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**HOW EUROPEAN WELFARE STATES
PERPETUATE THE GROWTH IMPERATIVE
AND WHY ALTERNATIVES ARE NEEDED**

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Abstract

In industrial circles, in political parties, and in newspapers, there is seldom one reiterating issue that concerns the general public more than the situation of a national economy, as well as how to secure or to undo the practice of it.

What is arguably one of the core principals of modern cultures, especially in European societies, not just being a nuclear unit in a bigger economy, but enacting and reenacting the social construct of a normative system a political state economy offers, is strangely overlooked by the majority. Perhaps it is the deep rootage of a welfare state in its economic and societal context that backs the unwillingness to question its practice, and thus there is little one can do to change the face of a welfare state fundamentally.

In contrast, this work commits to the belief that under the current predictions of environmental degradation and social insecurity, it is indispensable to start questioning the present lines of action in order to be able to adapt to the environmental and social challenges that are now approaching us. It will furthermore need an entire uplifting and reshuffling of the economic narrative to change the output of modern welfare states effectively. However, what it first takes is scrutinising the current system and the underlying thought mechanisms, and not least the ability to critically reflect on one's own practices.

The study sets out to explore the cultural mechanisms that lie behind modern approaches to welfare, which are given by the predominantly European conceptions on economics, society and politics. As a theoretical framework, Braudel's Annales school, European history and structuralism are used to explain the underlying thought mechanisms in European welfare state-making. Other points of interest rely on a discourse analysis of the European Green Deal that emphasises the work's topicality, as well as backing the thesis that European welfare states are unable to adequately react to contemporary struggles such as climate change.

Keywords: European welfare states, European thought paradigms, economic growth, climate emergency, European Green Deal

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1. Introduction: How sustainable are European Welfare States?

1.1. Background

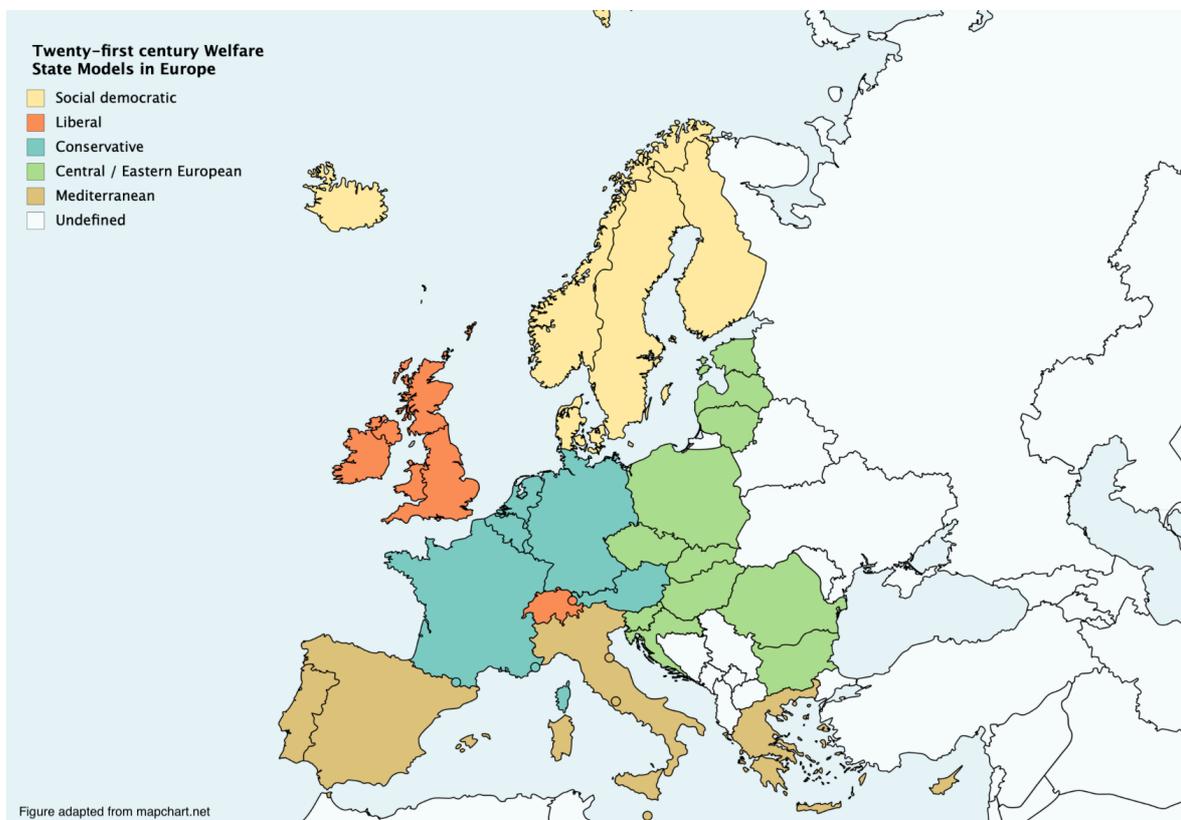
The political economy of European welfare state capitalism is a highly ideological one even though it is in many cases framed an economical and hence somewhat rational institution. In *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*,¹ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, a key scholar in the debate on the functioning of post-industrial welfare states in the Western world, suggests that variations in the historical development of different Western countries are not shaped by autonomous market forces but by the nature of states and state differences. He reflects on the importance of cultural differences and therefore, different approaches and goals of a welfare state. Throughout the years, and specifically after the global financial crisis of 2007/2008 and the European debt crisis in 2009, further European integration and the pressures of globalisation, the classification of European welfare states into more and more diverged clusters demonstrated how diversified the European welfare landscape looks like today, and what level of sophistication the research on political economy in Europe has reached since Esping-Andersen introduced the contemporary welfare capitalism investigation in 1990. When speaking of European welfare types in today's world, academia tends to categorise Europe into five general welfare state clusters. Even with weak features of one kind of welfare policy or overlapping characteristics of at least two different welfare types in one or more countries, it is possible to group this mosaic of European states into regimes through different historical developments, political aims and policy schemes.

The classic categorisation of liberal, conservative and social-democratic regime types Esping-Andersen developed is reproduced by states like the UK or Switzerland, which rely on a liberal approach of social security that functions as assets of the last resort to ensure a support on the lowest level of income while at the same time generating only low levels of insurance contributions or general taxation. These countries usually do rely on traditional work ethics and liberalisation of their market economies. For conservative welfare states, benefit levels are relatively high, insurance-based and strongly earnings-related. What that means for its model states of Germany or France is the implication of traditionalist values

¹ Esping-Andersen 1990

based on a male breadwinner ideal that redistributes social benefits throughout the attached household. For Esping-Andersen's third regime, the fundamental financing mechanism stems from a general (progressive) taxation with a high degree of redistribution throughout the social stratum. Hence, countries that function under social-democratic policy schemes like Sweden or Denmark tend to form higher levels of cohesion and benefit levels while relying on a cost-intensive taxation scheme.²

These days, an additional Mediterranean model can be added to the big five of European welfare regimes by showing a distinct cultural, political and economic set-up compared to its north-western European neighbours, as southern European states do traditionally over-protect core workers while granting little - if at all - protection to those at the margins of the labour market, with the exception of a universalist healthcare system. The fifth model applies to central and eastern European countries, which, due to a distinct shared post-communist background, is either regarded as a transition model or a blend of intermixed regimes of the north-western European models.



² Hay and Wincott 2012, p. 33-65

The golden times of welfare states - the end of the Second World War until the Seventies, that is - were marked by economic and population boom and have now faded into an era that is very post in that it chases after the same goals as its predecessor the post-war period, but does not play under the same rules anymore.³ Instead, the pressures of globalisation, financial crisis, austerity and new social risks that emerged since the 1990s and climaxed in the financial crisis in the late 2010s, build the determinants of today's welfare thinking.⁴ The decades of the economic miracle have passed, long live stagnation. The pressure, in turn, puts a lot of fiscal pressure on states no matter where in Europe while at the same time imposing substantial market liberalisation as the answer. The new age of public austerity is the outcome of globalisation and cohesion mechanisms, both of which are entwined with further market integration and creating a level playing field for its economic actors.

Due to its socio-economic implications, however, further Europeanisation, globalisation and environmental deterioration do also always carry ramifications for its citizens, and hence society.⁵ That leaves the welfare states in a position where they must learn where the economic, social and ecological boundaries lie, what is tolerable and what is not.

1.2. Relevance and Hypothesis

The different welfare state models in Europe, which distinct themselves from each other through historical developments and cultural implications, political aims and policy schemes, represent the great sociological diversity the European continent comprises. However, in this work, we are not primarily concerned with comparing and finding differences between the welfare state clusters, but carry the intention to pin down a reasonable amount of characteristics that these welfare states share in order to elaborate on common problems associated with underlying thought paradigms that originate in first and foremost European thinking.

³ Hay and Wincott 2012, p. 8-32

⁴ Cousins 2005, p. 41-57, 193-210

⁵ Kershaw 2019

The welfare state models share an economic liberal approach that is characterised by a globalised capitalist system, which is furthermore encouraged by the European single market, and is followed by common problems such as the latest global economic and eurozone crisis, austerity measurements as well as new social risks or climate change.

In addition to the common economic approach, there is a second commonality with modern welfare states share but which has not been touched upon yet. Irrespective of the traditionally economic and social parameters that shape a welfare state, the environmental confrontations have not been mentioned in the welfare state context, neither theoretically nor in politico-economic discussions.⁶ This could be indicative of several things, including unclear competence, incomplete theoretical frameworks, underdeveloped data, or merely the lacking will or assumption that climate change does not make a substantial contribution to the state of a national economy. One has ended up in a situation of the problem being neglected from both political economies as well as academia, which is undoubtedly a disappointing moment since anthropogenic climate change and its enormous impact has been known for at least half a century.⁷ In many aspects, it seems, the learning process to cope with environmental limitations has just begun.

Thus, it can be hypothesised that European welfare states are blind towards climate change. Moreover, it can be argued that under the prevailing socio-economic parameters, modern European welfare states will not be able to adjust to nor tackle the climate emergency in due time because of the hegemonic growth paradigm today's national economies are based upon.

The underlying message of this work is that the social as well as environmental risks and challenges that have to be overcome in the next decades is a matter of joint work, responsibility, and rethinking. That is to say, becoming a sustainable welfare state - and this is what we can hope for - is based on joint efforts rather than irreconcilable differences between the different welfare regimes. After analysing from a new point of view, the reader may hopefully see the importance of shifting the focus from what differentiates the welfare states to what they have in common, both in terms of harming but also implementing co-

⁶ see Hay and Wincott 2012, Cousins 2005, Room 2019, de la Porte and Heins 2015

⁷ Farley 2016, p. 8

operative solutions. At the same time, carving out different approaches to contemporary obstacles between the states is not a negative accomplishment, not least because it may help to crystallise some of the most frequently occurring patterns that concern unsustainable actions, which in turn may create an applicable counterpart when trying to formulate a solution. Having said that, this work is something of a hybrid between a humanistic enquiry and a less conventional analysis of policy development. The work wants to point out to some of the conventional practice of welfare state-making in Europe but does also offer insights into the reader's assumptions to formulate the question to what extent they are part of the system. In a way, this is a personal account of how an individual does both influence and reinforce the perceived mechanisms of welfare.

Nevertheless, this research does have its limitations: However all-encompassing the topic is in ecological, economic, political and social terms, this work is not able to provide one ready-to-apply solution for the ecological and social crisis European welfare states find themselves in, not least because the intricate differences between the welfare types would not allow it, but also because the solution would require a lot more research capacity.

1.3. Aims and Research Questions

The study aims to conceptualise the relationship between the environment and European society from a socio-economic point of view, plus painting a picture of the bridge between how the growth paradigm developed and how it constitutes contemporary welfare state-making. To what extent do European welfare states perpetuate the growth paradigm?

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- Based on the idea of historical contextualisation, how can the notion of welfare, climate change and economic growth be described through cultural theory?
- In what way does the comprehension of growth shape the thinking about European welfare states as well as the environment?
- How do the underlying assumptions about the growth imperative and vice versa the call for climate protection manifest in contemporary political actions?

The study furthermore aims to break free from its own background and tries to establish a new pattern of thought beyond the growth paradigm that is anchored in welfare states. Furthermore stressing the importance to sustain the unique set of European welfare states, nevertheless under a more sustainable approach for both nature and social environment plays an essential goal in the work.

