

“The climate transition requires growth, but it also drives growth”

The dominance of the neoliberal environmentalist
norm-complex in Swedish climate action plans

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to gain an understanding into how a neoliberal environmentalist norm-complex can be used to understand the Swedish climate action plans published in 2019 and 2023. This was done through a mixed method approach, where the qualitative stage was allowed to take the most place. The quantitative stage of the analysis showed that the normative element of Green growth and sustainable development was exceedingly present in the texts, especially when referring to climate goals. When diving deeper into the texts, it was apparent that the neoliberal environmentalist norm-complex carried a compelling power to explain circumstances and reasons behind certain phrasings. In alignment with the theory, the concept of growth was referred to in an uncritical manner and increased competitiveness was often framed as a solution to climate issues. The thesis therefore reaches the conclusion that the norm-complex offers a comprehensive way of understanding Swedish climate actions plans which shine light on the difficulty of alternative solutions to the climate crisis and that point out how the relationship to nature is framed.

Key words: Neoliberal environmentalism, Norm-complex, Norms, Sweden, Climate action plans

Words: 9981

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Purpose statement.....	5
1.2 Research question.....	5
2. Literature review.....	6
2.1 Norms.....	6
2.2 Neoliberal environmentalist norm-complex.....	6
2.3 The case of Sweden.....	8
2.4 Position in the research field.....	8
3. Theory.....	9
3.1 Neoliberal environmentalism.....	9
3.2 Norm complexes.....	10
3.3 Conceptual framework.....	11
4. Method.....	14
4.1 Research design.....	14
4.2 Selection of cases.....	16
4.3 Operationalization.....	17
4.4 A moment of reflection.....	19
5. Analysis.....	20
5.1 Ideological principles, concepts and theories.....	20
5.2 Green growth and sustainable development.....	22
5.3 Monetization and privatization of nature.....	25
5.4 Market-based instruments.....	28
6. Discussion.....	31
List of references.....	35
Appendix.....	38

List of Abbreviations

CBD - Convention on Biological Diversity

EGA - Environmental Goods Agreement

EGS - Environmental goods and services

ESR - Effort Sharing Regulation

EU - European Union

EU ETS - European Union Emissions Trading System

FTA - Free Trade Agreement

GEI - Global Economic Institution

GHG - Greenhouse Gas

MBI - Market Based Instrument

NE - Neoliberal Environmentalism

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

RTA - Regional Trade Agreement

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

UN - United Nations

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

US - United States

WTO - World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

Intertwining, substantiating and encompassing – the neoliberal environmentalist (NE) norm-complex can be identified in countless important international environmental documents, ranging from those published by the United Nation (UN) to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The NE norm-complex, as explained by Bernstein (2002), is the common normative ground on which both states and organizations rest most of their policies on, and has given environmental concerns a more noticeable status on the international agenda than would otherwise have been possible. Bernstein writes that norms are “shared conceptions of appropriate behaviour or action. In the context of global governance, they define, regulate, and legitimate state (and other key actors’) identities, interests and behaviour.” (Bernstein 2002, p.2). Norm-complexes, in turn, are sets of adjacent norms that can form the fundamentals of an ideology or a theoretical position (Dent 2022, p.4). The core thought of Bernstein’s concept is that new ideas and policy proposals must fit into the existing NE norm-complex in order to be accepted (Bernstein 2002, p.7 & 11).

Twenty years after Bernstein’s paper, Dent (2022) investigated the presence of a NE norm-complex in the trade-climate nexus. Through an in-depth text analysis of 37 publications by Global Economic Institutions (GEIs) from 2007 to 2022, he reaches the conclusion that a NE norm-complex is significantly evident in international discourses on trade and the climate (p.21).

However, both Dent and Bernstein’s papers limit the generalizability of the theory by exclusively studying documents published by international institutions. Bernstein has written briefly about individual states formatting their domestic and international policies to fit with the NE norm-complex and/or have had a positive response to such policies (Bernstein 2001, p.81), but only to a limited degree. Climate change is addressed on multiple governmental levels and it is of interest for the

scientific field to further study the topic, and to consider if the theory of a NE norm-complex can travel across different areas of governance. To gain knowledge about the presence of such a norm-complex on a national level is also important for the understanding of how states behave as individual actors as opposed to parts of an international organization.

