us, but you shall not make us feel that we are better than you, either” (Ibid.).

## **2.4 Tools to Protect Oneself**

In 2000-2001, American sociologist, Kari Marie Norgaard (2011) conducted an empirical study of the fictionalised, Norwegian town ‘Bygdaby’. She found that the failure to respond to climate change is not based on a lack of understanding nor on disbelief. Instead, the failure to integrate knowledge of climate change to the everyday life is characterised by a type of socially organised denial (Ibid.:141); a type of ‘implicatory denial’, originally introduced by British sociologist Stanley Cohen, which is not understood as denial based on a lack of knowledge, it is “doing the ‘right’ thing with the knowledge” (Cohen 2001:9). This type of denial therefore addresses this disconnect between knowledge and everyday actions, and create somewhat of a ‘double reality’, where on the one hand people are aware of the problem and on the other try not to think about it “to protect themselves a bit” (Norgaard 2011:5). This ‘double reality’ can also be termed as ‘cognitive dissonance’ (e.g. Lindén 1994:32). Cognitive dissonance is understood as the sense of discomfort that is experienced when faced with inconsistencies or imbalances between feelings, knowledge and actions (Ibid.:32-33). The uncomfortable situation will result in the person trying to re-establish a feeling of consistency (Ibid.).

Through a socially organised ‘cultural tool kit’ – a variety of methods and tactics – individuals can collectively normalise and create distance from unpleasant information, “maintain order and security” and “construct a sense of innocence in the face of the disturbing emotions associated with climate change” (Norgaard 2011:11-12).

Of particular interest to this thesis is one of the tools to maintain order is to find “something you can do” to cope with the fear of powerlessness and hopelessness by doing “a little” (Ibid.:128). Another strategy, a tool to create a sense of innocence, is an emphasis on the insignificance of a small nation in relation to the rest of the world (Ibid.:169); Norgaard argues that this tactic works to reduce responsibility for the nation’s environmental impact by creating a narrative of being a drop in the ocean which also further settles the feelings of guilt connected to the one’s privileged position in relations to the issue of global inequality

and environmental problems (Ibid.:86). The privileged position is in sharp contrast to the egalitarian worldview presented in the section above.

However, the lifestyle of the privileged is strongly connected to social norms and the perceptions of needs, as Norgaard states:

People in Bygdaby may feel that they can't use less fossil fuel because they "need" to be able to drive their kids to soccer practice or to take an annual trip to Greece, but these kinds of needs are very much a product of social context (Ibid.:75)

Thus, in the attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the individuals do not only face difficulties due to the perception of "needs", but also through the social pressure to conform to norms and standards of the community (Ibid.). As a result, the notion of denial, presented by Norgaard, works as a means for "[p]rivileged people [to] reproduce existing power relations" (Ibid.:218). The normalisation of the strategies of denial to tackle a 'double reality' or cognitive dissonance in combination with the privileged positions induces a sense of "invisibility" of environmental problems (Ibid.:219-220).

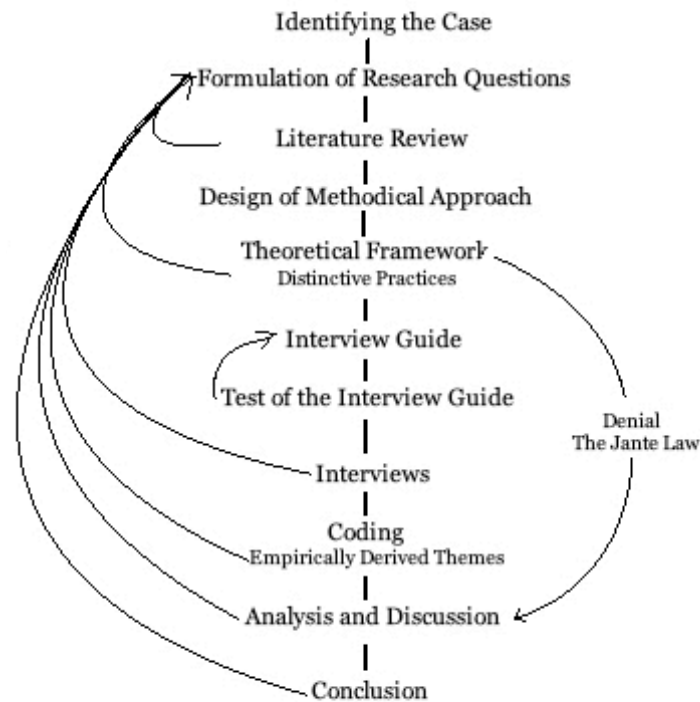
## 3. Methods

This chapter lays out the choices made in order to collect and interpret the empirical material. This section is meant to increase the transparency of my approach. Initially, I present my epistemological perspective and the abductive approach employed in the thesis. Afterwards, the method employed to conduct the interviews as well as the methods used to analyse the findings are described. Subsequently, I briefly describe my sampling method and present the informants in order to strengthen the reliability of the thesis (cf. Riis 2012:352). In addition to this, reflections on the consequences of and limitations to the choices made will be briefly discussed.

### 3.1 Interaction between Theoretical Framework and Data

Throughout the thesis work, I employ an abductive approach to connect my data to the theoretical framework, as it allows me to continuously readjust the theoretical framework used to explain the phenomena at play in my thesis (cf. Layder 1998:19). The Bourdieusian concept of distinctions was applied prior to the data collection to inform the interview guide; the interviews were therefore not conducted in an atheoretical vacuum (cf. Bryman 2012:401). However, a ready set theoretical framework was not applied which led me to identify themes from the data and thereby make the process more dynamic. The abductive approach further provided me with the opportunity to include additional theoretical concepts onto themes generated through the empirical material. The included theoretical concepts could thereby help to provide the most suitable explanation for my findings to strengthen the internal validity (cf. Riis 2012:359). A visual presentation of the thesis design

is given in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Thesis Design Process

### 3.2 Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological position I take throughout the thesis derives from the structuralist tradition combined with a more constructivist approach and is inspired by Bourdieu’s epistemological perspective (cf. Prieur & Sestoft 2006:225). Structuralism in this sense is about uncovering underlying structures that regularise certain green practises in the case of my thesis. On the other hand, constructivists understand “reality” or at least parts of it as constructed and aim to understand how phenomena that appear self-evident are socially created (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018:29). In combination, structures - e.g. cultural norm systems and habits - are accepted as natural and/or taken for granted, even though they could be different (Esmark & Laustsen 2015:291).

In line with Bourdieu’s thinking, I recognise that the structures that shape society and social relations are not objectively determined but can be transformed or preserved through constructions made by social agents (cf. Bourdieu 1989:15). However, these subjective constructions are not a product of ‘free will’ as the objective structures are embodied in the social agents (Ritzer & Stepnisky 2014:517). Therefore, focus in this thesis is on the relations between objective structures and subjective constructions of green practises and how the perceptions of these practices are an expression of power relations (cf. Esmark & Laustsen 2015:289).



