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Green Greed

A Poststructural Policy Analysis of
“H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2020”.

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Bachelor thesis 15 hp
HEKK03 HT 2021
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Abstract

This thesis examines how discursive formations of problem representations presented in the “H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2020” institutionalize and shape knowledge regarding strategies on combating climate change. The politics behind these formations are made visible by using Carol Bacchi’s (2009) Poststructural Policy Analysis What’s the problem represented to be?(WPR) as a methodological framework. The sustainability report is viewed as a practical text and a base of knowledge production regarding strategies on sustainability.

When analyzing statements of problem representation in the report Circular growth, Transparency and Discourse on Democratized fashion was identified as mechanisms, aligning with the singular and widely adapted strategy of green growth and decoupling. This represents a hegemonic ideology falsely suggesting that the pursuit of ever-expanding growth and a thriving nature can co-exist within frames of capitalism. As hegemonic discourse excludes solutions beyond their own functions. As such, degrowth theory and philosophy is used as a contrast to criticize and question green growth. Findings in this thesis argue that green growth as a single strategy to a sustainable future is not sufficient as it is based on growth and thus represents capitalism by other means (Groz, 1980). The mechanisms of Circular growth, Democratized fashion and Transparency presented in the report makes visible how policy based knowledge function as a medium, institutionalizing knowledge in line with current political ideologies, excluding knowledges outside of the hegemonic discourse of capitalism.

Keywords: Capitalism, Circular Growth, Degrowth, Decoupling, Democratized fashion, Depoliticization, Ecomodernism, Green growth, Governmentality, Institutionalized knowledges, Neoliberalism, Poststructuralism, Power knowledge, Policy analysis, Social Constructivism, WPR approach

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1. Introduction

As a result of the well-known report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2018), the European Commission announced the European Green Deal on December 11, 2019. The aim being to transform the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050 and turn growth green. The key aim in green growth is decoupling Gross Domestic Product from natural resources and ecosystems by changing the economy from a linear to a circular approach (Kallis, 2019). According to the EU, turning growth green will enable businesses to have a net positive impact on biodiversity. This means they give more to the global economy, society, and the environment than they take out (European commission, 2019). The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines a net positive impact as policies targeting commitments to plan project outcomes so that “[..]the impacts on biodiversity (i.e. the variety of ecosystems and living things) caused by the project are outweighed by the actions taken to avoid and reduce such impacts” (NIP, 2015).

The Green new deal, takes the approach of ecological modernization to deal with climate issues, relying heavily on technological innovation. This is reflected in the European Commission’s Innovation Fund with a budget of €1.5 billion. This makes it one of the world’s largest programmes for green technology development. The aim is to finance breakthrough technologies for energy storage, low-carbon technologies as well as technologies for renewable energy (European commission, 2019). Despite there being no empirical evidence of this decoupling being in any way possible the political and cooperate response to the alarming climate crises align with the above tactic (European Environmental Bureau, 2019). This represents a hegemonic ideology falsely suggesting that the pursuit of ever-expanding growth and a thriving nature can co-exist within frames of capitalism (Kallis, 2019).

This way of thinking is reflected in policies implemented by companies to conduct their ways of production. Policies are not laws but rather guidelines or letters of intent to steer decisions in a desired direction. As such they are practical documents dealing with the conduct of companies and their suppliers (Bacchi, 2021). In framing something as a problem, policies produce representations of problems and suggests solutions that are based on the current functioning’s of society (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,39). As such, policies play a critical role in dealing with the climate crisis. However, in the process of producing representations and solutions to problems, policies rule out other ways of thinking that exists beyond the dominant

discourse of taken for granted knowledges (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,22). These unexamined knowledges might just present alternate ways of dealing with the problems at hand.

2.Aim and Research questions

Aim

The aim of my analysis of the H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2020 is not a blame game where H&M Group as a singular unit in the fashion industry is pointed out as barer of the problems represented. The aim however, is to identify discursive formations and making politics visible trough statements of problem representations and institutionalization of current dominant ideologies. I will be looking at this by answering the questions below. The report itself is used as a lens through which the discourse and practices of the fast fashion industry can be examined. As the report is 82 pages long and filled with statements I will be focusing on the three areas of Transparency, Circular Growth and Discourse on Democratized fashion, as means to make the fast fashion industry a sustainable platform for green growth.

Research Questions:

How are discursive formations, problem representations and institutionalization of assumptions manifested and put into practice in the H&Ms Group sustainability Performance Report 2020?

- What discursive formations can be identified through statements of problem representation in the report?
- What politics are made visible through these statements of problem representation and what is left unproblematic in these statements?
- What effects in regards to the wider scope of sustainability and climate change can be produced by these institutionalized knowledges?

To conduct my analysis I will be applying Carol Bacchi's and Susan Goodwin's method of poststructural policy analysis called What's the Problem Represented to be(WPR), and its six questions presented in table 1, see page 24 (Bacchi, 2009). These questions will be used as a methodological framework, toolbox and guide trough my analysis. As I am applying poststructural discourse analysis the epistemological, ontological and theoretical outset are already somewhat determined. I will go further in-depth regarding this in the methods section below. However, when applying the WPR analysis the aim of the research is to make politics

visible through analysis of practical texts. That is, texts that frame a problem and tell the reader how it best should be dealt with (Bacchi, 2021).

In this thesis, I attempt to shine light degrowth as an alternate strategy to combat climate change by conducting a poststructural policy analysis on the H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2020. After presenting my aim and research questions, a background covering relevant historical and contemporary context of the fashion industry will be presented as well as arguments for relevance to the field. This is later followed by an explanation of theories and concepts used as a basis of the methodological framework applied to my analysis. The method section contains relevant information about the WPR framework, a table (1) of how it is adapted in the analysis and a summary of my NVivo coding technique as well as a delimitation section. In the analysis I will be looking at institutionalized knowledges implemented and put into practice and statements of problem representations. Building on Foucault's rationalities and technologies of governing I will look at transparency, circularity, and the discourse on democratizing fashion as mechanisms (technologies) of green growth aligning with, and so ensuring, the continued existence of growth as the only alternative to human underdevelopment. In the discussion the effects of these problem representations will be accounted for, and alternate ways of dealing with these issues outside of the dominant discourse of ecomodernism will be suggested.

2. Background

2.1 Contemporary Context, Fast fashion and Greenwashing

The UN is committed to changing the path of fashion, reducing its negative social, economic and environmental impact and turning it into a driver for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNECE, 2018).

The above citation is a statement made by The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in a press release on July 12, 2018. In the press release UNECE stated that the estimated emissions from fashion industry, which had seen a tremendous amount of growth doubling the total production between 2000 and 2014, could be as high as 8 percent of the global total of Green House Gases (UNECE, 2018). In this press release the textile industry was also identified as a major contributor to increasing levels of plastic entering the ocean and an unsafe working environment due to the hazardous substances used in production (ibid). While doubling the production the industry saw a 60% increase in consumption compared to the amount consumed in the beginning of the 2000s (UNECE, 2018).

In line with the SDGs the fashion industry has become a platform for sustainable development focusing on transparency through information, circularity through waste reduction and recycling and greener production through consciously sourced material. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (working closely with H&M when developing their sustainability performance report) defines a circular economy as one that “[...] decouples economic activity from the consumption of finite resources. It is a resilient system that is good for business, people and the environment” (Ellen MacArthur foundation, 2022).

The notion of sustainability through transparency is built on a combination of free market capitalism and the Information Deficit Model. This model draws on the assumption that public uncertainty and lack of action in regards climate change such as global warming is due to a lack of information. If the correct information was easily attained individuals would make responsible and rational decisions as consumers (Norgaard, 2011, 63). As such transparency and information is seen as enabler for social action (Norgaard, 2011, 64). This model of explanation has met critique from Kari Nordgaard, professor in sociology, amongst others. Norgaard (2011) argues the issue is not a lack of information but rather one based in feelings and social factors of alienation and separation creating a public apathy in regards to climate change in consumption countries (Norgaard, 2011, 64).

In alignment with the above notion of circularity an increasing amount of “more sustainable”, “biodegradable”, and “green” products have emerged on the fashion market. However, alongside these products, questions have been raised in regards to whether or not fast fashion products really can be sustainable. In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 2022).

Fast fashion production represents a global culture that requires a fast production process with low prices and constant renewal (Gabrielli, Baghi & Codeluppi, 2013, 207). As for today a new line of clothes, previously produced on a seasonal basis, is produced and arrives in stores every two weeks (Ibid). According to the fashion journalist Dana Thomas (2019), the fashion industry globally employs one in six people, which places it at the top of the most labor-intensive markets in the world. Less than 2% of these workers receive a living wage, being unable to cover their basic needs (Thomas, 2019). According to the UN Global Compact basic needs

includes being able to afford food, water, housing, education and healthcare (UN global compact, 2021).