1.1 Purpose statement

The purpose of this thesis is to gain insight into how the theory of a NE norm-complex can be used to understand Swedish climate action plans. It has been previously shown that the norm-complex is dominant on an international level and in global institutions, but to further expand on the knowledge in the field this study aims to investigate if the same dominance is observable in domestic policies. Diving deeper into Swedish climate action plans will be a starting point which will shed light on the influence international norms might have over domestic policies. Further, the exploration of how a NE norm-complex interacts and affects Swedish climate action plans may be able to provide insights relevant for countries similar to Sweden and advance the knowledge in the scientific field.

1.2 Research question

By placing Swedish climate action plans in the context of international environmental norms, this study seeks to gain understanding about how ideas and underlying values can shape domestic politics. To reach these objectives, the thesis will aim to answer the following question:

How can the neoliberal environmentalist norm-complex be used to understand Swedish climate change policies?

2. Literature review

In this chapter an overview of the literature will be presented. Here the relevance of this thesis will be further discussed and a gap in the literature will be exposed.

2.1 Norms

In recent years, scholars have shown increasing interest in norms in various scientific fields and how they dictate behavior and experiences. For example Penić, Mostovoy and Halperin (2024) investigate the power of emotion norms in conflict dynamics by measuring the emotions Israeli Jews and political groups (left/center/right) felt against Palestinians. Their results show that emotion norms are directly related to policy attitudes. Fayaz-Farkhad et al (2023) write about the correspondence between vaccine-supportive policies and social norms supportive of vaccination. Reinhardt and Eitze (2023) investigate the power of norms in the stigma towards menstruation, for example the concealment of pain or any visible signs of menstruation.

2.2 Neoliberal environmentalist norm-complex

As explained in chapter one, studies have shown that a NE norm-complex is dominant in international institutions. The most significant study for this thesis is the already introduced Dent (2022) paper in which he investigates the presence of a NE norm-complex in the trade-climate nexus. He does this through a content analysis of 37 GEI publications where he measures the frequency of four normative elements of NE per page in the entire text corpus, and in each publication itself. The four elements are Ideological principles, concepts and theories; Green growth and sustainable

development; Monetization and privatization of nature; and MBIs. The normative element with the highest result in terms of frequency per page was the final one, MBIs, which was referenced 1.27 times per page. Dent writes that “MBIs have been a leading normative element in the trade-climate nexus from their beginning and have become stronger over time” (Dent 2022, p.18).

Further, Zelli, Gupta and van Asselt (2013) argue that NE not only steer the practices of environmental regimes, but also the interactions with other regimes and institutions, such as the global trade regime. They write that “Ultimately, it also dominates whole complexes of regimes that address specific subjects at the intersection of international trade and the environment.” (Zelli, Gupta and van Asselt 2013, p.106). This is illustrated by an analysis of three cases of institutional interactions: the interaction on trade related climate policies between the UN climate regime and the WTO; the interaction on forest carbon sinks between the UN climate regime and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); and finally, the interaction on trade in genetically modified organisms (GMOs) between the CBD’s Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the WTO. The paper finds evidence for a strong dominance of the neoliberal norm complex, however it also finds that it is being increasingly contested in the sense that the United States and developing countries continue to push for more market oriented solutions, whilst the European Union (EU) fails to establish more trade restrictive measures.

Concerning the EU and NE, Musch and De Ville (2019) analyzes the role of the EU in the negotiations on an Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA), a process which failed in 2016. They investigate why the negotiations did not reach a successful conclusion with a focus on the EU and desirable policies in the trade-climate nexus. This is understood through a ‘discursive institutionalist’ perspective, where it is assumed that interests are always mediated by ideas and institutions, in this case – NE. They show that the negotiations on an EGA fall in line with NE and its emphasis on free markets, writing that “the first explicit negotiations to put international trade policies at the services of climate protection have evolved increasingly in a ‘trade first’ direction” (Musch and De Ville 2019).

2.3 The case of Sweden

Multiple scholars have investigated Sweden's role as a pioneer in comparing climate change. Zannakis (2013) writes about the country's "urge to go ahead" and nuances the take that successful environmental policies draw on the concept of ecological modernization by discussing discourses on green governmentality and civic environmentalism in the context of Swedish environmental politics. He asks what coalitions of such discourses in Swedish policy that made Sweden's over-ambition and implementation of environmental policies possible. Analyzing this, he points to Sweden's long tradition of being engaged in environmental problems, and the naturally subsequent dilemma – how to get other countries on board. Zannakis writes: "The Swedish answer to this dilemma was to try to show, first, that it is possible to reduce GHG emissions (to be a role model), and second, that a rich country actually takes climate responsibility." (Zannakis 2013, p.224). Further, some highlight Sweden's energy policies and the desire to demonstrate technological leadership on climate change as a way to increase market shares (Sarasini 2009), while others have shown Sweden's comparatively ambitious Climate Change Acts (Nash and Steurer 2021).