### **3.3 Method for Data Collection**

For my data collection, I made use of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted through phone or video calls due to practical reasons (the consequences of this choice will be discussed in section 3.3.3– Evaluation of the Interviews and Limitations). I chose to conduct interviews as the research questions called for a deeper understanding of the Tesla owners' perceptions of green practices rather than a broad, statistical overview (cf. Riis 2012:346). The interviews were scheduled so they were convenient for the informants to ensure that they had the time and were motivated (cf. Drabble et al. 2016:120).

In the beginning of the interviews, I introduced myself and briefed the informants on my topic by stating that I wanted to study how Tesla owners understand “green behaviour” and which, if any, actions they take to be greener. I chose to do so in order to avoid influencing the informants' perceptions of their own practices (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:149; Bryman 2012:474). In addition to the brief introduction, I gained consent to record the informants after notifying them, that the recordings would only be used for my thesis, and the participants would be anonymised (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:91).

#### **3.3.1 Sampling**

As presented in section 1.1 - Cars in Denmark, I chose to search for informants who own a Tesla. The selection of interviewees was based on convenience sampling and some were recruited using the so-called snowball method (cf. Bryman 2012:201-203). Through my network, I was guided in the direction of two informants, who led me to two other informants. Furthermore, one of my informants advised me to look for more interviewees in the Facebook-group ‘Tesla Owners Club Denmark’. Therefore, a post was created, where I searched for female interviewees to potentially nuance my findings; three women responded to my post, and the post was deleted afterwards. In total, I conducted seven interviews; three women and four men between the ages 36 and 54 were interviewed. The length of interviews varied between 40 minutes and 2,5 hours with most being around an hour long. All interviews were carried out in Danish. The informants will be presented in section 3.5 - Presentation of Informants.

#### **3.3.2 Interview Guide and the Operationalisation of Distinctive Practices**

Before carrying out the interviews, I created an interview guide to maintain focus throughout the interviews. The guide can be found in Appendix A - Interview Guide. When forming the interview guide, I was inspired by Blumer's notion of ‘sensitising concepts’ (1954). According to him, theoretical concepts are perceived as elastic and gives “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instance” (Ibid.:7). As a means to lay the foundation for the analysis, I operationalised the Bourdieusian concepts presented in the section 2.2. Although, I standardised the interview guide to strengthen the level of consistency in the themes, the questions were open ended and left room for the interviewees to give their interpretations and point to other issues they found relevant (cf. Bryman

2012:471). This resulted in flexible interviews with follow up questions that differed from interview to interview.

### **3.3.3 Evaluation of the Interviews and Limitations**

As a part of the preparation of interviews, I made a variety of choices in order to provide an informed answer to my research questions. Consequences of and limitations to these choices will be discussed in this section.

Ideally, I should have continued to conduct interviews until I reached a saturation point where I would no longer find new opinions and perceptions, however due to the time frame of my thesis, I had to take a pragmatic approach to collect enough data for an in-depth interpretation to answer the research questions. The sample method may have led to a biased or unrepresentative sample of people who were already interested in the topic of Teslas and “sustainability”. However, the aim of the study has not been to generalise to a population or provide a “real” explanation for green consumption and practices in an objective sense (cf. Riis 2012:349). Instead, it has been to uncover different perspectives on the topic to be able to generalise to a theory or provide ‘analytical generalisation’ (cf. Bryman 2012:406; Yin 1994:31).

As stated in a previous section, the interviews were conducted remotely. I would have preferred to be in the same location as the interviewees, but for practical reasons I prioritised conducting interviews over the phone rather than cancelling because I could not meet them in person. However, since the focus of the thesis is not connected to specific geographical locations in Denmark, it allowed me to conduct interviews over the phone with people located in different areas of the country.

I have previously worked as a telephone interviewer, I was therefore trying to minimise a potentially stressful situation and make the setting informal through tools I had learned in my former job. For example, one interviewee was looking after his young children during the interview, so I made sure to state that if he had to go for a minute or cut the interview short that would be understandable. Related to that, I aimed to establish a calm and positive attitude if sudden things required the interviewees attention during the interview.

Although the phone interviews may provide an increased sense of anonymity, they also removed the possibility of noticing non-verbal communication (cf. Drabble et al. 2016:121). I tried to establish trust by presenting myself, state explicitly that there was no ‘wrong’ answer to my questions, and that I was interested in hearing about their perceptions and everyday life, rather than the “ought to do”-behaviour. I would sporadically engage in small side conversations to establish a sense of trust, to avoid me merely being “a voice asking them questions” (cf. Ibid.:126). Finally, I would be more “vocalised” than I normally would in an interview situation making extra comments to indicate I was actively listening and make sure that I understood the meaning of the interviewees statements (cf. Ibid.:126-127).

At times, the interviewees became very technical in their statements about the Tesla cars, and I would have to guide them back to the focus on green behaviour. It was, however, also important to keep the questions open in order to capture their thoughts and perceptions of “what can be done” rather than guiding them towards specific perceptions - “individuals’ personal responsibility”, for instance.

### **3.4 Methods for the Analysis**

The interviews were recorded and I took notes during the interviews to be able to navigate in the timeline of them. I did not fully transcribe all interviews word for word, instead I chose to leave out sections that I found irrelevant - small talk and side notes unrelated to the topic for example. I further left out filler words due to the focus on the *meaning* of the interviewees statements rather than the linguistics (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:223). Afterwards, I re-played the recordings to ensure that I had not misheard the statements (cf. Bryman 2012:486). Citations were translated and then discussed with Danish speaking peers to strengthen the validity of the translation (cf. Riis 2012:362).

The analysis was carried out horizontally across the seven interviewees, and it was guided by reoccurring themes found in the interviews. As seen in section 3.3.2, my interview guide was informed by Bourdieu’s concept of ‘distinctive practices’, which laid the foundation for a single theme *a priori*. The other themes emerged through the coding process of the material process. This abductive process was taken in order to minimise the risk of missing out on important details due to ‘theoretical blindness’. This is based on the understanding that what initially may seem insignificant or trivial might reveal insights from the interviewees essential to understand the phenomenon (cf. Bryman 2012:401).

Eventually, the theoretical framework was applied to the themes that came from the empirical material. As presented in the section 3.1 – Interaction between Theoretical Framework and Data the theoretical framework was readjusted to capture the findings. The application of these theories strengthened the possibility of analytic generalisation (Yin 1994:31).

### **3.5 Presentation of Informants**

Partly because of the sampling method, some of the interviewees were familiar with each other and referred to each other by name in the interviews. However, all the informants have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity in the broad community (cf. Kvale & Brinkmann 2009:91). In this section, the interviewees will briefly be presented to help the reader distinguish them from each other and to provide further transparency (cf. Bryman 2012:406; Riis 2012:348).