1.4. Analytical Framework and Structure

In the chapters that follow, we interrogate and challenge each aspect of the conventional narrative. A vast body of literature exists on the relationship between climate change and politics, as well as on European welfare states. However, the missing interlinkage between these studies makes each subject limited in their contribution to latest developments. The structure of this work allows to close the research gap through the following framework.

Why do we think the way we think? In the second chapter, we begin by establishing a comprehensive historiographical groundwork for which the Annales school will act as the frame of reference. Afterwards, we trace the historical fabric European culture consists of, including industrialisation, religious implication and Western ideas and values based on progress that influence modern thinking in today's Europe. We look back to the origins of modern European thinking, developing a critical revision of the prevailing dogma in the process. In this, we seek to uncover, draw attention to, and incorporate into an account of the origins of typically European thought patterns that make it so inevitably challenging to overcome the current principals of the growth imperative. Embedding the welfare state into a far-reaching cultural perspective helps to better account for the common sense that has become deeply entrenched. European welfare states are constructed under the influence of the inimitable European thought and value system to the degree that has not been included in the discourse up until now. It is that invisible fabric of European thinking, that the welfare states compose, that makes it so hard to surmount the growth imperative.

How is our thinking made visible? In chapter three, we turn our attention directly to the question of growth implications in practice. This we do by engaging with the EU's Social Investment Strategy, as well as its underlying connection with the emerging EU social di-

mension through a case study on the European Green Deal. We form, in spirit of the literature that deals with market activation policies, a set of critical remarks of the European Commission's European Green Deal core concepts and its proposed empirical application by utilising a discourse analysis. While the different theories concerning European welfare states and the historical contextualisation create the research's theoretical fundament, the European Green Deal builds a concrete example for the practical implementation of the traditional rationales as conceptualised in chapter one and two of the work.

What can we do to broaden our perspective? The fourth chapter entwines the outcomes of the work with expectations for future research on alternatives to underline the fundamental principles of economic system change for European societies and political economy. It tries to settle a clear depiction of the cultural and socio-economic means of European welfare state economies in an environmentally sustainable setting by dividing the outcomes into the following subitems that are brought to light throughout the work:

- European welfare states in their modern context;
- Historically derived European paradigms on economics, society and the environment;
- Climate emergency from a political viewpoint using the example of the European Green Deal;
- The need for a new focal point plus outlook.

Additionally to summarising the outcomes, reflections, suggestions, recommendations and alternative approaches to future research are mentioned. The outlook adds current developments to the bigger picture and additionally includes alternative principles to economic growth via economic, policy and social determinants.

This research paper aims to analyse European welfare states and their economic growth imperative from a meta-perspective. It does not compromise on choosing between either humanities or political and social sciences but rather to find overlapping patterns that have to be taken into account on both sides of the academic spectrum. In order to find a method of resolution that leads to current European welfare economies into a more sustainable state, it is necessary to examine the material from a broad perspective. In future, it can be foreseen that European welfare states should additionally be measured by their ecological footprint, social safety mechanisms and general wellbeing.

2. Historical Contextualisation and Theorisation

In European history, welfare states have been considered a key factor of progress. Welfare has been the subject of many classic studies in political economy or social policy. Most researchers investigating welfare systems have utilised social policies such as workers' rights or pension reforms in the attempt to evaluate the impact of policies on citizens - there is now a variety of studies that indicate the latest developments, trends and forecasts with regards to the social impact of welfare policies.⁸ Much of the current literature on social provision policies pays particular attention to austerity, new social risks or Europeanisation processes.⁹ However, these studies are not able to explain the cultural mechanisms that lie behind modern approaches to welfare. Hence, this part of the research considers the implications of the evolution of European thinking in policy and market-making. The objective of this part of the study is to expose the dependence of European politics, economy and social construct on Western or rather European thinking. The purpose of the historical contextualisation is to lie open the extend to which welfare is dependant on historical institutionalisation, and to expose the fatality that stands behind such underlying structures. Characterisation of welfare states is vital for our understanding of European cultural developments as they play a key role in each political economy of a civilisation. That is why by the end of the chapter, we will be able to allocate welfare systems in a historical and cultural frame, and will furthermore be able to conceptualise the relationship between the environment and society from a socio-economic point of view. The socio-ecological aspect is important in order to understand the occurring discrepancy between natural limitations and the modern economic approach on welfare.

In order to shape a debate on welfare, one first needs a definition. Welfare generally accounts for health, happiness and fortunes of a person or group.¹⁰ The emphasis on mental wellbeing is critical because it means that simple material wellbeing is not sufficient. Welfare does not occur the moment when a statutory procedure designed to promote a basic physical security materialises. Aristotle formulates a similar goal of a city state - as city

⁸ see Hay and Wincott 2012, Cousins 2005, Room 2019, de la Porte and Heins 2015

⁹ see Vanhercke, Sabato and Bouget 2018

¹⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.

states used to be the common form of government in ancient Greece - which is to ensure that its citizens live the *good life*.¹¹ Putting welfare in an institutional setting, therefore, means that a welfare state occurs only when its government agrees on a common sense of well-being for its beneficiaries, and aims to realise such. In other words, welfare increases when its meaning captures both economic and social parameters, even if social insurance first of all means minimal physical provision that guarantees viability.¹² Thus, a welfare state is not limited to physical security only. It can furthermore be defined in economic, financial, technological, social, psychological, political, cultural, or even ecological terms. Contrariwise, due to the constant commercialisation of day-to-day operations since the 1980s through neo-liberalism, the social erosion that was implied through austerity measurements during and after both financial (2007/2008) and eurozone crisis (2011), and wilful ignorance over environmental deterioration in the meantime, a disproportion appears in contemporary parameters to form the idea of welfare. This mismatch favours a strong economic and financial performance over social or environmental protection. The idea that welfare states should function under an equilibrium of all possible economic, social and ecological parameters was first concluded by Herman Daly, ecological economist and co-founder of the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW). Daly criticises the capitalisation of welfare some thirty years before the contemporary welfare in equilibrium manifested.¹³

Although welfare is best viewed as a long-lasting process that continues to develop in every modern civilisation, most correspondents on welfare have just focused on the last thirty to seventy years.¹⁴ From this short-term point of view, welfare states are the accumulation of globalised trade networks, social benefits for citizens of a nation-state, as well as the growing influence of supranational institutions such as the European Union.¹⁵ As a description of the way modern societies function, the term 'welfare' can be useful in highlighting commonplace processes. However, when looking beyond the seventy-year span,

¹¹ Hall 2020, p. 58

¹² Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.

¹³ Daly 1973

¹⁴ see Esping-Andersen 1990, Hayward 1995, Baldock 2007

¹⁵ Naumann, Brodie et al. 2019

the definition of a welfare state starts to fluctuate. Questions arise when the term stands for a paradigm and all-encompassing account on historical change. It does not always indicate one particular paradigm and even those who use the term ‘welfare’ on a regular basis do not agree on a common account.

However, much of the debate recreates the narrative of welfare to be progressive, and if progress is considered *good*, as Michel Foucault, French philosopher and social theorist of the post-structuralist school, would say, then the narrative is very different from when it is viewed as a negative in its effects.¹⁶

2.1. Welfare, Climate Change and la Longue Durée

Economists have only recently discovered historical implications in their subject. Their neglect of the subject hardly makes them unique since a lot of human sciences with an appetite for post-modernism tend to forget about or do not identify with the past. However, as interest in historical constructs increases - see Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-first Century*¹⁷ - comprehensive historical contextualisation seems all the more important. In that regard, the Annales school offers a classic example of historiography.

The main difference of the Annales school to the other cultural theories (Marxism, identity politics, post-modernity) is shifting the focus on society, social groups and collective mentalities over a great amount of time rather than studying shorter time periods and events, which tend to be predominant in today’s social discourse.¹⁸

As well as scientists typically accept a prevailing standard to establish further specifications, the effects of paradigms are similar to the saying of the Annales School in that it perpetuates the narrative of its subject. The definition of a paradigm implies “conceptual world views, that consist of formal theories, classic experiments, and trusted methods”¹⁹ or “an overarching account of meta-narrative of historical development that includes [...] a

¹⁶ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2018

¹⁷ Piketty 2020

¹⁸ Hunt 2014, p. 16-18

¹⁹ Kuhn 2020

hierarchy of factors that determine meaning”.²⁰ The mode of a paradigm is comparable in complexity to the approach used by the Annales, which emphasises the narrative between social and economic history, as well as the slow pace of change through their cultural context.²¹ This finding, while preliminary, suggests that what gives meaning and uniqueness to a society is the reproduction of its way of life or, expressed differently, its pattern of thought.

Where does our way of thinking originate? Most of the time, we do not think about it. Now thinking about it, thoughts seem to follow a pattern subconsciously. The pattern I follow is more or less the same everybody else around me follows. How come it is this pattern and no other? What constructs my way of thinking and what are its characteristics? One should not take for granted the way we think, as it can change any moment, triggered by a new major incident.

The way Europe thinks, as much as culture itself, is deeply engrained in the historical development of European communities. Dichotomies such as 'traditional/modern', 'industrial/domestic', or 'scientific/artistic' analysed in terms of its thought processes, content, logic or social background deliver insight into the way European or - more generally - Western thinking differentiates itself from other civilisations.²² The broad use of the term 'culture' is sometimes equated with 'history'. As much as these two terms are often interchangeably and without precision, the vagueness shall help to constitute a general understanding of European thinking in the working of European welfare.

The breaking-down of history into distinctive levels as Fernand Braudel does by differentiating between a geographical time, a social time, and an individual time,²³ seems to be an adequate means to expose the different elements European thinking could be composed of. The French historian and leader of the Annales school is held in high esteem by the services of historiography. His work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, which was first published as a seminal book in French in 1949, is seen as

²⁰ Hunt 2014, p. 13

²¹ Rhodes 1978, p. 45-73

²² Horton and Finnegan 1973

²³ Braudel 1980, p. 4

an exemplar of the Annales school. There, Braudel describes geographical history as a changeless environment where humans are put in relation to their surroundings. Above this extreme long-term history, there is a social history of societies, economies and states. And thirdly, there is the history of “short, sharp and nervous vibrations”²⁴ of events and individual time, that is.

Individual time, hence, is to each one of us. It is what differentiates us from another in a very detailed fashion. By making us individual, we are unique. The amount of singular experiences we are exposed to creates a very personalised set of attributes that we call an individual. The individual is in that respect independent of a collective time as it is consciously aware of itself, choosing its path. Nevertheless, at the same time, the factors that influence the individual are in the majority the same others are influenced by as well.

Whether these factors are of geographical or social nature is in this case, first and foremost irrelevant. What follows is that individual time remains individual time, but that it comes rather like an apple on a tree next to a thousand other apples. It remains on its own but does not differ from the others. So the apple - being one out of many - will not change much of the overall structure. In that aspect, individualism is very short-sighted. How much is individual time worth the bigger picture? In the age of individualism, a lot. The age of individualism worth in the bigger picture, not at all. It is only the long-term developments that conclude the importance of a ‘short’ era. Hence, when speaking of individualism these days, we should better be careful not to take every gesture too seriously.

Only a few individuals or groups were remarkably different enough to change the bigger picture, an entire set-up of civilisation, that is. Those people or groups are enclosed in a social history of events (*histoire événementielle*), whereas individualism is based on a short period (*courte durée*). Both time spans stand in close relation to each other, as the time of events (*histoire événementielle*) is the history of individuals with names, as well as the time of surfaces and deceptive effects. It leans against the time of the *courte durée*, which looks onto history from a nuclear point of view.

Both conceptualisations mainly treat history of events, politics and people.²⁵ Which is why, according to Braudel, outside the Annales, the writing of history is focused on the *courte*

²⁴ Braudel 1972, preface

²⁵ Braudel 1980, p. 25-55

durée or on *histoire événementielle* only,²⁶ segregating long-term advancements from the modern perspective. This leads us to the notion that, since the Annales school occupies a scientific niche, the predominant form of European historiography, and therefore European thinking as well, focuses on short-term events. In addition to our concern of nearsightedness in current developments, Braudel argues that “traditional history, with its concern for the short time span, for the individual and the event, has long accustomed us to the headlong, dramatic, breathless rush of its narrative.”²⁷ Asserting the meaning of the shorter periods for the social aspect of welfare, rapid negative change such as climate emergency or economic crisis has almost what amounts to “a horror of the event”²⁸. In the age of individualism and short time spans, it seems that drama and suffering are inevitable.