The journalists Kärnstrand and Åkerblom (2016) believe the free market politics (and policies) of today make improving working conditions in the fast fashion industry something of a catch 22 (Kärnstrand&Åkerblom, 2016, 204). As production in the is being outsourced the companies claim they are to abide by the (minimum) wages stated by laws in the country in question. As such they are in no position to raise wages. Meanwhile, the factory owners claim they could increase wages if hiring companies pay more. As will be clarified in the historical section below, the production countries does not want to raise the minimum wage standards as they are afraid the heiring companies will relocate their production to other country with cheaper labor. As such, the fast fashion brands position themselves outside of the problem of underpayment and exploitation (Kärnstrand&Åkerblom, 2016, 204).

On their website, H&M (H&M Group Wages, 2022) states that:

Like most fashion companies, we don't own any factories or make our own clothes – we outsource production to independent manufacturers. This means we don't pay garment workers' salaries, nor can we decide how much they are paid.

H&M Group can offer sustainable fashion at affordable prices because we are a large company with a long history. [...] Wages are just one of many factors when it comes to pricing products.

In a study done by Gabrielli, Baghi and Codeluppi (2013), 60 different people were interviewed regarding consumption of fast fashion clothing. This study concluded that consumers categorized fast fashion companies according to four different characteristics; Low cost, Low quality, A wide range of choice and Frequent renewal. According to the authors, the fast fashion industry have contributed in changing consumer behavior by changing the attributed value of the product. In addition to this the low cost, multiple choice was proven to make customers more willing to accept the lack of quality as it enabled a faster renewal of the wardrobe (Gabrielli, Baghi, Codeluppi, 2103,213). The study further confirmed consumers were more likely to buy clothes that entailed a greater risk meaning it would most likely only be used a few times (Gabrielli, Baghi, Codeluppi 2013,215). Fast fashion products correspond to the prominent individualistic trend in consumption countries, the product is not seen as a cheap emergency purchase but rather as a good deal (Gabrielli, Baghi, Codeluppi 2013,217).

According to the sociologist Patrik Aspers (2010) various informal and formal institutions regulate the fashion market through frameworks, laws, policies and obligations, which in turn produces a general market culture. This market culture can roughly be divided into two different types of markets; Status and Standard (Asper, 2010,10). In the standard market, the value of a product lay in the function and usefulness(Ibid). Products in standard markets are therefore mainly attributed practical value. Products in the status market however, is attributed value beyond function. This means the value of a particular kind of clothing is determined and communicated by the producer (Asper, 2010,17).

As the fashion market in many ways remain unregulated the perceived value of the product being sold can be altered by ascribing attributes to it such as “green”, “conscious” or “more sustainable” without any real meaning to it (Aspers, 2010, 16). This is due to the fact that there are no frameworks established that determines what can be called a “green” product and what parameters need to be met to produce “sustainable” fashion (Ibid). As such greenwashing has become a common issue and can be defined as type of misleading information where empty signifiers such as “sustainable”, “green”, “biodegradable” or “more sustainable” are falsely attributed to a product to increase sustainable values (Sandilands, 1993, 45).

2.1 Historical Context; Fast-fashion and Outsourcing

During the 1950s the fast fashion industry gained momentum as the western world was rapidly recovering from World War Two. The Swedish textile production (TEKO) flourished in the cities of Borås and Västerås and companies such as Algots, Kappahl and Hennes, today called H&M, accounted for a major parts of Swedish textile production (Gråbacke & Jörnmark, 2008,10). Between 1940 and 1960 the wages of Swedish textile workers quadrupled, instigating a global search for cheaper production (Ibid).

And so, in the 1960s H&M moved large parts of its production to Hong Kong. At the time a fast-growing industrial economy that later came to compete with both European and American textile production through the large production capacity, but above all the low wages (Thomas, 2019,14). This new outsourced production resulted in Sweden accounting for the largest amount of clothing imports per capita in the world, and at the end of the 1960s, more than half of the Swedish clothing industry was located in low-wage countries (Gråbacke & Jörnmark , 2008,11).

Researchers Yoon-Jung Lee and Jacob Österberg (2013) states that labor-intensive fashion markets flourish in economies that are in the early stages of development, which enables competitive price-advantages (Lee & Österberg, 2013, 129). With a simple and developed technology, factories in production countries with many employees can produce high quantities of clothing in a very short time. According to the authors, the clothing industry enters a downward trend as economies grow stronger. At this stage, companies relocate their production to other instances (Ibid). An example of this is the relocation of factories employed by H&M from China to Myanmar in 2013. As the European Union ended trade sanctions against the previous military dictatorship, H&M became one of the first companies to move its production to the country (Kärnstrand&Åkerblom, 2016, 11). During the same time workers' rights and wage had grown stronger in China and when comparing the two, labor was five times cheaper in Myanmar (Ibid). This led to the relocation of Chinese factories to Myanmar, where surveys in 2014 showed that one in five children between the ages of 10 and 17 worked instead of going to school (Kärnstrand & Åkerblom, 2016,14). Today (2022) H&Ms production is located in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Turkey (H&M Group, 2020,72-75).

2.2 Relevance to Field

In the text *Vad kan ett humanekologiskt uppsats- eller forskningsprojekt handla om?* (What can a human ecological essay or research project be about?) Alf Hornborg, professor of human ecology frames the outset of the field and research regarding human ecology (Hornborg,N/A,1). Professor Hornborg refers to Dieter Steiner, professor of quantitative geography, and his explanation of the triangular relations between human, nature and society (Hornborg, N/A, 2). One could argue that human ecologists are alienating these from one another by naming them as separate entities in a system. However, when attending a lecture in human ecology at Lund university professor Hornborg argued that, for the purpose of analysis and problematization we need to make these distinctions in order to analyze and move in a new different direction. The purpose of studying human socioecological and economical relationships is to gain a holistic perspective to underline how they are interconnected. As an interdisciplinary field synthesizing insights from both humanities, social and natural sciences, human ecology stresses the notion and recognition of the human being as both a social and biological being (Lockie, 2015).

In this thesis I will be studying socioecological and economical relationships and strategies to combat climate change. Analyzing statements of problem representation in the H&M Group's Sustainability Performance Report 2020 the study contributes to an understanding of the structures of the global fast fashion industry affecting people, society and nature. As Poststructural Policy Analysis is applied as a framework the theory section will be presented before method. This as the method builds upon theories and concepts of Michel Foucault such as Powerknowledge, Governmentality, Archeology and Genealogy.

4.Theory:

4.1Foucault and Poststructural Discourse analysis;

When looking at discourse from a poststructural perspective one will undoubtedly encounter the ideas and theories of the French political philosopher Michel Foucault (b.1926-d.1984). To understand these ideas we must first see to the origins of the approach, that is the structural view of language as constitutive and the poststructural view of language as a performative act producing knowledge as explained below.

As mentioned structuralists approaches language as constitutive, that is as a way of producing social reality and doing so by looking at the relationship between perceived reality and discourse in different settings and contexts over time (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). This has its roots in the semiotic ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure and his theory of the relationship between the signified and signifier in relation to the meaning of signs. Every sign, (anything that conveys meaning), is described by a word or an image such as "a car" (the signified). This is then followed by an interpretation of this word through what is evoked in the mind as mental concepts (signifier), following this the meaning of a sign is determined by those mental concepts or cognitive maps (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). As signs are determined by social convention they are defined by what they are not through binary oppositions such as the night happening when the day ends or dark being the absence of light and so on (Ibid).

Structuralism differentiates between language as a fixed structure and parole(language in use) (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). It is on this very point structuralism and poststructuralism part ways as poststructuralism is based in the same perception of signs but the difference between language and parole is dissolved as language is viewed as performative. It is about how one talks about something and what one does about that talk, resulting in ideas put into practice

(Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). This means language in use (parole) changes underlying structures rather than being bound by them (Ibid).

As such the epistemology of poststructuralism is rooted in social constructivism. Everything that exists can be made and unmade, as I will elaborate below, knowledge according to Foucault is produced between power relations through dominant discourse and in line with current political ideologies (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,69).

