Lund University
Department of Political Science

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Tutor: Johannes Stripple

A pathway to climate neutrality?

An argumentative discourse analysis on carbon offsetting in Swedish politics

Pontus Strömberg

Abstract

Carbon offsetting has been one of the main international attempts to mitigate climate change. It is however a contested practice that has been heavily criticized in multiple ways. Seeing as Sweden offsets parts of its emissions to reach its national emission reduction targets, I am interested in studying the discourses on carbon offsetting and how the practice has been framed in Swedish politics. Taking a social-constructionist perspective, this essay uses Maarten Hajer's argumentative discourse analysis and the analytical concepts storylines and discourse coalitions to investigate how carbon offsetting is perceived in Swedish politics, by whom and how these framings have changed over time in the last two decades. Covering more than 30 motions, 25 reports, 18 appropriation directions and other texts, I identify four key storylines on carbon offsetting and trace their development over time. Drawing on these storylines and coalitions I make out the two main discourses on offsetting – one positive and one more critical. The thesis shows that actors in Swedish politics make sense of the practice in two contentious ways, but that these different understandings have not changed over time, which further indicates that carbon offsetting will remain a contested issue in Swedish climate change governance.

Key words: carbon offsetting, climate change, discourse analysis, storylines, discourse coalitions
Words: 9989

List of abbreviations

ADA	Argumentative Discourse Analysis
CDM	Clean Development Mechanism
GHG	Greenhouse Gas(es)
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JI	Joint Implementation
SEA	Swedish Energy Agency
SNAO	Swedish National Audit Office
SPICCM	Swedish Programme for International Climate Change Mitigation
SSNC	Swedish Society for Nature Conservation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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1 Introduction

Modern society is facing one of its most challenging issues to date in climate change and global emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) must be reduced significantly if the most severe consequences of a warming climate are to be avoided (IPCC 2018). One of the main international solutions that have been used to reduce emissions is carbon offsetting. In short, carbon offsetting refers to a market-based activity that compensates for emissions by reducing emissions somewhere else. This practice is heavily contested at the international stage, with advocates promoting it as an efficient way to reduce global emissions which also delivers additional side-benefits for the involved parties, while critics claim that there is little evidence that offsetting actually brings the promised results. Bearing this contentiousness in mind, I found it interesting to learn that the Swedish government uses carbon offsetting to reach parts of its emission reduction targets and wanted to know how this practice is perceived in a Swedish context. In this essay, I therefore examine how different actors make sense of carbon offsetting in Swedish climate change politics.

1.1 The problem

During my work on this thesis, the world's political leaders gathered in Madrid for the 25th Conference of the Parties (COP) to decide on more ambitious measures and commitments in order to reach the internationally decided emission reduction targets. After record-long negotiations the parties agreed upon increasing their ambitions ahead of COP26 in Glasgow later in 2020, where further decisions are to be made on how climate change should be mitigated in the coming years. The parties could however not reach an agreement on article 6, regarding flexible mechanisms and carbon offsetting, with countries having different opinions on what role offset projects should play in future efforts to cut global emissions (SVT 2019). Moreover, during the fall and winter of 2019 the daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter (DN) has conducted an article series on carbon offsetting, which illuminates that different actors such as political parties, governmental agencies and NGOs make sense of flexible mechanisms in different ways, ranging from advocating to rejecting views (DN 2019). These articles initially brought my attention to this topic and spurred my interest to further investigate the different ways that political actors speak about these so-called flexible mechanisms.

Carbon offsetting has been one of the main international responses to climate change and it has been implemented and promoted by powerful institutions like the UN and the EU. This applies to Sweden as well where offsetting is one of the

government's instruments in achieving climate neutrality and investments in offset projects have been a part of the Swedish policies to mitigate climate change for nearly 20 years. However, the broken down negotiations at COP25 and the article series in DN show that there are different narratives on carbon offsetting at both international and national scales. This is, as stated above, a contested practice and researchers have pointed out several weaknesses with offsetting, ranging from problematizations of certain methodologies of the overarching frameworks to a rejection of the whole underlying logic of the practice.

It is in the light of this popular promotion and use of the practice on the one hand and the heavy scientifically based criticism and questioning on the other hand that I find it interesting to study how carbon offsetting has been framed. Seeing as I am interested in these type of questions of how meaning is given to a policy instrument such as carbon offsetting and how these understandings change over time, I have consequently chosen to conduct a discourse-analytical research, which is a method particularly suited to investigate and detect meaning in language (Neumann 2003; Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000).

A great deal has been written on carbon offsetting and it has been a popular topic ever since it first started making the agenda in climate negotiations in the 1990s (Newell & Paterson 2010). While several studies have investigated how actors give meaning to offsetting, this essay stands out from previous work with its focus on the understandings on carbon offsetting at state level. The majority of the literature I have come across either investigates the more overarching international frameworks or deals with the carbon offsetting of companies or individuals (cf. Nielsen 2016; Paterson & Stripple 2010). By focusing on the offsetting of the Swedish state and the framings by actors in national politics, this essay thus contributes to nuancing the field of research on carbon offsetting.

1.2 Objective and research questions

The overall objective of this study is to bring greater understanding for the different views on carbon offsetting in Swedish politics. These discourses are important phenomena to study since they produce meaning about a physical and social reality, like carbon offsetting. How we speak about a problem determines our understanding of the issue at hand and subsequently sets the boundaries for different policies and measures, which makes the language that actors use an interesting research object (Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000). This study thus aims at identifying the main discourses on carbon offsetting in the context of the Swedish government's investments in offset projects through the Swedish Programme for International Climate Change Mitigation (henceforth the Programme or SPICCM). This will be achieved with Maarten Hajer's argumentative approach to discourse analysis by identifying the dominating storylines on carbon offsetting and by illuminating what discourse coalitions that gather around these storylines. This further enables an investigation of discursive change within the field of carbon offsetting in this national context. Taken together, this thesis contributes to the field

of studies on carbon offsetting by mapping these different understandings, the coalitions of actors that these storylines mobilize and their change over time.

The thesis will be guided by the following research questions:

How is carbon offsetting constructed in a Swedish political context?
How has the framing of carbon offsetting changed during the Programme's operation, i.e. in the time frame of 2002-2019?

2 Compensating carbon emissions

The aim of this chapter is to provide a background on carbon offsetting which makes it easier to follow the rest of the thesis. In the first two sections I will give a short introduction to the concept of carbon offsetting followed by an overview of the criticism that the practice has faced. Finally, I give an account of the offsetting by the Swedish government and introduce the SPICCM.