#### Caroline, 47.

Caroline lives on the countryside outside Odense, Funen with her spouse; they have two young adult children. She is a trained chef, working in a school kitchen and a bowling centre. Her husband works as a social and health service assistant. They have been driving a Tesla since 2015/2016, and drive 35,000 kilometres annually. They have installed a small wind-mill and changed to geothermal heating in 2012; the change led to an increased interest in

other green changes they could undertake. In the end of 2012, they had the chance to test an electric car, which led them to buying their first electric car, when they inherited an amount of money. Caroline explains, that the family has cut down its consumption of red meat significantly, and they primarily focus on “small, green steps” in the everyday household: repairing goods, turning down the heat, fully loading the washing machine, etc.

Christian, 48.

He lives south of Køge, Zealand with his family. Christian used to be an IT-developer, but stopped two years ago to take care of the family, renovate their house, and additionally build a bed and breakfast with conference rooms. Some 20 years ago, he started looking into electric vehicles and has been driving EVs the last eight years. He used to drive 50,000 kilometres a year, but has been driving significantly less the last couple of years. Currently, he drives 25,000 kilometres per year on average. The family has installed solar panels and through the renovation of the house they are implementing an off grid energy system. Furthermore, they plan to buy the neighbouring field to establish a solar panel park for private energy consumption. Christian has been a vegetarian for 30 years and stresses the importance of political focus on making it favourable for people to make the green choice.

Hanna, 54.

Hanna lives with her spouse in Odense, Funen, but is moving to Copenhagen soon. Their children have moved out. She is a trained pharmacist, but is now working as an IT-consultant. They bought a Tesla in the beginning of 2015, and drive 30,000 kilometres a year. They have planned to leave the Tesla on Funen where they have an apartment, and instead go by bike and public transportation in Copenhagen. Hanna states that this choice has been made partly due to parking facilities, but also because it is the greener choice. They had installed solar panels on the house they have sold. Hanna has made green adjustments to her everyday life, she buys organic food and is taking small, green steps. At the same time, she calls for a political change and expresses great frustration in regards to the lack of liberal parties with an ambitious green agenda in Denmark.

Ida, 36.

Ida lives with her spouse and small children in a smaller town in the central part of Jutland. They bought their Tesla four years ago, when they lived in Germany. They drive just below 30,000 kilometres a year in the Tesla. However, they are planning to sell the EV, as it is faster to go by train to her job and therefore only have the need for one car. They therefore want to sell the Tesla and keep the fossil fuelled car, as it is more profitable to sell the Tesla. They used to have solar panels on the house they lived in before they moved to Germany. Ida especially expresses concern of sustainability in their everyday lives in regards to buying second-hand clothes for the children and passing the children's clothes on.

### Nick, 50.

Nick lives in Vejle, Jutland with his wife and two children. He is a trained designer who runs an advertisement and business development agency. He drives 25,000 kilometres a year. In addition to that, the family recently purchased the new model 3. They have installed solar panels and are planning to change their heating system. Nick stresses the focus on green alternatives in their daily life and their prioritisation of consuming organic food. He, furthermore, calls for an increased focus of the sum of actions on a global, national, organisational, and individual level.

### Simon, 50.

Simon lives with his family of eight in a village in Thy, Jutland. He has been driving electric cars since 1991, and a Tesla for the last 3 years. Simon drives an annual 100,000 kilometres, as his job is located far away. Originally, he is a trained automotive technician. He has previously been working as an engineer at the Nordic Folkecenter for Renewable Energy and running the department of wave energy in Danish Energy Agency. Now he is teaching “Cleantech” in a vocational school. The family has installed a dyke-pond system and an off grid-system in their old house; they currently are planning to build a passive house<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, Simon is managing a project, where he and a partner are investing in green innovative projects. He also invests in projects outside Denmark. Simon especially stresses the importance of politicians taking the climate crisis seriously.

### Thomas, 49.

He lives in Thisted, Jutland with his three children. Thomas is working as an IT consultant. He has been driving a Tesla since late 2015, and drives 35,000 kilometres a year. Thomas emphasises the importance of a political change to take the climate issue seriously. He has changed heat-exchangers in his house and, furthermore, focusses on food waste reduction. Moreover, Thomas states that he has reduced flying drastically; he used to fly to USA 2-4 times a year for business meetings, now he has not gone there for the last four years. Instead, they conduct meetings through video calls.

## **4. Analysis**

The following chapter presents the analysis. The analysis is based on recurring themes found in the seven interviews and has been divided into four sections. The first section establishes who, according to the informants, drives a Tesla. The section that follows unfolds the perceived green practices and how these are used as social signifiers. The third part of the analysis introduces the struggle to tackle a ‘double reality’ when wanting to be green in a context where social norms are inevitably tied to perceived “needs”. Finally, the mechanisms of the Law of Jante are applied in order to understand the pressure for not being “too” green.

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<sup>13</sup>A passive house reduces the ecological footprint through energy efficiency; it is among other things done through proper insulation and not relying on traditional heating sources.

I do not claim that the practices and activities presented here are “everything” the interviewees do or engage in to be green, but these are the actions the informants bring forward themselves.

#### 4.1 Who are the People in the Teslas?

“It’s not cheapskates [who drive a Tesla], haha! They have sacrificed quite a bit of money, but they’re not all millionaires”, Simon explains when asked which type of people drive a Tesla<sup>14</sup>. The majority of interviewees agree that buying a Tesla requires the financial resources to do so – thus, it can be understood as a relatively ‘rare good’. However, the interviewees also seem to agree that there has been a change in the typical Tesla buyer throughout the last couple of years. Thomas states, that when he started driving a Tesla, “one had to be a bit of a nerd (...) or have some crazy idea that one could make a difference”. Now, the interviewees agree, it is “Mr. & Mrs. Denmark” – the average Danish family – who are interested in buying Teslas – especially with the introduction of the new more “affordable” Tesla Model 3. This indicates a shift from Tesla owners who were “pioneers (...) [that] paid a high price for being in front”, as Ida states, to the new “type” of Tesla owner that belongs to the somewhat ‘big middle’ (cf. Weijo 2019:34). It, furthermore, illustrates a perception of the average Danish family that is considered to be in a position that allows them to *choose* to buy a Tesla.

In line with that, one of my interviewees stated: “I will dare to say that today the majority [in Denmark] ought to be able to choose to drive, for instance, an electric car”. Moreover, most of the informants directly state that it is a question of priorities. Yet Caroline acknowledges that the Tesla is expensive. She states: “[buying a Tesla] is not something you just do. Our house cost 550,000 Danish crowns and that’s what we’re *living* in”. She further elaborates on this by arguing that her family has a low-middle income, yet they have prioritised a Tesla and therefore have given up on other things such as new clothes and going to the hairdresser.