Looking at the ontology of the approach, there is no question in Foucault's theories of whether the world and the things in it really exist or not. Objects do exist in this physical reality, we can see them and touch them, however according to Foucault they have no meaning other than what we ascribe to them (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,49). Most commonly one makes a difference between objects and subject, that difference being that the subject does something, it has agency and can take action whereas the object is passive and is having something done to it. However in this poststructural perspective the subject, (i.e the human being) is constantly being produced, recreated and reproduced as object of government and the conduct of conduct (see rationalities and technologies) (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,49). The same thing goes for places and spaces being produced as a particular kind of objects such as the nation state (Bacchi& Goodwin, 2016,104). Subjects being subjected to the conduct of conduct are therefore viewed as subjectobjects (Ibid).

In this same way we can perceive of problems being reproduced in different ways by different instances. Maarten A. Hajer (1995), professor of Urban Studies, exemplifies this by looking at the paradoxical effects of the new environmental politics and policies as I will do. According to Hajer this paradox can be defined as common issue (climate change) where political actors and policies does not match public expectation. This conflict can be identified by looking at the very definition given to the problem in question and its assumed social reality as well as what is left unsaid in the discourse (Hajer,1995,1). Hence, social constructivist criticizes the idea of there being one single solution to a problem and stresses the fact that different actors may perceive what the problem really is about in various ways (Hajer,1995,4). To cite Hajer (Hajer,1995,2);

These ideas may make perfect sense within the discourse in which they were constituted, but then subsequently become an element in a debate that is conducted by a far more diverse group of actors and in the context of acts and practices that do not function according to the discursive logic of that original discourse.

For example, as I will elaborate further down under the degrowth section, ecomodernist solutions to the climate issue (technofix) makes complete sense within discourse of growth economy, but very little sense from a degrowth perspective where the green growth will only increase the negative impact on the environment rather than solve anything.

4.1.1 Powerknowledge: Governmentality and Problematization

According to Foucault power should be seen through a nominalist lens viewing power as productive rather than a thing a group or individual can possess (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,28). In Foucault's own words power is "the name one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (Foucault, 1980a:93). Rather than being hierarchic and something that trickles down from the higher to the lower classes, power according to Foucault circulates amongst us (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,29). However, there are discursive formations creating hegemonic ways of seeing and talking about a particular topic dictating what can be "knowable" and deemed as "thinkable". Foucault calls this phenomenon regimes of knowledge or regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980,112).

Knowledge and history carries with it discontinuity. Change according to Foucault does not happen gradually but comes about through new regimes in discourse which creates and stabilizes new or previously ignored forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980,112). According to Foucault this happens through a modification in rules of statements meaning a "new" acceptance of what is accepted as scientifically true. This brings us to governmentality, how ideas are put into practice and how these ideas regulate our conduct and the conduct of others. This can according to Foucault be seen by looking at what governs statements and how those statements govern each other (Foucault, 1980,112).

According to Foucault there are two main instruments of governing, Rationalities and Technologies (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,41). Rationalities can be divided into two main categories; Governmental rationalities justifying the current modes of rule and power having its basis in human history and practice (Ibid). Political rationalities on the other hand present themselves as singularities in ways of governing with basis in forms of knowledge such as theory, idea and philosophy (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,41). These rationalities create ideologies, neoliberalism for instance is an advanced liberal rationality (Bacchi& Goodwin, 2016,42). The second instrument of governing is technologies. This can be identified as mechanism through which governing takes place and constitutes the conduct of individuals and groups

(Bacchi&Goodwin,2016, 44). As Bacchi explains “It refers to policies and programs produced to shape the conduct of individuals” (Bacchi& Goodwin,2016,42). These mechanisms can be seen as a mirror reflecting specific political rationalities and what is deemed as “thinkable” in that particular ideology (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016, 46).

Through a Foucauldian view, the purpose of policies is to solve and regulate existing problems (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,59). Policies are seen as ways of creating and producing problems as certain types of problems. As such, ways of governing are determined by how issues are problematized (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,39). The purpose of policies is to solve and regulate existing problems (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,59). In doing so the analysts problematize issues, meaning they give shape to the representation of a problem (Ibid). Instead of looking at how policy workers shape the understanding of problems, poststructural policy analyst look at how issues are problematized through statements and what knowledges those statements are built upon (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,59).

4.1.2 Archeology: Examining Unexamined Knowledges

Foucault has made a number of attempts at defining truth and made the suggestion that it be defined and understood as a “system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and operation of statements” (Foucault, 1980,133).

According to Foucault (1980) the general functioning’s of truth is carried out by five significant traits, these are:

- It centers around different forms of institutions producing scientific discourse.
- It is always object under different forms of diffusion and consumption as information and accepted knowledges circulates through the social body via institutions and social media.
- Universities, social media accounts, newspapers, books and the army functions as political and economic apparatuses controlling the production and transmission of truth.
- It is always subject to incitements(statements) made by political and economic actors.
- It is an issue of social confrontation.

Knowledge (truth production) is never just a singular statement but several statements from different sources about a topic at a given time. Discursive formations are created when statements come together referring to the same topic and support the same strategy (Foucault,

1980,133). As Foucault explains "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true (Foucault, 1980,131) As such, a regime of truth is institutionalization about a way of thinking, talking and acting about a something (Foucault, 1980,132). Knowledge is therefore often determined and supported by dominant ideologies. Meaning, at any point in history there is knowledge unexamined and ruled out by the dominant discourse (Ibid).

For example, in this thesis green growth as a solution to climate change will represent the discursive formation (institutionalized discourse) under scrutiny (the assumed knowledge) and degrowth will be representing the alternate solution and unexamined knowledge. Using Foucault's concept of archeology will allow me to uncover the underlying, embedded knowledges creating present practices (regimes of truth). Looking at statements of problem representation built on these knowledges will allow me to identify what is deemed as accepted knowledge and to highlight what has been ruled out.

4.1.3 Genealogy: A history of the present:

Foucault describes genealogy as a non-linear history of the present. It is about identifying heterogenous practices of problem representation and how these practices has come about (Bacchi&Goodwin,2016,46). This does not mean looking at an event as a given outcome from things happening in a particular order. Instead genealogy is a rejection of the now as a given outcome to these past events (Ibid). Outsourcing for instance, did not have to be the outcome/solution of the "problem" of higher salaries and better working conditions in Swedish textile industry during the 1960s. To clarify, applying Foucault's genealogy means mapping out how the ideas and concepts came about creating events (singularities) without accepting them as necessary outcome (Bacchi&Goodwin, 2016,47).

4.1.4 Critique on Foucault

Foucault's theories on powerknowledge has been widely criticized for two reasons. If power does produces knowledge and knowledge produces "truth", how is it possible to know or study anything, and above all how is it possible to know anything about power? And are we not by studying relations of power cementing its existing form? My interpretation of Foucault is that although we are part of the system of knowledge production we can, trough archeology and genealogy take a step back, observe and question. This observation will and can never be

completely objective as we are part of the system itself but, as thinking beings we can question taken for granted knowledges in our own systems of beliefs.

4.2 Degrowth

Social change is a process of creation, impossible to predict in advance. What academic studies of degrowth can offer are arguments and narratives to animate the politics of transition (Anguelovski,2014,116).

Degrowth is first and foremost a critique against the four major functions of capitalism. Capitalism can in Marx terms be defined as a political economy; a mode of production based on private ownership of means of production in order to make profit and benefit society as a whole (Kallis, Demaria& D'Alisa,2014).

Degrowth's main critiques are directed against;

- Capitalism itself as the only available, functional and thinkable economic system.
- Growth as the only enabler of “development”.
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as measurement off and way to reach social wellbeing and health trough wealth.
- Commodification, the act of ascribing monetary value to social products and socioecological services (Kallis, Demaria& D'Alisa,2014,80).

Although capitalism as economy and ideology has long been criticized, questions of capitalism and its connection to new climate issues accumulated to create a new environmental paradigm (NEP) within sociological sciences during 1970's (Dunlap & Catton, 1979). This NEP was characterized by attempts to understand and solve new types of social and environmental challenges coming as a consequence of imperialism and industrialization having exploited people, nature and societies for centuries (Ibid). NEP differs from the previous Human Exceptionalism Paradigm (HEP). The main point of difference being the later sees human beings as superior and exceptional due the ability to accumulate culture (social development and civilization). As cultural has the ability to change faster than biology all human related issues was to be solved in the social roam by development trough accumulation of capital (Dunlap & Catton, 1979,43). This way of viewing human related problems ruled out the material dimension concerning human-environmental relationships as it was only focusing on social values (Dunlap & Catton, 1979,50). Sociologist within the NEP paradigm was and still

are calling out for new tools to approach these issues adding onto the social realm of the human being, her biological existence in this world and the planetary limits of it (Lockie, 2015).