When looking at the historical consciousness and development of welfare states, however, one finds a structure that is dependant on a considerable amount of factors which derive from an extensive set of epochs - their complexity - that the continuity of the deep-rooted structures of society is central to the very existence of welfare states, that we need to define welfare systems as a form of *la longue durée* (long period).

For the discussion on historical contextualisation, however, only two time spans - *l’histoire événementielle* and *la courte durée* - play into our current way of thinking. Nevertheless, it is essential to move between these three poles of time by referring to welfare as a version of a *longue durée*, individualism as a form of the *courte durée*, and events such as the last financial crisis and climate emergency as versions of the *histoire événementielle*, in order to assert the entire understanding of European thinking through its history. Though man-made climate change is a process that has been going on for several generations and could therefore be categorised as a version of *la longue durée* in fact, the strong reactions to it have only been recent and, therefore, all the more dramatic.

These findings may help us to understand current political incidents. Is this orchestration of the two shorter time spans the same that Braudel criticised as too short-sighted as to lead

²⁶ Braudel 1980, p. 6-24

²⁷ Braudel 1980, p. 26

²⁸ Braudel 1980, p. 28

us straight to long-term thinking?²⁹ Because politicians and experts are not aware of the reoccurring nature of international financial crises under its historical progress, their reactions to economic turmoils are very abrupt and stress-intensive. It is the missing notion of historical consciousness in political actions that leads the majority of people to live through the precariat, which used to be an appearance of the pre-welfare times, again.³⁰ Where welfare states originally functioned as a buffer to economic upheavals, they now became victims of historical short-sightedness themselves, through austerity measurements.

The current discourse highlight the ramification of Braudel's notion of individual time through characteristics such as short-sightedness, the dramatic and abrupt approach of the *courte durée* and *histoire événementielle*, which are more significant in modern European behaviour than the *longue durée*, into a very loud and rather unpleasant resolution. Several questions remain unanswered at present. Is it possible that a long-sighted approach corresponding to *la longue durée* could be the answer to finding more sustainable approaches to decision-making in modern national economy?

One aspect of *la longue durée* Braudel was concerned with is structure. Braudel argues that structure is the dominant problem of *la longue durée*, an aspect that he describes as a social construct of a fixed series of relationships between realities (geographical, biological as well as psychological) and social masses that is yet strong enough to imprison an undefined number of generations in its framework.³¹ Likewise, welfare systems provide a structure that is both support and obstruction to the social masses that are embedded in it. Other than Braudel's geographical constraints, welfare's constraints are more based on cultural structures, which would explain why welfare regimes like the Scandinavian countries follow one similar pattern, as well as other geographical regions follow their individual patterns. As structures are of viscous nature because of their long life and reluctance to change shape, and as welfare states are dominated by structure, breaking out of certain patterns becomes almost impossible.

²⁹ Braudel 1980, p. 30

³⁰ Hunt 2008, p. 85

³¹ Braudel 1980, p. 31

What Braudel identifies as an analogous line of thought of civilisations and especially the intellectual elite, established by the identical subjects, comparisons, commonplaces or catchwords,³² characterises the same paradigm that perpetuates a welfare system's thinking. Moreover, it is the economic and political elite of a national economy that smoothen the line of thought in a welfare state.

In the same vein, Braudel discerns the idea of economic structures to be an integral part of *la longue durée* through their regularities, cycles and permanence that run parallel to civilisations and their habits of thinking and acting, "the set patterns which do not break down easily and which, however illogical, are a long time dying."³³ Hence, we can assume that the economic sphere of welfare states backs the thesis of welfare systems to be an adaptation of *la longue durée*. Braudel goes further into the economic discourse by referring to mercantile capitalism: He maintains that the predecessor of modern industrial capitalism, despite the changes that occurred during those approximately five hundred years, holds a certain coherence throughout the long time span, which can be traced back up until today's economic metres,³⁴ subsequently suggesting a strong link between economic systems and welfare systems' longevity.

Which leads to the question if modern welfare thinking does actually look deep enough into its history in order to substantially understand its historical factors that led us to where we are today. Furthermore, are national economists able to formulate solutions to the large-scale problems of our time by referring to just a short time span?

In his ground-breaking study *On History*, which was first published in French in 1969, Braudel showed that the *longue durée* also reveals some complications, one of its main conditions being that in order to study long-term developments, one has to get used to an almost rigmarole slower tempo, which entails a needed readiness to change one's entire judgement.³⁵ This long-winded demand may at best give fresh insights into the making of welfare states and at worst cause anxiety over the gravity of the thousands and thousands of parameters that are put into consideration. Furthermore, Braudel argues that social sci-

³² Braudel 1980, p. 31

³³ Braudel 1980, p. 32

³⁴ Braudel 1980, p. 33

³⁵ Braudel 1980, p. 33

ences and economics hardly look back further than 1945 and tend to reinforce the history of events and short time spans,³⁶ so that each discipline would not be able to produce long-term predictions.

This combination of findings provides some support for the conceptual premise that the life span of modern European welfare regimes does not just begin after the Second World War as the prevailing literature suggests,³⁷ but in fact stems from a much longer lapse of time. If welfare is considered a form of the long time span, both cultural and economic developments are way more important for the making and understanding of welfare states than is originally implied. For Braudel, history, as well as what for us is the welfare state, “is the total of all possible histories - an assemblage of professions and points of view, from yesterday, today, and tomorrow”.³⁸ For the prediction of long-term developments of welfare systems, therefore, we need to consider longer time spans that lie further in the past.

As all-encompassing as *la longue durée* is - with its extensive historical contextualisation of all human sciences - as holistic one shall think when trying to understand welfare’s being. Away with the idea of short time spans that are ignorant of any time that lies before nineteenth century. Looking beyond what is visible now and acknowledge that the current time being is merely one cause out of a hundred, in order to understand where modernity stands in our development as civilisation. Gone is the premise that social policies can only be observed from a nuclear point of view. There are more disciplines than politics and economics which can tell a story about modern statehoods, and a lot more to learn from as well.

Welfare states can be formulated a version of *la longue durée*. In order to comprehend welfare states, one has to put into consideration a great amount of sociology, economics and history. In the spirit of a new notion which gives space to a dialogue between all human sciences conceivable, an interdisciplinary approach to welfare states is key that one may initiate new perspectives as well as outcomes. Nevertheless, a note of caution is due here

³⁶ Braudel 1980, p. 35

³⁷ see Hay and Wincott 2012, Cousins 2005, Room 2019, de la Porte and Heins 2015

³⁸ Braudel 1980, p. 34

since not every political, social or economic move can be traced back through cultural connotations.

The emergence and characterisation of European welfare states is dependant on a significantly longer time span than acknowledged. Thirty or seventy years of social policies are not sufficient to underline the importance of historical and cultural drivers in the establishment of welfare on the European continent, nor can it hardly describe the inimitable diversity of welfare states. Much of the diversity of European welfare states stems from the cultural divergence that emerged since there were people settling on the continent. In social sciences, the emergence of welfare states is owed to politico-economic explanations. However, as well as the cultural factors that shaped European welfare states have been kept invisible from the explanation; the invisibility of climate change throughout the academic discourse might show social science's severity yet. "The Annales school of historians believed that environment, climate, and demography shaped human activity in fundamental ways. Since these factors changed slowly over long periods of time, neither revolution nor any other kind of short-term political change concerned them."³⁹ Braudel symbolises such short-term events "surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs."⁴⁰ Although the Annales somewhat dismiss the individual time with its loud and rushed style, most of modernity's socio-economic and political discourse is essentially based on short-term developments. Nevertheless, what can be learned from Braudel's geographical time is the weight of climate on social enterprise. Likewise to Braudel but a few hundred years earlier, Montesquieu notes demography, commerce, climate and even the quality of the soil to be influential when bringing the ideal republic, monarchy or despotism into existence, or when explaining the differences between people.⁴¹ From a long-term perspective; if the power of the environment and natural change is decisive in human activity, why has the environment and especially climate change been a neglected topic in current politics and mainstream economics for so long? Perhaps it is the nowadays predominant individual time, which Braudel frowned upon, that only perpetuates both

³⁹ Hunt 2014, p. 17

⁴⁰ Braudel 1972, p. 21

⁴¹ Montesquieu 1748

courte durée and *histoire événementielle* while leaving long-term developments such as climate change and cultural implications aside.

Overall, this study strengthens the idea that both welfare states and climate change could be characterised as forms of *la longue durée*. Although long-sightedness can help anticipate events more thoroughly, and describe the cultural implications on the environment or welfare state quite neatly, it cannot abandon the ‘destiny’ or path dependency that lies in its structure after all.

2.2. Industrialisation, Christianity, Linearity

In this section it is my aim to explain how history and European modernity come to shape thinking about European welfare states. How did the ‘modern thinking’ emerge as a concept and how did it shape our sociological narrative about the environment? Of particular interest is the way the term modernity came to be seen as a distinct, and eventually a superior category of humanity.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, progress has two related definitions. It is “the process of improving or developing, or of getting nearer to achieving or completing something”, as well as the “movement forwards or towards a place”.⁴² Although there is some question as to whether progress belongs to any other time than modernity, it does function as a category of our thinking, to judge from its idiom ‘in progress’, meaning ‘a happening at this time’. The meaning of progress obviously depends on the value it is given by modernity, which itself expanded in significance all along. The modern perception of progress is based on the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment, which has since then taken form in right- and left-wing politics, religious and secular thought as well as arts and culture,⁴³ and derives its modern meaning from the figurative sense of “growth, development, advancement to higher stages”.⁴⁴ The momentousness of the belief that humans are capable of making enduring improvement has reached a new level in this day and

⁴² Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.

⁴³ Slaboch 2018, abstract

⁴⁴ Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.

age. Intellectual, scientific, material, moral, and cultural advancement seem to have reached a deiform meaning in modern thought. However, latest events that are of universal significance, such as violence in form of novel wars and terrorism, the global economic crisis and climate change in the anthropocene, have called into question this faith in the continued improvement of mankind and that of human welfare.

One may suppose that humanity has never come farther. The technological innovation modern humankind has reached, in combination with the remarkable ability to substitute physical work with digital services, demonstrates how different modernity is to civilisations of the past. However, such dogma remains narrow in focus dealing only with modernity as a form of progress. In that respect, Braudel notes that “there is a general crisis in the human sciences: they are all overwhelmed by their own progress, if only because of the accumulation of new knowledge [...] Directly or indirectly, willingly or unwillingly, none of them can remain unaffected by the progress of the more active among them”.⁴⁵ Similarly, the modern European history professor Lynn Hunt summarises modernity as a set of values relating to scientific rationalism and liberalism, which go hand in hand with the definition that modernity is what is from the most recent, latest times.⁴⁶ Modernity can easily be understood as the most objective, most advanced condition of technological and human development. It can, therefore, be easy to fall into the rabbit hole of a certain modernity megalomania. Another interesting aspect is illustrated by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, who argues that the accelerative effect which characterises modernity is self-imposed: “the tempo of historical time has constantly been changing, and today, thanks to the population explosion, development of technological powers, and the consequent frequent changes of regime, acceleration belongs to everyday experience”.⁴⁷ Taken together with political scientist William Scheuerman’s belief that particularly Western consciousness has been preoccupied with the notion of speed because western modernity were the main site if not birthplace of social acceleration, which grew out of individualism, capitalism and eventual technological innovation.⁴⁸ When separating modernity from its time per-

⁴⁵ Braudel 1980, p. 25

⁴⁶ Hunt 2008, p. 47,49

⁴⁷ Koselleck 1985, p. 5

⁴⁸ Scheuerman 2004, p. 22,24

ception, the parameters of growth, improvement and subsequent progress still brand modernity as an irreversible constitution that only knows one direction, which is forward. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that the modern thought on economic growth, amongst others, is a version of linearity. The Cambridge historian Peter Burke tells Western thinking apart from the rest of the world by claiming that “[t]he most important, or at least the most obvious characteristic of Western historical thought is its stress on development or progress, in other words, its ‘linear’ view of the past.”⁴⁹ He goes further by paraphrasing that the idea of progress lies deeply embedded in the Judaeo-Christian thought that,⁵⁰ together with its alternative concept of evolution,⁵¹ build the two flanks of one argument of Western linearity that see historical development as cumulative and irreversible. Both religion and evolution theory affect Western modernity.

