Mitigating climate change, one hamburger at a time

A discourse analysis of how MAX Burgers AB communicates their carbon offsetting — and how customers perceive it

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Abstract

Carbon offsetting through forest sequestration in the Global South has become an increasingly common way for companies to mitigate their greenhouse gas emissions and thereby sell products and services with net zero emissions. In Sweden, fast food company MAX Burgers AB goes even further. They offset 10 % more than what they emit through carbon dioxide removal (CDR), thus claiming to have a "climate-positive" menu and that "every bite is good for the climate".

In this thesis I analyse how Max narrates their carbon offsetting online and in advertisements, as well as how a sample of 92 of their customers perceive this narrative, through short interviews. I also conduct a discourse analysis and discuss how these narratives draw on the ecological modernisation, green governmentality and civic environmentalism discourses, and how Max and the interviewed customers relate to each other in terms of governmentality, i.e. the conduct of (carbon) conduct.

The major findings of the thesis are three: firstly, despite a lingering confusion around Max's concept of "climate positivity", the message of consuming burgers to solve climate change seems to have stuck. Indeed, most of the interviewed customers were positive towards Max's carbon offsetting, but very few understood what it actually means and that Max is doing CDR. Secondly, Max places a lot of responsibility on the individual customer to *consume* sustainably, which together with the first major finding ultimately allows them to escape their own responsibility of *producing* sustainably. Thirdly, despite that Max constructs the individual customer as responsible for climate change mitigation, self-disciplining into conscious and responsible consumers is not very pronounced among the interviewees. This might indicate that Max is not conducting their customers' (carbon) conduct to as great an extent as the governmentality literature suggests.

The contribution of this thesis is to shed light on a previously quite unexplored area, namely how companies communicate their carbon offsetting, and how their customers in the Global North perceive, reason and act in relation to those carbon offset products. The findings indicate that one has to be mindful in jumping to conclusions about the conduct of (carbon) conduct in terms of consumers' behaviour, but also call for more research in the topic as no generalisations can be made to any customers other than those interviewed.

Key words: green governmentality, ecological modernisation, civic environmentalism, carbon dioxide removal, conduct of conduct, climate change mitigation

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Abbreviations

BECCS = Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage

CDR = Carbon Dioxide Removal

CDM = Clean Development Mechanism

CER = Certified Emission Credit

GHG = Greenhouse gas emissions

PES = Payment for Ecosystem Services

RQ = Research question

VCM = Voluntary Carbon Market

TFGB = Trees for Global Benefits

1. Introduction

Sweden is often celebrated as being at the forefront of sustainability. Here, consumers' wish to consume sustainably is growing in step with an expanding environmental awareness (Sustainable Brand Index™, 2019). Accordingly, companies are increasingly offering products and services whose emissions have been compensated through forest sequestration projects (Gupta, Lövbrand, Turnhour & Vijge, 2012). For instance, the Swedish-Danish dairy company Arla (2019) now offers "net zero climate footprint" milk, Swedish coffee maker Arvid Nordqvist (n.d.) sells "climate neutral" coffee and the major airport corporation Swedavia (2017) provides its customers the opportunity to "climate-compensate" their flights.

Some companies go even further than net zero, offsetting more than what they emit, so that their products or services contribute to so-called net negative emissions, or carbon dioxide removal (CDR). The Swedish electricity company GodEl (n.d.), who has had net negative emissions since 2019, is an example of this. Perhaps the most prominent company in terms of net negative emissions — and the subject of this thesis — is MAX Burgers AB (hereafter referred to as "Max"), whose entire menu is what they call "climate positive"[1] (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a). Max offsets 110 % of their emissions via the Ugandan forest sequestration project "Trees for Global Benefit" (TFGB), and claims therefore that every bite of a Max burger, beef or vegan, is good for the climate (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a). Max is internationally recognised as a role model in net negative emissions and has won several sustainability prizes for their efforts — including the UN Global Climate Action Award of 2019 (MAX Burgers AB, 2019a).

Max vigorously communicates their CDR to customers by emphasising the importance of tree plantation and proclaiming how consumption of their burgers ultimately contributes to a better climate (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a). The communication is simple and accessible, but carbon offsetting and CDR are far from easily grasped, for several reasons. Indeed, they involve complex processes of global exchange and climate change mitigation governance (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2011), and the voluntary carbon market (VCM) that Max operates within has no common definition of what exactly a carbon credit is (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). The VCM has also no standards for ensuring additionality[2] or for validating carbon offsetting schemes (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). Furthermore, carbon offsetting is a highly political

[1] Max does not use quotation marks for the concept "climate positive", but I do so in this thesis to indicate that it is a dubious and ambiguous concept that is, to my knowledge, not internationally established.
[2] Additionality will be further explained in the subsequent 2. *Background* chapter

matter and subject to discursive struggle: while proponents of market based solutions to climate change see carbon offsetting as a useful and efficient strategy to reduce atmospheric carbon, critical voices see it as green washing and further perpetuating unequal relationships between North-South (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

As the UN Global Climate Action Award of 2019 showed, the UN evidently promotes companies who employ CDR (MAX Burgers AB, 2019a) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) even counts on CDR to be employed in all of their 1.5°C pathways for the future (IPCC, 2018). Yet, carbon offsetting has also been highly criticised, e.g. for the high risk of release of stored carbon (Galik & Jackson, 2009) and for being justified by false degradation narratives (Hajdu, Penje & Fischer, 2016). Furthermore, carbon offsetting has been criticised for having enabled socioeconomic tradeoffs (Richards & Lyons, 2016; Ekstedt & Carton, 2018), land grabbing, and disbenefits to local people (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012; Lyons & Westoby, 2014; Lohmann, 2019).

Clearly, carbon offsetting is a contentious matter, yet Max communicates an arguably simplistic and apolitical story in which consuming their burgers is good for the climate (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a). This all sounds great, but obscures the complexities of carbon offsetting and the contention around it. Against this background, I set out to analyse how Max communicates their carbon offsetting, and how a sample of their customers perceive it. I do so first by a narrative[3] analysis, establishing which problem-cause-solution chains Max and these customers tell about Max's carbon offsetting, drawing on Bacchi's (2012) "What's the problem represented to be?" framework. I then conduct a discourse analysis of Max's and their customers' narratives, based on a discourse analysis of forest sequestration projects by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006). They identified three main discourses commonly articulated, namely green governmentality, ecomodernism and civic environmentalism, which are to various extents drawn upon also in Max's texts and in the conducted interviews. Additionally, incorporated in the whole analysis is a discussion on how Max and the interviewed customers relate to each other in terms of governmentality.

The novelty of this thesis is in the scrutiny of how carbon offsetting via forest sequestration projects is communicated by an influential stakeholder and perceived by its customers in Sweden, which to my knowledge has not been researched before. Although there is a lot of work on carbon offsetting from the perspective of where the tree plantation takes place, little is known about how CDR is

[3] With "narrative" I mean stories, or ways of representing the world, typically encompassing a beginning, a middle and an ending — or a problem, its cause(s) and solution(s) (Adger, Benjaminsen, Brown & Svarstad, 2001).

communicated by the business sector and perceived by its customers. Consequently, the current work might render important insights in the topic of carbon offsetting in general, and net negative emissions in particular, which is valuable considering the growing trend of companies employing it (Gupta, Lövbrand, Turnhour & Vijge, 2012).

There are three main research questions (RQs) guiding this thesis:

1. **What carbon offsetting narratives (problem- cause- solution chains) do Max Burgers AB and (a sample of) their customers respectively tell?**
2. **What discourses do these carbon offsetting narratives draw on?**
3. **How do Max and (a sample of) their customers (and their respective narratives) relate to each other in terms of governmentality?**

The purpose of the first RQ is to determine what narratives — i.e. what the problem is represented to be and what solutions this problem representation produces (Bacchi, 2012) — that Max and its customers tell. It covers three sub questions: What *problem* is carbon offsetting constructed as the solution for? What is presented as the *cause*(s) of this problem? How is carbon offsetting as a *solution* being communicated by Max, and perceived by their customers? The second RQ is of a more analytic character, with the purpose to discuss how the discourses identified by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) are articulated in the narratives. The third RQ covers if, and in that case how, Max's narrative is somehow conducting the conduct of the interviewed customers (i.e. governmentality).

2. Background

This chapter contextualises first carbon offsetting in the international arena, i.e. what it is and how it works (2.1). It then zooms in to Sweden, presenting Max as a company and how they go about their carbon offsetting (2.2).