2.1 Carbon offsetting explained

When speaking about carbon offsetting, it is first important to point out that this is one term amongst many for the same phenomenon. In this thesis I mainly resort to the concept of carbon offsetting since it is the most commonly used term within the field of climate change policy. There are however other terms that can refer to the same phenomenon and that appear in this thesis, such as climate investments, international efforts on climate change mitigation or carbon colonialism.

A carbon offset is an activity that compensates for the emission of GHG by reducing emissions elsewhere (Britannica 2011). The underlying logic of carbon offsetting is quite simple. A buyer from an industrialised country invests in a project in a developing country. These projects can take place in various areas, such as energy efficiency, forestry or renewable energy. The investor can then claim the reduced emissions, called emissions reduction credits, against its own reduction targets (Paulsson 2009; Paterson & Stripple 2010, p. 343).

Although the logic behind the practice is straight-forward, carbon offsetting involves much more complicated processes, such as the commodification of carbon, i.e. turning carbon and other GHG found in the atmosphere into tradeable units with set economical values (Newell & Bumpus 2012, p. 55; Paulsson 2009, p. 67-68). Offset projects must prove environmental and financial additionality, meaning that the reductions and the project would not have been carried out without the funding. Carbon offsetting thus relies on the ability to estimate and verify the additionality of offset projects, which entails complex systems of calculation, auditing and monitoring (cf. Bumpus & Liverman 2011, p. 209-210; Paterson & Stripple 2010, p. 343).

Emission credits are measured in tonnes of CO_2 or the equivalent amount of another GHG and each credit represents a permit to emit one ton of CO_2. These credits can be bought, sold and traded on carbon markets by countries, companies and individuals. There are several international carbon markets, both governmentally and privately constructed, with some of the most important ones

being the market created by the framework of the Kyoto protocol, the EU Emissions Trading Scheme as well as the voluntary carbon markets.

Offsetting is a practice emanating from the fundamental influence of neoliberal ideology on climate politics (Lohmann 2010, p. 25; Newell & Paterson 2010, p. 23 ff.). Carbon offsets can be seen as a form of "green capitalism" and are often argued to yield investments and spread technical and socio-economic benefits in the developing world while simultaneously reducing emissions (Bumpus & Liverman 2011, p. 213). The practice has also been promoted in terms of a more market-centred logic, where the practice opens up the door for making cheaper cuts compared to reducing emissions domestically (Paterson & Stripple 2012, 577). According to the discourse of ecological modernization, offsetting is thus an example of how environmental protection is coupled with achieving continuous growth (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2006). Moreover, carbon offsets have been framed as a way for richer countries to make amends for their sense of guilt. Seeing as wealthier countries in general have larger historically and contemporary carbon footprints but poorer countries are likely to experience the worst effects of climate change, offsets "offer the prospect of compensating directly those whose livelihoods are threatened as a result of your actions" (Newell & Paterson 2010, p. 108).

This essay mainly deals with carbon offsetting in the context of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), one of the so-called flexible mechanisms from the Kyoto protocol (see section 2.3). CDM is a market-based mechanism with two main objectives. Firstly, it attempts to mitigate and cut emissions through international offset projects in developing countries, thus giving industrialized countries some "flexibility" in how to meet parts of their emission reduction targets (Paulsson 2009; UNFCCC 1998; 2019). Secondly, the mechanism aims at stimulating investments and supporting developing countries in their transition toward sustainable development. Emission reduction credits from CDM-projects are calculated by using a baseline, which is a counterfactual scenario that describes how much GHG would be emitted if the project in question was not implemented (Paulsson 2009, p. 68).

2.2 The criticism of offsetting

Although carbon offsetting has attracted much interest and support from companies, institutions and other market promoters, it has also endured widespread criticism from a variety of scholars, NGO's and other actors that have critically scrutinized and problematized different aspects of the practice.

One of the main points of criticism regards the uncertainty about additionality, i.e. if projects can deliver actual emission cuts. Cames et al. (2016, p. 152), studying more than 5000 CDM-projects from the period 2013-2020, shows that only 2% of these projects have a high likelihood of providing real, additional reductions. These findings indicate that the CDM framework has substantial flaws and cannot properly verify the projects' climate benefit. Lohmann (e.g. 2006; 2009; 2010), one

of the main critics of carbon offsetting, rejects the complete notion that offset projects through CDM or other project-based mechanisms can claim to neutralize emissions. The difficult part, he argues, is that additionality is an unattainable goal because of the way that emission credits are calculated in a "baseline and credit"-scheme like the CDM. Firstly, it is impossible to verify an offset project's counterfactual outcome, i.e. the amount of GHG that would be emitted if a project was not carried out, due to the arbitrariness in the choice of what baseline the credits should be calculated from (Lohmann 2006, p. 142 ff.; 2009, p. 179-180). Secondly, there is no way of knowing if a project, say a wind turbine or a forest, will continue to reduce emissions for the coming 100 years, which is how long the carbon it offsets will linger in the atmosphere. Consequently, if emission reductions cannot be verified, carbon offsetting might exacerbate climate change, but the unverifiability also implies that it is impossible to determine with certainty that a project is non-additional (Lohmann 2009, p. 180; 2010, p. 35). Lohmann's main point is that without credible claims on additionality, carbon offsetting subsequently becomes an ineffective response to climate change (Lohmann 2010, p. 175; Newell & Paterson 2010, p. 132, 160).

According to these critics offsetting schemes are likely not as clean as promised, but do they contribute to sustainable development? There are evident social benefits from offset projects, but they vary between different projects and studies also show that these benefits are uncertain or might even do extensive harm to both societies and ecosystems (cf. Andersson & Carton 2017; Bachram 2004, 11 ff.; Bumpus & Liverman 2010, p. 205).

Moreover, carbon offsetting is criticized for strengthening unequal power relations between countries in the rich North and the poor South (Bumpus & Liverman 2011, p. 212; Newell & Paterson 2010: 132). Bachram (2004) goes even further and states that offset projects constitute a new type of colonialism. She claims that carbon offsetting reinvigorates exploitative relationships between the North and the South, as the more powerful actors benefit at the expense of the disempowered ones, e.g. by deflecting moral responsibility for consuming more fossil fuels (Bachram 2004, p. 11, 20). Hence, why this climate policy instrument can be used by developed countries to further dominate developing countries through carbon colonialism (Bachram 2004, p. 10; Newell & Paterson 2010, p. 32-33).