The Christian viewpoint on the nature of economy and the environment can be explained further: Max Weber, a German sociologist, political economist and key figure in the analysis of modern Western society, examined the bureaucratisation and work ethic in industrialised economies in his chief work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.⁵² There, Weber offers an explanatory theory for Western societies’ viewpoint on economy and polity, which first arose from the Reformation and industrial revolution:

People began to believe that the problems of poverty and securing enough provisions of survival could be solved, but only by complete dedication to work. Labour might one day be rendered unnecessary by machines, but only after many centuries of extra-intensive labour. Work consequently acquired a much higher status, or at least work geared towards maximising output of material goods. This had several ramifications. Work stopped being a means to an end - supporting life - and became an end in itself. The idea of ‘non-productive’ work, work in spheres not

⁴⁹ Burke 2002, p.17

⁵⁰ Löwith 1953

⁵¹ Schoenwald 1965

⁵² Weber 1905

strictly necessary for our biological survival, became perceived as less intrinsically valuable than industrial work.⁵³

Although European modernity prefers to see itself as a secular civilisation, the religious forces of the past imply a certain modern behaviour linked to the values of European systems of belief.

In a like manner, Adam Smith deplors any activity that does not maximise materialist output as ‘unproductive labour’, including monarchs, churchmen, lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds, players, buffoons, musicians, opera-singers, opera-dancers, etc.⁵⁴

Another premiss of linear thought is the sociological equivalent to the Darwinian idea of evolution, which deploys on a gradual development of organisms.⁵⁵ The sociological aspect of Darwinism states that only over time civilisation became associated with an evolutionary view of history.⁵⁶ However, such linear viewpoint crystallised and has become the predominant mode of thought.

The historiographical analysis of Burke resonates in today’s secular rational choice dogma like an echo of *la longue durée*. Opposite to the cyclical theory of change, which dominated the viewpoint in ancient Greece and Rome and focused on a reoccurring system of events,⁵⁷ modern linear thought believes itself to be unique and therefore special. A combination of such destined individualism and the pride on a so-called Western objectivity⁵⁸ becomes quite problematic when trying to look beyond the inherent thought of progress. Similarly, the modern economists’ focus on progress is supported by Hunt’s argument, an academic in the field of modern European history, who writes that “moderns developed a notion of progress”⁵⁹ in response to interpreting their own being in human history. When comparing the contemporary idea of progress with notions from the Enlightenment period, however, one sees the same narrative occurring again. In *Observations concerning the Dis-*

⁵³ Hall 2020, p. 191-192

⁵⁴ Smith 1776

⁵⁵ Freeman 1974

⁵⁶ Hunt 2008. p. 53

⁵⁷ Trompf 1979

⁵⁸ Burke 2002, p. 24

⁵⁹ Hunt 2008, p. 50,51

inction of Ranks in Society, John Millar, a Scottish philosopher and historian in the eighteenth century, notes that “in human society, [there is] a natural progress from ignorance to knowledge, and from rude, to civilised manners”.⁶⁰ Turgot, a eighteenth-century French economist and statesman, takes the notion a bit further, seizing European progress to be of a certain general Western superiority when comparing European development with other civilisations during the eighteenth century.⁶¹

If the narrative of the Enlightenment (Smith, Millar, Turgot) and Industrialisation (Marx) reveal the same narrative of progress that is used by contemporary thinkers (Braudel, Huntington, Burke, Hunt), the historical developments of the past depict the general laws of socioeconomic development of the present. The consequence of repeating narratives that can be found throughout the development of European modernisation, is confirmed habit. Therefore, the European modern thought might not be a unique disposition after all, but the latest social development of the general laws on progress established by European thinkers from the past few hundred years.⁶² In that sense, the study was successful as it was able to identify general tendencies in European modern thinking that share remarkably much with past paradigms, while furthermore questioning modernity’s uniqueness.

A further aspect that brings together the historical developments of modernity is described by Björn Wittrock, sociologist of ancient, medieval and modern societies, who summarises the main factors to create modernity to be the technological-economic transformation of the Industrial Revolution and the democratic transformation caused by the French Revolution.⁶³ If those two factors make modernity as such, it can in addition be argued that it is those same factors that drive modern welfare. It can be hypothesised that democratic coherence legitimises the use of technological innovation in the field of economics to justify progress. Furthermore, the mechanisms imply a selection of practical behaviours which at the same time reduce the focus points to a narrowed range of paradigms surrounding the so-called technological-economic and democratic transformations. These mechanisms could be

⁶⁰ Millar 1779, p. 5

⁶¹ Turgot 1750, p. 88,89

⁶² Dirlik 1999, p. 29

⁶³ Wittrock 1998, p. 211

Archetypically exemplified by a liberal market economy rather than a regulated mercantilist economy, by a modern nation state and a constitutionally limited polity rather than an absolutistic police state [...] - all emerged in the wake of the deep-seated economic, political and discursive transformations of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶⁴

Haven't modern welfare states reached just this? The long-standing influences that reach further into the past than the mid-twentieth century do not only support but lie the foundation for modern welfare states' preferential treatment of efficiency-driven globalisation trends, liberal market forces and democratisation. They are eventually reduced to a liberal democracy with a constant 'do more' attitude. What is excluded from the selected behavioural mechanisms is the affirmation of ecological boundaries or any existential proposition. Hartmut Rosa and further researchers from the ecological economics school explain the preceding arguments as the following:

The defining feature of a modern society (or, in fact, a modern institution) seems to be that it can only stabilise itself dynamically. [...] More precisely, it can only reproduce its structure through an *increase* of some sort - quite regularly through economic growth, technological acceleration, and higher rates of cultural innovation. Hence, we suggest that a society is considered modern when it operates in a mode of 'dynamic stabilisation', i.e. when it systematically requires growth, innovation and acceleration for its structural reproduction and in order to maintain its socio-economic and institutional status quo.⁶⁵

These findings raise intriguing inferences regarding the nature and extent of the economic growth paradigm in modern European welfare states. The need for constant improvement, an increase in output and excellence appear to be the only means to maintain their institutional structure. "Thus, not just the economic system depends on the on the logic of esca-

⁶⁴ Wittrock 1998, p. 212

⁶⁵ Rosa and Henning 2018, p. 2

tion as a consequence of the dynamic stabilisation, but also the welfare-state and the system of democratic politics”,⁶⁶ as an increase in hospital beds, pension payments, university graduations or workplace seems the only way to enchant voters.⁶⁷

During the classical period in ancient Greece, Aristotle saw a great importance in the interconnectivity between the environment and the economy. He describes how different forms of economics can either complement or substantially harm nature. In the first scenario, people pursue trade in order to live comfortably. He calls this scenario natural, and part of living well until all sufficient goods to exist are made available. The sustainable business activity implies a limit, since there is a state at which materialist sufficiency is reached and needn't be overcome. In the second scenario, trade is bound by no limits and exaggerates to a point that can as well be described as industrial capitalism.⁶⁸ Aristotle sees this business activity as fundamentally unnatural, as it is not accountable to natural boundaries or its original purpose to cover basic human needs. In addition, he stresses that it is only humans that have moral agency and capacity to either look after the planet or cause horrendous damage.⁶⁹ Furthermore, around 350 B.C.E., Aristotle theorised the definition of happiness in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as:

The function of man is to live a certain kind of life, and this activity implies a rational principle, and the function of a good man is the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed it is performed in accord with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case, then happiness turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue.⁷⁰

This implies a magnitude of factors to achieve happiness - or welfare - and a certain necessity to make use the the rich variety of factors to eventually reach 'holistic' wellbeing.

⁶⁶ Rosa and Henning 2018, p. 3

⁶⁷ Luhmann 1990, preface

⁶⁸ Orhan 2014, p.45-63

⁶⁹ Aristotle 2004

⁷⁰ Aristotle 2004

Much of his wisdom Aristotle drew from his knowledge about nature.⁷¹ It suggests that a connection to nature may help prevent ignorance about the negative impacts Western economic thinking has on its natural environment.

When dealing with welfare through the modern tense which view is preoccupied with progress, growth and the always new, the associates to welfare - governments and ministries, industries and employers, civil partners - perceive welfare from a nuclear point of view and will act accordingly. The effect is exemplified in the historical studies undertaken by Hunt: “Ignorance of past writing impoverishes our sense of the discipline and on occasion leads us to reinvent the proverbial wheel, as we discover information that was in fact already known to our predecessors. [...] Presentism, at its worst, encourages a kind of moral complacency and self-congratulation.”⁷²

Frederick Cooper, an American historian for colonialism, summarises the results on modernity as such: “The concept of modernity, multiplied, therefore runs the gamut, from a singular narrative of capitalism, the nation-state, and individualism - with multiple effects and responses - to a word for everything that has happened in the last five hundred years.”⁷³

Adding onto that, further research on Braudel’s study on economic history might explore how climate change could not be taken into consideration even if it were yet so crucial to do so:

To those living at the time, incidents unfortunately seem all too often to be an all of an equal degree of importance, and the most momentous events, those which will shape the future, make so little noise -arriving with the silent step of a dove, as Nietzsche once said- that one is rarely even aware of their presence.⁷⁴

This section has analysed the implications of European thinking, historical developments, cultural institutionalisation on European welfare state making and has argued that its char-

⁷¹ Craig 2019

⁷² Hunt 2008, p. 85

⁷³ Cooper 2005, p.127

⁷⁴ Braudel 1980, p. 84

acterisation is inherently entwined with the ideal of economic growth. The next part of this chapter will deal with the contradiction between modernity and climate change. It is apparent from this discussion, however, that the decoupling of growth and happiness, ‘the good life’ or, theoretically speaking, materialist and social security is considered an essential part in the transition towards a sustainable welfare state.

2.3. Path Dependency versus Ecological Urgency

When trying to analyse European welfare states, path dependence has a pivotal role in the understanding of its behaviour. Path dependence of welfare systems is of general interest because it explains how historical developments matter through the means by which restraints on usual behaviour appear and of the form that those restraints take in the shaping and re-shaping of welfare. It helps us understand why welfare systems, despite its suboptimality in terms of social and environmental solutions in the last few decades, allow to prevail as a result of their structural properties or their beliefs and values.

Path dependence is often used in studies based on the historical-institutionalist approach to political science, which focuses on how institutions come to constrain organisational life. It has become a key concept in explanations of why institutions in political life do not change as much as might be expected. Path dependence tends to suggest that policy makers work within a series of limited assumptions about their world, that they frequently fail to learn from past experience, and that they emphasise caution in their decision-making processes. Studies of path dependence demonstrate that politics is often subject to considerable inertia. Studies of the welfare state, for example, have suggested that significant changes in policy or procedure can be effected only in exceptional situations.⁷⁵

Of particular concern is whether climate change is considered such an exceptional situation in order to justify such significant changes to welfare policies. One of the greatest challenges to encourage renewal for European welfare systems, therefore, is first of all to ac-

⁷⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.

knowledge the strong element of contingency and the partial insulation from change in its nature. However, changing the narrative is easier said than done.

In consideration of the fact that structural properties constitute welfare states, what made our modern understanding of economic welfare, environment and progress into what it is today? In this section, we try to conceptualise the relationship between environment and European society, and put it into relation with the character of welfare states.

A number of cross-sectional studies suggest an association between ecological and economical dependencies and an environmental injustice in the modern world, which is intrinsically tied to the economical advancement humanity finds itself in until today.⁷⁶ The scale and dependency between ecology and the economy in a globalised system are of greater importance than what has been observed in previous generations. Due to its universal inter-linkage of international trade and growth-oriented development, twenty-first-century economy, as much as the human behaviour Adam Smith specified a few hundred years back, gravitates around the accumulation of material rather than the subtle distribution of resources in a sustainable manner. What follows is a degradation of the natural environment to be a marginal phenomenon or a resource bank because its value is measured by the output it produces without being part of the economic equation itself. With Smith's creation of the *homo economicus*,⁷⁷ the economic rational choice paradigm modern economy feels obliged to succumb to its charms, maintains the common principal to strive to maximise one's personal interests in today's global economy. As much as societies and the economic systems have changed since Adam Smith's times, the core principles of the *homo economicus* seem to prevail: His mentions of the institutionalisation of property, exaltation of entrepreneurship and a strongly protestant viewpoint on the market as a creational force,⁷⁸ agree with the way modern economies socialise today.