2.1 Carbon offsetting

Carbon offsetting can be defined as any measure that serves either to *sequester* already emitted carbon, such as tree plantation, or to *hinder* carbon that otherwise would have been emitted, such as replacing stoves that require a lot of firewood with more efficient ones (Hyams & Fawcett, 2013). Carbon offsetting is a form of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), behind which the logic is that it is most efficient to protect the environment by setting a price on its "services", thus creating a market to incite sustainability (Andersson & Carton, 2017). According to Fairhead, Leach and Scoones (2012), carbon offsetting is a part of "the economy of repair": to price the reparation (i.e. carbon offsetting) of damage inflicted by economic growth. Thereby, the market corrects the unsustainability of GHG emissions "here" with sustainable practices "there" (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012).

According to Bumpus and Liverman (2008), the idea of carbon offsetting entered the global climate change mitigation arena in the 1990s, in connection with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of 1992 and the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. The idea was that industrialised countries would meet their reduction targets by purchasing reductions that had been achieved elsewhere, where it was cheaper and easier. In this way, pressure could be relieved on the Global North, where it would be both complex and expensive to decrease emissions. Simultaneously, money and technology would flow to the Global South — countries whose economies would be imbalanced if forced to meet reduction targets — in exchange for carbon credits. This is what is called "joint implementation" through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM): a mechanism for states to offset their emissions (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008).

Since the introduction of the CDM, carbon offsetting has become an increasingly common tool for actors in the Global North to mitigate emissions (Gupta, Lövbrand, Turnhour & Vijge, 2012). Companies and individuals who want to offset cannot go through the CDM, however, as it is designed for states only. Therefore, a parallel voluntary carbon market (VCM) emerged, in which neither states nor the UN are involved (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008).

According to Bumpus and Liverman (2008), the VCM is much more informal than the CDM with its rigorous rules, frameworks, standards and specific definitions of what is allowed to be a certified emissions reduction (CER) and not. In contrast, the VCM has no standard definitions for carbon credits, which in practice means that a carbon credit from one project may not be equivalent to a carbon credit from another. Different certifiers may apply different criterias, and as the rules and standards are voluntary this means that they may not always be followed, or only partially obliged to (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). Max, just like all companies and other private actors who employ carbon offsetting and/or CDR, do so through the VCM.

Carbon offsetting is dependent on the rendering of carbon into a governable unit that can be exchanged on the market: that is, carbon offsetting entails a process of commodification (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2011). It also implies essential calculations, as every achieved tonne of sequestration or hindrance of GHG emissions is translated into a carbon credit to be bought and sold (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). These calculations are very complex, not only because the abstract and intangible entity of GHG emissions is turned into a commodity but also because of practicalities. For example, weather variations, geographical circumstances and complicated monitoring methods all affect the calculation (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008).

According to Bumpus and Liverman (2008), these practicalities easily complicate the requirement of carbon offsetting having to be additional[4], i.e. that the economic gain and the sequestration must be anticipated to not have happened without the project. Additionality relies on speculations on the future which at best will come true, but might also be exaggerated or simply wrong. For example, sequestration may have occurred even without the project (no economic additionality) or the already paid for sequestration does not actually happen (no environmental additionality). Carbon offsetting projects rely in other words on counter-factual — not yet existing — future scenarios (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008).

2.2 MAX Burgers AB and their carbon offsetting

MAX Burgers AB (2020a) was founded in 1968 in a small town in northern Sweden, and quickly expanded to more cities. Today, Max has 120 restaurants worldwide, a turnover of over 330 million euro

[4] Economic additionality means that the carbon offsetting must be financially attractive solely by reason of the carbon credit generated money. Environmental additionality means that the carbon offsetting project must result in reduced atmospheric carbon solely by reason of the project. (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008).

and they pride themselves with serving the most preferred hamburgers in Sweden as well as having the most satisfied customers (MAX Burgers AB, 2020a). Max switched early on to 100 % renewable energy in their Swedish restaurants, and in 2008 they started to label all their products with their respective CO_2 footprint (MAX Burgers, 2020b). In 2013, Max became "climate neutral" by offsetting 100 % of their GHG emissions and, in 2016, they launched the "green family" with five new vegetarian and vegan burgers (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b). This became their most successful and profitable campaign ever (MAX Burgers AB, 2019b).

In 2018, Max advanced to become "climate positive" as they for the first time started to offset 10 % more carbon than what they emitted (MAX Burgers AB, 2018c). "Climate positive" is not an internationally established concept, but for Max it means that they are taking three steps: 1) measuring all emissions throughout the production chain, 2) reducing these emissions e.g. by introducing their green menu, and 3) offsetting 110 % of the remaining emissions (MAX Burgers, 2018c). With this extra 10 %, their net emissions become negative, hence the advertisement claiming that "every bite is good for the climate" and the concept of "climate positive" (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b).

Despite the Swedish Advertising Ombudsman's[5] conviction of Max being "misleading" in claiming that every bite is good for the climate (Reklamombudsmannen, 2019), Max is doing better than ever. Their sales are increasing, they are expanding internationally and have won numerous Sustainable Brand Index awards (MAX Burgers AB, 2019a). At the COP25 in Madrid, Max was even credited with the UN "Global Climate Action Award" for their carbon offsetting initiatives (MAX Burgers AB, 2019a). Yet, due to their expansion, Max's total level of carbon emissions is steadily increasing (MAX Burgers AB, 2018b), as depicted in Figure 1.

[5] The Swedish Advertising Ombudsman (Reklamombudsmanen, RO) is the official representative for the public in advertisement matters, tasked with reviewing commercials and making sure they keep high standards (e.g., are not misleading consumers).

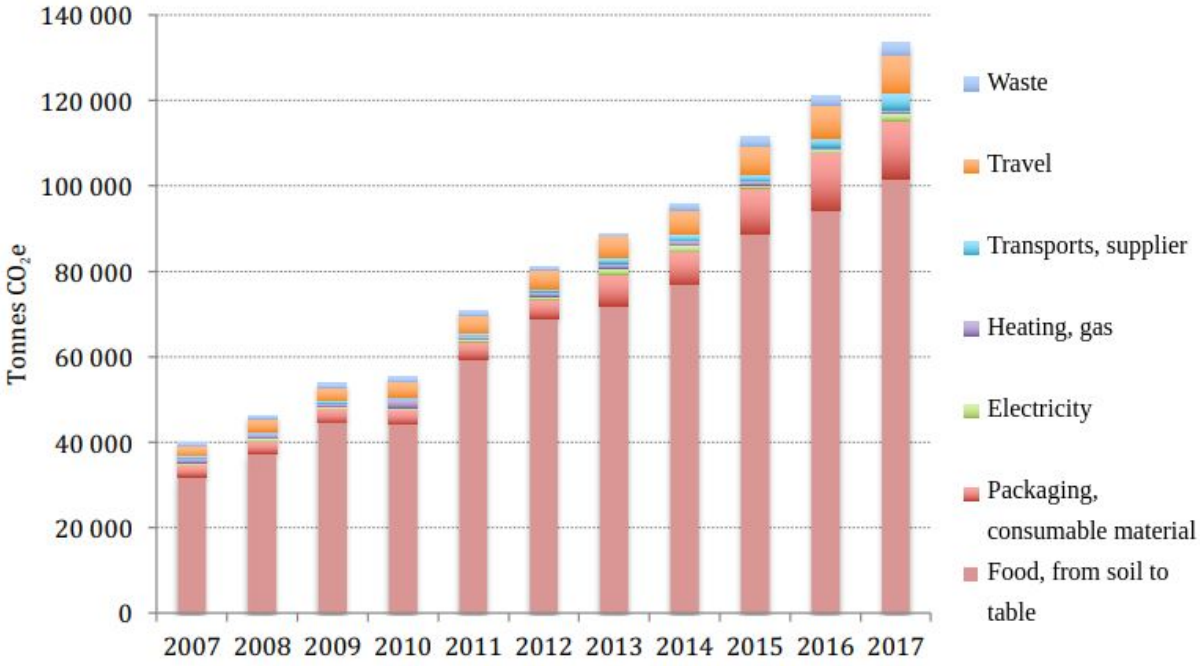

Figure 1. Max's ten years' steady increase of carbon emissions, the majority stemming from food production (100 000 out of 135 000 tCO_2e in 2017). (MAX Burgers AB, 2018b, p.24).