In alignment with this the NEP André Groz (1972), journalist and pioneer in political ecology asked the question "Is the earth's balance, for which no growth – or even degrowth - of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?" (Kallis, Demaria & D'Alisa, 2014,75). This question remains the core point of critique in degrowth as for today (Ibid). Instead of focusing on yearly economic growth and production, degrowth centers around the care of commons. It is a strategy suggesting work-sharing, basic and maximum income, eco-communities and different cooperatives supported by new types of institutions. All in all- new ways of structuring and building societies. As Groz (1980) puts it the point of degrowth is:

Is not to refrain from consuming more and more, but to consume less and less – there is no other way of conserving the available reserves for future generations. This is what ecological realism is about. [. . .]. Radicals who refuse to examine the question of equality without growth merely demonstrate that "socialism", for them, is nothing but the continuation of capitalism by other means – an extension of middle class values, lifestyles, and social pattern[...]. (Groz,1980:13).

Due to its strong belief in a society functioning around other means than production, consumption and growth, degrowth as a concept along with its thinkers has received a lot of criticism making it out to be a utopian and ideology far beyond reach (Kallis,2019). Although Foucault was no degrowth philosopher his ideas on reformation and ways of thinking outside of the dominant discourse aligns with the basic foundations of degrowth. According to Foucault one of the essential political problems of postmodern society is about "[. . .] ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth" (Foucault, 1980,133). It is about making room for parallel systems existing at the same time decentralizing power and localizing equality.

Giorgos Kallis (2014), research professor of ecological economics, argues that capitalism as ideology is unable to think outside of itself because capitalism is created by and exists through the very variables that makes a collapse inevitable. With its basic formula: M-C-M'(Money-Commodity-More Money) it has but one goal, to grow and in its pursuit for growth nature is subordinated under a never ending expansion (Foster et al. 2010,63). It is this equation that lead

economies and so societies to either grow or collapse under the reign of capitalism (Kallis, Demaria & D'Alisa, 2014, 86).

4.2.1 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a central point of critique in degrowth and most especially in political ecology due to its focus on privatization and individualism. Neoliberalism can be defined as policies standing behind the freedom of markets, with no or very little government control alongside a lowering of taxes in the private sector (Escobar, 2014, 156). The market is in this case governed by an invisible force justifying individual accumulation of capital as it is believed to benefit the social organism as a whole (Pointing, 1992, 130).

The origins of neoliberal values can be traced back to the 18th century and the book *Inquiry Into The Nature and Cause of The Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776) in which the economist Adam Smith put forward the idea that, when an individual strive for their own personal gain whether it be as a producer or consumer and are at the same time governed by competition between themselves and others, that same individual will always benefit society as a whole (Smith, 1776, Pointing, 1992, 131).

Neoliberalism as an economic philosophy reemerged in the 1930 as a response to the prevailing depression in the USA as scholars attempted to renew the central ideas of liberalism. But the concept of neoliberalism truly cemented its position in postmodern society during the 1980s with the ideas of trickle down economy implemented by the U.K Prime minister (1979-1990) Margaret Thatcher and the 40th American president Ronald Reagan (1981-1989). In a trickle down economy taxes are cut to enable expansion of businesses. The idea is that profits made from tax cuts benefitting the private sector will be reinvested in the own company or organization. This investment will then enable employment of workers, increase wages and increase the ability to take loans of the bank. As such the workers will stimulate the economy through a creation of demand and spending of their wages and savings. The increased wealth trickles down as through the masses and is shared. Company owners and private savers as well as investors are thus seen as the true drivers of growth as human development creating a way to health through wealth.

4.2.2 Neoliberal Depoliticization

Degrowth emerged as a demand to repoliticize environmentalism aiming to end the depoliticizing consensus of on sustainable development (Swyngedouw, 2014,331). To depoliticize is to remove the political character out of something i.e by making questions of climate change policy driven rather than stated by law (Swyngedouw, 2014,333). In so doing, the responsibility is transferred from the heads of state to the shoulders of the private sector (Escobar, 2014,152). Sustainable development is policy driven, deeming preframed environmental problem technical issues promising conditions in which growth continuously can thrive (Swyngedouw, 2014). Instead of dealing with the core problem of inequality and climate change (the way neoliberal economies are currently structuring their societies around growth), technological solutions and empty signifiers of ascribed value such as “circularity”, “green” and “transparency” are presented as ways of dealing with universal issue of climate change concerning all of humanity (Swyngedouw, 2014).

Erik Swyngedouw (2014), professor of geography, argues that the current depoliticization is made possible by a hegemonic articulation (institutionalization of discourse) of a naturalization for the need of economic growth by presenting “the unquestioned mobilization of market relations and forces as the only possible mode of accessing, transforming, and distributing (transformed) nature,” (Swyngedouw, 2014,333) and “Capitalism as the only reasonable and possible form of organization of socio-natural metabolism” (Swyngedouw, 2014,333).

By depoliticization the environmental issue nature is subordinated under capitalism, commodifying its value as its being governed through market logic, i.e via carbon pricing. Degrowth criticizes this very notion by, like other critics of commodification, claiming that some things ought not to be governed by market logic or priced by it (Kallis, Demaria & D’Alisa, 2014,261). As such degrowth calls for the de-commodification of human-environmental relations to nature viewing market based instruments as solutions to climate change (Gómez-Baggethun, 2014,263).

4.2.3 Ecomodernism, Green Growth and Technofix

In response to the critics of degrowth as utopian Kallis (2019) claims that capitalism is just as, if not more utopian (Kallis, 2019,3). Ted Trainer (2016), an academical advocate for degrowth makes a strong point of this in his critical review of ecomodernist Leigh Phillips “*Austerity Ecology and the Collapse-Porn Addicts* (2015)”. In the article Phillips (2015) argue that the only way to reach the technological development needed to solve our environmental issue and make decoupling (a separation of human development and our environmental impact) possible is trough economic growth and accelerated consumption (Phillips, 2015). Trainer (2016) emphasize the economic outset of today aims for and expects a 3% p.a growth in GDP. This level of growth combined with a growing world population expected to hit 10 billion by 2050 would result in a production and consumption three times greater than today (Trainer, 2016). As such the energy and material throughput in the current economic system would have to increase immensely to meet the growth required (Ibid). Energy throughput refers to the amount of energy and material passing through a system. This and is governed by the physical law of energy conversions- the first and second law of thermodynamics presented below.

- 1, Energy can't be created, destroyed or consumed-it can only transform from an ordered to a less ordered form.
- 2, Each time energy (a recourse) is put through a system its capacity to produce work, that is the amount of exergy in the resource, is reduced (Areskoug, 2009).

Simply put, each energy conversion results in a higher level of disorder (entropy) in the atmosphere (Areskoug, 2009). According to Kallis, Demaria and D'Alisa (2014)

[...] compared to fossil fuels a lot of conventional energy will have to be expended in the transition to renewables. A solar civilization can only support smaller economies, given the low EROI (Energy Return On Investment) of renewable energies compared to fossil fuels. A transition to renewables will inevitably be a degrowth transition (Kallis, Demaria and D'Alisa 2014, 95).

This means a high amount of renewable recourses are to be invested in technology to potentially find other type of energy recourses, currently leaving us standing with nothing but already spent resources. A fully circular system of renewable recourses is not compatible with growth as it indicates an increase of material and energy throughput. Green growth in its pursuit for capital acumination will inevitably result in an increase in energy throughput and raw material use.

This is why degrowth in contrast to the ecomodernist green growth aims to lessen the amount of energy throughput slowing down the dissipation of energy manifesting as climate change (Kallis, 2019).

Ecomodernism, as explained by the degrowth advocate Jason Hickel(2020), is built on the argument that economic growth will stimulate technological innovation and research, enabling future solutions and human development achieving a net positive impact on the environment (Hickel, 2020,4). Degrowthers, as explained by Kallis, Demaria and D’Alisa (2014) “are critical of such high-tech projects of ecological modernization and green growth not only because they might not turn out to be sustainable, but because they reduce autonomy” (Kallis, Demaria& D’Alisa, 2014,98). Autonomy can be defined as a collectives ability to decide its future outside of heteronomous imperatives such as the laws of economy (Ibid). By placing solutions solely in the technical roam as tools requiring specialized knowledge, the ability to act on the problem in placed far beyond the reach of the common individual (Kallis, Demaria& D’Alisa, 2014,99). As such, climate change is deemed as too big of a problem, creating in line with Norgaards suggestions, feelings of apathy and inaction.