This perception that driving electric vehicles – and more specifically a Tesla – is a matter of priorities contributes to an understanding that *not* driving “sustainably” is a choice. A general opinion that acquiring an electric car is a matter of priorities is not only accepted, but driving ‘sustainably’ is also legitimised as the ‘proper’ choice by the dominant agents. The ‘luxurious’ Tesla functions as a social signifier (cf. Bourdieu 2010:246). Ida explains, “Tesla is or has been – no, is – people who choose to spend more on their cars. There was a period where they were ‘affordable’, but it is a luxury car”. Driving a Tesla is, thus, a distinctive practice characterised by its distance from necessity (cf. Ibid.:244). At the same time, the Tesla brand’s exclusive focus on electric cars unambiguously serves as a symbol of environmental consciousness, much like what the Toyota Prius earlier has been a symbol of (cf. Maynard 2007; Sexton & Sexton 2014). However, as stated in section 1.1 - Cars in Denmark, only 12% of Danish families in the lowest decile even has access to a car in the first place. In a Bourdieusian sense, the taken-for-granted consensus of desirable behaviour and

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<sup>14</sup> In the thesis “driving a Tesla” is equal to “owning a Tesla”. I am aware that it is possible to lease, this is however not accounted for as the informants have been selected on the basis of *ownership*.

“good” taste then functions as a latent type of domination of people who do not have the means to act accordingly. This structural domination is unveiled in the discourse of priorities; although most interviewees express awareness of their own privileged position in statements like: “I could easily say ‘we should just be driving electric cars’ but it’s just not everyone who can do that”, it also implicitly demonstrates the continuous positioning within social space and ends up reproducing the relational distance from people who do not drive a Tesla.

The continuous positioning is also found, when the interviewees agree that the recently introduced so-called affordable Model 3 might democratise the green car market in Denmark, as previously suggested. Simon states that it might be the model that makes average families change to an electric vehicle, but at the same time he distinguishes the new model from the previous ones – “you get what you pay for (...) it’s not the same car”, he explains. The growing demand for and acquisition of the Model 3 does however not diminish the distinctive, distinguishing value tied to Tesla; although, being of the same brand, it is a cheaper model and to some degree functions as a mock version which other Tesla owners can position themselves in relation to. It thereby ultimately ends up re-legitimising the dominant distinctive taste (cf. Bourdieu 2010:366). Meanwhile, the new affordable model “creates the same [visual] effect” in broad Danish society as if it had been a more expensive model (cf. Ibid.:323). Following the previous argument, it maintains its legitimacy, which positions “environmentally conscious” people who drive a Tesla in relation to others.

“It’s not a coincidence that one buys a Tesla”, one of the interviewees states and continues, “it’s people who are conscious and bold” who buy it. The informants agree that Tesla owners do not necessarily have a “pure green agenda”. Instead, the interviewees are convinced that the majority of Tesla drivers also are both motivated by the prospect of profitability and fascinated by the gadget and technological aspect of the car. Ida enthusiastically says that “it gets updated overnight, and you can wake up to a completely new car one day and be like ‘wow, now it does this thing too’, haha”. Nick adds that he does not believe that “foot shaped”<sup>15</sup> people with a solely green agenda are a noticeably big group among Tesla owners, as they do not necessarily possess the means to buy a Tesla. However, the informants point to Tesla drivers being more environmentally conscious than the average Dane – it is people who want to “walk the talk”. But how do the informants walk the talk?

## 4.2 A Carrot is a Carrot?

Solar panels, windmills, and heating systems are among the first things mentioned, when the interviewees are asked which other eco-friendly action(s), they have undertaken. Five have installed solar panels on their current or previous houses. Four state that they have changed their heating systems or are planning to change it, two participants have installed private windmills, and one of the informants is planning to build a passive house. What the

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<sup>15</sup>Danish: Fodformet. A Danish idiom that does not translate. “Foot shaped” refers back to the 60s-70s’ trend of comfortable, healthy somewhat orthopaedic “foot shaped” shoes particularly trendy among the dogmatic leftist and relatively well educated groups, who were holders of the “politically correct” values and opinions. A somewhat similar and more “modern” English idiom is “Granola”.

actions all have in common is that they are technological means to be “greener” - and that they require a certain amount of financial resources to install<sup>16</sup>. Some of the interviewees do however state that they conduct some parts of the installations themselves and thereby save some money.

These actions reveal the same mechanisms at play as in the case of driving a Tesla; the solar panels and windmills are easily identifiable and visible markers of eco-friendly behaviour; outsiders can recognise these objects at a distance (cf. Griskevicius et al. 2010:399). Moreover, these actions might signalise an eco-modernist optimism and belief in technological solutions to environmental struggles in the sense that economic growth can be decoupled from nature (Dauvergne 2016:143). This may very well be the same technologically innovative aspect that, according to the interviewees, attract many Tesla owners in the first place.

The actions thereby function as tools to adapt to a greener everyday life without giving up on a relatively convenient lifestyle (cf. Ibid.:142). These installations efficiently transform the energy consumption, so that it derives from renewable sources. However, this transition has also resulted in some of the interviewees increasing their energy use. As Christian states: “we use more electricity than before, we adjust our energy consumption to when there’s sun”. He furthermore argues that they would rather add more solar panels than reduce their use of electricity; they are currently considering the possibilities of putting up a solar panel park in the neighbouring field. Similar to this, *all* my informants also drive significantly more than the Danish average of 17,000 kilometres a year<sup>17</sup> (cf. Alm in Hindse 2018). Due to his job, Simon is by far the one who drives the most reaching an annual 100,000 kilometres. In comparison the others have reported that drive 30,000 kilometres on average.

Other green actions that the interviewees list are buying organic food, reducing food waste, and lowering the consumption of (red) meat, and eating flexitarian or vegetarian. Some of the interviewees also state, that they buy sustainably produced clothes or pass on used clothes to relatives or second-hand shops. These initiatives are unlike the above mentioned technological actions brought up at very different times during the interviews. Some of the interviewees instantly state that they predominantly buy organic food, whereas others wait until halfway through the interview before they reveal that they have lowered their meat consumption significantly or have been vegetarian for 30 years. These everyday actions are not as cost intensive as the actions presented first *per se*. Moreover, they are not necessarily as ‘visible’ as the installation of solar panels or the Tesla, and might not be considered worth mentioning as responses to the environmental crisis<sup>18</sup>; the goods or practices are not signifiers of green behaviour in themselves. Instead, these practices require the persons to state that they have gone green, whereas the installation of solar panels or driving a Tesla speaks for itself. Nevertheless, for some of the interviewees these everyday actions are closely tied to the identities or presentation of self.

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<sup>16</sup> I do recognise that prices for e.g. solar panels have decreased and regulations have previously been introduced (2012-2013) to make solar panels “attractive” in DK (cf. Jensen 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Numbers originates from an annual Danish survey on habits of transportation carried out by Denmark’s Technical University.

<sup>18</sup> The actions may not be perceived as “effective” actions



“A carrot is a carrot. But an organic carrot is a carrot broadcasting an opinion and that’s the difference”, Nick states. The actions they undertake are therefore not only done as a result of the notion of being eco-friendly; but also in order to position themselves in their social context, to display values and everyday priorities. The actions are distinctive practices internalised in the person through her/his habitus, yet the actions are also continuously reshaping the habitus (cf. Bourdieu 2010:166). This use of eco-friendly practices to position oneself can also be illustrated when Christian explains, how he has experienced that second-hand stores in general have become more popular and can now be found in the most prominent locations in Danish towns.