As depicted in the previous chapter, numerous terms can be used to describe modernity. Another prominent version which can be added is globalisation. Globalisation, it seems, does not only force every nation state's economy that is involved in this deterritorialisation

⁷⁶ see Daly 1973, IPCC 2013, Robert Costanza, Gar Alperovitz, Herman Daly, Joshua Farley, Carol Franco, Tim Jackson et al. 2017

⁷⁷ Smith 1776

⁷⁸ Greenfield 2014

of goods and services,⁷⁹ to become interdependent on each other but also makes economies converge into a big blob of equivalent methods and implicitness. Not only does globalisation impose a convergence of market forces, but also a concurrence of sociological thought mechanisms, as economic and political decisions are closely entwined in the process. The more globalisation operates as a paradigm, the more it perpetuates the process as well as the thought mechanisms that lie underneath.⁸⁰ The British sociologist Anthony Giddens brings forward the argument that “Modernity is inherently globalising”,⁸¹ consequently designating modern spirit and globalisation to be inseparable. In the same vein, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels anticipate the innately globalising effects of capitalism in *The Community Manifesto*. Similarly, Thomas Piketty, one of the most renowned contemporary economists whose work mainly focuses on modern wealth and income inequality, describes the key economic and social patterns that drive global capitalism in the twenty-first century as a long-term evolution of the concentration of wealth and the prospects of economic growth.⁸² As a result of this, globalisation can both be seen as driver and product of the socioeconomic pattern of thought modernity delineates.

Globalisation as one of modernity’s fundamental occurrences turns problematic as it shifts the attention to a macro-historical and particularly macroeconomic point of view, thus installing the assumption that economics shapes all aspects of life.⁸³

How does Europe stand in relation to its environment? The development of that relationship one can analyse through several disciplines related to environmental history: Archaeology, history itself, geography, anthropology, sociology, economics or politics. Much of the research is viewed from a global perspective, thus focusing on the unequal that globalisation brings with it. Or academics focus on the local implications of environment and people by showcasing ecological degradation from an empirical analysis of nuclear examples. Globalisation from an ecological perspective is the world system of harnessing new territories, energy sources combined with their transportation over great distances. When

⁷⁹ Scholte 2000

⁸⁰ Hunt 2014, p. 55

⁸¹ Giddens 1990, p. 60

⁸² Piketty 2014

⁸³ Hunt 2014, p. 59

boiling down the world system perspective down to a smaller size, Europe fits very well into the picture as one of the most integrated markets, but is also most cohesive when it comes to its understanding of trade and capital.

Europe, with its ever closer union of markets, political institutions and individual states gaining Europeaness, allows to bring together fields, disciplines and discourses that can normally only be applied on a global scale, but can now be analysed much more in detail, through subjects such as the political ecology of EU policies. However, Europe's historical and economic uniqueness makes it impossible to transfer the outcomes of a socio-economic analysis of sustainability and welfare states to other regions in the world. On the other hand, as Western and European thinking overlap in many aspects, especially in terms of modernity, progress and economic growth, the materialist perspective on the environment, all three globalisation, europeanisation and local cases in Europe share.

The conventional narrative of economic growth is not concerned with the physical interdependencies of the commodities traded throughout the chain of consumption. The extend to which human, and therefore market behaviour, is shaped by cultural norms and what is regarded as 'the good life' aka welfare, is significant. It is not surprising that the economic and political thinkers who are told to be the founders of modern epistemology on nature, society and the economy, are of European origin. Hence, the modern economic growth paradigm does not only constitute Europe's idea of welfare but is perpetuated by the similar narrative globalisation takes as a basis and is closely related to. In that sense, one may also speak of globalisation as a form of neo-colonialism of the European thought.

The value that European thinking bears does not allow to change the habits of trade. It implies an economic growth imperative. Such economic growth imperative cohabitates, together with the other two paradigms of 'welfare means economic prosperity' and 'nature as a resource of achieve welfare'. The environment as a body human activities are dependant upon is taken out of the perspective. One of the outcomes of the negligence of the environment as a value in itself, anthropogenic climate change.

The challenge for the socio-economic and politico-economic setting, however, is to take proper account of all three levels of the triple bottom line: People, profit and planet, meaning "that cultural behaviour takes place within a material world whose properties constrain

what is possible and determine the environmental consequences of that behaviour.”⁸⁴
Changing the welfare narrative will therefore be one of Europe’s biggest challenges.

The set of values the globalised economy is founded upon mentions nothing about the preservation of resources, much less nature. Although Smith’s argument of a collective benefit from an individual self-maximising interest does in many regards foster greater prosperity for mankind as a whole, since industrialisation enables more and more people to live under better conditions,⁸⁵ it does on the other hand put tremendous pressure on the earth’s delicate system of natural resources, without any of its mentioning.

In this regard one has to admit that it is not necessarily any superiority of originally European thinkers’ economic paradigms that imposed liberalism on the rest of the world but rather its dominance, or as Huntington phrases: “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion [...] but rather by its superiority in applying organised violence [...] Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.”⁸⁶

Even when addressing nature’s *raison d’être* in the variations of economic systems, capitalism, communism and other forms of market economy share similar attitudes towards the subjection of the environment. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, for example, expressed their interest in the relation between the natural environment and the human economy through the concept of “metabolism” between society and nature through human labour. Their work *Lettres sur les sciences de la nature et les mathématiques*⁸⁷ proves the importance of ecology in the Marxist school of economy. However important ecological margins were for the founders of communism, ecological economy can barely be found in today’s Marxist practice. Nor is it certain that the natural resources are seen to be respected from a Marxist perspective, on the contrary; the *Communist Manifesto* describes how only the “subjection of nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents

⁸⁴ Hornborg 2007, p. 3

⁸⁵ Torstendahl et al. 1996, preface

⁸⁶ Huntington 1996, p. 51

⁸⁷ Marx and Engels, n.d.

for cultivation, canalisation of rivers”⁸⁸ is able to conjure whole populations out of the ground. It is, therefore, questionable if welfare under a more communist system is more ecological than under current neoliberal practices.

In the traditional system, European welfare states are often referred to as capitalist forms of welfare. Much of the current literature on European welfare states is extensive and focuses particularly on the capitalist dimension of European welfare economies. Cover names such as *The Political Economy of European Welfare Capitalism*⁸⁹ or introductory chapters listing welfare state developments in response to the needs of advanced capitalism⁹⁰ indicate the strong alliance of European welfare states with the notion of capitalism in the twenty-first century. Over a great amount of time, numerous studies have attempted to explain the exploitative relationship between capitalism and nature,⁹¹ and were able to form our current perception of capitalism to be exploitive. Together, these studies indicate that the same capitalist mode of production that set in motion social progress is the same mode of production that makes the growing extraction and further processing of natural resources, no matter the technological efficiency or change in consumer goods, inevitable. Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that both ideologies of capitalism and communism, as well as other forms of economic systems that fit between these two poles, meet at the idea of nature’s purpose to be subjugated in order to become accessible to human needs.

In terms of the apperception of nature for capitalism or communism, both ideologies meet at the idea of progress by defining nature to be something that humans need to submit, that nature exists to serve humans. From Smith’s or Marx’s or Huntington’s theories, when modified appropriately to modern technologies and social conditions, policies and market advancement derive that lead each state economy into the same direction of progress we find ourselves in today, as pictured by the same European thoughts that emerged a few hundred years back in time.

Or is it the repeated application of those political economists of the past that re-enact their patterns of thought and make it part of our world today? Is this attention to the commemo-

⁸⁸ Marx and Engels 1990, p. 5

⁸⁹ Hay and Wincott 2012

⁹⁰ Cousins, 2005, p. 19

⁹¹ for example, Galee 1969; Caldwell 1977; Bunker and CiccanteII 2006

rated economists just an effect of their importance, or might it be one of its causes? Much depends on the definition of modern economy and how it functions as an explanation that, at the same time, replaces critical approaches to growth economics. In that case, currently predominant economics threaten to bring back old paradigms rather than truly offering new ones. The historically prevalent economists (Adam Smith, Karl Marx, David Ricardo) transcend a notion of inequality, colonialism, expansion or greed. Do we risk losing all that we gained through liberal democracy, a term Francis Fukuyama coined in the discourse on modern society,⁹² from the challenge to the old paradigms, or can new approaches under new challenges (such as climate change) offer a critical perspective that helps reshape the modernity debate itself?

Globalised mainstream economics envisage that only economic growth is able to foster prosperity for most of the people,⁹³ giving way to prioritise peoples' wellbeing over nature's since more economic output necessitates more natural resource input. This conception forms the dilemma of playing peoples' wellbeing off against nature's wellbeing. Another parameter that manifested is to equate development with always desirable progress, modernity, intrinsic improvement and growth, although development first and foremost means change.⁹⁴ The nature of modern economic thought remains unclear unless we examine the values it is based on, namely progress, growth and modernity itself.

In an investigation into sustainable economics, the ecological economist Joshua Farley finds that the prevailing economic system is virtually obsessed with economic growth:⁹⁵ Although concerns over biophysical constraints to growth did already surface some eighty years ago, the believe of technological progress and infinite substitutability dominate the economic and political discourse up until today. In response to the political unwillingness to look beyond the technological advancement narrative, critics of the economy of growth in the 1970s established a doomsday-like attitude towards further industrialised exploitation of natural resources. However reluctant economists and policy makers were towards a shift in direction, a few decades later it was taken as a given that resource scarcity would

⁹² Fukuyama 1992

⁹³ Farley 2016

⁹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.

⁹⁵ Farley 2016

limit the common means of production at some point. Nonetheless, by the early 2000s, the general reply to such resource scarcity threat was to uncouple economic growth from biophysical limitations through environmental taxation schemes, ecosystem protection services, CO2 trading and the like.⁹⁶ Farley's investigation into the latest historical research in economy demonstrates that advancing ecological limitations are well known since the twentieth century - and possibly even earlier - and how executives react to the very fact. However, instead of accommodating the biophysical restrictions to their economic thinking, decision-makers put growth in the centre of economic purpose. In contrast, natural boundaries and the economy as a socioeconomic yet physical sub-function in a finite planet eliminate the possibility of an economy to be based on continuous growth.⁹⁷ Even though this calculation seems crystal clear it has not reached globalised mainstream economics yet. In summary, it can be concluded that "[n]ature did not appear much in twentieth century economics, and it doesn't do so in current economic modelling. When asked, economists acknowledge nature's existence, but most deny that she is worth much".⁹⁸ In the same vein, the testing of a nation's wellbeing is preferably measured by its gross domestic product (GDP) and its overall growth,⁹⁹ cutting short on social wellbeing or nature's health. GDP growth as a means to test progress is at the same time ignorant of humanities and nature's wellbeing as it reinforces the paradigm of growth. Thus far, the thesis has uncovered a relentless need to think in ever bigger terms for economy, societal modernity and general prosperity. On the downside, the paradigm of growth does not deliberate whether there is ignorance nor constraints in its own behaviour.

Welfare states in Europe are unique in that they developed differently over a significant amount of time. Each welfare state tells a lot about a nation state's historical development and culture.

No matter what type of welfare state (liberal, conservative, social-democratic, Mediterranean, eastern European) we talk about in Europe, all of them are dependent on constantly

⁹⁶ Farley 2016

⁹⁷ Jackson 2017

⁹⁸ Dasgupta and Heal 1979, p. 474

⁹⁹ Posner 1985, p. 88

growing input of revenue into the social funds of each state, hence they are dependent on economic growth. Their dependency on economic growth let the different European welfare states develop a capitalisation of economic growth for their social economies. Additionally, the socio-economic dimension of the European Union supports the growth imperative through its own social investment strategies.

Due to environmental deterioration and the acute need to tackle climate change on the political stage - as the market economy fails to lessen its climate impact - the contradictory natures of the welfare state growth paradigm and sustainable development in Europe become apparent. Further contradictions to the economic growth paradigm are the role of demographic change - an ageing and simultaneously shrinking European population, that is - in this process as well as current labour market activation policies with regards to new social risks.

In conclusion, modern European welfare states no matter what regime, fail to overcome the economic growth imperative. On the contrary; through historical and present developments, welfare states tend to reinforce the paradigm of constant growth. What is needed to overcome the economic growth imperative without dismantling the function of welfare states of social inclusion and protection are alternative principles via sustainable economic, policy and social determinants.