5. Method

5.1 Poststructural Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is not merely a method but a set of already determined ontology, epistemology and theories (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002,2). Being a qualitative method the main characteristics of discourse analysis is the view of social life as a result of everchanging negotiations and interactions between individuals and not as a fixed structure subjects needs to adapt to (Bell & Bryman, 2019). Meaning, the way we speak, write and express ourselves is not seen as a reflection of a set reality with a predetermined direction of events and developments but rather as a fundamental platform of change making (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002,2). As Gordon Waitt, professor of geography and sustainable communities, emphasizes this method when applied in social sciences, focuses on the very effects of discourse looking at communication production and circulation rather that the linguistics (Waitt,2005). Examining the building blocks of the taken for granted it is a method concerned with the construction of truth and meaning with roots in Foucault’s ideas of governmentality (Bacchi, 2009,see above).

5.2 WPR-What's the Problem Represented to be?

Carol Bacchi, professor emerita of politics, has developed a methodological framework of guiding questions for poststructural policy analysis called What is the Problem Represented to be? (WPR). In this method policy is defined as ways of maintaining order through politics (Goodwin, 2011). It is not only concerned with what governments do but includes the knowledge produced by institutions such as experts, political actors, scientists and professionals (Bacchi, 2021). With its attention to heterogeneous practices that produce knowledge, the method demonstrates its roots in poststructuralism (Bacchi, 2021). The WPR analysis is a framework made up of six questions (see table 1, p.24) meant to be used as a conceptual checklist and guide rather than a step by step process (Goodwin, 2011).

In the article *Widening the Ambit of WPR: Media texts* Carol Bacchi (2021) clarifies the limits to her method. Originally developed to be used as a guideline to analysis of governmental policies, WPR can be applied to other types of documents and reports (Bacchi, 2021). It can be applied on any text concerned with the production of how to deal with a particular political problem with clear proposals of how things ought to be and in doing so actively producing certain conducts in their audiences (Bacchi, 2021). The purpose of the WPR analysis is to reveal underlying concepts of what is perceived as a "true reality".

5.2.1 Summary of WPR analysis

Below table 1 is a summary of the WPR analysis questions, goals, strategy and concepts used to answer each research question in this thesis. The first three top columns are categories (Question, Goal and Strategy) from Carol Bacchi's book *Analyzing Policy, What the problem represented to be?* (Bacchi, 2009). The strategy has been modified to be applicable to my own research question. The last category (Theory and Concepts) is included in the table to clarify the analysis and make sure that you as a reader can follow even though the WPR questions are many and the concepts applied are covering a wide scope of concepts.

Tabel 1, WPR framework

WPR Question	Goal	Strategy	Theory and Concepts	Research-question
1,Whats the problem represented to be?	To identify implied problem representation	Identification of problem as expressed in report trough looking at statements rather than individual words.	Degrowth, Ecomodernism Discursive formations	1, 2
2,What presumptions or assumptions underline this representation of the problem?	To ascertain conceptual logics that underpin the specific problem representation.	Identify binaries, key concepts and key categories i.e- growth/recession, sustainability/unsustainable, innovation/stagnation	Signify/signifier, Archeology	1, 2,
3, How has this representation of the problem come about?	To highlight the conditions that allow a particular problem representation to shape and assume dominance	Tracing the history of the current problem representation to identify power relations involved in prevailing problem representation	Genealogy- a history of the present- mapping concepts of what is deemed as “thinkable”	1, 2,
4,What is left unproblematic in this problem representation, can the problem be thought about differently?	To raise reflection in regards to issues and perspectives silenced in identified problem representation.	To later present other ways of going about the problem	Archeology and Genealogy Assumptions and Unexamined knowledges	3,
5,What effects are produces by this representation of the problem?	To ascertain discursive effects, subjectification effects and lived effects	Identification of subject positions- production of subject as responsible for the problem i.e “south depends of norths consumption”	Ecomodernism and Degrowth	3,
6, Where is the representation of the problem produced?	To pay attention to the means trough which some problem representations become dominant and for possibility to of challenging problem representation that are judged to be harmful	Identification of institutions, individuals and agencies involved in sustaining the problem representation. Mobilizing competitive discourses or reframing the “problem”	Green growth- discourse produced by political bodies, foundations, organizations and companies. H&M Group Sustainability report	1,2,3

Adapted from Bacchi, C, (2009), *Analysing Policy: What’s the Problem Represented to be?* Pearson education, French Forest

5.3 H&M Sustainability Performance Report 2020

The H&M Sustainability Performance Report is an annual report with aims to transparently communicate the H&M Groups strategies, challenges, activities, goals and performance in their own operations. Their vision is to lead the change towards sustainable fashion (H&M Group, 2020,3). H&M Group consists of eight brands. These are & Other Stories, ARKET, AFOUND COS, H&M, H&M Home, Monki and Weekday. In addition to those, the company is a major shareholder of the online resale platform Sellpy and operate three other businesses; Singular Society, a subscription-based model enabling subscribers to buy high quality products to a cost price, Treadler, a business to business company and Itsapark, a platform for sustainable lifestyle choices. The H&M Group (2020) report refers to frameworks such as:

- Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) providing standards for sustainability reporting to help organizations take responsibility for their impact
- UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework. reporting on human rights in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework.
- Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). A financial information site providing information on climate-financial related questions.
- UN Global Compact and CEO Water Mandate. An industry driven, CEO-led Water Resilience Coalition with aims to elevate global water stress and preserve the global fresh water resources.

The data is collected from functions within the H&M Group as well as from external parties such as implementation partners and suppliers. Only improved and active business partners are included (H&M Group, 2020).

Year 2020 H&M Group had 5000 stores in 74 markets as well as 52 e-commerce markets (H&M Group, 2020,9). 153.000 employees not counting the employees of their 1,603 tier 1 suppliers (manufacturing and sub-contracted factories) and 708 commercial product suppliers- pushing the number of workers to 1.56 million people (Ibid). In that same year the fashion company generated 187 billion SEK in net sales, a number equivalent to 18,7% of Swedish revenues in the central governmental budget(999 billion SEK) (Regeringskansliet, 2022).

5.4 NVivo Coding and Delimitations

NVivo is a type of software intended to help people organize their qualitative research and analyze non-numerical and unstructured data. As suggested by Alan Bryman (2019), professor of organizational and social research, when conducting my analysis I looked for latent content of meanings lying beneath the surface of the statements. In doing so, themes and patterns related to concepts outside of the report were identified (Bryman, 2019, 209). The key aim of the NVivo coding in this paper is to identify statements of problem representation and so answering the first question of the WPR analysis, What's the Problem Represented to be? The answer to this question being the basis of my analysis.

5.4.1 NVivo Coding

When conducting the NVivo analysis three rounds of coding were executed. The first round allowed me to familiarize myself with the material at hand. As such I did not look only for statements of problem representation but let the material speak for itself and coded (attached labels) sporadically looking for possible categories and themes. Categories can be identified as similar codes merged into a broader sense. Examples of categories found in the first coding are; Transparency, Empowerment, Innovation, Technology, decoupling, Circularity, Democratizing fashion, Biodiversity and of course sustainability amongst others. These categories can further be categorized into major themes identifying larger elements of the research.

The relationship between theory and research material in this paper is inductive. As such, the theories came out of the material rather than the other way around. As the strategy to combat climate change in the report align with Green Growth solutions relying heavily on technological innovation I choose to look further into concepts of Degrowth being an example of unexamined knowledge (archeology) in contrast to the sustainable solution presented in the material.

Having familiarized myself with the material the second round of coding was more organized and less abstract. At this point statements of problem representation aligning with the dominant discourse of ecomodernist character were identified. To find these statements I applied the

second question of the WPR analysis; What presumptions or assumptions underline this representation of the problem? To answer this question I identified binaries i.e growth/recession and liner/circular, and categorized by assumptions.

In the third and final round of coding a number of themes were identified represented in below tables, 6.1 Circular growth 6.2 Discourse of Democratized fashion and 6.3 Transparency. As nodes were created and labels attached to statements, categories were created that were later assigned a theme.

5.4.2 Delimitations

The entire report is filled with statements of problem representation and in presenting my NVivo analysis I had to be very selective as to what statements were to be presented as I have a very limited amount of space. The basis of the selection of statements are statements including discursive formations and institutionalized knowledges. As mentioned, after assigning nodes(code/label) to the statements I sorted them into categories that were later assigned a theme. The selected statements are an assortment representing the primary issues of each theme (circular growth, democratizing fashion and transparency). Each issue-(what's is left unproblematic) are central concepts of degrowth criticizing the existing and representing new, ways of going about the problem.