The interviewees appear to disagree on who *is* and *can* be eco-friendly. Nick continues the discourse presented in the previous section. He states: “it’s a question of priorities. As a student with a very low income you can also make a lot of climate friendly choices. No doubt about that.” Hereby, he emphasises that environmental consciousness and eco-friendly actions are not solely connected to financial resources – ‘economical capital’. Ida agrees that students and young people can “maybe make more sustainable decisions, despite their economical position”. The consciousness is, however, not shared to the same extent by all ‘groups’ in Denmark. Nick argues:

Today there are many in resourceful positions who make the green choice (...) The climate friendly choice is not found in the lowest social class. If you have to think in these terms, then it might be true that it defines a more ‘well padded’, or status or more enlightened segment.

This is supported by Thomas, who states: “it’s easier to do something if you already have some resources. Perhaps it’s also us who have made the biggest mess”. Yet another interviewee explains: “if you don’t have a long education or aren’t able to comprehend matters, then you do not really stand a chance”. On the contrary, Simon points out: “it is relatively easy [to be eco-friendly], it’s just about not spending money and installing a solar panel. I mean, what’s not to like? Haha”. What it requires to be considered “eco-friendly” thereby becomes somewhat more achievable. This may seem to contradict that the eco-friendly behaviour and attitudes are used as distinctive practices to position oneself in relation to people who do not appear to be green. Instead, it may function as an attempt to bring eco-friendly behaviour down to earth and make the notion of who is and can be green less divided. Furthermore, it adds to the notion of green actions as easy to undertake without missing out on what is considered “necessary” (cf. Norgaard 2011:75).

The actions presented above can be perceived as individualised actions to tackle one’s own guilt through consumption. Although one “can communicate *a lot* by the choice one makes”, as Nick puts it, many of the informants call for direct political action to accelerate the green transition. They agree that politicians have failed to do anything but present idle talk.

Suggestions made by the interviewees included adding taxes on flights, make EVs more attractive for the average consumer, and introduce a compulsory carbon label for companies to be transparent about the impact of their products. Thereby, it will be made easier

for the consumer to see if products marketed as “green” are in fact environmentally friendly. However, these suggestions may result in a reproduction of the individualised responsibility for acting green, and added taxes on flights may even function as a means to create a sense of innocence by paying indulgence to wash away one’s guilt, which is touched upon in the next section. Simon adds that as a part of fuelling the green transition “there’s nothing wrong in deciding ‘we are not allowed to do this’, because it will force us to find alternative [renewable] solutions” to accommodate needs.

### 4.3 “I Think Most People *Want to do Something*”

Most of the interviewees agree that the vast majority of Danish people want to be eco-friendly. Nick has noticed that sustainability is a “growing trend” which is increasingly prioritised by his clients at the advertisement agency. The informants also argue that many of the eco-friendly actions that they undertake are relatively small and simple changes without “missing out on anything in any way”, as one of the informants puts it. Thomas says that the practices undertaken are primarily to “change these little things you can do without ‘suffering’ in any way... We are rather comfortable, and we would prefer that we don’t have to ‘suffer’ in any way, haha”. This is in line with the argument Dauvergne (2016:142) makes, when he presents a perception of easy changes undertaken by the Western middle class without having to ‘sacrifice’ anything of note, and can be considered a ‘tool of order’ to tackle discomfort by focussing on what one “can do” (cf. Norgaard 2011:128).

However, these changes are not always undertaken despite a wish to do so. Christian argues: “I believe, that the vast majority want to be environmentally friendly, but there are other things in their lives that are more important”. This notion is elaborated upon, when Caroline explains:

Maybe I’m living in the wrong place or maybe I’m being pessimistic but I think the average Dane does the same as they do with charity. They write something on Facebook like ‘we should really help Sudan’ and then they have done ‘something’ in their opinion. (...) I think most people *want* to do something. However, it’s like wanting to buy organics and then forgetting it when you’re in the supermarket.

Her statement points to a collective failure to act and also brings forward a general perception of how expressing environmental consciousness is considered eco-friendly in itself. This perception can also be understood as a tool to tackle somewhat of a ‘double reality’ or cognitive dissonance, where a notion of “doing one’s part” is nurtured to settle the unease, one may experience when confronted with the consequences of environmental problems in their everyday life (cf. Ibid.; Lindén 1994:35).

At the same time, pointing out the failure to act also functions as a tool to distance oneself from ‘the average Dane’, who, despite wanting to be green, do not “walk the talk” (cf. Bourdieu 2010:xxix). Hanna has also noticed this type of discrepancy between the wish to act eco-friendly and the ‘reality’ of everyday life. She argues:

We have social medias where we can display our lives. You have to show that you’re doing something good for others, then of course you might go on vacation in Thailand afterwards, right? Haha. It’s about that Facebook appearance, where you’re showing you’re also doing something for others even though

you're travelling to Thailand. It's like the indulgence for everything else, but you have to mention that you bought the right t-shirt.

Similar to this, Christian argues: "One doesn't pay for [climate] compensation when flying, and buys a tree without letting anyone know. In reality, that's what's important - it's that others can see [it]". His statement underlines that perceived eco-friendly practices are used to position oneself in society, as discovered in the previous section. Moreover, the statements touch upon a somewhat socially organised sense of taking responsibility for one's "sins" by paying indulgence and thereby settle the feelings of guilt by not being "able" to use less fossil fuels (cf. Norgaard 2011:75).

Although many of the interviewees address this type of collective 'double reality' and distance themselves from people and organisations who fail to practice what they preach, they also address their own struggles. Most of the informants admit to facing difficulties themselves when addressing the discrepancy between eco-friendly attitudes and the failure to act. This is exemplified by Hanna, who argues:

Right now, meat [minimising meat consumption] is popular, but then it falls apart because you need to go on vacation. And then you kind of don't care, and you travel 'a bit' to Thailand. It should be holistic. Perhaps a bike trip in DK instead, if one would have to be drastic; we're not completely like that either [not the bike trip in DK-type].

The acknowledgement of not always doing the 'proper thing' creates a sense of honesty and *reduces* the distance to other people, who do not act eco-friendly. In line with that, Caroline shares the ambivalence – or cognitive dissonance, she experiences:

I feel like I don't even want to fly, but I do it anyways. It's a bit embarrassing and a bit pathetic that I'm saying that I care about the environment, yet I still get on the plane. I'm a bit embarrassed, but I'm terribly green anyways, haha. I think that we are quite a few of exactly this type among the Tesla people.