2.3 Climate neutrality and the Swedish Programme for International Climate Change Mitigation

The Swedish government has carried out different adaptation and mitigating measures in order to reduce the country's emissions, with investments in offset projects being one of them. Sweden has declared its goal to become one of the world's first climate neutral states, i.e. having net-zero emissions, by 2045 at the latest (Fossilfritt Sverige). Net-zero emissions means that national greenhouse gas

emissions shall be at least 85% lower in 2045 compared to the emission levels of 1990 (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2019). The remaining 15% of reductions needed to reach net-zero levels are to be achieved through "complementary measures", which comprises carbon offsetting.

The Swedish Energy Agency (SEA) has been responsible for Sweden's investments in offset projects since 2002 and this work is carried out through the SPICCM (previously "the Swedish CDM- and JI-programme"). It supports and participates in over 80 bilateral projects as well as several multilateral climate funds that in turn support over 130 different projects with focus on mitigating climate change (ET 2014:16, p. 6). The Programme aims at developing international cooperation on reducing emission and supports different projects in developing countries, focusing mainly on actions regarding renewable energy, energy efficiency and waste management (ER 2019:05, p.3; SEA 2019). It enables Sweden to make contributions to reducing emissions in developing countries that otherwise are likely not to have taken place (ET 2014: 16, p. 6). These projects further create conditions for investments in environmentally adapted technology and contribute to sustainable development in the developing countries. The projects, bi- and multilateral alike, are mainly based on the CDM that stems from the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Subsequently, this essay primarily investigates the framings of CDM projects.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the philosophy of science of this thesis, which is based on a social constructionist understanding of discourse. The chapter then goes on to unpack Hajer's argumentative take on discourse analysis, which constitutes the thesis' analytical approach.

3.1 Social constructionism and discourse analysis

This essay has its theoretical point of departure in social constructionism and uses discourse analysis to study meaning. With this approach comes certain epistemological and ontological presumptions that constitute the overarching theoretical framework.

According to social constructionism, we cannot acquire objective truths or knowledge about the world. The real world 'out there' is only accessible to us through our categorization of it and our depiction of reality is a product of how we make sense of our surroundings (Burr, cited in Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000, p. 11). The social constructionist approach to science is anti-essentialist as it rejects the notion of the social world as being given or determined in advance (Burr, cited in Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000, p. 12). Knowledge is thought to be created through social interaction, in a process of struggle in which people define what is right and wrong. In specific social conceptions of the world, some actions are rendered normal, while other kind of actions are obscured. Different conceptions and understandings of the world thus give rise to different social actions with subsequent tangible consequences.

Although most forms of discourse analysis share fundamental social constructionist presumptions, they also differ in certain theoretical aspects, starting at the core of the whole method, i.e. the definition of discourse. As Hajer (1995, p. 43) succinctly writes, "discourse has come to mean many different things in as many different places". Each discourse-analytical tradition defines discourse in its own specific manner in accordance with its scientific understandings, but speaking in general terms, discourse analysis is about studying meaning and the site where meaning is constructed, i.e. in language (Neumann 2003).

There are several ways of doing discourse analysis and scholars have categorized and contrasted the different discourse-analytical approaches' ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects in various ways. Some scholars focus on a smaller set of discourse-analytical traditions (cf. Bergström & Boréus 2012; Winther–Jørgensen & Philips 2000), while others differ between a larger number of approaches (cf. Glynos et al. 2009; Skoglund 2011). Although

scholars look at discourse-analytical traditions differently and use different terms, they mostly refer to the same kind of differences between the approaches. A central point of discussion is the agent-structure debate, which is based on scholars having different perspectives on the limits to discourse (Nielsen 2016). Some approaches define discourse in a narrower manner and make an explicit distinction between discourse and other social practices, e.g. economics (Arts et al. 2010: 59). According to this view, discourse not only shapes and reproduces the social world, but is also shaped by other forms of non-discursive practices (Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000, p. 25). These forms of discourse analysis place a greater emphasis on agency, meaning that people can influence and change the policy process through their framing of the world (Nielsen 2016).

At the other end of the spectrum, scholars attribute a broader scope to discourse. They define discourse as social practice and the definition moves beyond different forms of language use to also encompass phenomena like the economy, institutions, and policy processes. According to this more structural perspective, there is no distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices and discourses completely constitute the social world (Arts et al. 2010, p. 59; Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000, p. 25–26, 40). This point of view acknowledges the existence of a physical world out there, but emphasizes that it is solely through social interaction, i.e. through discourse, that objects are given meaning.

In this thesis, I mainly resort to Hajer's definition of discourse and his argumentative discourse-analytical approach because it provides me with good and interesting tools to investigate actors and their roles in constructing meaning within a given policy field. This form of discourse analysis is thus more placed towards the agency-end of the theoretical continuum that the agent-structure debate opens up.

3.2 Argumentative discourse analysis

The argumentative discourse analysis (ADA) of Maarten Hajer provides the basis for the underlying analytical frame of my thesis. This approach to discourse emphasizes the importance of narratives, storylines, argumentation and meaning when it comes to understanding various aspects of public policy (Glynos et al. 2009). Discourse, in the words of Hajer, is "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities" (1995, p. 44; 2019; Hajer & Versteeg 2005). Consequently, the focal point of ADA is to understand how meaning is constructed, i.e. how actors make sense of a specific policy or policy process. The aim is to identify linguistic regularities in written or spoken statements, thus unravelling the argumentative structures that construct meaning in a certain context (Hajer & Versteeg 2005; Nielsen 2016). "Argumentative" discourse analysis refers to the focus on understanding how actors criticize or justify specific positions, rather than taking a purely linguistic turn to discourse (Hajer 1995, p. 53). This is achieved by applying different analytical

concepts such as storylines and discourse coalitions, to which I return to and explain in greater detail below.

According to the argumentative discourse-analytical approach, policy discourses, e.g. environmental discourses, are not seen as coherent entities, but often involve several different discourses. This discursive complexity arises from the fact that environmental issues are complex and understanding these problems involves knowledge from different disciplines in addition to natural science discourses (Hajer 1995). The carbon offsetting problem does for example not only involve ecological phenomena like fossil fuel emissions and carbon sequestration, but also includes "questions of costs, abatement techniques, analysis of social and economic repercussions of the different remedial strategies, and ethical questions concerning fairness or the attribution of blame and responsibility", among other aspects (Hajer 1995, p. 45). Consequently, actors cannot make sense of the issue of carbon offsetting by solely drawing on natural science discourses, but must also involve discourses grounded in different disciplines, such as economics, engineering and philosophy.