2.4 Position in the research field

Even after a thorough scan of the literature, no studies investigating a NE norm-complex on a national level were found, thus exposing an extensive gap in the literature. Though limited, this thesis intends to shine light on at least a part of this knowledge gap. By looking closer at the case of Sweden, this thesis also positions itself in the vicinity of the studies in 2.3 which pointed to Sweden's role as a pioneer in the field. Might they be regarded as successful internationally because their national policies also fit into the dominant global norm-complex?

3. Theory

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the study. The aim of the chapter is to give an overview of the theory and to specify how it will be used in the study. First, NE will be briefly presented in 3.1 and Bernstein's theory of the NE norm complexes will be presented under 3.2 Finally, the conceptualization of the theory will be introduced in 3.3.

3.1 Neoliberal environmentalism

Neoliberalism, according to Harvey (2007), is a “theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets and free trade” (Harvey 2007, p.2). In such a system the state plays the role of creator and guardian of the institutional framework in which those practices operate (ibid, p.2). NE, in turn, applies such practices to environmental issues. It merges neoliberal views with environmentalist thinking and advocates for a ‘greening’ of the economy and the capitalist structure as a whole (Dent 2022, p.2). ‘Greening’ stresses the use of market mechanisms, investments in technology and sustainable consumption (Carter 2018, p.242). The Brundtland report, and sustainable development, are written within this framework of NE. Brundtland views economic growth as a positive thing because it allows developing countries to develop and improve their standard of living (ibid, p.216; Bernstein 2002, p.3).

3.2 Norm complexes

This section will primarily be based on Bernstein's book *The Compromise of Liberal Environmentalism* (2001), since that work developed the theory of a liberal environmentalist norm complex. The book analyzes the evolution of international environmental governance following the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment investigates why liberal environmentalism prevailed as a norm-complex as opposed to others.

Norms perform three different functions – constitutive, regulative and deontic – simultaneously, but to varying degrees. The first defines who may act in a certain situation and what their actions mean in that particular context. The second regulates how actors should behave in a particular context. Lastly, norms can empower actors by providing them with justifications for their actions (Bernstein 2001, p.5). The majority of international norms are found in everything from treaties and conventions to less formal agreements and various standards set by international organizations. The basis of this has to do with the level of *institutionalization* of the norm, which concerns the perceived legitimacy of the norm. Bernstein writes that “Legitimacy matters because the question is not whether the norm exists, but the political authority the norm enjoys.” (Bernstein 2001, p.30). The more institutionalized a norm is, the more durable it is and the more likely it is to possess an ability to (re)define state interests (ibid, p.30).

The 1972 Stockholm conference presented a set of norms which evolved into the current norm-complex. However, Bernstein points out that it is not definite that liberal environmentalism was the only path forward, but rather that multiple different futures could have also sprung from these norms. A clear example of this is that command-and-control mechanisms were favored over market principles. The linkage between the environment and economics was far more ambiguous than in protocols from more recent conferences (Bernstein 2001, p.48). When sustainable development had its breakthrough in the 1980s it emerged as a way to further institutionalize such environment and development norms recognized in Stockholm (Bernstein 2002, p.3). The Brundtland report, which further popularized the term, promoted a norm-complex

which merged traditional forms of Keynesian interventions in the economic order with an environmental twist (Bernstein 2001, p.66).

Finally, Bernstein points to social structure as one of the reasons for the success of the norm-complex. Social structure limits and controls the entrance of new ideas because those must stem from rules and practices set by the existing structure. This can be referred to as “contagion of legitimacy” where norms are connected to each other in networks. In such a network change is often resisted because changes in one norm forces changes in another which then necessitate changes in the next. Thus, new ideas about environmental governance have a higher probability of being acceptable if they already fit with the norms that steer related issues (ibid, p.186-188).

3.3 Conceptual framework

The Dent (2022) paper contains a comprehensive conceptualization of the NE norm-complex which encapsulates multiple aspects of the theory. It is therefore appropriate to work cumulatively and use the same conceptualization here, which, like stated in the introduction, is built on four normative elements of NE.