This honest way of portraying her own struggle to act in line with her set of values supports the notion of being humble and acknowledging one's own imperfection that is presented in the JL. However, it also ties into the perception of needs which are strongly connected one's social context; in spite of a "wish" to be green it can prove difficult to carry out if society's norms advocate flying on vacation. Similarly, Hannas statement uncovers a societal norm of needing to "go to Thailand" on vacation whereas staying in Denmark is considered a "drastic" choice (cf. Ibid.). The social context does play a critical role in the socially organised denial, as Thomas suggests: "I think we have become too talented at ignoring the consequences [of our consumption and choices]. Of course they have consequences."

These confessions further function as a means to create a narrative of not considering oneself *better* than others or showing off. This may be connected to the social code of conduct – the fictional law of Jante, which will be examined further in the next section.

#### 4.4 Breaking the Law of Jante through Conform Practices

“There has been a lot of envy and law of Jante in relation to driving Tesla, it’s completely insane, because it’s the car that’s doing best in sales – model 3 is selling like crazy (...), they’re coming – they come rolling in”, Hanna states. Other informants’ statements also support the notion of the prevalence of the ‘Jante-mentality’ and envy. They argue that Tesla drivers are considered “rich bastards”, and they receive comments like: “wow, *that’s* a fancy car”, and “*somebody* can afford to drive that, I see”.

All of the informants state that they consider themselves “more” environmentally conscious than the average Dane, not only because of their choice of electric vehicle, but also their other eco-friendly decisions. However, when engaging in these green practices they put themselves in a position where they can be criticised and rebuffed as bragging or showing off. They may be perceived as people, who are breaking the law of Jante and therefore risk suffering from informal social sanctions. At one end of the scale, Hanna explains how somebody threw rocks at their Tesla and broke the window on it. She believes that it was done to taunt them, and she states:

It becomes a bit like ‘those rich bastards’ who drive a Tesla. But there are many completely ‘ordinary’ people. (...) That’s where I experience reactions, it’s on electric cars – on the Tesla, it’s not the other [eco-friendly] things, I do.

Hanna expresses a notion that driving a Tesla is somehow provoking people, because it is an act out of the ordinary and breaks with the notion of being similar to others. At the other end of the scale, Caroline laughingly states how she and her spouse are known as “Mr. & Mrs. Dong”<sup>19</sup> in the local community. She further argues that her green actions are “provoking people” and explains that her choices may lead to some kind of guilty conscience among other people. “It’s like posting a picture of my 10k run. It would get no likes, but if I posted a picture of a cake I baked, I would get 40 likes”, she states.

Additionally, Simon expresses a need for flexibility in green practices, when his actions distance him from the norms in his local community. He states:

But try to do that (being vegetarian or vegan) in Thy! Haha. That’s freaking hard! There’s no one who can understand, if you can’t go to the hot dog stand and eat a sausage, like I can (being flexitarian). Then you’re considered one of those militaristic people, who wants to shoot people, that eat pork, right? That’s difficult!

The interviewees present their green actions as “walking the talk”, it is not merely an adopted green narrative. At the same time, they stress flexibility in their everyday lives to avoid ‘sticking out’ by “making a fuss about it”, as Nick puts it. The informants understand eco-friendly behaviour through a tiered approach, rather than claiming they *are* eco-friendly, they indicate that going green is somewhat of a journey that “does not happen overnight”, as Thomas

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<sup>19</sup> Dong Energy was the previous name of the largest energy company in Denmark. The company is now called Ørsted A/S to emphasise the transition towards renewable energy sources.

states. Furthermore, a humbleness is presented as they claim that they “are trying step by step” and changing “where [they] can”. Yet it is still in a relatively convenient way, which is not making their social lives too difficult (cf. Norgaard 2011:97).

For instance, Hanna assures that she is “not fanatic” when it comes to buying seasonal vegetables, and Nick acknowledges that some people consider it “a bit pious”<sup>20</sup> to predominantly consume organic food like he does. In addition to that, Thomas mentions that although he is on the verge of making fun of people who frequently fly, he is not “a saint” himself, and Simon happily adds, that one does not have to “be a fanatic. I am not. Every Thursday I get my durum kebab, because it is a tradition at my work. Then my stomach hurts for a week, because I ate meat, haha”.

The informants thereby express conformity by trying to ‘not stick out’ and downplay their own attitudes in situations that might lead to somewhat of a sanction, for instance comments (cf. Gopal 2000:26). At the same time, they are strengthening an egalitarian and inclusive narrative, when they claim that they are also not doing all the “right” things, but rather trying to change where they can. This can be related to some of the commandments of the JL such as “you shall not think you are smarter than us” and “you shall not imagine that you are better than us” (Sandemose 1962 [1933]:10). The informants do not, although considering their own environmental consciousness and green behaviour above Danish average, want to be considered as ‘too much’ or as if they are superior to others. Caroline demonstrates her aversion towards people, who, in her opinion, are ‘too much’ and not relatable in the following way:

I think that vegans, presenting that extreme and rabid, almost religious side, is a huge problem, because people distance themselves from that, and it’s going to have the opposite effect of what they want. (...) I think I’ve reached the conclusion because I feel provoked by them. (...) Exactly, in the same way as people are being provoked by me running 10k but think it’s fantastic when I bake a cake.

The informants thereby not only position themselves in relation to people who, in their opinion are not green, they also distance themselves from the “fanatics” or “60s-like, ‘foot shaped’ fuss”, who appear to be clashing with social norms in order to minimise their carbon emissions (cf. Cherrier et al. 2012:405). Instead, the participants indirectly advocate a “lagom ideal” where the ideal environmentally conscious person is acting eco-friendly, inspiring others without making them feel uncomfortable or extreme (cf. Marshall 2016:201). The ideal fits into the ‘Jante-mentality’ where everyone is perceived to be equal.

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<sup>20</sup> Danish: ‘småhelligt’

## 5. General Discussion

In this chapter, the findings will be discussed in more general terms. I connect the Tesla owners' acts in an everyday life Danish setting to global capitalist structures which encourage a greenified business-as-usual growth to maintain existing power struggles.

A sense of techno optimism was detected in section 4.2, where the informants' actions presented a trust in technological innovations to be an important part of the "green transition" and to tackle a variety of environmental challenges including climate change. This optimism fuels a new potential for economic growth – a *green* capitalism – facilitated by "applying greater intelligence to consumption [and] being more clever in how energy is used" (Black 2017:248). Tesla might be the symbol of such green technologies which "represents a high point of green capitalism: a trophy purchase for the megawealthy that is good for the environment", as argued by Black (Ibid.).

However, claiming that Tesla functions as a trophy for the "megawealthy" is, in my opinion, too simple and superficial. I find in the analysis, that green consumption – Tesla included – is used as a tool to continuously position oneself in relation to other people in social space, based on habitus rather than mere income (cf. Bourdieu 2010:166). Driving a Tesla is characterised by the distance to those who do *not*. The green narrative tied to the Tesla thereby broadcasts that the driver cares about the world (cf. Brisman 2009:353; Taffel 2018:176).