This discourse was undertaken to evaluate our modern understanding of the environment, economic welfare, and progress. These thought experiments confirmed that the environmental subjection is intrinsically tied to the economical but especially European thinking we find ourselves in today. There are variations in economic systems such as capitalism or communism, but most of those originally European systems she similar attitudes towards nature. Economic paradigms from earlier times overlap with modern parameters of economic success. Scale and dependency of the use of natural resources in a globalised economy that is mainly based on a capitalist approach manifest the European approach to natural exploitation universalise the paradigm. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that globalised mainstream economics is based on parameters of growth, progress and modernity.

Taken together, the results from this interdisciplinary discourse argue that we should entertain the possibility that inveterate progress, infinite growth and indisputable modernity, may be more wishful thinking than actual achievement. Democratic capitalism, a field dominated by historical optimists, has much to engage in order to change the growth paradigm. So has modern European thought.

The main outcomes of this historiographical analysis attribute to the contextualisation of European welfare states in their cultural development.

Due to welfare states' time extensive advancement, they can be considered a variation of *la long durée*. Because welfare states are a variation of *la long durée*, welfare states change very slowly and are culture-intensive. Due to the fact that both welfare states and culture change particularly slow, they tend to not be able to adjust to rapid changes. In other words, change is hardly achieved through sudden alterations.

What constituted our understanding of European welfare does mainly relate to long-term European historical development that is founded on industrialisation (with its outcome of globalised mainstream economics), Christianity (systems of belief) and linearity (attributes linked to the values of modernity, progress and growth).

Because climate change, financial crisis and social upheavals behave dramatically, welfare states are not able to address such issues in due time. Hence, we speak of a dilemma called 'path dependence versus ecological urgency'.

Putting the current growth imperative in contrast to emerging urgencies like the climate crisis through a case study on the European Green Deal: How far does the EU Green Deal reproduce the growth imperative plus correlating thought mechanisms? A further analysis and discussion on labour market activation policies and the peculiarity of European demographics should lie open what needs to change: A questioning of the ruling paradigm concerning European welfare state behaviour, to find appropriate measures to sustain the European welfare state system, and to build cornerstones that constitute a post-growth economy that supports both people and planet.

3. Climate Emergency and Political Responses

- Case study: The European Green Deal

3.1. Purpose

In light of recent events in global climate change and international climate movements, it is becoming extremely difficult to ignore the existence of environmental deterioration on an intergovernmental level. Understanding the link between latest political climate action and socio-economic means to achieve more environmental protection on a pan-European level is thus crucial to give it a meaning in the frame of this work. Consequently, this part of the work includes a practical case study on the European Green Deal, a policy framework to transform the European single market into a green economy as proposed by the European Commission (EC) in late 2019. The European Green Deal is analysed in order to illustrate the theoretical framework that was established in the previous chapter. The methodological approach and material utilised in the case study are entirely independent from the previously established theory. This shall help to employ a most unbiased mode of enquiry as possible, in the attempt to illuminate the veridical connection between theory and praxis.

3.2. Literature Review

To understand the constructive effects of the discourse, we must place the document in its historical and social context. However difficult it is to depict what aspects of context are potentially relevant to the textual analysis, I will, despite the probability to be blind to other contextual aspects, later on utilise those aspects that I established in the previous chapter.

The concept of a New Deal originates from the domestic recovery programme implemented under the democratic U.S. government during the 1930s, which recovered the depressed economy by means of reforming the U.S. economy's key industries as well as relieving the economically aggrieved parties such as unemployed workers.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019

The term advanced to describe a similar approach of investments and policy reforms that would, under sustainable development premisses, guarantee a greener yet stable economy. The Green New Deal term was introduced by recent movements in the U.S., Australia, Europe and other regions to illustrate a sustainable economy that is environmentally friendly, economically feasible and socially accountable.¹⁰¹

Since December 2019, the concept of a European Green New Deal has been obtained by the European Commission in form of the European Green Deal, a set of policy initiatives to steer the EU's economy into a more sustainable direction. Brought forward by the European Commission itself, the overarching aim is to make Europe the first climate neutral continent by 2050. Another cornerstone of the action roadmap is to achieve a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by at least fifty percent compared with 1990 levels by 2030. The action plan includes a multilayered approach, liaising several industrial and service sectors. Next to the self-proclaimed targets, the strategy also entwines measures set by the Paris Agreement and further international climate negotiation outcomes.

Several months before the European Green Deal was introduced, climate change was already dominating the political agenda, especially during the 2019 European Parliament elections, as Bruno Pozzi, director of UN Environment, stated.¹⁰² According to an opinion poll published in April 2019, as many as seventy-seven percent of potential voters identified global warming as an important criterion when deciding whom to vote for at the 2019 European elections.¹⁰³ Even though Green parties did not score high in either Central, Eastern and Southern European countries,¹⁰⁴ the gains of the European Green Party¹⁰⁵ emphasises the continuous need to implement climate action from a political angle.

Why is climate politics and climate action necessary for international political bodies such as the European Commission? Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the modern world. To mitigate anthropogenic climate change, industries, governments and individ-

¹⁰¹ Green Party US 2019, European Greens 2019, Green New Deal Group 2019, Greens Australia 2019

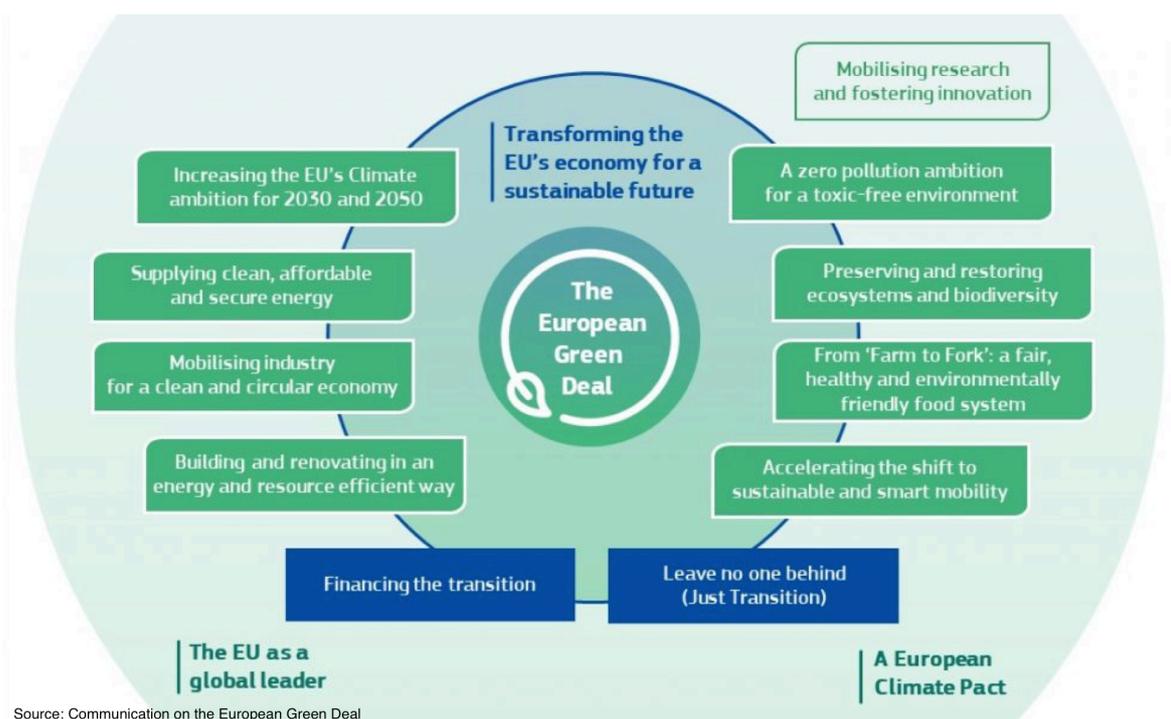
¹⁰² Pozzi 2019

¹⁰³ Simon 2019

¹⁰⁴ Heinrich Böll Stiftung Brussels 2019

¹⁰⁵ European Parliament 2019

uals must reduce or prevent the emissions linked to human activities.¹⁰⁶ Because climate change, next to other Europe-wide phenomena such as the financial or refugee crisis, goes beyond nation states' influence and is not bound to borders.¹⁰⁷ Since the European political integration has reached a crucial influence in economic, political and social terms,¹⁰⁸ and climate action requires an international effort in order to mitigate climate change effectively,¹⁰⁹ climate politics on the European level can be seen as one of the most crucial policy areas these days.



3.3. Analytical Framework

Goal of a discourse analysis is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality in a particular context.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the goal of this discourse analysis is to investigate the

¹⁰⁶ European Environmental Agency 2019

¹⁰⁷ Civicus 2019

¹⁰⁸ European Parliament 2018

¹⁰⁹ Nulman 2015, p. 8

¹¹⁰ Halperin and Heath 2017, p. 335

co-variation or association between the European Green Deal discourse and the EU's context on economy, people, and the environment.

However, the discourse analysis is only the first step. A second step is to provide detailed information of the mechanism through which the power relations of the document gains its impact.

The reason for utilising the European Green Deal (EGD), also called EU Green Deal, is because it brings latest insights into climate action and economic practices on the European level. For the research paper, we will have a close-up look at the official *Communication on The European Green Deal*.¹¹¹ The European Green Deal is a policy framework proposed by the European Commission. This publicly available document declares the European Commission's beliefs, motives, objections and promises for a greener economy. Analysing such public relations document is the most efficient way to understand the European Commission's stance on climate politics, as the official communication document tries to brief and convince the general public of the EU's capability to represent the electorate's concerns regarding climate change and market stability, two aspects which are engrained in people's everyday life. Therefore, the analysis will deal with the framing related to both climate crisis and economic actions.

The first part of my hypothesis is to acknowledge the historical and cultural implications of socio-economic constructs. Welfare states, as much as social policies, are part of the socio-economic construct of the European Union. The EU Green Deal, which outlines a climate-neutral economy by 2050 through a multi-sector investment plan, can be described as another socio-economic construct as it comprises labour market activation policies whilst dealing with mitigating climate change. It might, therefore, replicate the same historical and cultural implications as delineated by the European thought paradigms, specifically of progress, economic growth but also globalisation.

While the first part of the hypothesis creates the foundation of the research study, the second part will put forward the actual focus point of the analysis in which I argue that the European Green Deal might not actually shift the paradigm into a more sustainable impera-

¹¹¹ European Commission 2019

tive narrative, but does to a certain extent recreate the economic growth imperative instead.

The European Commission's commitments to take political action to combat climate change manifests in the policy proposals communicated through the European Green Deal. It thus reacts to public and climate movements' demands for more political climate action. However, its response might pursue variable goals in terms of procedure and commitment than what ecological economists or environmental researchers could suggest. Thus, the research question asks how far the European Green Deal reiterates the economic growth imperative.

The hypothesis could be validated through a discourse analysis of the *Communication on The European Green Deal*, published on the official launch date of the European Green Deal, on the 11th of December 2019.

3.4. Methodology

This chapter aims to give clarity on the subject by demonstrating how recent developments in climate politics holds significance in current EU politics through having a close-up analysis of the European Green Deal and what it indicates regarding climate change and sustainability goals.

The central hypothesis of this case study is that under current approaches, the European dimension will not be able to meet the climate targets in due time, whilst having to deal with economic and social maintenance. The main research question is: How far does the European Green Deal recreate the economic growth imperative.

Furthermore, what focus does the communication and framing on the European Green Deal indicate? How effective are the measurements that are referred to in order to tackle the climate crisis?

The analysed material includes the European Commission's *Communications on The European Green Deal* document utilised in the EGD's presentation launch. I selected the document based on its political significance as the first official communication document. Although further press releases exist on the aim of the EGD, they do not provide further critical material that would in any way change the content of the European Green Deal, nor do

they add on to the original document's initial clarity. Also, considering several additional communications into the analysis would go beyond the scope of the study.

The addressees of the document - the European Parliament, the European Council, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - or individuals who partly represent the addressed institutions did provide feedbacks, meaning that more information on the EU Green Deal's implementation does exist. Nevertheless, other EU institutions cannot encounter with the EGD on the same level as the publisher. Therefore, their input will also not be taken into account for the analysis for the time being.

For the procedure, I will use a discourse analysis, which shall allow me to qualitatively examine the document through ways in which the rhetoric gives legitimacy and meaning to social practices and institutions such as the European Commission.