Ideological principles, concepts and theories refer to the ideological base on which NE rests on. This includes ideas such as economic liberty, free trade, marketisation and comparative advantage. Dent writes that a key ideological concept is libertarian justice, which underlines the importance “of individual liberties and ‘freedoms’, upholding of property rights, rational pursuits of self-interest leading to optimal efficiency outcomes, and voluntarism regarding environmental responsibility.” (Dent 2022, p.8). Climate change is often regarded as a government failure, rather than a market failure (ibid, p.8)

The element of *Green growth and sustainable development* regards the “ultimate aims” of NE. Since NE is closely tied to the pursuit of wealth and economic liberty, green growth is a core norm, advocating for the integration of continued capitalist growth and solutions to environmental issues (Dent 2022, p.8-9). This element has strong connections to sustainable development, a term popularized by the

Brundtland report from 1987 and defined as “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Brundtland Commission 1987, p.43). Sustainable development also links environmental and economic problems to those of political and societal nature. Here, they point to the effect population growth has on the environment and the fact that such a growth is often driven by the status of women in society. Furthermore they underline the fact that “the distribution of power and influence within society lies at the heart of most environmental and development challenges.” (Brundtland Commission 1987, p.37). However, Kiel (2007) means that sustainability “has taken a backseat to capitalist development” and that its primary concern is sustaining capitalism itself (Kiel 2007, p.53).

Monetization and privatization of nature focuses on the relationship between environmental resources and the market economy. According to NE, nature should be regarded and converted into economic assets in order to save it. Through this line of reasoning, climate change and environmental issues are consequences of a failure to properly value natural resources. Nature is not seen as a static mass of resources, but is rather viewed in terms of its “service-providing capacities” (Dent 2022, p.9). This element characterizes the anthropocentric framing of the environment embodied by NE, and thus EGS often refer to human-made products and technology instead of ‘natural’ environmental products (ibid, p.9).

The final element, *Market-based instruments*, concerns policies. It was popularized in the 1980s as an alternative approach to ‘command and control’ regulations, and became a means for environmental policies to venture into new areas. Dent describes market-based instruments as a way of exploiting market mechanisms to incentivize climate action behaviors through various levels and forms of state intervention (2022, p.9-10).

Dent operationalizes his elements at the first stage of the text analysis by uploading the documents to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, and running tests to identify and categorize relevant terms under each aspect of NE (2022, p.13). Only terms mentioned more than 10 times in the text corpus remained in the final selection of terms, and are listed below.

- *Ideological principles, concepts and theories*

Liberalization, Comparative advantage, Trade liberalization, Market access, Free trade, Trade openness, Open trade, Market based

- *Green growth and sustainable development*

Sustainable development, Economic growth, SDGs, Green growth

- *Monetization and privatization of nature*

Environmental goods and services (EGS), Environmental services, Resource efficiency, Ecosystem service

- *Market-based instruments*

Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs)/Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Carbon taxes, Emissions trading, Carbon prices, Carbon border adjustments, Carbon markets, (intellectual) Property rights.

This list will be reviewed and discussed further under *4.3 Operationalization*, which will result in the complete list of relevant terms for this study.

4. Method

This chapter will demonstrate the overall research design of the thesis. At first, the overall research design will be presented and motivated. In the 4.2 the material of the study is briefly outlined. Further, in 4.3. the operationalization of the NE norm-complex used in this thesis will be discussed and reviewed. Lastly, a short discussion about the overall quality of this thesis is held.

4.1 Research design

For a study with the aim to investigate how the NE norm-complex can be used to understand Swedish climate change policies, it is appropriate to conduct a case study, which could be defined as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin 2003, p.13). Further, since the study gives attention to subunits within a single case (one text from 2019 and one from 2023) it should be classified as an embedded case study (ibid, p.45). In this case this translates to investigating the NE norm-complex within Swedish climate action plans, which can be motivated as a typical case as it captures the essence of the current political character. The Swedish climate action plans contain, not only the environmental aim of the current government, but also the opinions and reviews of relevant governmental agencies (e.g the Environmental Protection Agency, the Energy Agency, the Forest Agency). The climate action plans can therefore be viewed as a representative for a broader opinion on climate change policies in Sweden. Conclusions drawn from typical cases can be assumed to be informative about the matters or experiences of other average instances or cases (ibid, p.41).

Furthermore, to reach the aim of the study the analysis will be divided into two stages, a shorter quantitative part and a more extensive qualitative part. Though only brief, the qualitative content analysis is of importance to this study because of its ability to analyze large sets of text. By counting words, phrases, values or opinions, the method can reveal similarities and differences between various texts and how they have evolved over time (Beckman 2005, p.42), or how present a certain theme is in the texts (Boréus – Kohl 2018, p.52). The latter is of extra significance for this study.