Hajer's ADA consists of four main theoretical concepts, namely storylines, discourse coalitions, discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization. Storylines and discourse coalitions are central to the theory when it comes to defining the different framings of a policy problem and to shed light on how different actors make sense of a given issue. Discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization on the other hand are important in a later phase of ADA when it comes to studying power relations between different discourses and identifying hegemony (Hajer 1995). Because of the limited timeframe I have chosen to confine the analytical scope of this thesis to storylines and discourse coalitions, since these concepts are most closely related to the research questions. Hence why this thesis focuses on mapping the discourses on carbon offsetting in Swedish politics and leaves notions of power relations aside.

3.2.1 Storylines

As mentioned above, ADA deploys various concepts to identify discourses, how they intersect with one another and if they are maintained or transformed. Storylines is one of two key terms that I pay the closest attention to in this thesis. According to Hajer, a storyline:

> […] is a sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena. The key function of storylines is that they suggest unity in the bewildering function of separate discursive component parts of a problem like acid rain. The underlying assumption is that people do not draw on comprehensive discursive systems for their cognition, rather these are evoked through storylines. (Hajer 1995, p. 56)

The concept encompasses discursive practices such as metaphors, analogies, allusions to history, clichés as well as "senses of guilt" (Hajer 1995, p. 63; 2019).

People use these storylines as a shorthand in discussions, allowing discursive complexity to be reduced, e.g. to a single word, phrase or a snappy one-liner (Hajer 1995; 2006; Zannakis 2009). Cost efficiency and technology transferring are examples of storylines that could manifest themselves in the framing of carbon offsetting in the context of SPICCM. The cost-efficiency narrative for example draws on interdisciplinary elements and specific perceptions of nature, economics and equity, without these assumptions necessarily being explicitly uttered. Storylines thus enable actors to present a complex discussion in a more simplistic manner (Nielsen 2016). As they get accepted and more actors start to use them, storylines become a permanent feature of the specific debate. They become figures of speech or symbolic references that suggest a common understanding between actors of what seems to be a coherent issue (Hajer 1995). Every discourse has its central storylines or narratives, which attempt to attract people to their certain understanding (Nielsen 2016; Zannakis 2019).

ADA subsequently uses the notion of storylines to detect and illuminate how discursive orders are maintained or transformed (Hajer 1995). The mapping of storylines thus provides me with a useful tool to discern and examine the underlying perceptions and shared concepts that actors use to give meaning to carbon offsetting.

3.2.2 Discourse coalitions

Having introduced and explained the notion of a storyline, I now turn my attention to discourse coalitions, the other key analytical concept of ADA that is deployed in this thesis. The argumentative approach defines discourse coalitions as "a group of actors that, in the context of an identifiable set of practices, shares the usage of a particular set of storylines over a particular period of time" (Hajer 2019). Storylines and discourse coalitions are closely intertwined as the former constitutes the "discursive cement" which consolidates the latter (Hajer 2019). According to ADA, coalitions are formed by actors as a result of a struggle for discursive hegemony. The notion of hegemony in this sense regards the dominant discourse's constraint on what understandings and policies that are viable in a given political dimension, rather than persuading actors to make sense of phenomena in a certain way (Nielsen 2016). The actors do not necessarily have shared values or interests, but have a common attraction to the same set of storylines and perceive the issue on, e.g. carbon offsetting as a means to mitigate climate change, in similar ways (Hajer 1995 2019, Nielsen 2016).

4 Methodology and material

The first section of this chapter entails the operationalization of the two key analytical concepts mentioned above and the construction of the analytical framework which guides the following analysis. In the second section I discuss the limitations of taking a social constructionist approach to science and present how I handle these issues. The last section gives an overview on the material used in the thesis.

4.1 Methods

In order to investigate how and by whom carbon offsetting is constructed in a Swedish political context, I will use Hajer's argumentative discourse analysis. ADA uses the two concepts storylines and discourse coalitions to illuminate how meaning and discursive orders in a given policy domain are constructed and maintained or transformed (Hajer 1995). Hajer's theory is based on a set of several analytical concepts, but due to the time frame of this thesis I cannot use all of them. I have therefore chosen to focus on storylines and discourse coalitions since they are most closely related to my objective and research questions.

The notion of storylines is one of two key terms that provide the analytical frame for this thesis. Drawing on Hajer's definition (see section 3.2.1 above) and Nielsen (2016), I view storylines as a form of building block of discourses and simultaneously as a way to illuminate and recognise these discourses. Storylines can thus be seen as the discursive elements that make up a certain discourse and can be identified and analysed in language. Mapping storylines therefore enables me to make out the main discourses on carbon offsetting. ADA further regards storylines as the main means for identifying discursive change, which makes it an important concept to study. I will further analyse the actors that mobilize around the same storylines to discern the discourse coalitions in this field. Since these coalitions are formed as a result of discursive struggle, I believe that studying these formations of actors can help distinguish different discourses. By analysing the reoccurrence of the storylines and the formation of coalitions at different times I will be able to identify discursive changes.

However, although Hajer is explicit in his definitions of storylines and discourse coalitions, he is less clear on how to operationalize and analyse the concepts. I have therefore taken inspiration from the works of Carol Bacchi (2009; 2012) in constructing explicit questions to ask the empirical material. Her analytical model is based on six specific questions which aim at identifying the underlying understandings and implicit perceptions of an issue (2012). I have, on the basis of

these questions, constructed my own analytical model which is tailored to fit my objective and research questions as well as Hajer's argumentative approach.

The analysis builds on the following questions:

Concept	Questions
Storylines	What are the core assumptions on carbon offsetting? How has the use of specific storylines changed over time?
Discourse coalitions	What actors gather around the same storyline? How have the coalitions changed over time?

In the analysis below I will illustrate the key storylines and major discourse coalitions within the discourses on carbon offsetting in Swedish politics. The result will be presented through citations of typical wordings or phrases found in the material that are representative of each respective storyline, along with presentations of the different discourse coalitions that form around these storylines.