The way in which Max offsets their GHG emissions is through a forest sequestration project called Trees for Global Benefits (TFGB) that has been running in Uganda since 2003 (PlanVivo, n.d.). Several other Swedish companies, such as Arla, Arvid Nordqvist and Axfood also offset through this project, although Max is one of their most important customers — and the main reason for the project's recent expansion to the Rwenzori mountains (Zeromission, n.d.). In contrast to many other projects — often characterised by large scale monocultural forest stands and structural violence in the form of land grabbing — TFGB is promoted as a socioecologically sustainable alternative (Andersson & Carton, 2017). Its mission is to support local small scale farmers by paying them for planting trees on their land, which contributes to carbon sequestration (PlanVivo, n.d.). The generated carbon credits are sold as *planned* sequestration — so-called *ex ante* — i.e. before the sequestration has actually occurred (Andersson & Carton, 2017).

3. Theoretical framework

The research questions and theoretical framework essentially revolve around governmentality. This chapter will therefore first briefly introduce this concept (3.1). It then proceeds to present the theoretical underpinning of problematisation and narratives (3.2), as well as that of discourses in forest sequestration projects (3.3). The chapter is concluded with a discussion on the individual as the subject of climate change mitigation (3.4).

3.1 Governmentality

Governmentality was originally coined by french thinker Michel Foucault in a series of lectures in Paris in the late 1970s. It can be understood as the "conduct of conduct": how power is being exercised through *conducting* (as in directing, administering, controlling, managing or leading) the *conduct* (as in behaviour, actions, practices, wishes, aspirations or manners) of individuals and collectives (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2015). Accordingly, power is not executed by a certain person, government or institution — it is everywhere, in every governing activity and in any device, tool, technique, material and program that enables the conducting of subjects (Miller & Rose, 2008). This is an insidious process that directs individuals' and groups' conduct to certain norms and macro socio-political objectives — even concerning everyday practices such as sexual activities or eating habits — without explicitly telling or physically forcing them to do so (Miller & Rose, 2008). Governmentality is therefore both a way of thinking ("mentality") and a way of intervening, acting, conducting ("government"), intimately connected and thus irreducible to each other (Miller & Rose, 2008).

3.2 Narratives

The first research question asks what narratives (problem-cause-solution chains) that Max and their customers tell and perceive about Max's carbon offsetting, implying that problems are not objective or pre-given (Bacchi, 2012). Rather, problems are constructed through a process of problematisation, rendering someone or something into appearing problematic and, accordingly, requiring governance in order to solve this "problem" (Bacchi, 2012). This problematisation process is a necessary prerequisite for governmentality: for an individual (or collective) to become subjects of conduct, they must first appear to embody a problem in need of solving (Miller & Rose, 2008).

The process of problematisation is inherently linked to how it is acted upon, as "problems" and "solutions" are made up in relation to each other: the representation of the former constitutes the frames within which the latter can be employed (Miller & Rose, 2008). In this sense, proposed solutions produce "problems", which in turn constitute how one can (and cannot) act upon this "problem" (Bacchi, 2012). Following this line of thought, carbon offsetting as a solution can be seen as a product of a subjective problematisation process, rather than as the best solution to an objective problem (Bacchi, 2012).

3.3 Discourses

The second research question asks what discourses (i.e. knowledge regimes) that the narratives of Max and its customers draw on, behind which there lies an assumption that discourse constitutes what is rendered a problem and how this problem should, as well as *can*, be solved (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Accordingly, carbon offsetting is perceived differently in different discourses: in some, it is precisely a solution to an objective problem, while in others it could be an expression of neocolonialism (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

According to Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), there are three main discourses present in carbon offsetting through forest sequestration projects in the Global South: ecological modernisation, green governmentality and civic environmentalism. This is a contentious arena, or a "microcosm of competing and overlapping discourses" (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006, p.50), as the two former are dominant, whereas the latter is a challenging underdog (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Since green governmentality and ecological modernisation are the dominant discourses, they set the frames for the commonly accepted problematisation process (in which carbon offsetting is viewed as a good solution to climate change) and thus for conduct (Miller & Rose, 2008).

In the ecological modernisation discourse, economic growth is viewed as compatible with environmental protection: decoupling environmental destruction from economic growth is both possible and desirable (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Sustainable development through green investments, green regulations, technology and a free market is promoted, and notions of "limits to growth" are rejected (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Flexibility and cost efficiency are cornerstones of ecological modernisation, and together justify carbon offsetting and the implications that come with it (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). It is simply cheaper, faster and easier to undertake GHG reduction in the Global South, which ultimately

will benefit the atmosphere more efficiently as well as contribute to sustainable development (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008).

These types of win-win storylines are common in the ecological modernisation discourse (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006), and particularly articulated in promoting forest sequestration projects (Hajdu & Fischer, 2017). Carbon credits flow to the Global North from the Global South, in exchange for money and technology — everybody benefits (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

In order for carbon to be tradeable as credits on the market, it needs first to be monitored, measured, calculated, reported, verified and commodified (Gupta, Lövbrand, Turnhour & Vijge, 2012). This managerial, top-down view of nature as subject to supervision, measurement and protection (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006), but also power and domination (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012), is characteristic of the green governmentality discourse (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). It is also a prerequisite for carbon offsetting: carbon must become governable — rendered into a problem in need of conducting (Miller & Rose, 2008) — through "turning stocks and flows of carbon into objects of governance" (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2011, p.188).

Forest cover is being supervised via satellite, emissions are being modelled with computers, atmospheric CO_2 levels are being measured at meteorological stations (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006), and flows and stocks of carbon are being abstracted into commodities or tradeable pieces of information (tCO_2e[6]) (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008). Specialised knowledge practices and technical infrastructure are in other words essential in the technocratic and elitist discourse of green governmentality (Gupta, Lövbrand, Turnhour & Vijge, 2012).

According to Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), the green governmentality and the ecological modernisation discourses overlap in their shared managerial approach to climate change mitigation. Forest sequestration projects draw heavily on both of these: the technocratic, elitist and scientific operationalisation of green governmentality; and the win-win rhetorics and emphasis on cost-efficiency of ecological modernisation. The former draws the discursive frame within which a forest becomes a carbon sink subject to administration and dominance, and the latter then provides justification — or a blueprint for action — for how this subject is governed, namely through the market (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

[6] Tonne of carbon dioxide equivalents (tCO_2e), a measure that allows comparison with other GHGs relative to one tonne of CO_2.

According to Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), the pragmatic and more reform-oriented form of civic environmentalism overlaps somewhat with a strong and more ambitious form of ecological modernisation in the acceptance of market-based solutions to climate change. That is, if the inclusion of local stakeholder participation and indiginous knowledge can be guaranteed. The more radical form of civic environmentalism, however, is deeply sceptical towards market-based solutions like carbon offsetting. Here, the free market is viewed not as a mechanism with which to govern climate change mitigation, but as an intrinsically power-laden *cause* of climate change (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

In the civic environmentalism discourse, multilateral financial institutions, UN agencies and other climate change mitigation governance bodies are perceived as biased towards neoliberalism, and therefore unable to generate "real" solutions (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Carbon offsetting is perceived as a practice of green washing that effectively disguises power relations between North and South and avoids targeting what is seen as the root of the problem, namely the Global North's continuous extraction and burning of fossil fuels (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Radical civic environmentalism takes in other words a more ecocentric, bottom-up approach, advocating for structural system change and social justice (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

3.4 Individuals as the subjects of climate change mitigation

The third research question covers how Max and their customers (and their respective narratives and discourses) relate to each other. This builds on governmentality theories around the individual as the main subject of climate change mitigation.

The individual has been increasingly targeted in climate mitigation interventions, policies and campaigns aimed at reducing personal carbon footprints through individual actions (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012). What is being problematised is the *individual* and their lifestyle choices, so that the possible solution(s) become, accordingly, to direct the individual to reduce their personal emissions (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2015). Lövbrand and Stripple (2015) call this the "conduct of carbon conduct": the steering of individuals to self-govern and self-regulate into being carbon conscious, responsible consumers (Paterson & Stripple, 2010).

According to Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), green governmentality can be understood as the conduct of individuals and groups, disciplining how they act and think (or are acted upon) in relation to the environment. Environmental problems tend to be constructed as the sum of individual behaviour —

therefore it is the individual who must mitigate their personal emissions (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012), using the market as a tool to do so (Llodo-Bidart, 2014). This individual, consumption-based climate change mitigation can be put in contrast with the collective ditto: instead of "reclaiming the power" and changing the structures through collective action, individuals can "choose" (to consume) sustainably (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012, p.46).