Initially, the plan for conducting this study was to do a primary analysis of the texts using the auto-coding feature in the software NVivo to identify relevant terms under each element of NE. However, this feature was unavailable when working with Swedish texts. Instead, Dents terms were translated and terms without a [relevant] Swedish counterpart (market access, trade openness, RTAs/FTAs) were removed and other relevant terms added. A deeper discussion about this will be held in the section, *4.3 Operationalization*. In the first stage of the analysis, the selected terms were counted based on appearance and frequency per page. This was done by a word search in the documents and assortment in Google Spreadsheets. It should be noted that variations of the terms (e.g resource efficient, resource efficiency etc.) and compound words (e.g electricity market, finance market etc.) were also counted.

Further, only doing a quantitative analysis on the text would result in blank spots. The method is only able to observe explicit themes in a text and fails to take context into consideration (Boréus – Kohl 2018, p.79-80). This presents itself as particularly significant for this study with the aim to investigate norms, which Bernstein writes are “shared conceptions of appropriate behaviour or action” (Bernstein 2002, p.2). Some of such shared conceptions might well be implicit and therefore not observable with the quantitative method. However, since this study aims to observe how the norm-complex can be used to understand Swedish climate change policies, there is a strong argument to use a large amount of text to get an overarching picture. Still, since norms are a crucial aspect of the study it also forces a qualitative element to reach knowledge about how NE is framed in the texts. Through the qualitative method it is possible to perceive a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena of interest (Alvehus 2023, p.20-21). In the second stage of the analysis in

this study, a deeper reading through the lens of NE was conducted on a selection of relevant parts of the text corpus. These parts were picked based on the first stage analysis, where the frequency of the words were highlighted. The chosen parts were those of certain significance and were deemed to represent what was communicated in the texts.

4.2 Selection of cases

The text corpus contains the only two Swedish climate action plans that exist, one from 2019 and one from 2023, with a total of 432 pages. The following paragraphs will give a brief summary of the different publications.

The first text is from December 17th 2019 and is titled *A Coherent Policy for the Climate – Climate Policy Action Plan*.¹ It is the first climate action plan proposed by the government to the parliament. In the text the Social-Democratic led government proposes increased efforts to integrate climate policies in every relevant administrative sector to be able to reach the long-term emission reduction target. A part of that process should be to review all relevant jurisdictions to make sure climate policies have impact (Regeringskansliet 2019).

Secondly, the text from December 21st 2023 is similar to the previous one but is proposed by the government led by the Moderate party, and is titled *The Government's Climate Action Plan – the Entire Way to Net Zero*.² They write that there are three key aspects for the understanding of their climate policies – a global issue requires global solutions; technology advancement and climate neutral electricity is crucial for a green transition in Sweden and in other countries, and; a green transition can only be successful if it occurs in a growing economy (Regeringskansliet 2023).

¹ Translation from https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/LTS1_Sweden.pdf, the original Swedish title is *En Samlad Politik för Klimatet – Klimatpolitisk Handlingsplan*

² Translation by the author of the thesis. The original Swedish title is *Regeringens klimathandlingsplan – hela vägen till nettonoll*.

4.3 Operationalization

Drawing from the discussion in 3.3, this thesis has used Dent's conceptualization and operationalization as a starting point, but has done some adjustments to fit the case of Swedish climate action plans more appropriately. This section will clarify and motivate this process.

The operationalization used by Dent is formatted to the empirical case of the trade-climate nexus, in the sense that some of the words used as indicators for the NE normative elements were added after an initial analysis of the texts. There is a possibility that the results of this study would be skewed if the same operationalization were to be used, since there exist terms that could act as indicators of elements of NE in the context of Sweden (e.g. "Paris Agreement" as an indicator for green growth and sustainable development) that are not on Dent's final list. This would lead to a risk of a systematic measurement error, where the phenomena of interest in the study would consistently be over- or underestimated (Teorell – Svensson 2007, p.55).

For the sake of accuracy and validity, a formatting of the terms has therefore been done to a certain extent. This formatting was done by skimming through the chosen texts to get an overview of what terms were used to address certain issues and by looking at aspects of the theory that might be of interest for this thesis. In total, seven terms were added: Freedom, Climate goal, Paris Agreement, Climate-friendly goods and services, EU ETS, Carbon dioxide equivalents and Energy taxes. These terms will briefly be motivated as valid and relevant indicators for a NE norm-complex in the paragraphs below.

The term "Climate goal" is a substitute for SDGs, since it was observed that "SDGs" was rarely used to describe Sweden's climate aspirations. Rather, it was the term "Climate goal" (which sometimes still referred to the SDGs) that was adapted. This term did not exclusively refer to the SDGs, but also other climate goals such as the EU Fit for 55 package and Sweden's own national climate goals. However, both Fit for 55 and the national climate goals can be motivated as being created in the same framework as the SDGs since they are not in opposition to the dominant neoliberal

ideology, or require an alternation of the capitalist system but still recognize the equity aspects of environmental issues (Carter 2018, p.222 & 231).