4.2 Methodological considerations

With a social constructionist approach to science comes certain issues, of which one must be aware. One of the premises of social constructionism is that knowledge is understood as productive, meaning that the research produced when conducting a discourse analysis is itself both affected by discourse and in turn affects it (Burr, cited in Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000, p. 11, 111). Another implication for research from this perspective is the fact that the researcher is often part of and already has knowledge about the discourse that is the object of analysis. This means that I as a researcher might have trouble distilling the different framings that are taken for granted within the discourse, due to my own perceptions and understandings. I try to deal with this problem by approaching the empirical material from a specific theoretical perspective, i.e. ADA, in order to alienate myself from my everyday understanding of carbon offsetting (Winther-Jørgensen & Philips 2000, p. 154). Moreover, the premise that there is no objective reality for the researcher to identify means that the ideal of complete intersubjectivity, i.e. that another researcher would come up with the same results given the same analytical framework and material, is in principle unattainable according to a social constructionist understanding of social science (Bergström & Boréus 2012, p. 43). However, it is possible and of utmost importance for me as a researcher to improve the transparency and reliability of my thesis by reflexively analysing the production

of knowledge, explaining my methodological and theoretical choices as well as by substantiating my results and conclusions with explicit references and quotes to the empirical material (Bergström & Boréus 2012, p. 42–43).

4.3 Material

The secondary material that underlies the theoretical perspectives and discussions has been selected as a result of a comprehensive literature review of discourse-analytical traditions, discourse analysis in environmental politics and previous research on carbon offsetting. This is a crucial step in order to take part in the cumulative discussions on the specific topic of research and to position the thesis in a broader theoretical context (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p. 20).

The empirical material used in this essay was carefully chosen to be able to answer the research questions in the best possible manner. Since the focal point of my analysis is the mapping of the different framings of the concept of carbon offsetting in Swedish politics, I found the SPICCM to be a central point of interest. Large parts of the empirical material is thus provided by documents and annual reports regarding the Programme from the SEA. The material further consists of appropriation directions, private member's motions, audit reports from the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) and a few more public documents that relate to the Swedish government's international climate change mitigation policies. In addition to the different policy documents and in order to sufficiently map actors' different framings I have also included reports and statements from relevant businesses and NGO's, in this case the Swedish carbon offset company Tricorona Climate Partner, which has delivered parts of the Swedish government's offsets, and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), Sweden's largest environmental NGO. The motivation behind the choice of using both public documents, such as motions, and material from Tricorona and the SSNC is that I believe that these sources provide good conditions to find different framings on carbon offsetting.

In total, the empirical material consists of 18 appropriation directions, 25 reports, 33 motions as well as a number of additional documents.[1] This is a rather extensive study in relation to the relatively large material, but it is important to stress that this is not a completely exhaustive investigation of the different perceptions on carbon offsetting. I would preferably have used an even larger empirical material, e.g. including more propositions, written communication from the government or interpellations, but this was not possible due to the timeframe of the thesis. The results will however provide a good indication of the different discourses in this field of Swedish climate change policy and their change over time.

[1] See Appendix 1 for a comprehensive list of the empirical material used in the analysis.

5 Analysis

In the first section of this chapter, I present the four main storylines found in the analysed material and account for their respective understanding of carbon offsetting. The second section subsequently discusses the main findings presented in the previous section and takes the analysis one step further by drawing on the identified storylines to distil them into the main discourses found in the empirical material.

5.1 The storylines on carbon offsetting

5.1.1 Saving our economy

This reasoning on carbon offsetting ties together climate change mitigation and an economic rationale by comparing international and national measures in terms of their respective financial proportions (ER 2011:09). In this light, carbon offsetting through flexible mechanisms is promoted as a more cost-efficient way for Sweden to reduce the country's emissions in accordance with its reduction targets. This type of climate investment is seen as an economically rational alternative to undertaking expensive, less efficient measures at home (ER 2011:09, p. 45; ET 2014:16; RiR 2011:8, p. 25–26, 34). The core argument of this narrative is that investing in emission reductions where this is the cheapest yields more bang for the buck.

> It is important to use the invested resources so that both short and long-term climate targets can be achieved as cost-efficient as possible and to get the greatest environmental effect as possible. (ER 2005:01, p. 29)
> The support of international commitments is cost-efficient compared to several climate actions in Sweden, which means that a greater climate benefit is achieved per invested crown. (ET 2014:16, p. 6–7)
> The funding of international climate investments should be increased at the expense of ineffective actions in Sweden. (mot. 2019/20:595, p. 9)

This storyline emphasises the understanding of climate change as a global issue that in turn requires global solutions (ER 2011:09, p. 37; ER 2015:02, p. 13; Green Stream 2018, p. 6). The context allows for a downplaying of Sweden's role in relation to other countries with larger environmental footprints. Seeing as Sweden is a country with a comparatively small share of the global emissions, it is perceived important to promote other countries' actions on mitigating climate change (ET 2014:16, p. 4). It is this reasoning that underlies the conception of carbon offsetting

and emission reduction credits as "low-hanging fruit", i.e. cheap solutions to reduce global emissions (mot. 2017/18:3352, p. 12; mot. 2019/20:595, p. 9).

> It doesn't matter to the climate where emissions are reduced, the important factor is that they take place. More far-reaching emission reductions can be achieved with the available resources through cost-efficient international climate actions. (ET 2014:16, p. 46)
>
> Since the challenge with climate change is global, it doesn't matter where in the world the emission reductions that Sweden can be credited with take place. Therefore, we want to increase the investments within Sweden's Programme for International Climate Change Mitigation, which has a proven effect as well as great climate benefit and high cost-efficiency. (mot. 2017/18:3681, p.109)
>
> The planet and the physics of climate change don't care who has "sinned" or where. What's important are the actual, concrete emission reductions, not to apportion blame. (Tricorona 2019a)

Moreover, cost-efficiency is argued by some proponents to be an integral part in striking ambitious agreements on climate change mitigation at both national and international levels (ER 2014:02, p. 1; ET 2014:16, p. 5).

> The tangible cooperation through CDM contributes to increased confidence between developed and developing countries within international cooperation. Flexible mechanisms further bring opportunities for cost-efficient emission reductions which in turn pave the way for more far-reaching commitments regarding limits to emissions. (ER 2012:02, p. 5)
>
> New mechanisms are being discussed as a part of a future global climate regime. Mechanisms offer flexibility and increases the possibilities of cost-efficient restrictions on emissions. They are thereby important if countries are to commit themselves to extensive emission reductions. (ER 2014:02, p. 65)
>
> Mechanisms that create flexibility and cost-efficiency will be important components in a future treaty and can make it easier to strike a deal on a more ambitious climate policy. (ET 2014:16, p. 5)

Some actors that deploy the storyline argue that cost-efficiency, i.e. greatest climate benefit for least money spent, means taking responsibility for "the environment, the climate and the taxpayers' money", thus further connecting climate change with economic reasoning by implying that a more cost-efficient way to reduce emissions is not only financially rational but also morally sound *vis-à-vi* the public purse (mot. 2017/18:3681, p. 109).