Each statement can be viewed differently as they are built on value and per-set assumption. As such, this analysis is highly dependent on me as a researcher and interpreter of the statements. That said, each interpretation of the statements are unique as to my way of thinking, assuming and reflecting upon the problem. Were the analysis to be done by someone else, other statements and reflection might have been presented despite using the same methodological framework. However, the main point of reflection upon these statements are as previously mentioned to widen the horizon in regards to how to deal with climate change. The idea is not to present degrowth as a singular solution to the problem but rather to question the institutionalized discourse of the selected statements and so question the regimes of truth ruling our socioecological relationship to nature. In the following three section the statements, categories and themes from the NVivo analysis will be put in a greater context answering the research questions:

- What discursive formations can be identified through statements of problem representation in the report?
- What politics are made visible through these statements and what is left unproblematic in these statements?

The below tables 2, 3 and 4 (p.29, p.33, p.36) are a visualization of the NVivo analysis. The first column representing category, the second statements, the third identified binaries and the fourth issue based on the first part of WPR question number four “what’s left unproblematic in this problem representation?” The numbers in the columns refers to WPR questions presented in numerical order in table 1.

6. Analysis

As a global fashion and design company, the impact of our value chain on people, communities, economies and ecosystems is significant and far-reaching (H&M Group, 2020,10).

Although the report is not a policy in and of itself the WPR method can be applied to any text concerned with the production of how to deal with a political problem. That is through proposals of how things ought to be dealt with and in doing so actively producing certain conducts in their audiences (Bacchi,2021). In so doing, the report produces customers and the own organization as subjectobjects.

The report is a new type of practical text in the neoliberal sphere of free market economy having appeared in accordance with attempts to hold business accountable for their actions as well as underpinning the individuals’ responsibility and ability to make an informed choice. As such, it can be viewed as a platform for knowledge production, cementing the hegemonic and institutionalized discourse of green growth through mechanisms of transparency, circularity and democratized fashion. Knowledge being produced between power relations -professionals, organizations and policymakers, through dominant discourse and in line with prevailing political ideologies (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016,69). It is a basis of performative sustainable development as governmentality. That is, ideas of sustainability put into practice via pre-formed ways of acting on the challenges of climate change. It is a record of policies set in motion and a window providing insight on the current workings of the attempts to create and establish sustainable fast fashion.

6.1 Tabel 2: Circular Growth

NVivo Category (WPR2)	Statements of problem representation (WPR1)	Binaries: Conceptual logics underpinning problem (WPR2)	Issue: Institutionalization of; (WPR4)
Circularity	Our sustainability vision remains more relevant than ever: to lead the change towards circular and climate positive fashion while being a fair and equal company (H&M Group, 2020 13).	Vision/Reality Positive/Negative impact	Climate positive fast fashion
Innovation	[...]but also to build back better so that environmental impacts don't increase with economic growth (H&M Group, 202).	Economy/Ecology Society/nature	Decoupling
Innovation	New sustainable materials and recycling innovations are fundamental to achieving our goals (H&M Group, 2020 37)	Innovation/Stagnation	Technofix
Circularity	This means moving from a linear model — take, use, waste — to a circular model where we maximize the value of products and resources by reusing them more and as much as possible until finally recycling them (H&M Group, 2020 29).	Circular/Linear Maximize/Minimize Development/Stagnation	Growth by other means
Growth	We call this mindset meaningful growth. It's about growing in ways that make a difference to our colleagues, our customers, our business and our planet(H&M Group, 2020 12).	Meaningful/Insignificant Growth/Recession	Naturalizing growth
Circularity	Circular products: Creating products that are made to last, from safe, recycled and sustainably sourced input that can recirculate multiple times. Circular supply chains: Fueling systems that recirculate products and support circular production processes and material flows. Circular customer journeys: Providing accessible ways to experience and engage in circular fashion where products are used more, repaired, reused and recycled (H&M Group, 2020, 29).	Long term/Short term Circular/Linear Repair/Torn Reused/Thrown away Recycled/Wasted	Decoupling
Recycling	By 2030, we aim for 100% of our materials to be either recycled or sourced in a more sustainable way, including our new goal of 30% recycled materials by 2025 to further accelerate use of recycled fibers(H&M Group, 202037).	More sustainable/less sustainable	Material throughput

Word frequency of “circularity” in report: 110

The above table (p.29) is a visualization of the NVivo analysis. The first column representing category, the second statements, the third identified binaries and the fourth issue based on the first part of WPR question number four “what’s left unproblematic in this problem representation?” The numbers in the columns refers to WPR questions presented in numerical order in table 1.

6.1.1 What discursive formations can be identified through statements of problem representation reflection circular growth in the report?

(WPR framework 1,2,4)

Our sustainability vision remains more relevant than ever: to lead the change towards circular and climate positive fashion while being a fair and equal company (H&M Group,2020, p.13).

As the fast fashion industry is a global one effecting people, societies and their surrounding environment, the effects of how they operate their business on a daily basis are crucial in slowing down global warming. Basing their operations on the UN Sustainability Development Goals and aligning with the Green new deal it is an industry that is being subjected to the creation of a new platform of sustainable development. As such the industry can be seen as a “system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and operation of statements” (Foucault, Gordon, 1980,133).

When conducting the NVivo analysis circularity was identified as one of the primary strategies presented in the report to combat climate change and create a net-positive impact on biodiversity trough their own operations. As mentioned in the background section, circularity can be defined as an economic system that decouples economic activity from natural ecosystems and finite recourses (Ellen Macarthur foundation, 2022). The aim being to achieve a net-positive impact; A way of making business that benefits and gives more to the global economy, society and environment in at a higher degree than it takes from it(European commission, 2019). As such, looking at the report circularity as a discursive formation can be seen as means for performative sustainability by decoupling.

The above strategy compounds to the idea of meaningful growth “It’s about growing in ways that make a difference to our colleagues, our customers, our business and our planet.” (H&M Group,2020, p.12). Hence, the notion of circularity being possible builds upon the assumptions (taken for granted knowledge) that 1, Capitalism is the only possible way to organize the socio-

natural metabolism and 2, Growth and sustainability are compatible with one another and the former is a given path to achieve the later (Swyngedouw, 2014,333).

6.1.2 What politics are made visible through the circular growth statements of problem representation and what is left unproblematic in regards to these statements?

(WPR 2,3,4,6)

Based on the statements above the politics (activities, thoughts and behaviors associated with systems of governing and power) made visible in the report are; capitalism through statements of growth (green growth) as well as ecomodernism and decoupling through statements of circularity.

H&M states that meaningful growth “[...] is about growing in ways that make a difference to our colleagues, our customers, our business and our planet.” (H&M SPR, 2020, p.12).

Explaining H&M groups (2021) approach to circularity it is about:

[...] Creating products that are made to last, from safe, recycled and sustainably sourced input

Fueling systems that recirculate products and support circular production processes and material flows

Providing accessible ways to experience and engage in circular fashion where products are used more, repaired, reused and recycled (H&M GROUP, 2020, 29).

Capitalism as a political economy is based on private ownership of means of production. depending on its basic formula of M-C-M’, Money-Commodity-More money growth by accumulation is an immanent quality in the capitalist order (Kallis, Demaria & D’Alisa, 2014, 86). In this view material dimensions concerning human environmental relationships are ruled out as the socioecological order is based on functions of the market being ascribed monetary value (Dunlap & Catton, 1979, 50). As Erik Swyngedouw argues, capitalism poses a hegemonic articulation of economic growth naturalizing the need for its continued existence. Growth is never questioned but always presented as the only “[...] possible mode of accessing, transforming and distributing (transformed) nature” (Swyngedouw, 2014, 333). As such, capitalism is presented as the only reasonable way of organizing society, an unquestionable force carving more by the year (Ibid). Instead of dealing with the root of problem of inequality being core accumulation of capital, circularity is presented as ways to achieve sustainable development through growth.

Ecomodernism is, as mentioned in the introduction, heavily dependent of techno-solutions as environmental issues are deemed technical. Decoupling builds on the notion that technological advancement will enable ever expanding growth by turning growth green (Kallis,2019). From this perspective the green growth strategy will in time remove the material and so ecological dimensions of economic expansion (ibid). The way to reach this advancement is as Leigh Philips argues, through capital accumulation by new means of production and consumption as this growth will stimulate technological innovation and sustainable development research.