In general, the green actions and conspicuous consumption undertaken signalise that a person has "sufficient time, energy, money, or other resources" (Griskevicius et al. 2010:399) to "do something" about the environment. These signals are used in the continuous competition to uphold or advance the agent's position in social space (cf. Bourdieu 2010:94). These actions are not to be understood as the agent actively and consciously deciding to buy a Tesla to signalise that he/she is different in relation to others; it is rather an expression of taste and a coherent set of preferences internalised through habitus that is used to classify the agent (cf. Ibid.:xxix). As I argued in the analysis, this type of green consumption serves as a marker of social status. When a legitimate "environmentally friendly" way of living is recognised as consuming green products it results in a latent structural domination of those who are without the resources to engage in these practices (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:168; Brisman 2009:354).

The egalitarian ideal that is dominant in Nordic countries (Weijo 2019:25; Norgaard 2011:29-30) may add to the consensus of green practices being a matter of priorities - this includes driving EVs. It is believed that people are equal and part of the 'big middle', therefore, everyone within a Danish setting "ought" to be able to make the same choices. However, the relatively privileged positions some people hold are downplayed when everyone is perceived to belong to the middle. Thus, this perception becomes a tool to exercise symbolic violence and dominate the groups who do not undertake the legitimised green practices and are further not recognised as green when undertaking less carbon intensive practices out of

necessity (cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992:168). Meanwhile, the privileged people are not faced with the informal social sanctions for having the means to “stick out”. Yet, “nonconsumption” in the shape of not engaging with acts such as flying on holidays or driving a fossil fuelled car does not receive social acknowledgement as green practices, if they are done because the person cannot afford to act differently. Instead, these green “consumption practices reflect and help maintain structures of power and inequality” (Brisman 2009:367).

I find that green alternatives which maintain the social standards in a Danish context are preferred to an ascetic lifestyle as a method to reduce personal carbon footprints. These “green alternative” practices are to a higher degree visible compared to abstention, which on the other hand, cannot immediately be classified as a distinctive practice distanced from those without the means to do anything but abstain. The visibility of green actions is brought forward in the analysis, however, the more subtle adjustments to what is considered a more eco-friendly lifestyle, such as consuming organic food, reducing the consumption of (red) meat, and minimising food waste needs to be stated out loud to segregate the “doers” from the “do-not’s”. At the same time, these subtle adjustments also function to minimise the distance between the “haves” to the “have-nots” and thereby add to the egalitarian ideal, as they are less costly to engage in (cf. Brisman 2009:363; Gopal 2000:30).

In the analysis, I find that green practices – especially driving a Tesla – result in informal social sanctions in the shape of witty comments and some degree of aversion. This is rebuffed as an example of the mechanisms of the ‘Jante-mentality’ by some interviewees and indicates that these informal sanctions should not stop their individualised green actions.

However, as presented in section 4.4, the law of Jante can be proven useful in understanding the social mechanisms behind the interviewees stressing that they are not “fanatic”, “saints”. Instead, pragmatism and flexibility seems to be the keywords. This is in line with Marshall, who argues that the consensus of pragmatism expresses a wish for a ‘lagom ideal’ (Marshall 2016:201). The flexible ideal is legitimised as the “proper” way to go, and it results in the agent not only distancing himself from those who are not considered green, but also the “foot shaped” people and “vegans” who are considered “profound” and appear even more “extreme” in the small, relatively homogeneous Danish context (cf. Gopal 2000:41). The lagom ideal thereby provides space to not be perfect and can be used to tackle cognitive dissonance which may arise when faced with one’s unsustainable practices that goes against the self-perception of being green (cf. Lindén 1994:32; Norgaard 2011:3). It even reduces a potential sense of guilt for not being “greener” as it is considered “extreme”. Furthermore, the green pragmatism becomes a means to avoid criticism and informal social sanctions by the being first in line to admit one’s lack of complete consistency. As Weijo argues: “Nordic consumers are more careful with their identity reinvention projects, due to fears of social costs from perceived identity inconsistencies” (2019:39).

A shift towards a greener future is achieved by continuously challenging common standards for green behaviour within the ‘big middle’ through distinctive practices. A common consensus of ‘desirable’ green behaviour is repeatedly negotiated on the basis of the

collective ‘Jante-mentality’ that has been internalised by individuals. Thus, no one is to perceive her- or himself as “better” than others, and, furthermore, not make others feel uncomfortable about their own relational social position. It results in somewhat of a mainstream environmentalism, where bit by bit Danish people collectively become more eco-friendly by conforming to greener social standards.

However, the “belief in the power of eco-consumerism and small lifestyle changes as forces of progressive change” (Dauvergne 2016:4) appears as a structural tool to maintain a convenient lifestyle. In the analysis, I illustrated how lowering one’s consumption is generally not taken into consideration as a response to the environmental crisis. This was further illustrated in figure 2, where waste sorting is believed to be the most effective way to reduce personal greenhouse gas emissions (Minter 2018:38). Instead, the focus is on a more responsible and efficient way to continue consumption as usual, as perceived context dependent “needs” can make it difficult to “see” where one can limit consumption (cf. Norgaard 2011:75).

The ‘lagom ideal’ risks being a lullaby for people to “protect themselves a bit” and avoid taking “real” responsibility for the sake of averting informal sanctions for breaking the JL by going against the normalised “consumption as usual”. Moreover, it may add to a sense of innocence by “paying indulgence for one’s sins” through a greener way of living (cf. Ibid.:5). Meanwhile, the green narrative may result in the outcome that people “will see such [green] efforts as their fair share” of responsibility (cf. Dauvergne 2016:149).

Consequently, this pragmatic, mainstream environmentalism can be understood as the privileged people’s denial of their own carbon intensive lifestyles in a local as well as a global context (cf. Norgaard 2012). Some of the products that are presented as “green alternatives” “do not address environmental problems and may even exacerbate them” (Elliott 2013:295). For example, Tesla has not only received critique for the human and environmental impact of the extraction of lithium for the batteries (Taffel 2018:175); they have also been faced with accusations of maintaining social inequalities through e.g. inadequate pay for the factory workers (Klein & Lewis 2017). In addition to that, the level of eco-friendliness depends on the type of energy source used to produce the electricity to charge the car (Smith 2015:78).

Actions such as purchasing extra land to install a solar panel park in order to accommodate private consumption or profit from the excess energy function as an individualised response to a global problem. Acquiring more space to maintain individual habits through renewable sources even further manifests social imbalances and power relations. As argued above, this can be understood as a ‘tool of order’, where people are “doing their fair share part”, while being blind to the fact that these types of individualised green responses are only possible for a limited, privileged group of people – both in a Danish context and on a global scale.

Although it may seem like opposing mechanisms, the individualising green practices used to distinguish oneself in relation to others are done in a conform way. Certain practices are



legitimised as the “proper” actions to show you care, and green consumption may, as I have argued previously, serve to foster a feeling of “doing something” about the environment (cf. Elliott 2013:314; Norgaard 2011:129; Dauvergne 2016:140). Thus, it results in people striving to undertake these practices and consume the similar green goods. The demand for the same green products thereby provides leeway for a greenified business-as-usual eco-industry. It may even result in a boost in consumption rather than reduction. This eco-industry promotes the notion that people can consume their way to a green life without missing out on the context specific perceived needs (cf. Taffel 2018:175; Pohoata et al. 2018:7; Norgaard 2011:75).