Further, the term “Paris Agreement” was added to the list as another goal closely tied to the ideas of sustainable development. The agreement is said to offer “financial, technical and capacity building support” (UNFCCC 2015), for countries who need help reaching their part of the agreement and puts emphasis on developed countries to contribute to capacity-building actions in developing countries (ibid).

Much like the case with “Climate goals”, the term “Climate-friendly goods and services” was added because it frequented alongside the more direct translation “Environmental goods and services”. The term “Freedom” was added to capture more of the neoliberal ideological principle, which Dent states underlines the importance of “individual liberties and ‘freedoms” (Dent 2022, p.8). The term “Individual” was discarded because it was only used in the context of wanting to attract individuals with relevant competence to the regions of northern Sweden, and would thus not be an accurate indicator for the element of interest.

The term “EU ETS” (EU Emissions Trading System) was added simply to have a more all encompassing framework, since emissions trading was sometimes discussed in terms of just that, and other times when referring to EU ETS (European Commission 2023a; European Commission 2023b). Along the same lines, “Carbon dioxide equivalent” was added as a term since it was also used when discussing emissions trading (European Commission 2023b).

Further, “Energy tax” was added after the initial skim through of the Climate action plans where it became evident that it was discussed in the texts. Much like a carbon tax, an energy tax is a market-based instrument used to create incentives to reduce pollution, which in this case would mean to use less electricity (Energimarknadsinspektionen 2021).

Finally, the term “Circular economy” was also added after the initial skim through where it became apparent that it was frequently referred to as a kind of solution to environmental problems. The concept heavily relies on product life extension by consumers through repairs, and thus an increase in value, but also on innovation and product designs (Niskanen and McLaren 2021, p.4).

4.4 A moment of reflection

Before continuing to the analysis, there is reason for a short critical discussion on the method. First, it should be noted that the material used is in Swedish, whilst this thesis is written in English. There is thus a risk that both explicit and implicit language gets lost in translation. Being mindful of this, the reading of the documents and the entire analysis was thoroughly executed and read through multiple times. The quotes used in the analysis were translated by the author of the thesis, a native Swedish speaker and fluent English speaker.

Secondly, there exists a common critique against case studies for being too limited and for providing too little evidence for scientific generalizations. On this topic, Yin writes that case studies are generalizable “to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (Yin 2003, p.10), and should have the aim to expand on theories (ibid, p.10), which is a strong argument for the design of this thesis. Nonetheless, this thesis uses a limited set of text and therefore even conclusions about the theory should be mindful of being all too generalizing.

Lastly, there is quite extensive criticism of mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, primarily because they are on the opposite side of the debate on scientific philosophy (e.g. O’Donoghue and Farrelly 2022). However, there are valid positive aspects to the mixed methods approach. Watkins and Gioia (2015) write that drawing on the strengths of the two methods often offers a unique way to understand research problems, which is a line of reasoning appropriate for this thesis. Here, the two methods complement each other and provide a more holistic perspective on the NE norm-complex than would have been possible if only one method had been used. Of course, this study could have been conducted in a plethora of other ways and with different material, for example by interviewing politicians and civil servants. Still, because of the scope of this thesis and the previous studies in the field, a text analysis was deemed most suitable.

5. Analysis

This chapter contains the analysis that will formulate the answer to this thesis' research question. Initially, the result of the quantitative content analysis is presented in a simplified chart. A more detailed chart can be found in the appendix on the last page of this thesis. Further, the four sections in this chapter will delve deeper into a qualitative analysis of the elements.

The below chart accounts for the result of the frequency of the operationalized words of each element presented in 4.3. Green growth and sustainable development was referenced the most times and also contained the individual term, "Climate goals", which frequented the most in the text.

Element	References	Average per page
Ideological principles, concepts, theories	547	1.27
Green growth and sustainable development	770	1.78
Monetization and privatization of nature	146	0.34
Market-based instruments	469	1.09

5.1 Ideological principles, concepts and theories

The first of the four elements – Ideological principles, concepts and theories – was referred to 547 times in the texts with a frequency of 1.27 times per page, making it the element with the second highest result. Out of the selected terms "Competitiveness" and "Market" performed by far the strongest, being referenced to

203 and 274 times respectively. The term “Liberalization” was only mentioned once in each text. In the one from 2019 they write that in multiple of the EUs trade treaties “...there are writings about cooperation for the liberalization of environmental goods and services...” (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.183). Similarly, in the text from 2023 they write that “The WTO has initiated work regarding the liberalization of climate-friendly goods and services.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.38). There is an obvious progression in the four years, indicating the passage of time, from liberalization being written about to the process of it being initiated by the WTO.