According to Soneryd and Uggla (2015), the "power to choose" and consume sustainably can also be conceptualised as a process of responsibilisation and individualisation. People are increasingly addressed in terms of free will and choice, which disguises the responsibility that is put on the individual (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). Individuals are perceived as "free" subjects, but this freedom is illusory as individuals' actions — what they consume and how, their choices, actions and decisions — are in fact steered (towards sustainability) (Lloro-Bidart, 2014). This conduct of conduct happens for instance through campaigns, news media reports, eco-labelling and tools for calculating carbon footprint, which may seem innocuous but aim to subtly conduct the individual to "choose" sustainably (Hobson, 2013). Climate change mitigation governance is thus becoming increasingly related to consumption, responsible choices and lifestyle rather than for instance citizenship, duties and solidarity (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). The responsibility of climate change mitigation thereby transfers from nation-states and corporations to the individual, who disciplines themself to act sustainably, through the market (Llodo-Bidart, 2014).

What must be noted is that this green governmentality steering of individuals does not necessarily play an important role in people's actions, according to Soneryd and Uggla (2015). Indeed, people with low income do not have to feel responsible to "choose" sustainably — their carbon footprint is usually low regardless. Or, people might buy eco-labelled or carbon offset products without it being an act of responsible consumption — it might simply be routinised, or the most time efficient or closest choice at hand. In these cases, governmentality is arguably not that decisive for individuals' behaviours (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015).

3.5 From theory to analysis

Governmentality lays the overarching theoretical and analytical basis for this whole thesis. Bacchi's (2012) theorisation of narratives forms the theoretical ground for analysing Max's and their customers' narratives, i.e. what they see as the problem, its causes and solutions, answering RQ1. Bäckstrand and Lövbrand's (2006) discourse analysis — where they identify three common discourses within carbon

offsetting — lays the theoretical basis for the discourse analysis of this thesis' data, thus responding to RQ2. The theoretisation on the individual as the subject of climate change mitigation and the conduct of (carbon) conduct discusses how Max and the interviewed customers relate to each other in terms of governmentality, answering RQ3.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents a justification for the chosen case (4.1) and how data collection (4.2) and data analysis (4.3) were conducted. It is then concluded with a brief note on ethics (4.4).

4.1 Case selection

Max is considered to be a pioneer in their sector, and is internationally recognised as such (MAX Burgers AB, 2019a). They have also (despite international awards) been under fire in Sweden, concerning their advertisement of "climate positive" burgers (Reklamombudsmannen, 2019). The recent expansion of TFGB to the Rwenzori mountains is largely due to the involvement of Max (Zeromission, n.d.), and last but not least, they are doing exceptionally well economically (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a). All of these are factors that make Max a very interesting as well as timely case to analyse in regards to carbon offsetting and how it is being communicated.

One could of course ask why I analyse "only" Max and not the other actors in the chain of carbon offsetting. The reason is that I am interested in the narrative that is available for the everyday consumer — the story of carbon offsetting that can be easily accessed via a Max restaurant, an advertisement, Max's webpage or their social media. Furthermore, much research on carbon offsetting has traditionally been conducted in the Global South, where the actual offsetting takes place (see for example Fischer & Hajdu, 2018; Lyons & Westoby, 2014; Hajdu, Penje & Fischer, 2016; Edstedt & Carton, 2018; Andersson & Carton, 2017), but little is known about how carbon offsetting is being communicated by companies and perceived by consumers here in Sweden.

4.2 Data collection

The thesis builds on two data sets: one from Max and one from 92 of their customers. The Max data consists of eleven texts that touch upon their carbon offsetting and were extracted either from their official website (both the Swedish and international one), or from sites *linked* on any of these two websites. This included several information texts and folders about Max's "climate positivity" and their sustainability work; a press release regarding the launch of their "climate positive" menu; Facebook-updates; a transcripted speech held by the sustainability and information manager Kaj Török at the Sustainable Brands conference in 2018; an analysis of Max's carbon footprint of 2017 and three advertisements.

The customer data consists of transcriptions of quick interviews (both individual and in group), conducted at a Max restaurant in Lund (Sweden) on the 11th, 12th and 13th of February 2020. In total, 95 people were approached and asked if they could answer a few questions regarding Max's environmental work, of which 92 agreed to be interviewed, in 45 different individual and group interviews conducted in Swedish. The selection of interviewees was a "first best" selection, i.e. the people interviewed were those who dwelled at the restaurant at the time of data collection. The interviewees happened to be largely in their teens, likely due to the fact that the restaurant in question is situated close to several schools (and because the school lunch, according to the interviewees' own admission, was not satisfying).

A "first best" type of selection is not ideal in terms of generalising (Esaiasson et al, 2012), but that is not the aim. Rather, the value of this thesis is that it sheds light on how consumers of carbon offset products such as the "climate positive" burgers of Max might reason in regards to carbon offsetting and campaigns around it — an area that to my knowledge has not been well researched before.

The interview contained five questions. The first one asked why the interviewee ate at Max, aiming to find out if there were any environmental objectives behind choosing Max specifically. The second question asked how the interviewee interpreted the menu being "climate positive", with the objective to establish the customer's pre knowledge of Max's carbon offsetting. The remaining three questions intended to uncover the customers' narratives, asking what they thought the problem is that Max's tree plantation is intended to solve; what they thought cause(s) that problem; and whether Max's carbon offsetting in the form of tree plantation is a good solution to that problem (or if something additional/instead should be done).

4.3 Data analysis

The data analysis took place in two steps: narrative analysis answering the first RQ; and discourse analysis answering the second. Incorporated in both of these steps was the analysis of governmentality, thus answering the third RQ. For the narrative (problem, its causes and solution) analysis, I drew inspiration from Bacchi's (2012) "What's the problem represented to be?" framework. The framework is useful as it critically scrutinises "solutions", which essentially may reveal the hidden presumptions of a problem formulation as well as make explicit that "problems" are highly political and subject to discursive struggle (Bacchi, 2012).

Particularly, the questions “What’s the ‘problem’ (...) *represented* to be?”, “What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the ‘problem’?” and “What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?” (Bacchi, 2012, p.21, own italicisation) were used. These questions uncover implicit problem representations and assumptions that underlie this problematisation, as well as what possible solutions these problem representations produce (Bacchi, 2012).

After having distinguished the narrative(s), the second step was to determine what discourses these narratives draw upon. For this I employed Bäckstrand and Lövbrands (2006) discourse analysis as a basis, identifying the discourses of ecological modernisation, green governmentality and civic environmentalism in the data through repeated reading and colour-coding.

4.4 Ethical considerations

Since the data set of Max consists of publicly available texts, no particular ethical aspects have been taken into consideration when acquiring it. The customer data was however collected from people, so to ensure an ethical data collection, the interviewees are anonymous. Furthermore, consent to record was collected in the beginning of the interview, and consent to use the data in the thesis was collected at the end of the interview (which was also made sure to be recorded).

5. Findings and discussion

This chapter both reports as well as discusses the findings of the data analysis in two parts, the first one addressing RQ1 and the second one RQ2 and RQ3 respectively. Section 5.1 covers what carbon offsetting narratives Max and their customers tell/perceive and section 5.2 what discourses these narratives draw on, as well as how Max and their customers relate to each other in terms of governmentality.

5.1 Carbon offsetting narratives

5.1.1 The perceived problems and causes

Both Max and a majority of their customers (38 of 45 interviews) were found to share the narrative that the emission of GHG is the main problem that Max is trying to solve through carbon offsetting. For Max, beef production is the primary cause of this problem, expressed for instance by sustainability manager Kaj Török: "Our signature product, the classical hamburger with beef, is a major climate villain" (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th). Max writes that the best thing they can do to reduce their emissions, is therefore to make sure that the green burgers taste at least as good as the meat burgers (MAX Burgers AB, 2018c).

In a majority of the interviews (31 of 45) it was also recognised that the biggest cause of the problem of GHG emissions is Max's production process, particularly regarding meat and dairy. One customer said that "of course" it is the meat production (interview 20) when asked what they think caused the problem of GHG emissions. Another said that Max has a lot of vegetarian food but that they still sell a lot of meat products which contribute to the climate crisis (interview 24).