The introduction of the so-called affordable Tesla Model 3 may therefore not only provide consumers with a “cheaper” alternative to broadcast their green attitudes. It also provides them with somewhat of a tool to tackle the inconsistency of *wanting* to be green and experiencing difficulties to be so in their social context that has normalised consumption. Furthermore, the narrative of it being a car the majority can prioritise to buy reproduces the “relations of domination and subordination” (Brand & Wissen 2018:86). The structural exercise of symbolic power is done both on a national level and a global level by providing the “fuel” to the continuous competition for legitimising “taste and preference” to uphold or advance one’s social position (cf. Bourdieu 2010:94;153). The “democratisation” of EVs - and Tesla in particular - takes place within a relatively privileged ‘big middle’ who now may be able to afford broadcasting their environmental consciousness behind the steering wheel of a green status symbol. These exclusive and visible makers of green behaviour may thus “eschew other less costly ecologically friendly practices and products on the grounds that environmentalism equals elitism and that their contributions are not needed or welcomed” (Brisman 2009:354).

Although, the focus has been on individuals’ practices many of the interviewees advocate a crucial need for political action to change the collective unsustainable behaviour on organisational, national, and global levels. The mechanisms at play in the internalised ‘Jante-mentality’ may prove useful to address the environmental crisis *because* they advocate conformity towards the ‘big middle’. As argued earlier, the conformity may increase the collective environmental consciousness *and* willingness to act. Thus, those who fail to meet the common standards for eco-friendly behaviour might be mobilised through social pressure to “walk the talk”. The Law of Jante is built on an egalitarian sense of unity and interdependency which could therefore require different actors to take on more responsibility (cf. Weijo 2019:36). Failing to do so may then result in social sanctions towards people, companies, and national states who do not “walk the talk”, and instead seize the eco-friendly narrative as an opportunity to capitalise on or gain prestige through slight changes in behaviour.

## 5.1 Future Research

Due to a limited time frame, size of the project, and the character of my research questions, the argument I present does not fully describe the intricate, structural mechanisms at play

in the individualised green practices. Although, it was beyond the scope of my thesis, I recommend examining the sense of techno optimism and fascination among the people driving the Teslas, as it may add to the understanding of green consumption as a way to tackle cognitive dissonance. Alf Hornborg's (2016) work on technological utopianism may prove useful to apply to this focus. Moreover, I reckon that it will prove fruitful to employ a gender perspective on conspicuous and green consumption. Especially in the case of cars, as "the different social roles played by men and women dictate that they travel with different frequencies, at different times, and by different modes" (Wachs 1966:100). Finally, I would like to recommend that future research ought to examine this pragmatic and "lagom" attitude towards environmentalism outside a Nordic context.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to understand how certain practices are perceived and legitimised as eco-friendly and to further understand how these practices are influenced by the social context they are located in. To do this, I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with Danish Tesla owners. What I found was that many of the green practices the informants undertook were characterised by their visibility and somewhat exclusivity; perceived green actions such as driving a Tesla, installing solar panels, etc. could be used as symbols to broadcast environmental consciousness. Yet, the "exclusivity" of the actions were downplayed through a common perception of the actions being "a matter of priorities". Other practices such as lowering one's consumption of meat and buying seasonal, organic food were also reported and strongly tied to a notion of "walking the talk". Albeit, a general sense of considering oneself more environmentally conscious than the average Danish person was detected, a widespread call for a flexible and pragmatic type of 'lagom' environmentalism was also demonstrated (cf. Marshall 2016:201).

I conclude that the 'lagom ideal' is closely connected to the 'Jante-mentality' which fosters a notion of social conformity and a wish to be a part of the 'big middle'. The 'lagom ideal' is, furthermore, used to tackle cognitive dissonance, when the context dependent perceived needs are conflicting with one's green attitudes. I further conclude that eco-friendly practices are used as means to distance oneself from others within 'social space'. But not all "green" practices are given the same value and considered equally 'desirable'; everyone can buy a bamboo toothbrush to display environmental consciousness, yet it lacks what the Tesla possess - visibility and exclusivity.

These results may seem contradictory. On the one hand, people are displaying individualised eco-friendly behaviour to position themselves in relation to others. On the other hand, they are conforming to social norms of not 'standing out'. However, these two mechanisms may in fact direct the focus away from an actual reduction of our environmental impact in

relatively rich societies and create leeway for an emerging eco-industry which seeks to pursue *green* growth. The violence in that sense becomes double; in a social sense for people who do not have the resources to act in a 'desirable' manner, and in a material sense through the failure to truly engage with the environmental crisis. Green consumption may therefore not only function as a bittersweet lullaby to continue a business-as-usual growth in a greenified version, it ultimately induces the responsibility of the individual to act sustainably.

I argue that social conformity may provide a useful insight to address this issue. Individualised green actions have been put in front and centre of attention throughout the thesis, yet the individuality is demonstrated through conform practices. Similar practices are undertaken, similar experiences of cognitive dissonance are tackled in similar ways. This sense of conformity may result in a collective shift of focus towards being more environmentally friendly. Although Sandemose (1962 [1933]) originally described the mechanisms of the 'Jante-mentality' as a means to restrain the freedom of the individual, they can also be understood as an expression of the strong belief in the collective. Thus, as emphasised by some of my interviewees there is a crucial need for political and collective actions. If all of us are driving each our own electric car it will inevitably slow down the pace on our way to Paris.

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# 8. Appendix

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

- Can you start by telling a bit about yourself?
  - For instance, your age, your type of job, and where in Denmark you live.
- What was the reason(s) for you deciding to buy a Tesla?
  - How long have you been driving Tesla/electric car? How many kilometres a year do you drive?
- If you were to describe people that drive Tesla, how would you do it?
- In your everyday life, have you changed anything or are you doing things to be more sustainable or eco-friendly?
  - What things are you doing, what are the reasons for you to do these things?
- How do you experience, other people perceive the actions you undertake?
  - Both in your social circle and other people
- Compared to the average Danish person, would you say you are more conscious about mitigating your greenhouse gas emissions?
- If you were to describe the typical Danish person, what would you say they think or do to be more sustainable?
- What do you consider the most important in order to mitigate the greenhouse gas emissions?
- What is the most important task(s), we as individuals can undertake?
  - Can you say more about this?
- What are your thoughts on the initiatives, which are presented as small green steps in the right direction?
  - For instance, waste sorting, buying sustainably produced clothes etc?
  - Can you elaborate on that?
- Do you think, that there is some kind of status connected to care about the environment or to be green?
  - Why not/ in which ways?
- In your opinion, would you say that different groups of Danish people perceive sustainability in different ways?
  - Do people do different things, what things?
- Is there anything, you would like to add? Something, you consider important which has not been touched upon through the questions?