The storylines is one of the key storylines on carbon offsetting and it has been popular throughout the entire analysed time period. It has mobilized many actors, with its key proponents being the Swedish Government, the SEA and members of the parliament, most notably from the Moderates but also from the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats.

5.1.2 Saving the world

The saving the world-storyline is the other main storyline found in the analysed material. This storyline promotes a "win-win-win" narrative and advocates the idea that carbon offsetting through flexible mechanisms can not only deliver actual global emission reductions in an effective manner, but also contribute to sustainable development in a broad spectrum of areas in developing countries as well as enabling export of technology. Carbon offsetting is seen as a way to achieve contributions such as better living conditions for women and children, higher employment and reduce the negative effects of deforestation on local ecosystems and biodiversity (ER 2011:01, p. 69, 75; ER 2016:02, p. 15–17; ER 2018:03, s. 20, Tricorona 2015). As such, carbon offsetting projects are seen as vehicles to reduce emissions whilst also improving prosperity in the less wealthy parts of the world and spreading Swedish sustainable technology.

> Sweden's Programme for International Climate Change Mitigation focuses on projects within renewable energy and making energy more efficient, project categories that generally give clear contributions to sustainable development by enabling modern and environmentally adapted technology to be chosen ahead of traditional, and in many cases fossil fuel based, energy technology. (ER 2017:5, p. 19)
>
> In addition to emission reductions, the projects contribute to surplus values such as more reliable energy supply, reduced air pollution and improved access to environmentally adapted energy services in rural areas and reduced negative effects on local ecosystems. Several projects have contributed to new job opportunities and have had a pedagogical effect by conveying the value of saving energy. (ER 2019:5, p. 19)

Moreover, the storyline emphasises that emissions in developing countries are increasing at a rapid rate alongside growing prosperity. It is therefore important to steer these countries toward a path of more sustainable development, e.g. regarding improved economising and energy efficiency, in order to avoid further increases of the amount of GHG in the atmosphere (ER 2011:09, p. 45–46; ET 2014:16, p. 4).

> The developing countries strive toward increasing their production of electricity and the financing through CDM enables renewable energy production to be chosen instead of other alternatives, e.g. fossil fuel-based production. (ER 2013:02, p. 54)

Actors frequently tie the saving the world-storyline together with the saving our economy-storyline and its cost-efficiency rationale depicted above. In so doing, proponents argue that sustainable development, technology transferring and cost-efficient economic reasoning achieves synergies, thus strengthening the view that carbon offsetting yields more benefits than only reduced emissions, i.e. a win-win-win narrative.

> Flexible mechanisms, and the opportunity of achieving cost-efficient emission reductions that they bring about, enable greater commitments than what would otherwise be the case and can contribute to sustainable development and the spreading of environmentally effective technology. (ER 2011:09, p. 64)

Carbon offsetting is also viewed as a way for developed countries to act responsibly in the context of climate change mitigation. Not in relation to the notion of industrialised countries' historically high emissions, as the proponents of the acting responsibly-storyline argue (see section 5.1.3 below), but rather with regard to each country's capacity and available resources. In this light, developing countries are portrayed as not having the financial and technological prerequisites to accomplish a transition to sustainable sources of energy on their own. Hence, why it is required of wealthier countries to help less developed ones out in order to reduce emissions on a global scale.

The storyline has been important throughout the analysed timeframe and together with the saving our economy-narrative makes out the two most frequently occurring framings of carbon offsetting. It has been commonly used by several actors but has most notably by the SEA, the Swedish government in appropriation directions and Tricorona.

5.1.3 Acting responsibly

This storyline partly distances itself from the reasonings of the "saving"-storylines in its focus on culpability and equity. At the core of this perspective is the notion that Sweden should take its own responsibility in reaching its emission reduction targets. Responsibility in this sense refers to Sweden's and other early industrialised countries' historical responsibility for great amounts of GHG emissions that have accumulated in the atmosphere (mot. 2006/07:MJ391). Climate change is thus viewed as a global issue, but some specific actors have a greater responsibility for causing the problem than others. Having this in mind, carbon offsetting is portrayed and criticised as a way for richer countries to buy their way out of carrying out national commitments on climate change mitigation (mot. 2012/13:U327; mot. 2013/14:U316, p. 13-14; mot. 2018/19:392, p. 14). In other words, according to this storyline, carbon offsetting through flexible mechanisms works as an alibi that allows developed countries to deflect responsibility for not undertaking more costly actions domestically (mot. 2007/08:MJ463). This critical argument is for example refuted by carbon offset company Tricorona, which calls the "buy-ones-way-out" metaphor "neat but definitely untrue" (Tricorona 2019a).

The proponents of the storyline are thus sceptical toward using carbon offsetting as a practice to cut national emissions with regards to senses of guilt and responsibility. They do however support offset projects in the context of reducing global emissions and view them as an important tool in helping developing countries in their transitions to a more sustainable society. Offsetting emissions might also be a way for Swedish companies to cover up for some emissions at home that cannot be reduced at once (SSNC 2015). The main point of critique is that

carbon offsetting should not be an excuse for developed countries to not undertake sufficient domestic measures.

Furthermore, buying credits from offset projects poses a threat to both global and domestic reduction targets if these international investments discourage national actors in the developing world to reduce their own emissions (SSNC 2013, p. 9-10).

> Expectations of opportunities to buy ones way out of national commitments risk contributing to decision makers within politics, public administration and industry to rest on taking action. (mot. 2006/07:MJ391)
>
> The pursuit of solutions that are cost-efficient in the short-term cannot obstruct or delay unavoidable changes, e.g. changes of the infrastructure in the rich part of the world. It is therefore counterproductive to allow developed countries to count measures for emission reductions in developing countries as a part of the domestic commitments, which is enabled by the current design of the Kyoto protocol's flexible mechanisms CDM and JI. The support to developing countries should be conducted beyond the measures at home that lead to the long-term reduction targets. (SSNC 2013, p. 9-10)
>
> We mean that international climate investments are necessary but these should not be used to reach the national climate targets. Instead of buying emission credits with uncertain environmental effects, the Left wants to pursue a policy of powerful climate investments in developing countries. These investments shall contribute to new emission reductions that should not be used to reach our national climate target. (mot. 2015/16:187, p. 14)

The acting responsibly-storyline has not been as popular as the two presented above, but it too has been regularly found in the analysed material from the whole time period, most notably in political motions. Its use in motions intensified slightly between 2012-2014 before returning to previous levels of occurrence. The storyline has mainly attracted actors from the Left party, the Swedish Green Party as well as the SSNC.