As shown, Max and most of the interviewed customers share the narrative that GHG emissions are the main problem that carbon offsetting is meant to solve, and that this is mainly caused by Max's (meat and dairy) production — albeit with some deviations among the customers. In 21 of the interviews, for instance, Max's transportation was mentioned either as the main, or an additional, cause to the problem of GHG emissions. This is not wrong, as Max's transports *do* of course emit GHGs. However, far more importance seemed to be attributed to transportation as a source of GHGs than what is actually true, as barely 3.2 % of Max's total emissions in 2017 stemmed from transports[7]. This can be compared with the

[7] If one includes transportation associated with staff and customers the number is 9 % (MAX Burgers AB, 2018b).

meat and dairy production, which was the source of 64 % of Max's total emissions in 2017 (MAX Burgers AB, 2018b).

Another deviation was that in 13 of the interviews, customers indicated that deforestation, rather than GHG emissions, was the main problem — which is also not completely out of line. Max *does* mention in at least one text that deforestation is a problem and actually one of the biggest sources of climate change — an issue that can also be tackled with their solution to the problem of GHG emissions (namely carbon offsetting) (Max Burgers AB, 2020c). This emphasis on how a solution to one problem happens to be able to solve another problem too, is a clear win-win narrative commonly adopted in the ecological modernisation discourse (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006) which I will come back to in 5.2.2.4.

Yet another deviation was that in 13 of the customer interviews, it was expressed that the main reason why Max is doing carbon offsetting is to create a green profile and thereby appeal to conscious consumers. It was held by these customers that the purpose of Max's carbon offsetting is not to tackle a problem of carbon emissions nor of deforestation. Rather, the incentives were believed to be economic. One interviewee said for instance that they did not think that Max would have done carbon offsetting unless they could say that they do it in the commercial, if no one knew about it (interview 2). Similarly, Max's carbon offsetting was described as window dressing (interview 7) and employed mainly to get a good reputation (interview 12).

This scepticism towards Max's carbon offsetting as purely environmentally motivated implies an implicit view of the problem being economic, such as for instance low sales, or not as big turnover as desired. This problem can then be solved by enticing more customers — the environmentally conscious ones — with environmental branding (i.e. carbon offsetting). The interviewees that had this more critical narrative in which Max's carbon offsetting is viewed more as greenwashing than anything else, draws on the civic environmentalism discourse (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006) (which I will address in 5.2.3).

5.1.2 Solutions

So far the findings reveal a more or less unified narrative (between Max and its customers) in regards to the problem and its causes, but when it comes to solutions, the narrative divides in two. The dominant narrative sees compensation, i.e. carbon offsetting, as a good solution to the identified problem of GHG emissions and its causes. This dominant narrative is expressed of course by Max, but also in a narrow majority of the interviews (26 of 45). A minority (16 of the interviews) expressed a challenging narrative

in which reduction of emissions is what Max should do to solve the problem of emissions, rather than compensating them (and the remaining three interviews expressed neither of the two).

The dominant narrative is, unexpectedly, expressed in all of Max's texts, although they constantly emphasise the importance of complementing the compensation of emissions with simultaneously reducing emissions. Reduction and compensation of emissions must, Max maintains, be done in parallel: "We need to *reduce* greenhouse gas emissions and, at the same time, *remove* some of the carbon dioxide that we've already emitted. In other words, becoming climate neutral is not enough." (MAX Burgers, 2020e, own italicisation). Although Max continuously emphasises this combination of reduction and compensation, they are not explicit about how much of each they are doing or plan to do in the future.

When asked if the customers thought that carbon offsetting in the form of tree plantation is a good solution to whatever problem they had identified (which in 38 of the interviews was Max's GHG emissions), a narrow majority (26 of 45 interviews) said that it was. Most of these customers viewed carbon offsetting as a good solution without raising any concerns about it. Many expressed that carbon offsetting is "better than nothing" (interview 5, 14, 16, 17, 31, 42), a "good start" (interview 1, 4, 11, 18, 29, 37, 38, 41, 44) or that Max could always "do more" (interview 4, 36). A few were slightly sceptical in recognising that there could be difficulties in the implementation (interview 11, 20) or not make much of a difference (interview 14) but still remained positive.

It is important to highlight the discrepancy in degree of positivity towards carbon offsetting between Max and these customers. While the customers who expressed this dominant narrative were positive towards carbon offsetting, they were still far from depicting it so unproblematically and unequivocally good as Max does; they were much more nuanced. This is a clear deviation from Max's communication of carbon offsetting, which is categorically non-problematising.

The minority of interviews, 16 of the 45, engaged with a challenging narrative, in which reduction of emissions is viewed as a better solution than compensation (i.e. carbon offsetting). Interestingly, most of these more critical interviewees seemed to have a misconception about what measures would be required to actually reduce. Beef alone stands for more than half of Max's total emissions (MAX Burgers, 2018b), hence, completely removing the beef from the menu would be the most efficient way for Max to cut their emissions radically.

Even so, it was only in four of these 16 interviews that a radical reduction or complete removal of beef was suggested as a way to reduce emissions. In the remaining twelve interviews, several other, much less efficient, measures were suggested. Using more locally grown products and reducing packaging were the most common suggestions — but Max already uses Swedish meat exclusively and has significantly reduced their packaging (Max Burgers AB, 2020c). Additionally, neither the vegetable based food nor the packaging stand for more than 11 % each of Max's total emissions which is a very low percentage compared to the meat and dairy products which, as mentioned previously, together stand for 64 % (MAX Burgers AB, 2018b). That is, most of the interviewees who expressed the challenging narrative that reduction rather than compensation is the best solution, seem to have a misconception about what reduction measures would actually be required to realise this narrative.

5.1.3 Summary

To summarise, the main problem is perceived to be Max's emissions, caused by their production (mainly beef). Max and the majority of the interviewed customers see carbon offsetting as a good solution to this problem, while a minority of the interviewees, representing a challenging narrative, see reduction rather than compensation of emissions as a better solution.

5.2 Discourses

An important finding of this thesis is that only 28 out of the 45 interviews with customers had distinguishable elements of any of the three discourses identified by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), which suggests that other discourses and mechanisms are at work beyond those. While it would have been interesting to further investigate what these other discourses and mechanisms might be, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. The below discussion of green governmentality (5.2.1), ecological modernisation (5.2.2) and civic environmentalism (5.2.3) therefore builds only on these 28 interviews, as well as Max's texts.

5.2.1 Green governmentality

5.2.1.1 Technocracy and a top-down, administrative view of nature

In Max's texts, the green governmentality discourse is expressed in the technocracy and the top-down, administrative view of nature. For instance, Max describes how their emissions are being calculated by certain standards and protocols, explaining in detail the steps and what every so-called scope entails,

often referring to experts (MAX Burgers AB, 2020c). Furthermore, Max shows a top-down view of nature, especially in the report of their total emissions in 2017, in which the act of planting trees is something to be "monitored", reaching certain "milestones", "measuring" and "quantifying" the correct number of sequestered carbon (MAX Burgers, 2018b). They also write about the tree plantation as a "buffer" of trees (MAX Burgers AB, n.d.), or a standing "stock" of sequestered carbon (MAX Burgers AB, 2018, June 5th). The way in which nature is constructed in Max's texts is not surprising in itself, but it allows Max to approach nature as a terrestrial infrastructure (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006) and thereby govern it through power and control (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012).

In the customer data, the green governmentality discourse could be distinguished in eight of the 45 interviews. In difference to the Max data, there was a lack of a managerial, administrative view of nature among the interviewed customers. Rather, what is the most prominent expression of green governmentality in both Max's texts as well as in the customer interviews is the emphasis on the individual as subject of — and sometimes even responsible for — climate change mitigation.

5.2.1.2 The individual as responsible for climate change mitigation

This responsibility put on the individual is particularly present in Max's texts. For instance, the labels with the products' respective carbon footprint are held to enable guests to lower Max's climatic impact by choosing burgers with the least emissions (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b). Essentially, individual consumers are constructed as "helping" Max (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b), while at the same time Max also constructs themselves as "helping" the consumers to "make informed choices" (MAX Burgers AB, 2020c). In fact, sustainability manager Kaj Török describes Max as the "gurus" or the "Obi-Wan-Kenobis" that can "help" the consumers to "make informed decisions" (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th).