A majority of the references to the term “Competitiveness” in the 2023 text can be exemplified by the following quote: “The climate issue can only be addressed within an economy characterized by growth, increased competitiveness, resilience, and preparedness.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.10). This aligns strongly with NE and the ideological base on which it rests on. The sentence frames climate change as something that can *only* be solved through capitalist means, in which growth plays a crucial role. A few pages later, the government underlines the fact that a green transition is crucial, not for the benefit of the climate, but to maintain the competitiveness of Swedish businesses (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.13). Moreover, they point to climate change as an opportunity for Swedish businesses to claim new market shares with their fossil free products and technological solutions (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.10). More than just the drive for growth, this presents itself as a ‘greening’ of the economy, where the government pushes for investments in technology and the consumption of sustainable, fossil free, products (Carter 2018, p.242; Dent 2022, p.2).

The text from 2019 writes similarly about competitiveness, often at the cost of environmentally progressive policies. For example they write that the carbon tax needs to be adjusted with respect to the competitiveness of businesses to establish a cost-effective reduction of GHG emissions (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.53). This points to a core aspect of NE – that climate change is caused not by market failure but by government failures (Det 2022, p.8). In the text, it is framed that the blame for climate issues should be put on the government for not taking the competitiveness of the market into enough consideration when deciding on carbon taxes.

Finally, the term “Market” was referenced 274 times in the two documents. Like pointed out earlier, this includes variations of the term and compound words like electricity-market. “Market” is often referred to in terms of solution and innovation, a theme in line with what was observed with “Competitiveness”. In the text from 2023 the government writes that the green transition creates “...new opportunities for export, new markets and incentives for innovation,” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.37). This is worded in a noticeably positive way, framing climate change as something that drives society forwards to new discoveries, and that puts Sweden on the leading edge. Climate change is a means through which Swedish businesses can gain shares on a global market by being progressive with the green transition, and make economic profit (ibid, p.14). Like so, climate change is framed as a component motivating the market and, especially, Swedish businesses and manufactures. Like Dent puts it, this poses as an example of libertarian justice and “the rational pursuit of self-interest” (Dent 2022, p.8).

Similar language is found in the text from 2019 where research, advancement of technology and a market economy are mentioned as crucial aspects of a green transition. The Swedish state takes on the responsibility of contributing with conditions that gives businesses opportunities to bring climate-smart solutions to the market (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.47). This neoliberal take, of the state creating, or reinforcing, a framework in which entrepreneurial freedom and open markets can operate, is reminiscent of Harvey’s very definition of the theory (Harvey 2007, p.2).

To summarize, the element of ideological principles, concepts and theories was strongly showed signs of a NE norm-complex. Climate change was frequently framed as something that needs to be solved though capitalist means, and that allows Sweden to gain shares on the global market.

5.2 Green growth and sustainable development

Green growth and sustainable development was referenced 770 times with a frequency of 1.78 times per page, thus making it the element that performed by far the best. This element also contains the term “Klimatmål” (Climate goal) which was

referenced the most times (377 with a 0.87 frequency) out of all the selected terms and was often described as a motivator for certain decisions. When writing about climate goals, the normative basis of sustainable development shone through. For instance, in the text from 2023 it was clarified that the work with climate issues should contribute to strengthening gender equality, which in turn would contribute to the climate goals. Sweden will “work towards ensuring that gender equality and women's full enjoyment of human rights are considered in the UN climate negotiations.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.28). The linkage between gender equality and the climate issue, underlined in the Brundtland report (1987, p.37), is also made by the Swedish government. Like Brundtland, Sweden sees equality as something necessary for reaching climate goals because equality in itself has positive environmental impacts. Similarly, the government points to the importance of cooperation with developing countries to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement, not only because technology and finances are crucial to combat climate change, but also because developing countries and growing economies need to be able to compete on the global market and reduce poverty (ibid, p.30). Viewing economic growth as overwhelmingly positive because it helps countries to develop and enhance their quality of life is one of the pillars on which sustainable development rests (Bernstein 2002, p.3). This is a norm taken for granted in the texts, which repeat similar sentiments multiple times. For example, in the text from 2019 they write that the EU plays a crucial role in showing the rest of the world that it is possible to merge economic growth with a green transition (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.168), and that Sweden has been involved in international programs with the aim to contribute to sustainable development in developing countries for over twenty years (ibid, p.167). It is an intriguing way for the government to formulate itself, that the EU has to *show* the world that it *is* possible to link growth and transitioning to a more climate friendly society. Somehow, it seems like the EU, and as an extension, Sweden, is pushing an agenda of sustainable development, and therefore the continued dominance of NE. Their way of succeeding in climate issues is by doing their share of the Paris Agreement, but also by promoting the unification of economic growth and climate-friendliness. Further, this hints at how institutionalized the norm of