Discourses consist of ensembles of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is produced and reproduced in a particular historical situation. The elements of a discourse can be brought to light through analysing the language, semiotics (latent meaning in text), and conventions found in a variety of written, oral, and visual 'texts'. But while textual analysis can reveal the elements of a discourse, the *meaning* that they produce or reproduce can only be understood in relation to some broader context. Consequently, discourse analysis is concerned with analysing, not just the text itself, but the relationship of a text to its context (its source, message, channel, intended audience, connection to other texts and events), as well as the broader relations of power and authority which have that context.¹¹²

By dint of the interpretive and constructivist properties of the discourse analysis, I try to understand the European Commission's political behaviour, values or ideology that give meaning to the European Green Deal. In common with some key ideas on which the constructivist notion of discourse is based - specifically speech act theory, post-structuralism and critical discourse analysis - my approach assumes that the EC's action to declare the

¹¹² Halperin and Heath 2017, p. 335

EGD reveals the meanings that the European Union's value system has for agents who participate in it and that give people reasons for acting. In this case, agents to be the European common market as well as the natural environment, and reasons for acting to be environmental degradation and economic stability. Simultaneously to its role as actor, the European Commission is potentially the structurally most powerful institution of the EU and can thus be considered as representative of the European Union's future actions.

The analysis entails a strongly inductive reasoning. Examining the written work through the means of inducing shall help to quickly notice patterns that reflect how the Commission lines up certain concepts or events, which thereupon result in a prevalent outcome. The weakness of inductive reasoning in the case study is that the analysis can give some direction of the EC's political approach in the climate change context, but that it therefore has its limitations. Using the inductive analysis tool aids to investigate truth. However, the likelihood of another possible outcome to the textual implications remains.

3.5. Findings and Analysis

A discourse is "a system of texts that brings objects into being"¹¹³ in a specific institutional and historical context. The goal of this discourse analysis is to uncover the relationship between the European Commission's discourse - on climate change mitigation, its interaction with society, and the economy's role in it - and reality. Thus, it can be assumed that there is a covariation between the EC's written communication and the context of international climate change politics. The general hypothesis can be that the Commission's *Communications on The European Green Deal* is a reaction to the international discussion on climate action. Hence, the hypothesis will be explored by virtue of *how* the EC reacts to the given context.

The local context includes the immediate task of the European Commission to provide a response to the significant international climate action discussions. Given the flamboyant situation, the source provides the producer's message to form a EU-wide restructuring of policies and funding towards a greener economy. Channels such as the European Commis-

¹¹³ Hardy 2001, p. 26

sion's website, where the document originates from, social media campaigns and speeches were held with the aim to effectively address the main intended audiences of the communication, namely the European Parliament, the European Council and the general public. The three main addressees are in that sense most important to convince since the decision-making processes in the European legislative framework depends on all three given institutions. Furthermore, it is important for the EC's democratic accountability to gain public legitimacy through transparent communication such as social media or the Commission's official European Green Deal website.

The analysis has identified several major aspects that were given greater significance due to the textual structure and wording. The research has shown that the European Green Deal values a holistic approach to achieve its goals, provided by the inclusion of all substantial sectors of the European Union's competencies. The framing conceptualises a triangle that interconnects the economy, society and natural environment of the EU. This is made clear from the first page of the introduction but also reaches into the following chapters, which engage with the EGD's policy framework in a more nuanced way of explaining reason and measures of the introduced policies.¹¹⁴

The second major finding is that the reasons for taking drastic measures, as they are described as in each chapter, are "this generation's defining task [...] to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges", as well as to "put Europe firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth" to benefit the economy and citizens (p. 2).

Another finding is that the communication stresses the foreseen importance of international cooperation between EU member states (as in the European Climate Pact), further international institutions such as the UN (as in the United Nations' sustainable development goals), but also the harmonisation with preexisting legislations, policy frameworks (as in the European pillar of Social Rights) and further implications for citizens in form of consumer and labour rights protection. By re-emphasising the economic and social significance throughout its chapters, the EGD's priority is being shifted from environmental protection to social and economic parameters. This trend can furthermore be found in the

¹¹⁴ see chapter 2 of the thesis

wording that emanates from the economic capital narrative, such as “natural capital” (p. 13), “competitive economy” (p. 2), “prosperous society” (p. 23).

Although the European Commission acknowledges the past failures to put the common market in line with the planetary boundaries and identifies potential trade-offs (p. 4), as well as it recognises the economy’s linearity (p. 7), it remains unclear whether the new green growth approach proposed through the EGD is actually less linear, since the measurements consist of policy reformations on one side, but also investments like the proceeding Emission Trading System and a general economic growth strategy on the other side.

The reassurance of the economic stability through growth does provide a predictability for investors (as mentioned on page 4). However, the business-minded wording which can be found throughout the text, such as “risk management practices” (p. 5), “extended producer responsibility” (p. 7), “energy performance” (p. 9) or “green investment” (p. 15), does question the original aim to put nature as a value in itself into the centre of the EGD’s strategic plan.

Additionally, in some cases, nature is substantially portrayed as a resource provider: “[T]he Commission will prepare a new EU forest strategy covering the whole first cycle and promoting the many services that forests provide” or “Ecosystems provide essential services such as food, fresh water and clean air, and shelter” (p. 13).

When it comes to measurable targets and concrete time frames, several statements remain vague. Such can be found in paragraphs where directives either continue to be a draft version (see p. 13) or numerical targets are not referred to an action plan (see p.16). The written communication refers to multiple conferences (see p. 4, 14, 20), policy proposals or strategies that yet have to be implemented, thus not necessarily releasing the tension of a climate emergency, but rather postponing the proceeding to a later point of time, and making it dependent on a broader range of stakeholders, such as the UN. Especially the usage of large numbers of subjunctives like “Fossil-fuel subsidies should end” (p. 10) or “This may include ending global fossil fuel subsidies (p. 21) leaves the decisiveness to take action open.

Other accounts such as “Well-designed tax reforms can boost economic growth and resilience to climate shocks and help contribute to a fairer society and to a just transition” (p.

17) underline the economic advantages of a reshuffling towards a European Green New Deal.

In reviewing the twenty-four pages of the *Communications on The European Green Deal*, the data is found to cluster into several distinctive framings. The first cluster of words such as “challenge”, “substantial change”, “all sectors” (p. 2) in relation to environmental degradation signifies a pressing urgency for change. The second cluster that can be identified highlights an efficient approach (“sustainable” (p. 7), “resource-efficient” (p. 9), “green” (p. 15), “circular” (p. 18)). However, the third cluster (“modern”, “prosperity”, “investment”, “growth” (p. 2), “increase” (p. 20)) points towards a growth-oriented approach. Particularly the fourth cluster denotes a strong ideological connotation to the EU’s position on the world stage (“leader” (p. 20), “strength” (p. 2), “competitive” (p. 18)): “The EU as a global leader” or “The Commission will [...] use its economic weight to shape international standards that are in line with EU environmental and climate ambitions” (p. 22).

Taken together, these results suggest that there is an association between the European Commission’s goal to alter the narrative by steering all market mechanisms that would run through the EGD policy proposal into a more environmentally friendly direction, while increasing its leadership role in international climate negotiations through its economical strength:

“The European Green Deal launches a new growth strategy for the EU. It supports the transition of the EU to a fair and prosperous society that responds to the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation, improving the quality of life of current and future generations.”¹¹⁵

In summary, the document reiterates the *old* economic growth narrative to a certain extent by continuing to lie the focus on growth, but this time in a *sustainable* way, for example through proposing to decouple economic growth from materialist resources. In addition, the text echoes a business genre and eurocentric jargon that gravitates towards a business-as-usual position.

¹¹⁵ European Commission 2019, p. 23,24

On the other hand, the document also brings in *new* narratives, such as a comprehensive multiple-industry method to achieve change or a linguistic approach that mentions all three parameters of economic, society and natural environment. Some proposals refer to alternative economic models, such as circular economy, energy performance contracting or a Just Transition, which indicate a potentially entirely new direction of mainstream economics. One of the issues that emerges from these findings is that the *old* and *new* narrative seem considerably contradictory. An implication of this could be the assertion placing blame on the European Commission to attempt greenwashing or to direct to a goal that entails negligible achievements in terms of environmental protection.

The European Green Deal's implementation will doubtless be much scrutinised whether the policy proposals were effective enough, but there are some immediate dependable conclusions for the language functions and how the meaning is created in its socio-political context.

The broad context (cultural norms and assumptions, knowledge, beliefs and values, resources and strategies) establishes the author's intentions towards the surrounding. When applying the speech act theory,¹¹⁶ it is made visible that the Commission intends the EU Green Deal to become

a new growth strategy that aims to **transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy** where there are **no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource growth**. It also aims to **protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks** and impacts.¹¹⁷

The present results are significant in at least two major respects. It is somewhat surprising that the European Green Deal's intention is so obviously aiming to perform an economic growth strategy in the first place. Secondly, it repeats the means of economic linearity as

¹¹⁶ speech act theory understands language to be used as much to make statements as to put them into action, in Halperin and Heath 2017, p. 337

¹¹⁷ European Commission 2019, p. 2

utilised in the early 2000s, to seemingly decouple economic growth from natural resources via Carbon Emissions Trading schemes, and as described as unsuccessful in chapter 2.3.¹¹⁸ Defined as post-structuralism, the ways of talking about a topic are considered embedded in sets of power relations and are associated with key words and statements that reiterate what can be said, thought and done.¹¹⁹ Throughout the text, including the for the European Commission typical usage of business jargon, the framing confirms the importance of continues growth in the pursuit of a sustainable environment, low-risk involvement for industries as well as uninterrupted evolving social security in a sustainable environment for economy and people. This illustration reveals the intention to further rely on the narrative established previous to the European Green Deal, in order to foster the European common market, but from a more sustainable angle.

The power relations between the need to tackle the climate emergency and the normal operation of the both EU's social and economic dimension is supported by the European Commission in favour of continuous economic growth. These institutional and historical configurations of discourse construct the new kind of *sustainable economic growth*. From a critical discourse analysis point of view, which attempts to unveil connections between language, power and ideology,¹²⁰ the role of the European Commission's EGD is enacting the *old* narrative under the premise of sustainable development. In that regard, the European Green Deal's rhetoric agrees with the Commission's dominance over the public discourse on political climate action, since its communications reproduces the predominant notion on economic performance in the EU. The European Commission's hegemony over the discourse is grounded on its political as well as economic power in the structure of European decision-making processes, which is furthermore bolstered by the EC's ambition to become a driving force in international climate action negotiations such as the UN's Conference of Parties (p. 20).

¹¹⁸ see Farley 2016

¹¹⁹ Halperin and Heath 2017, p. 338

¹²⁰ Halperin and Heath 2017, p. 338

The nature of institutional strategic communication is to be value-laden, which is unveiled in the way the European Commission interacts. In the light of discourse analysis, the information gives enlightening clarity over paradigms and power relations of a given context, but also tends to disrupt and challenge those power relations. Correspondingly, the analysis easily generalises or condemns up to the point where it gives texts a negative meaning. After all, the European Commission's decision to react to the current context is a proactive step into a more sustainable approach on the economic standards of the European Union.

The discourse analysis gives fresh insights into the current importance of climate action in EU politics and pushes the limits of what we know about present EU climate politics further. Text mining the official communications about the European Green Deal brought substantial insights into the general attitudes of the European Commission towards climate change mitigation. It clarified that the Commission responded to current climate action politics by referring to the subject in its EGD policy proposals. However, the account is biased in terms of vocabulary, and hence developed a framing that gives way to an economic stance on tackling the climate emergency. Moreover, the research contributed to the question in how far the EGD can effectively achieve the necessary measures to mitigate climate change. Holding a stance on environmental protection to maintain the European Union's accountability towards the electorate is significant, especially when the majority of voters identify global warming as an important criterion when deciding whom to vote for in elections.¹²¹ A key policy priority for research as well as political institutions should therefore be to plan for the long-term effort of measuring the EU's climate impact instead of quantifying its economic impact.