5.1.4 Risky business

The key focus of this storyline is placed on the additionality aspect of carbon offsetting, i.e. if the projects result in actual emission reductions and how this can be verified and guaranteed. The proponents of the storyline deal with these issues in two main different ways and consequently draw different conclusions about what it means for the applicability and reliability of the practice.

Some advocates emphasize the uncertainty regarding different aspects of offsetting projects through flexible mechanisms and several risks with the CDM and JI-frameworks are stressed and problematized. This criticism involves uncertainty surrounding whether the projects will take place and will be able to deliver the determined emission reduction credits. It also entails a questioning of whether they result in actual emission reductions or might even lead to increased

emissions (RiR:2011:8, p. 42 ff.). The criticism also regards whether the local communities will reap actual benefits from the projects, as promised by the saving the world-storyline (mot. 2011/12:MJ407; mot. 2012/13:MJ485).

> CDM and JI have considerable inherent risks. It is uncertain if the projects result in real emission reductions. It is furthermore uncertain if many of the projects will deliver the agreed emission credits. (RiR 2011:08, p. 51)
>
> Carbon offsetting risks taking focus away from efforts to reduce emissions. It could be a way to buy ones way out of necessary technological and behavioural changes. It can be positive when companies that have done their homework also invest in renewable energy in order to cover for emissions that cannot be immediately reduced. It is however important to show that carbon offsetting really leads to the desired long-term effects and that the social effects do not become unacceptable. (SSNC 2015)
>
> The Left means that complementary measures open up for Sweden to risk losing focus on its own necessary emission reductions and to partly rely on measures with uncertain climate benefit. (mot. 2018/19:392, p. 14)

These proponents question whether the projects result in actual additional cuts, stressing the difficulties in verifying that acquired emission reduction credits are real and not "fictitious" (mot. 2012/13:MJ453). Based on these uncertainties it is argued that Sweden should not acquire credits with uncertain values at the expense of domestic measures (mot. 2017/18:1141, p. 13). It is stressed that the mechanisms must be further scrutinized and investigated and that already contracted projects must reach the highest standards of verification (mot. 2012/13:MJ453; RiR 2011:08). Taken together, these actors are more sceptical toward the methodologies and their abilities of verifying climate benefit.

Other advocates don't explicitly refer to the risks associated with flexible mechanisms, but still emphasize the importance of additionality and ensuring that the project-based mechanisms deliver real reductions. This view, mainly advocated by the SEA, supports carbon offsetting and argues that the uncertainty can be dealt with through independent third-party investigations and comprehensive controls within the UN framework (cf. ER 2015:02; ER 2019:05, p. 17). The climate benefit of carbon offsetting is to be verified and ensured by the aforementioned specified methodologies, such as additionality tests and different auditing and controlling practices established in the CDM framework (cf. ER 2015:02, p. 61). These advocates thus place a stronger trust in technological methodologies to verify climate benefit from carbon offsetting projects.

This storyline appears throughout the analysed time period, but has occurred more frequently in the last eight years, with its critical part becoming more popular after the publication of the SNAO's report (RiR 2011:08) in 2011. The storyline has mainly been used in the less critical way by the SEA and has been deployed in a more critical sense by the SNAO and members of parliament from both the Left and the Swedish Green Party.

5.2 Interpreting the results – from storylines to discourses

The results of the analysis, summed up in table 5.1 below, give rise to some interesting conclusions. There are four main framings of carbon offsetting found in the material, which all have their specific understanding of the practice. Drawing on these results, my understanding of storylines as the building blocks of discourses and by looking at the actors of each discourse coalition, I argue that there are two main discourses on carbon offsetting in the analysed political context.

The first discourse, which is the dominating one in terms of frequent use and attraction of actors, is made up by the saving our economy and saving the world-storylines which are frequently mentioned in tandem. This discourse highlights climate change as a global problem of an increase in inefficient energy use and production in developing countries, which can be solved through international project-based actions. It thus has a positive stance on carbon offsetting through flexible mechanisms such as the CDM. Carbon offsetting is portrayed as a cost-efficient method for achieving emission cuts and reaching Sweden's climate targets while also delivering side benefits in sustainable development for developing countries and technology export. This discourse draws on both economic and technological discourses and shares distinct features with neoliberalism and ecological modernization (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2006; Nielsen 2016). Ecological modernization holds that environmental protection is compatible with continuous economic growth, the liberal market order as well as sustainable development, much like the underlying reasoning found in the "saving"-storylines, where carbon offsetting is framed as a way to both mitigate climate change using market-based mechanisms and achieve synergy effects in the form of further economic and societal benefits (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand 2006, p. 52-53, 60-61). The trust put in carbon offsets, in carbon commodification and in verifying the additionality of offsets, further rests on a belief in innovative technological solutions to handle environmental problems, which also resonates with ecological modernization. Moreover, the identified actors' emphasis on cost-efficiency and "bang for the buck"-type rationales, promotion of international networks and trust in using markets to achieve environmental goals are characteristics that are in line with neoliberal ideology (Newell & Paterson 2010, p. 23-24, 26). That this more positive discourse adheres to neoliberal values is rather unsurprising since neoliberalism has fundamentally shaped the overall responses to climate change and particularly the creation and promotion of market-based solutions such as carbon offsetting (Lohmann 2010, p. 25; Newell & Paterson 2010, p. 23 ff.).