As knowledges are deemed acceptable discursive formations are created cementing the hegemonic way of seeing and talking about climate change, its problems and suggested solutions. This new regime of truth (green growth) building on circularity poses the question of whether or not decoupling is by any means possible. The H&M underlines this approach by trusting “New sustainable materials and recycling innovations [...]” (H&M Group, 2020, 37) to achieve their circular outset and moving away from a linear economy (make-use-waste) to a circular economy (remake-reuse-recycle) positions the company’s strategy in the ecomodernist roams of green growth.

This raises questions of whether a fully circular system can grow without having any new material input? If the company was able to change their production to 100% recycled materials (the goal being to reach 30% by 2030) the technology used for recycling would assumingly still demand an energy input. If that input are to be from renewable recourses rather than fossil once there would have to be a material increase as the energy return on energy investment is lower is renewable recourses (Kallis,2014,95). Following Trainers economic outset the expected 3% p.a growth combined with a growing population would result in a production three times greater than today by 2050 (Trainer, 2016). This assumption does not seem to unlikely considering the fashion industry doubled its levels of production between the years 2000 and 2014 (UNEC.org, 2018).

6.2 Tabel 3: Discourse of Democratized Fashion

NVivo Category (WPR2)	Statements of problem representation (WPR1)	Binaries Conceptual logics underpinning problem (WPR2)	Issue: Institutionalization of; (WPR4)
Mass production Accessible to everyone	Our vision is to make fashion and design accessible to everyone, in a way that's good for people, the planet, our industry and our business (H&M Group, 2020, 8).	Vision/Reality Good/Bad Accessible/Non-accessible	Green Growth
Democratization Dependency relation	Our vision has always been to democratize fashion. Today, that means making sustainable fashion available to all (H&M Group, 2020 3).	Vision/Reality Democratized/Elitist	Sustainability trough consumption-for whom?
Subject/Object	Reinforcing this shift towards more sustainable behavior by enabling, inspiring and rewarding sustainable actions (H&M Group, 2020 23).	Sustainable/unsustainable Rewarding/Shaming Action/Inaction	Empty "green" signifiers Green washing.
Democratization	To make sustainable choice more accessible, we must work with them to understand customer needs, challenges, and drivers so that opting for lower impact fashion is a natural, affordable decision for everyone (H&M Group, 2020 15).	Natural/Unnatural Affordable/Non-affordable Active/Passive decision making	Customer centric. Relocation of factories in search for better margins.
Fair and Equal	Being a fair and equal company requires us to enable equal access to sustainable resources and solutions (H&M Group, 2020 13).	Sustainable/unsustainable Access/Inaccessible Solution/Problem Equal/Inequal	Exploitation Wage strategy above minimum instead of under living

The above table is a visualization of the NVivo analysis. The first column representing category, the second WPR statements, the third identified binaries and the fourth issue based on the first part of WPR question number four "What's left unproblematic in this problem representation?" The numbers in the columns refers to WPR questions presented in numerical order in table 1.

6.2.1 What discursive formations can be identified through the statements of problem representation in the report? (WPR framework 1,2,4)

Our vision is to make fashion and design accessible to everyone, in a way that's good for people, the planet, our industry and our business (H&M group, 2020, 8).

According to H&M group, democratizing fashion means making sustainable fashion available to all, the "available to all" referring to a low cost enabling a wider range of people to consume

their products. Sustainability in accordance with the Brundtland report does not only refer to the economic impact on the environment but also to the social roams of economic activity and development. The fashion industry, as mentioned in the background employs 1 in 6 people globally of which only 2% are paid living wage(Thomas,2019). The difference between minimum and living wage being the minimum wage is the lowest pay allowed stated by law, and living wage enables workers to cover their basic needs and meet a decent standard of living. According to the UN Global Compact (2021) the basic need includes being able to afford food, water, housing, education and healthcare (UN global compact, 2021). As for today, no factories employed by H&M Group are paying their workers living wage as presented in their Fair and Equal Key Performance Indicators.

In order the keep the prizes down in their retail sector the cost of production needs to be kept accordingly. As argued by the researchers Yoon Jung Lee and Jacob Österberg fashion markets flourish in economies in early stages of development where wages are low and a larger number of workers can produce high amounts of clothing in a short amount of time (Jung Lee & Österberg, 2013, 129). When economies grow stronger production is relocated continuing the never ending pursuit of cheaper production and capital gains.

The discourse on democratized fashion align with the notion of the neoliberal free market ideology where company-owners are seen as true drivers of growth and development. It is a discourse creating a justification of exploitation as it is a customer centric view providing cons only for the consumer.

6.2.2 What politics are made visible through these statements of problem representation and what is left unproblematic in these statements?

(WPR framework 2,3,4,6)

Based on the discursive statements presented in the above table, discourse of democratized fashion make traits of neoliberal free market functions visible. Neoliberalism is one of the main points of critiques from a degrowth perspective due to its individualistic traits. As mentioned in the degrowth section, an individual whom strive for their own personal gain and is governed by competition between themselves and others will benefit society as a whole (Pointing, 1992,131). It is an economic philosophy standing behind free market functions established in policies. As such, business are to regulate themselves and each other by competition that in turn

functions as an “invisible force” (Escobar,2014,156). The questions raised in regards to democratized fast fashion is, democratized for whom?

The idea of benefiting society as a whole comes from the ideas of a trickle down economy where company owners and investors are seen as the true drivers of growth and development. As wealth is accumulated it is intended to trickle down through the masses. However, as fast fashion companies rarely own the outsourced factories producing their garments they see the opportunity to position themselves outside of questions of exploitation and responsibility for their workers. “This means we don’t pay garment workers’ salaries, nor can we decide how much they are paid.” (H&M group, Wages, 2022). Although this might be true, the companies actively, in accordance with free market functions, make the decision relocate their production where they have the highest price advantage. In doing so they are creating a competition between the production countries pushing down the prices of production and so the wages of the workers. Researchers Gabrielli, Baghi & Codeluppi (2013) argue that fast fashion companies have contributed in fundamentally changing consumer behavior. In their interviews the low prices of the fast fashion garments made up for the fact that the item might only be used once and so increasing the consumption levels. This argument is supported by the numbers represented in the UNEP report accounting for a 60% increase in consumption from the early 2000s (UNEP,2018).

6.3 Table 4: Transparency

NVivo Category (WPR2)	Statements of problem representation (WPR1)	Binaries Conceptual logics underpinning problem (WPR2)	Issue, Institutionalization of; (WPR4)
Information	Transparency. Sharing clear, accurate, relevant information in an honest and accountable way. Openly sharing our progress and challenges to create accountability and encourage others to do the same. Collecting and disclosing sustainability information relating to our supply chain, products and business practices to increase visibility and enable informed choices (H&M Group, 2020,20).	Sharing/Concealing Accurate/Inaccurate Honest/Dishonest	Information deficit model
Empowerment trough consumption	Empowering informed choice. Giving customers more information about the impacts and journey of our products so they can make informed choices aligned with their values. Reinforcing this shift towards more sustainable behavior by enabling, inspiring and rewarding sustainable actions (H&M Group, 2020 23).	Empower/Disempower Information/Disinformation Rational/Irrational choice	Redistribution of climate Issue
Story and value	Transparency helps our customers understand the story behind our business and products, helps us build relationships based on trust and accountability, and pushes us to do better(H&M Group, 2020 23).	Trust/Distrust Accountability/Non accountability	Greenwashing Ascribed signifiers
Free market	Simple indicators of business and product sustainability can give customers the detail they need to make informed choices (H&M Group, 2020 24).	Rational/Irrational decision-making	Redistribution of climate Issue
Changemaking	This won't happen overnight, but one way we can speed up the process is by openly and transparently reporting on our progress and challenges, and encouraging others to do the same . It's a vital step towards changing our company and industry for the better (H&M Group, 2020 33).	Speedup/Slow down Progress/Stagnation Change/Stagnation	Institutionalization of preframed solutions

Transparency: Word frequency in report: 117

The above table is a visualization of the NVivo analysis. The first column representing category, the second statements, the third identified binaries and the fourth issue based on the first part of WPR question number four “What’s left unproblematic in this problem representation?” The numbers in the columns refers to WPR questions presented in numerical order in table 1.

6.3.1 What discursive formations can be identified through statements of problem representation in the report? (WPR framework 1,2,4)

When conducting the NVivo analysis transparency was identified as one of the primary strategies. The word was mentioned no less than 117 times in the report. This strategy creates discursive formations of empowerment through choice, sustainability through full production disclosure. Transparency is defined in the H&M report (2020) as follows:

Transparency. Sharing clear, accurate, relevant information in an honest and accountable way. Openly sharing our progress and challenges to create accountability and encourage others to do the same. Collecting and disclosing sustainability information relating to our supply chain, products and business practices to increase visibility and enable informed choices (H&M Group, 2020, 20).