Interestingly, Max constructs this responsibility they place on the customers to make informed decisions as an opportunity, even as an empowering activity (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). The carbon footprint labels are described as "allowing and *empowering* the guests to take the climate impact into consideration", giving "*power*" to the customers and allowing them "the *opportunity* to choose meals not only from taste or health but also from climate impact" (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b, own italicisation). Customers are even described as "climate heroes" when choosing to eat Max's carbon offset products (MAX Burgers AB, 2020c). These frequent appeals to empowerment, opportunity and free choice may seem like innocuous communication techniques (Hobson, 2013), but they construct individuals as "free" subjects while at the same time placing on them the responsibility of fighting climate change (Lloro-Bidart, 2014).

Individuals thus become the subjects of climate change mitigation through "the power to choose as a conscious consumer" (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012, p.46), which is simultaneously both empowering *as well as* a responsibility (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015).

Often the responsibility on individuals is subtly imposed (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015), such as when sustainability manager Kaj Török says that Max can help the consumers "slay the monstrosity of climate change", by giving them "climate positive products in their hands" (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th). Török here paints a vivid picture of warriors who fight climate change armed with "climate positive" burgers, but the metaphor reveals that it is the customers, not Max, that should stand on the barricades in the quest to stop climate change. At times, however, there is no doubt about whose responsibility it is: "So I asked you earlier, who is going to stabilise the climate? Is it you, is it me? No, I think it is the consumers." (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th). It appears that Max is escaping the moral obligation of producing sustainably, instead shifting responsibility to their customers to *consume* sustainably, which ultimately allows Max to keep selling carbon intensive products like beef (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012).

The data suggests that also the interviewed customers, at least to a certain extent, place responsibility on themselves: a form of disciplining self-governing (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). In fact, in the customer data, the green governmentality discourse was most commonly expressed precisely in the emphasis on the individual as subject of climate change mitigation, i.e. consumers' responsibility. One customer said for instance that the problem lies in what every individual does (interview 12), while another said that the message Max is trying to convey is that every individual can always do something (interview 3). Furthermore, the problem of climate change was said to be caused by overconsumption in general, not only by companies but by individual consumers (interview 27). Indeed, it is not only the fault of restaurant chains such as Max: "det är ju mitt fel också" [It is my fault too] (interview 13). One customer even said, albeit implicitly, that Max has no responsibility at all in their emissions, because if no one had been there to eat, there would be neither consumption nor emissions (interview 5).

5.2.1.3 The role of governmentality

The self-imposed individual responsibility outlined above reveals how some of the interviewees self-regulate into responsible consumers (Paterson & Stripple 2010, p.345). According to Soneryd and Uggla (2015), this phenomenon is in line with an overarching societal development. Previously, governance was related to obligations, moral and citizenship, while there is now more emphasis on consumption and conscious lifestyles (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). This change risks depoliticising climate

change mitigation, as it implies "that we can attempt to consume our way out of environmental problems rather than gathering as citizens and finding political solutions to institutional problems" (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015, p.926).

What appears to be happening is that Max is conducting some of the interviewed customers' (carbon) conduct through their own self-governing (Paterson & Stripple, 2010). Governmentality does in other words play the role of steering (some of) the interviewed customers into self-regulating carbon-conscious consumers (Paterson & Stripple, 2010), in contrast to citizens engaged in collective action for structural change (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012). Governmentality *does* in this sense depoliticise climate change mitigation, as individuals become responsible to solve climate change by consuming "climate positive" burgers (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012).

Having said that, it must be recalled that of the 92 people interviewed in 45 different interviews, only seven of these interviews revealed aspects of the individual's responsibility for climate change mitigation. In fact, when asked what the customers' reasons were for choosing Max, not a single person said that their visit was motivated by Max's environmental work. Rather, the reasons were predominantly practical: Max happens to be close to work or school, it is relatively cheap, it is fast and the food tastes good. One customer even specifically emphasised that going to Max was not an active environmental choice and that they would have had no problem going to McDonalds instead (interview 9).

This suggests that governmentality for these interviewees does not play such an important role as literature (e.g. Paterson & Stripple, 2010; Hobson, 2013) argues. As discussed, the vast majority of the interviewees did not seem to see their consumption of "climate positive" burgers as an act of climate change mitigation, but as a random practical choice. This can be explained by the fact that consumption that was initially based on a conscious choice can be become routinised (i.e. no longer environmentally motivated), or that the majority of the interviewees may simply reject to see themselves as responsible (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). Furthermore, as already mentioned, it was in any way only 28 of the 45 interviews that had distinguishable elements of any of the three discourses suggested by Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006), which might also be indicative of that there are other mechanisms than governmentality at work.

These are however just speculations and the data cannot tell anything about these potential other mechanisms, due to the spatial and temporal limitations on this study (as already discussed in the 4.

Methodology chapter). What the data *does* indicate, is that one needs to be mindful in jumping to conclusions about the importance of governmentality in regards to consumers' behaviour, as it does not seem to matter that much for these specific customers. On the other hand, a similar study with other Max customers might find the contrary, which suggests that more research is needed on the topic.

5.2.2 Ecological modernisation

5.2.2.1 "Every bite is good for the climate"

If the green governmentality discourse draws the frame in which nature becomes governable through management, calculation, protection and domination, ecological modernisation functions as a legitimising action plan for doing carbon offsetting (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). The ecological modernisation discourse is very distinct in all of Max's texts, particularly in their emphasis on "climate positive" burgers and how every bite of ditto "is good for the climate" (MAX Burgers, 2018a).

Max's vigorous communication of the "climate positive" menu — i.e. that they offset 10 % more than their total emissions so that the net emissions become negative (MAX Burgers, 2020e) — builds on their strong belief in carbon offsetting as means to stay under 2°C global warming (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b). In fact, "just going carbon neutral is not enough anymore" (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b). Negative emissions, or CDR through carbon offsetting, are constructed as crucial — even imperative — if we are to solve climate change:

> If we're going to keep global warming under two degrees, we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and, at the same time, remove some of the carbon dioxide we've already emitted. In other words, becoming climate neutral is not enough. (MAX Burgers AB, 2020d)

The belief in negative emissions to solve climate change is perhaps most on-pointedly expressed in Max's slogan "Every bite is good for the climate" (MAX Burgers, 2018a), or in "Every single bite of a MAX burger will actually help fight climate change" (MAX Burgers AB, 2018c). Sustainability manager Kaj Török also says that "every bite you eat at Max anywhere will help improve the climate" (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th). As those quotes depict, Max pushes very strongly that when you are eating their burgers, the climate becomes better than before you ate it (MAX Burgers, 2020d). Disregarding that this last information is de facto wrong — the CDR is *ex-ante*[8], i.e. does not take place in the instant

[8] Planned or forecasted carbon credits, i.e. the sequestering of carbon has not yet been achieved at the time of purchase of the credit (Fisher, 2013).

the burger is consumed but sometime in the future — Max essentially implies that consumption (of their burgers) is the way to solve climate change (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012).

5.2.2.2 The confusion around "climate positive"

As for the interviewed customers, carbon offsetting as the way to solve climate change was only echoed in a narrow majority of the interviews (26 of 45)[9]. Even so, the vast majority of interviews (40 of 45) were still coded as more or less positive towards Max's carbon offsetting. That is, overall, the interviewees were found to appreciate that Max does CDR: one customer said for instance that they prefer to go to a fast food chain that they know has a "climate positive" menu (interview 15). Interestingly, despite this general positive attitude, very few of the interviewees actually understood how "climate positivity" works or what it implies.

Many expressed, quite logically, that "climate positive" means that Max's food is positive for the climate (or the environment) (interview 1, 4, 5, 13, 16, 32). Some also said that it means that the menu does not have any negative effects for the climate (or the environment) at all (interview 14, 20, 23). This is precisely the message that Max is conveying, but the production of the burgers — and especially the beef burgers — *does* emit carbon, and the amount of emissions does not change just because Max now offsets 110 % of it. Accordingly, it is questionable whether Max's food in itself can really be said to have a positive effect on the climate, yet this is what Max communicates — and what many of the interviewed customers perceive.

As a matter of fact, the ambiguity of "every bite is good for the climate" (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a) was evaluated by the Swedish Advertising Ombudsman (RO) after some individuals reported the commercial for being misleading. The RO found that the message implies that *compensating* emissions equates *decreasing* emissions, which is misleading for consumers (Reklamombudsmannen, 2019) — something that seems to be reflected among the interviewed customers. Indeed, the majority of the interviewees thought that a "climate positive" menu means that Max is taking a range of measures such as using locally produced food (mentioned in 19 interviews), having vegan/vegetarian options (mentioned in 10 interviews) and reducing plastics (mentioned in 9 interviews). These responses are not wrong, as Max does all of these things, but neither of these measures serve to *compensate* Max's emissions, let alone create so-called net negative emissions, which is the essence of "climate positivity" (MAX Burgers AB, 2020d).