The competing discourse is mainly built on the acting responsibly-storyline and is more critical toward carbon offsetting. International actions are held as important to cut global emissions, but offsetting is not viewed as a viable means for Sweden to reach its own reduction targets. This discourse draws on philosophical and ethical discourses in its reasoning on the historical responsibility of Sweden and other

Table 5.1 The storylines and discourse coalitions on carbon offsetting

Storyline	Core assumptions	Change	Actors	Coalition change
Saving our economy	Climate change a global issue, doesn't matter where reductions take place Carbon offsetting yields greater environmental effect per invested crown, i.e. more bang for the buck, than national commitments Cost-efficiency necessary incentive/element in striking global deals on climate change mitigation	Occurs regularly throughout analysed time period, usage in motions slightly intensified in recent years	Green Stream, members of parliament from the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats, the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats, Swedish Energy Agency, Swedish Government, Swedish National Audit Office	No identified change, coalition stable
Saving the world	Offsetting enables maximizing of synergies between cost-efficient emission reductions, sustainable development and technology transferring Rapid increase of emissions in developing countries – important to help and put them on a more sustainable path	Stable, occurs regularly throughout analysed time period	Members of parliament from the Moderates and the Swedish Green Party, Swedish Energy Agency, Swedish government, Tricorona	No identified change, coalition stable
Acting responsibly	Carbon offsetting allows rich countries to deflect historical responsibility International commitments important but credits from these projects should not count toward Sweden's national targets Risk of focus being shifted away from domestic measures	Stable, occurs regularly throughout analysed time period	Members of parliament from the Left, the Social Democrats and the Swedish Green Party, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation	No identified change, coalition stable
Risky business	Carbon offsetting associated with risks and uncertainties Uncertain if projects are additional, i.e. result in real or fictitious emission reductions Methodologies for evaluation and investigation crucial and needed to verify climate benefit, differing belief in these methodologies Different views on the trustworthiness of carbon offsetting in delivering actual emission reductions	Present throughout analysed time period, critical perspective mainly occurs in the last eight years and most notably in motions	Members of parliament from the Swedish Green Party and the Left, Swedish Energy Agency, Swedish National Audit Office,	No identified change, coalition stable

countries for having emitted large amounts of the GHG emissions currently concentrated in the atmosphere (Hajer 1995). Hence, why Sweden, acknowledging its moral culpability, should contribute to developing countries' transition to sustainable development and support them in reducing emissions, but credits obtained from such offset projects should not count toward Sweden's national commitments. This reasoning echoes some of Bachram's (2004) criticism on offsets and can be found in the discourse on climate justice, which problematizes these very questions of equity, culpability and liability in the context of climate change (cf. Meyer & Sanklecha 2017; Schlosberg & Collins 2014). Investing in offset projects furthermore risks diverting attention away from undertaking necessary measures at home and thereby becomes a way for developed countries to escape their historical responsibility.

These two discourses are accompanied by the risky business-storyline, which stands out from the other storylines because it can belong to both discourses, depending on the actor using it. As identified above, this storyline can be used to stress the uncertainties surrounding carbon offsetting, most notably focusing on the additionality of projects. This questioning of whether offsets result in actual emission cuts is reminiscent of the criticism that scholars have uttered against offset practices (Cames et al. 2016; Lohmann 2006; 2009; 2010). When deployed to criticize offsetting and the methodologies of verifying additionality, the storyline subsequently becomes a part of the challenging discourse. However, when actors such as the SEA emphasize the ability of these methodologies to handle the uncertainties and achieve a credible claim on additionality, the storyline is used in the context of the dominating discourse, which is less critical of flexible mechanisms and has a stronger belief in current technological responses to climate change. This storyline therefore illustrates Hajer's (1995; 2019) claim that storylines have the possibility to attract actors with different underlying values and interests but who perceive an issue in similar, though not necessarily identical ways.

Moreover, one of the most interesting aspects of the results is the apparent stability in this discursive field. Although the saving the economy and risky business-storylines have experienced minor changes in their usage in later years, the storylines have generally remained constant. This is also the case regarding the discourse coalitions, which too have remained unchanged and indicate permanence. This shows that these challenging perceptions on carbon offsetting, concentrated in the two main discourses, are static and continuously compete in a form of discursive struggle between two fixed sets of actors. Further research is however needed to discern the actual power relations between the discourses.

To sum up the analysis, the findings indicate that there are two competing discourses on carbon offsetting: one more positive, technocratic and economic discourse and one critical discourse which mainly draws on philosophic arguments and is less trusting in the underlying technological methodologies of carbon offsetting. The discourses thus exemplify Hajer's claim that actors draw on discourses from other stocks of knowledge, e.g. economics and philosophy as in this case, when making sense of environmental issues (Hajer 1995, p. 45). Their respective advocates frame the problem of climate change differently and subsequently perceive offsetting in different ways. These discourses mainly

disagree on whether carbon offsetting should be undertaken to reach Sweden's national reduction targets and they make use of distinctive arguments to argue for or against the role of offsetting in domestic climate governance. The findings also illustrate that the discursive change has been minimal since both framings and coalitions have been stable over time, which further suggests that there will be little discursive change in the near future.

6 Conclusion

This thesis shows that while carbon offsetting is currently used as a way for Sweden to reach its goal of becoming climate neutral, the debate on carbon offsetting in Swedish politics is anything but neutral. The four key storylines, and the two discourses that they make up, illustrate that actors construct carbon offsetting in different ways and perceive its role in climate change mitigation differently. Based on their different understandings and arguments, these discourses disagree on whether or not the government should use offsetting as a means to reach Sweden's national reduction targets.

In terms of discursive change, this thesis has further made it evident that both storylines and discourse coalitions have generally been stable over time. The main conclusion to be drawn from this thesis is that carbon offsetting has been and remains a controversial issue in Swedish climate change politics and that actors have seemingly fixed opinions and understandings of offsets. As the findings indicate, this is not likely to change in the near future because of the apparent stability and permanence of both storylines and discourse coalitions over the analysed years.

Although this thesis has focused on domestic Swedish politics, one cannot help but to look at these results in the light of the climate negotiations that broke down at COP25 in Madrid, precisely on this very issue of how to implement flexible mechanisms in international climate change governance. If the discursive field of carbon offsetting is as contested and static at the international level as in Swedish politics, which I find likely due to substantially greater amount of actors at the international scale, it is not difficult to understand why these negotiations failed. It would furthermore not be surprising if this issue remains unresolved even after Glasgow. However, comprehensively investigating the different ways that actors make sense of carbon offsetting in international politics has to be left for future studies.

Moreover, it would be interesting for future research to analyze new material in order to gain a better understanding of the different framings and achieve a more nuanced and thorough mapping of the discourses on carbon offsetting in Swedish politics. One could for example use newspaper articles or study the political institutions more closely by investigating more propositions, interpellations or other forms of public data. It would also be of great interest to interview different key actors from the SEA, from respective parties in the Swedish parliament as well as representatives from the SSNC, Tricorona or other relevant organizations. Future research could also go further and build on this thesis by deploying Hajer's other analytical concepts of discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization and thereby study the power relations between the discourses found in this discursive field. Finally, how actors make sense of climate change, its accompanying

challenges as well as its possible solutions is and will remain a both contested and important topic as the world tries to deal with a warming climate, which is why discourse analysis in general offers interesting opportunities for future studies in this policy field.

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