The extent to which this case study has been made plausible is that the patterns in the meaning of the text are constitutive in some way. How far the interpretation adequately accounts for observations in relation to the relevant contextual factors is dependant on the judgements of validity. The study's ability to provide insights that may prove useful show in how it fits together in terms of content, timeframe, functions and effects, which are

¹²¹ see Simon 2019

made visible by the European Green Deal's credibility as "Europe's man on the moon moment."¹²²

The discourse analysis of the *Communication on The European Green Deal* helped to visualise the research hypothesis that the European Green Deal recreates the economic growth imperative. The case study supports the hypothesis in a broader context insofar as it discloses that a European proposition on welfare is taken from an economic approach. The modern displacement of the natural sphere thus has precedent through mechanisms in the origin of Europeaness. How many centuries this European thinking reaches back remains vague.

Moreover, one can estimate that the economic growth motive does to a definite amount play off against an effective protection of the environment.

More information on sustainable economic development in the European Union would help to establish a greater degree of accuracy on this matter. Further research could usefully explore how a steady escalation of the economic growth imperative could resemble, for example in form of long-term degrowth. For future research, it would hence be interesting to engage with European Union politics and their mentions on climate politics further. This approach would bring a consistent and chronological qualitative content analysis to the development of climate change-related politics and pan-European policy-making for that matter.

¹²² Ursula von der Leyen, speech in front of the European Parliament, December 11, 2019

4. Conclusion: Toward Post-Growth?

4.1. Summary: The Changing relationship between Social and Environmental Protection

In the attempt to understand climate change in a welfare state setting, one comes to realise a disconnection between modern social welfare and environmental protection, and to that effect a missing association between the economic and political connotations and their natural boundaries.

In order to sum up the discussion, I shall bring up four issues that have been brought to light throughout the discourse and which deal with the main research question to what extent European welfare states perpetuate the growth imperative:

1. European welfare states in their modern context;
2. Historically derived European paradigms on economics, society and the environment;
3. Climate emergency from a political viewpoint using the example of the European Green Deal;
4. The need for a new focal point plus outlook.

The introduction provides us with an informative platform about the current conceptions of European welfare states, from which to reflect on the extent to which the arguments of political economy and notions of ecological disregard can be projected backward onto the history of European culture.

Classification of European welfare states, their differences and the multitude of welfare state models signify the great diversity of institutionalised welfare on the European continent. However, all systems share the economic growth imperative as a vital aspect to continue their more or less extensive healthcare services, pension schemes, education systems or social housing. The growth imperative are associated with a globalised European worldview on progress, modernity and growth. Thus, under the prevailing premises, European welfare states share the same imperative that does not allow to become carbon neutral while ensuring social security for their beneficiaries.

On the concept of social policies, the contemporary academic literature merely bases its analysis on a post World War II timeframe. Nevertheless, the cultural implications that set

the economic growth imperative date back to a much broader historical development intrinsically linked to an especially European thinking.

The problem of the modern European viewpoint on welfare is that such is affected by the structure of historical implications. Based on the idea of historical contextualisation, the notions of welfare, climate change and economic growth can be described through the cultural impacts of long-term developments by the Annales school's appropriation of *la longue durée*. In spite of its traditionally nuclear perspective, the study on welfare states in a *longue durée* context adds to our understanding of the importance of long-term cultural developments in welfare state-making. It concludes that the deep rootage of a welfare state in its economical and social context and therefore very crystallised structure prohibit a willingness to change drastically.

The comprehension of growth shapes modern European thinking about welfare states as well as about the perception of the environment. European traditions and habits are what makes European welfare states distinctive to other welfare systems: Feudalism, capitalism, bureaucracy, the Protestant ethic, a certain style of cultural arts, as Max Weber would put it.¹²³ The contrast between some features that are present in European welfare, but also in other Western welfare systems, leads to the concern of what is absent in the making of modern European welfare typologies, and that is the natural sphere. From the modern economic viewpoint, environmental impacts are made invisible, for example, by post-historical apprehensions of European thinking that comprises strong impressions of technological advancement and industrialisation, progress, growth and linearity, or materialism. The subliminal, indirect but negative environmental effect impacts contemporary welfare states, which are mutually determined by their European thinking. Thus, one can argue that European welfare states are blind towards climate change.

As a side effect, the research furthermore demonstrates that governments' commitments towards climate action tend to be not effective enough in due time, and will, therefore, not be able to realise the requirements needed to counter the acute problems that are related to climate change. This is due to the implied structuralism or path dependence, but also due to the competing needs between the ongoing growth imperative in European national economies and the climate emergency.

¹²³ Weber 1905

The appropriateness of the initial research question is tested through the means of a case study on the European Green Deal, which combines aspects of the European social dimension, economic growth and environmental protection through latest political developments. The rift between the economic tenor of the European Union and its over-extractive attitude towards the environment can be identified through a discourse analysis of the European Green Deal, which further implies extending political boundaries of the European sphere on the economic idea for the different European member states. The underlying assumptions about the growth imperative and vice versa the call for climate protection manifest in contemporary political actions such as the European Green Deal. In its response to counter environmental degradation the European Green Deal proposes a green growth strategy characterised by an investment in environmentally friendlier industries, which, however more sustainable the new approach for the European single market promises, reiterates the economic growth imperative on a political level.

The ‘right’ question to ask is one about the structural ability of Europe’s old system to change. While this question can receive a political answer, one can also agree with Max Weber and all the other scholars’ work on European civilisation, that a call for action is a formidably plausible one. Nevertheless, it is path dependency from which the European traditions originate from, as well as certain blindness towards climate change, which are hard to overcome.

What follows is the need for a new focal point which effect lies in the establishment of a post-growth paradigm. Such focal point seeks a welfare state in which national economic and social boundaries are set by the natural environment’s tolerance towards human activities.

The requirement is to release from one’s own socio-economic background and establish a new pattern of thought beyond the growth imperative that is anchored in welfare states. It will furthermore need an entire uplifting and reshuffling of the narrative on welfare, economic structures and the environment in order to be able to change the aim and to create a sustainable welfare state.

4.2. Outlook: European Welfare States in a Just Transition Context

The following outlook explores experimental investigations on the established conclusions as well as concrete recommendations for future examination or research.

In post-1945 Western and European societies, economic growth played a major role in the stabilisation of welfare states, providing employment and social security.¹²⁴ The idea of growth as a means to stability provides a justification to continue the paradigm, without questioning whether the measurements do actually suit the socioeconomic needs in today's welfare state setting. With anthropogenic climate change taking its toll on the natural resources in Europe and the globe as a whole, the growth imperative creates a predicament where only economic structures can react just in time. Hence, what needs to be worked towards, if a welfare state wants to outlast environmental deterioration, is the restructuring of the economy's goal into a sustainable version that cohabitates with nature. A sustainable welfare state that deploys a post-growth economy and the equal ranking of all aspects of welfare for its beneficiaries.

The changes experienced by established welfare states over the past decade remain unprecedented. One of the greatest challenges welfare states are facing manifest in austerity and globalisation pressures.¹²⁵ It is now well established from a variety of studies that welfare does no longer enjoy the admiration it received during its golden times (1940s until 1970s).¹²⁶ A question that should be debated thoroughly is whether European welfare states continue to exist in their diversity for the next fifty years, and debate also continues about the best strategies for the management of social services on both national and supranational level.

On the whole, it is by no means clear that one welfare state type should be seen as more sustainable than the other types. European welfare states are full of examples in which each type has more than just one aspect of welfare that is not prepared for climate change, nor shrinking demographics as it is the case in many European states, or globalisation pressures. For all the reasons of diversity on the European continent, one should not start from

¹²⁴ Hay and Wincott 2012, p. 8-32

¹²⁵ Cousins 2005, p. 41-57, 193-210

¹²⁶ see Hay and Wincott 2012, Cousins 2005, Room 2019, de la Porte and Heins 2015

the assumption that a sustainable welfare state is a uniform undertaking, but should be ready to accept that each welfare state has to accommodate climate action in their own logic. An appropriate goal for future research is to uphold the unique set of welfare states in Europe, nevertheless under a more sustainable approach for both nature and social environment. The actual differences between European welfare states' readiness and approach on climate change ought to be investigated by empirical studies, taking into account that welfare through the EU has also grown fundamentally since its beginnings in the 1950s. So in the end, a depiction of the modern European welfare states from an environmental perspective will not only better analyse the differences, but also the similarities. Considering the European Union's social dimension as a second version of welfare state-making is yet another aspect that should be taken into account when seeking sustainable solutions for each national economy.

Further research on the concept or the actual implementation of sustainable welfare states should continue the inquiry into the detrimental core aspects of modern welfare systems - economic growth imperative, environmental degradation, globalisation pressures, new social risks, nonconforming pension reforms - to find long-lasting systemic transitions that accommodate both social and environmental needs.

Without offering evidence, given the circumstances of a shrinking European population, climate emergency and the volatile character of the economic and financial system, new changes in the design of welfare states to make those more enduring have to be explained by their reaction to current social and environmental crises.

With regards to the question whether the linear perception on social development ought to be generally inferior to a cyclical viewpoint, one answer can be given through one of Peter Burke's suggestions: "My own view is that we need both models, each compensating for the defects of the other."¹²⁷

Although Natural Philosophy is seen as a primitive version of modern natural sciences, Aristotle's way of thinking of an interconnectivity between nature and philosophising can be found an adequate means to find a new purpose for welfare and welfare states: A restored connection to the natural environment, as well as to the meaning of welfare in

¹²⁷ Burke 2002. p.193

modern society can be found a virtue in itself, but also as a way to develop a sustainable welfare state.

The invisibility of the environment is a subject matter that can be traced from mainstream economics over politics to society. When asked what is rational, the question can be extended beyond a critique of the logic of welfare state capitalism to a reflection on the general relationship between social and ecological systems throughout the course of Europe's history. It is, however, visible that much of the ecological imbalance - from the extensive extraction of natural resources, industrialised chains of production, carbon-intensive transportation of goods to non cyclical waste management - fundamentally stems from an economic system Europe's economy is based on. If one were to change the goal of modern economic welfare, one might well agree with the three environmental historians Paul Warde, Libby Robin and Sverker Sörlin's extraordinary conclusion that what modernity affects is the lack of an idea:

[A] way of imagining the web of interconnection and consequences of which the natural world is made. Without this, we also lacked a way to describe the scale and scope of human impact upon that world. This idea - a planet-changing idea, because it made the planet visible in a wholly new way - was 'the environment'.¹²⁸

Alternative approaches to welfare state capitalism do exist. For example, Herman Daly describes new ways of a just distribution and efficient allocation of resources as alternatives to GDP growth in his vision of an Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) as well as the development of a steady-state economy.¹²⁹ Just Transition, which has already been touched upon in the European Green Deal, underlines the idea to transform an economic setting into one that is both sustainable and fair. Finally, the existing alternatives emphasise the two main ingredients for a sustainable welfare state, namely ecological and social security.

¹²⁸ Warde, Robin and Sörlin 2018, p. 2

¹²⁹ Daly 1973

Weaving in latest European developments in terms of the COVID 19 pandemic, the climate emergency is the agent that glues all parts of economics, social implications and political reactions together. By reflecting on the parallels between the pandemic and the broader crisis that Europe faces with the climate emergency. The analogy in how European policy-makers respond to climate change and the Corona virus is very revealing and in some ways similar. The first similarity is that climate change is a threat that has been known for a long time but was met with gradual changes only. Hence, effective measurements to mitigate climate change have not been prepared in due time. In both cases, one could argue that in social disciplines and environmental sciences, scientists and experts have not been heard promptly. The second similarity is that when the symptoms of social or climate degradation finally manifest, political leaders are only able to respond with shallow countermeasures. The third parallel is, once governments fully admit that there is a serious problem, no matter if of a health or environmental problem, it tends to be too late to craft gradual, incremental and manageable changes and the measures that have to be taken have to be vastly more difficult, costly as well as hurtful to the society affected than they would have been if it had been acted upon earlier.

The solutions to the climate crisis also show similar outcomes to current social crises: What needs to be done in order to solve the climate crisis is international cooperation. However, that requires global coordination which seems to be insufficient and unlikely to cause an actual change in the course. Taken together, policy-makers' response to climate change is similar to social crises such as the Corona virus in that there is insufficient prevention work to avoid a crisis situation. Due to their gradual appearance, social as well as climate change tend to stay invisible, if not forecasted and communicated directly, until they break out. It lies somewhat in their nature to be underestimated. Originally, welfare was seen to give support and safety to the people in a national economy. With the continuous change of social standards and the merely financial counteractions though, latest measurements to prevent people to grow into insecurity did not take place. This might worsen given the growing sincerity of environmental degradation and the difficult future of Europe.

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