[9] As already discussed in 5.1.2

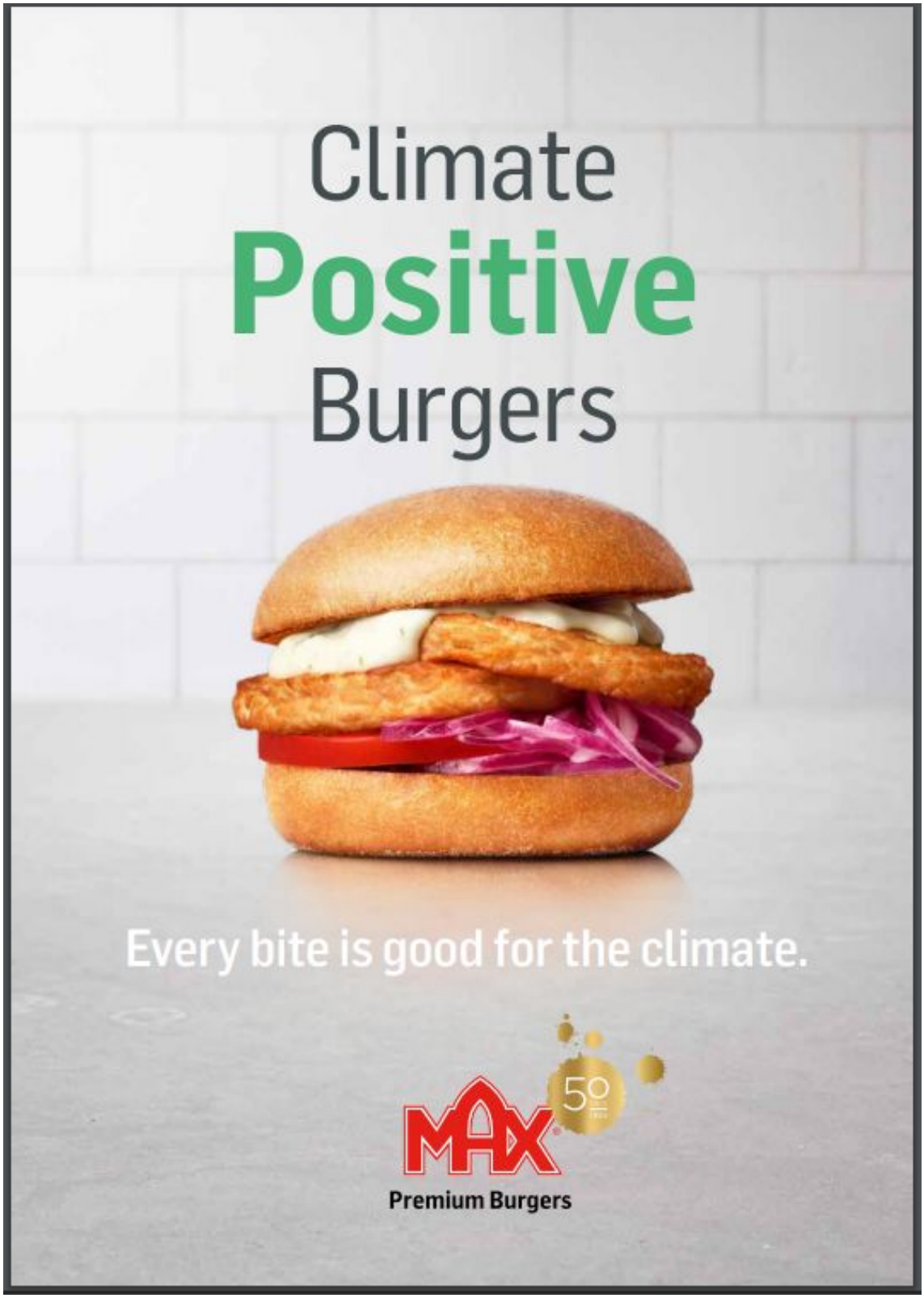

Figure 2. Max's advertisement (MAX Burgers, 2018a).

That customers mix up compensation of emissions and decreasing emissions is not surprising, as Max themselves is somewhat unclear regarding the distinction. In one text, for instance, Max says that their CDR is comparable to them taking away 23 000 cars from the streets during one year (MAX Burgers AB, n.d.). Here, Max equates *compensating* and *sequestering* carbon that has already been emitted, with completely *hindering* carbon from being emitted in the first place, which is not the same thing. Max still emits — and their total amount of emissions is increasing every year (MAX Burgers AB, 2018b) — it is just that they *compensate* these emissions (and 10 % more) by planting trees which will sequester them sometime in the future.

Only in 13 of the 45 interviews, customers mentioned "compensation" when asked what "climate positive" means, but it was solely in two of those (interview 2 and 44) that it was recognised that it actually means that Max is compensating for more than what they emit. Two interviewees even asked — after we had already talked about the "climate positive" menu — why Max is not sequestering more carbon than they emit, evidently not understanding that that is precisely what Max is already doing (interview 30). Some were even profoundly misinformed about the "climate positive" menu: one customer thought it means that when Max kills a chicken, they will raise ten more (interview 9). This captures exceptionally well the confusion that lingers around "climate positivity" and "every bite is good for the climate" (MAX Burgers AB, 2018a): how the majority of customers do not understand what it means, let alone implies.

This all suggests that the message of "every bite is good for the climate" (MAX Burgers, 2018a) seems to have stuck among the interviewed customers, although they are apparently less knowledgeable about exactly *how* the effect on the climate is supposedly positive (MAX Burgers, 2020d). It is quite a worrying finding, as it implies that Max can communicate something very complex in a simplified, positive-sounding way that appeals to these customers, without them necessarily understanding the mechanisms behind it.

5.2.2.3 Mitigating climate change, one "climate positive" hamburger at a time

Max does not only emphasise their own "climate positivity", but also sees themselves as advocates for wider change. For instance, Max writes that it is not only products and companies that can become climate positive, but individuals too, explaining how you in three steps can first analyse your individual carbon footprint, then work for decreasing emissions, and finally compensate what is left plus 10 % more (MAX Burgers, 2020d). This is obviously related to the individual as responsible for climate change

mitigation as discussed in 5.2.1.2, but also to the ecological modernisation notion of the "economy of repair". The economy of repair implies that unsustainable actions "here" — such as the consumption of a beef burger — can be repaired by a sustainable action "there" — in this case the tree plantation (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012). By inspiring others — both companies and individuals — to become "climate positive", we can thus "together change the story about climate change" (MAX Burgers, 2020d).

Sustainability manager Kaj Török eloquently paints a particularly vivid picture about a "climate positive" future:

> Imagine you wake up in the morning in your climate positive bed. You put on your climate positive bathrobe. And you brush your hair gently with a climate positive brush. (...) Imagine climate positive homes. Climate positive cars. Climate positive stock markets. Imagine you tell the companies you work for, or buy from, that you want to see more climate positive products in the world. Imagine, thousands of people doing the same. Then, together, we can change the story of climate change (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th).

In this quote, Max equates "more climate positive products in the world" with "changing the story of climate change", essentially saying that we can consume ourselves to sustainability (Soneryd & Uggla, 2015). Or, put differently, mitigate climate change, one "climate positive" hamburger at a time.

5.2.2.4 Win-win narratives and a colonial gaze

Another typical feature of the ecological modernisation discourse, is the frequent mentionings of additional benefits that carbon offsetting may contribute to (apart from sequestering carbon, that is) (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Max regularly does this, emphasising how their tree plantation does not only improve the climate but also renders direct income to the farmers involved (MAX Burgers AB, n.d.) as well as counteracts poverty and increases local resilience (Sustainable Brands, 2018, June 5th). Furthermore, the tree plantation is held to promote sustainable land use (MAX Burgers AB, n.d.), ameliorate the soil, halt deforestation and create social benefits (MAX Burgers AB, 2020c).