Transparency as a strategy to reach a sustainable consumption builds on the idea of information being an enabler for social action (Norgaard, 2004,63). Action in this case referring to an exercising power through consumption. By making an informed and rational choices, the consumer can steer the market in the desired direction of a more sustainable production. It is a strategy relying heavily on the consumer attaining this information produced by the companies themselves. H&M explains “Giving customers more information about the impacts and journey of our products so they can make informed choices aligned with their values” (H&M Group, 2020, 23) . This is, other than dependent on the consumer attaining the information, dependent on the correct information being given in the first place.

The fashion industry operates within the sphere of a status market where products are attributed value beyond function (Aspers, 2010,10). As various formal and informal institutions regulate this market by i.e establishing policies rather than laws, large parts of the market remain unregulated (Aspers, 2010,10). This allows for the producing companies to ascribe values function as signifiers for sustainability such as “more sustainable”, “conscious” or “green”. However the premises of what constitutes such labels are debatable.

H&M explains in the report “Transparency helps our customers understand the story behind our business and products, helps us build relationships based on trust and accountability, and pushes us to do better” (H&M Group, 2020,23). Status products are ascribed value through signifiers or even stories. Signifiers, according to Ferdinand de Saussure are mental concepts

(associations) evoked by what is being signified. As such when a piece of clothing is being ascribed a label such as “green “(the signified) additional value is added by the customer as it evokes association (signifiers) such as nature, good, sustainable, environmental friendly, and so on. When creating cognitive maps we are also defining things by what they are not. To clarify, when a label is attached to a product we read it, associate, and exclude opposites such as, unnatural, unsustainable and bad (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

6.3.2 What politics are made visible through these statements of problem representation and what is left unproblematic in these statements?

(WPR framework, 2,3,4,6)

As transparency builds on free market functions political traits of neoliberalism are made visible through the above statements. The main function of a free market builds on competition between different actors operating within the same market (Pointing, 1992, 130). Competition and demand are what governs the market (Asper, 2010,16). When the demand for something in a particular market is high more actors enters as producers and when the production has met demand an over production creates a price advantage for the consumer. As such, a free market is intended to be for the benefit of the consumer rather than the producer(ibid).

The information deficit model, criticized by Norgaard (2011), builds on the assumption that the lack of social action in the face of climate change is due to a lack of information (Norgaard, 2011, 63). If the correct information was given, through a transparent reckoning, the consumers would make different decisions in the right direction. In so doing, market transparency redistributes the climate responsibility to the individual only looking at the symptoms of climate change in the sphere of consumption rather than facing the cause in the sphere of production.

The rationalities of consumption is closely related to the motivation of it. In the interviews conducted by Gabrielli, Baghi and Codeluppi (2013), the motivation to consume fast fashion had very little to do with sustainability, in fact it was rather the opposite. The lower prize motivated a higher consumption enabling a faster renewal of the closet and a willing to compromise lower quality products (Gabrielli, Baghi and Codeluppi, 2013, 213). As the motivation to buy is built on a faster renewal the expected rationalities in making a sustainable choice simply does not apply to the fast fashion segment.

Another thing left unproblematic is the fact that as the status market remains unregulated it is the companies themselves that ascribe the sustainable signifiers to their own products. As there are no framework in regards to what makes a product sustainable one part of the production process can deem a product “sustainable”. For example, H&M attaches the label conscious to products containing recycled material. Even though a sweater might only contain 20% recycled material the communication to the consumer is that the product is a “more sustainable” choice. And this is just it, the conscious sweater is *more* sustainable than a sweater made from 100% non-recycled polyester. However, this does not make the sweater a sustainable choice. The phrasing “more sustainable” is used 80 times in the report. Ascribing labels of false signifiers of sustainability is not an act of empowering the customer, it is an act of disinformation and disempowerment.

As our worlds are made up of signs and all meaning is ascribed transparency and empowerment through consumption position the customer in a reality of having done a sustainable action through consumption. By empowering through consumption the report produces their consumers as subject objects being exposed to the conduct of conduct. That is being told 1, what the problem is and 2, how to deal with that problem (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016,104). As such, the report is a text concerned with the production of how to deal with a particular political problem with clear proposals of how things ought to be and in doing so actively producing certain conducts in their audiences (Bacchi, 2021).

8. Discussion

So, how are discursive formations, problem representations and institutionalization of circular growth, transparency and discourse of democratizing fashion manifested and put into practice in the H&M Groups’s Sustainability Performance Report 2020?

Mechanism of political rationalities rarely present themselves as singular statements but rather they are coming from many sources at the same time. In terms of green growth, it is a strategy being widely adopted by organizations (IUNC), foundations (Ellen Macarthur) and executive institutions (European commission) creating the basis of knowledge production. As such, statements of problem representation appear as discursive formations creating hegemonic ways of seeing, talking about and dealing with climate change. This regime of truth dictates what can be knowable and seen as a thinkable solution only confirming the political rationality in which

it is constituted (Foucault, 1980,112). The institutionalized discourse of democratized fashion, transparency and circular growth represents knowledges falsely portrayed as solutions to climate change. They are mechanisms constating the conduct of individuals and groups aligning with the singular solution of green growth. As such, the H&M Group Sustainability Performance Report 2020 can be viewed as a platform of knowledge creation as it is a part of “system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and operation of statements” (Foucault, 1980,133).

8.1 What effects in regards to the wider scope of sustainability and climate change can be produced by this institutionalized knowledges?

(WPR 5)

By deeming environmental issues technical, I would argue that ecomodernism and green growth disempowers individuals by removing the ability to act on the problem as the solution requires specialized knowledge (Kallis, Demaria& D’Alisa,2014,99). This in turn, may produce feelings of apathy in regards to social action against climate change as the problem is simply too big and too complicated (Norgaard, 2011). I would argue, the issue is not that people don’t understand climate change but rather, they feel they cannot produce an action big enough to make a difference.

This disempowerment have further been strengthen trough depoliticization of environmental issues placing sustainable development in the private sector governed by policies rather than in the political one governed by law, where people (in election states) would have power trough voting. However, transparency is used as a tool to re-empower consumer as they are able to make a difference exercising the power of consumption. If enough individuals creates a demand for sustainable products, the market will change accordingly.

As such, the report produces the consumer as subject objects under sustainable development strategies as they are being thought how to deal with a particular problem in a particular way creating certain behaviors in their audiences. By “putting all cards on the table” the responsibility is redistributed from the resigned producer to the rational consumer. As the value of products in the status markets are ascribed by the producers themselves, transparency positions the customer in a false sense of taking climate action trough consumption.

Further, the notion of circularity through growth naturalizes the need for capital accumulation suborning nature under capitalism through commodifying it according to market logic. Instead of dealing with the root of problem of inequality being accumulation of capital, circularity is presented as ways to achieve sustainable development through growth. With aims to grow and expand the common goal of decoupling to achieve a net-positive impact will inevitably lead to an increase in energy throughput increasing the dissipation of energy manifesting as climate change. As such degrowth calls for the de-commodification of human-environmental relations and a repolitization of environmental issues removing it from the technical to the social sphere (Gómez-Baggethun, 2014,263).

The naturalized discourse on democratized fashion poses as a paradox as fast fashion industry creates differentiation and segregation through exploitation and underpayment. As mentioned, none of the 1,56 million factoryworkers producing for H&M are receiving living wage despite the fact the company made 187 billion in net sales 2020. Is that conscious? With a consumption centric view and a constant systemized pursuit for cheaper production, green growth is not compatible with sustainability, and is most certainly not democratic.

9. Conclusion

Change according to Foucault, is not something that happens gradually, but rather something coming about through new regimes in discourse. These new regimes creates and stabilizes preciously ignored forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980,112). Instead of focusing on yearly economic growth, degrowth centers around the care of commons. It is a strategy suggesting work-sharing, basic and maximum income, eco-communities and different cooperatives supported by new types of institutions. All in all- new ways of structuring and building societies. It is about adding where there is lack of cutting down where there is excess (Hickel, 2020, 4). Degrowth is about making room for parallel systems existing at the same time, decentralizing power and localizing equality. It is high time we step outside the institutionalized and naturalized knowledges of growth and capitalism. As Anguelovski (2016) puts it

Social change is a process of creation, impossible to predict in advance. What academic studies of degrowth can offer are arguments and narratives to animate the politics of transition (Anguelovski, 2014,116)

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