Among the interviewed customers, win-win narratives are also present, particularly those with a developmentalist approach. One interviewee said for instance that Max's carbon offsetting does not only sequester carbon, but also helps the country of Uganda to develop (interview 37). Another one said that the carbon offsetting creates work opportunities for the people involved (interview 43). Here, the

participating farmers are assumed to be in need of development (Fairhead, Leach & Scoones, 2012), which can be achieved through "green" interventions like carbon offsetting (Lyons & Westoby, 2014).

Some customers even had a colonial gaze, saying that Max's carbon offsetting is good since it counteracts deforestation, because they always cut down a lot of trees in these countries (i.e. African countries) (interview 26). Another one said that Max's carbon offsetting creates work opportunities so that the farmers can be developed, "och ju mer utvecklat ett land, desto mer klimatsmart är det ju" [and the more developed a country, the more climate smart it is] (interview 37). Here, the interviewee does not only place responsibility on the Global South, but also assumes that (economic) development equals "climate smart" — essentially environmentally friendly economic growth.

5.2.2.5 Decoupling

This idea that it is possible to decouple environmental degradation from economic growth is fundamental to the discourse of ecological modernisation (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). Some interviewees expressed their belief in decoupling (e.g. interview 37), but also Max frequently mentions it. For instance, Max says that they are trying to find ways to grow and increase their turnover without increasing the impact on the climate (MAX Burgers AB, 2020c). According to Max, they are actually already on the right path to achieve this: "The sales of Green-Family meals have increased by 900 % over the last two years. As a result, MAX's total climate impact has been reduced by 13 % per earned dollar over the last two years" (MAX Burgers AB, 2018c).

Indeed, *per earned dollar* Max's emissions have been reduced. *In total*, though, their emissions have increased tremendously from 40 000 tCO_2e in 2007 to 135 000 tCO_2e in 2017 (MAX Burgers AB, 2020b). It is therefore questionable whether the decoupling of growth from environmental destruction outlined by Max really is achievable: it seems to depend on how you count.

5.2.3 Civic environmentalism

5.2.3.1 Only curing the symptoms, not the roots

While Max's texts had virtually no elements of the civic environmentalism discourse, thirteen interviews with the customers did. This makes civic environmentalism the most pronounced discourse among the interviewed customers, which might further indicate that governmentality (i.e. Max's conduct of their

customers' conduct) does not play such an important role in the present case (as already discussed in 5.2.1.3)

The majority of these thirteen interviews all ranged from carefully sceptical to expressly critical towards carbon offsetting, recognising that it would be better to decrease than to compensate emissions. Several drew metaphors on how carbon offsetting only scrapes at the surface of the problem, without actually addressing the roots of it. For instance, one interviewee said that Max's carbon offsetting is comparable to if someone puts a bandaid on a wound that they have already caused you — it would have been better if they did not hurt you in the first place (interview 2).

Another customer also referred to this bandaid analogy (interview 6), stating that the root of the problem still needs to be solved. One interviewee asked whether it would not be better to remove the thing that makes you have to plant the trees in the first place? (interview 24). Others recognised that carbon offsetting indeed compensates, but it does not change the fact that carbon is still being emitted (interview 7). One interviewee said that it would be better to replace the meat, than to compensate for it (interview 8) and yet another said that Max could focus more on *their* emissions instead of compensating them (interview 14).

5.2.3.2 Greenwashing

These thirteen interviews also draw on the civic environmentalism scepticism to market based solutions, as these "solutions" are viewed as not solving the roots of the problem, but rather the symptoms (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006). In Bäckstrand and Lövbrand's (2006) words, this can be described as "green cosmetics": how carbon offsetting is a short-term solution that serves to cover up the actual problem, namely continuous burning of fossil fuels in the Global North. One interviewee said for instance that they thought Max's "climate positivity" is a PR stunt (interview 30), while another one said that the carbon offsetting is primarily done to increase Max's reputation (interview 12). This serves to disguise rich countries' continuous unsustainable extraction of fossil fuels, which ultimately "will increase the 'carbon debt' the North owes the South" (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006, p.64).

5.2.4 Summary

To summarise, Max's text is characterised by the ecological modernisation discourse in their vigorous emphasis on "climate positivity" and how we can consume ourselves to sustainability. Among customers, Max's "climate positivity" is generally quite appreciated, but there lingers a confusion

around what it actually implies: many do not understand that Max is doing CDR. Developmental, sometimes even colonial, win-win narratives are present both in Max's texts and among customers. The green governmentality discourse is mainly distinguishable in the emphasis on the individual as responsible for climate change mitigation, which Max pushes very strongly. This is not as reflected among the interviewees, which suggests that governmentality does not seem to matter that much for the interviewed customers. The civic environmentalism is categorically absent in Max's texts, while being the most commonly expressed discourse among the interviewed customers, mostly in their view of carbon offsetting as greenwashing, failing to address the roots of the problem.

6. Conclusion

The responsibility that Max is placing — sometimes insidiously, and sometimes downright explicitly — on their customers to tackle climate change by consuming Max's "climate positive" burgers has two important implications. Firstly, it implies that climate change mitigation shall be done *individually*, conducting one's personal carbon conduct. This stands in sharp contrast to engagement in collective action attempting to change the structures that enable high GHG emissions in the first place. The second implication is that climate change mitigation shall not only be done individually, but through *consumption* — of Max's burgers and other "climate positive" products and services, that is.

These two implications are pointedly captured in Max's simple message "Every bite is good for the climate", which essentially says that the more burgers you — the individual customer — consume, the better it is for the climate. By conducting the (carbon) conduct of their customers in this way, Max is enabled to avoid decreasing their own total emissions, and to continue selling carbon intensive products like beef, since it is anyway their customers' responsibility to stay under 2°C global warming, not theirs. Max is only providing these individuals — the "climate heroes" — with "climate positive" burgers in their hands, as weapons in the struggle to halt climate change. In essence, we will thus mitigate climate change, one hamburger at a time.

This is a simple message that seems to have stuck among the majority of the interviewed customers — yet the carbon dioxide removal that lies behind Max's "climate positivity" is neither simple nor apolitical. This is reflected in the fact that only two out of the 92 interviewees fully comprehended what "climate positivity" actually implies: namely continuous — in fact, even increased — emission of greenhouse gases justified by the promise that that they will be sequestered back from the atmosphere some time in the future.

Despite Max's vigorous, yet subtle, emphasis on the individual as responsible for climate change mitigation — through the consumption of Max's burgers and other "climate positive" products and services — governmentality is not very visible among the interviewed customers. Some *did* show signs of self-disciplining, but the vast majority did not, and no customer had environmental reasons for choosing to eat at Max nor saw it as a responsible act of climate change mitigation. Indeed, among the interviewed customers, the civic environmentalism discourse and its scepticism towards market-based "solutions" to climate change was twice as common as ecological modernisation and green

governmentality. It appears that Max thus is *not* conducting these customers' (carbon) conduct, which calls for nuance — as well as more research — in terms of how important a role governmentality is playing in consumers' behaviour.

Nevertheless, all the people that I interviewed still ate at Max (albeit solely for practical reasons). As discussed, Max does not seem to conduct these interviewees' (carbon) conduct, and most of the interviewed customers did not see their consumption of Max's burgers as a responsible act of climate change mitigation — but they were still eating at Max. This raises a question: if eating at Max is generally not seen as an act of climate change mitigation (as Max is trying to convey), what *is* then seen as climate change mitigation...?

I do not think that it is possible for companies like Max to take the lead in climate change mitigation, because after all, economic growth is the raison d'être for any company and the ecological modernisation notion that it is possible to decouple that from environmental destruction is still but a dream. Following this, neither do I believe that governments or the EU are able to produce radical enough climate change mitigation strategies on their own, as they would inevitably imply too much of a threat to continuous economic growth. What is left, then, is the civil society. And unlike Max, I do not think that consumption, "climate positive" or not, is the answer to all our environmental problems, as it does not target the root of these problems: namely the continuous extraction and burning of fossil fuels. We need to radically and immediately *decrease* emissions, not increase and then rely on counter-factual eventual scenarios (Bumpus & Liverman, 2008) to sequester them back from the atmosphere sometime in the future.

What I call for, therefore, is for individuals to engage in the struggle to halt global warming not by consuming Max's hamburgers — but through collective action demanding radical environmental politics on a global scale. What allows for companies to escape responsibility to decrease emissions, instead imposing it on individuals, is unsustainable structures built on continuous economic growth — per definition, structural change is required. Along the way, one might grab a burger for lunch, but the struggle to halt climate change should neither start nor end there.

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