sustainable development is in Sweden. Like Bernstein writes, institutionalized norms enjoy political authority and have an ability to define state interests (2001, p.30), just like the definition of what marks success for Sweden stems from their progress within sustainable development.

What permeates a majority of what has been analyzed above is the sanctimony of growth, which was referenced 111 times in the text corpus with a frequency of 0.26 times per page. Though it is only a third of the amount of times “Climate goals” was referenced, it is framed as the only way to reach said goals and is best exemplified by a quote from the 2023 text:

“Without broad, long-term support, it is impossible to implement climate policy. It presupposes that individuals and businesses can act, innovate, consume, invest, finance, and produce in a more climate-smart manner and that prosperity increases. Fundamentally, these are the same factors that drive growth. The climate transition requires growth, but it also drives growth.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.10)

Here, the long-term support for policies is instantly linked to the concept of growth and the government constructs a frame in which no policies that do not involve growth will ever be successful. Growth is the basis which will legitimize their climate policies (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.13). This speaks to the denotative function of the norm as it provides the government with justification for their actions (Bernstein 2001, p.5), i.e the government will continue to push for continued growth because the norm of sustainable development justifies such policies. They also write that poverty needs to be fought for before developing countries can prioritize work with the climate (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.12). Like Kiel puts it, this is a primary example of sustainability taking a backseat to capitalist growth (2007, p.53). The government frames the issue like there needs to be more growth before it is even possible to make environmental progress. It highlights the absolute need for continued growth that seems to characterize the Swedish climate action plans. It is further evident when

discussing the production of batteries as not only being of importance to reach the climate goals, but also because it promotes the competitiveness of industries and green growth (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.100), once again explicitly linking the symbiosis between environmental protection and growth promoted by Brundtland (Bernstein 2001, p.74).

In the text from 2019 a similar sentiment is repeated multiple times. On page 6, 46, 53 and 54 an almost identical sentence is echoed: “The government also believes that politics based on long-term rules of the game is needed to contribute to reducing emissions while maintaining strong economic growth and competitiveness.” (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.54). Here the repetition of the phrase ‘rules of the game’ is interesting as it indicates something less stagnant than for example laws. Instead, it points towards something like norms, a set of ‘rules’ that determines who may act in a certain situation and what their actions mean in that particular context (regulative), and that provides a justification of such actions (deontic) (Bernstein 2001, p.5). The ‘rules of the game’ can thus also be viewed as a norm-complex which is said to be important to reduce emissions and maintain growth. Though the end goal is environmental concerns and societal development, it should be noted that the sentence underlines the concept of norm-complexes themselves as necessary to reach such goals. This, the need to find and establish a common ground, may well speak to how institutionalized norm-complexes are in Swedish politics.

To conclude, the element of green growth and sustainable development was the element that performed by far the best – both as a whole and by containing the term that frequented the most. It was showed how institutionalized the norm of continued growth is in Swedish climate action plans, and how the norm was able to define what “success” in climate issues meant for the government.

5.3 Monetization and privatization of nature

The third element, Monetization and privatization of nature, was the element with the fewest references (146). Out of the selected terms, “Circular economy” was

referenced the most with a total of 101 times and appeared in sentences in line with NE thinking. For example, the text from 2023 writes that Sweden contributes to the global work on climate change by “promoting a swift transition to circular and bio-based value chains, where waste and residues, such as those from the forestry industry, can be refined into essential inputs for refineries and the petrochemical industry” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.91). The sentence embodies the idea of this element – that the environment must be converted into economic assets in order to save it. Nature, in this case in the form of trees, needs to be properly valued to avoid environmental issues and climate change (Dent 2022, p.9). The government paints a picture where environmental progress can be made by creating a market for reusing trees or monetizing residual products from the forestry industry.

Like several other terms, it was not unusual to see this term be discussed in the context of growth. For example they write that “For many companies, the potential of the circular economy lies in increased competitiveness through secured access to raw materials, improved resource efficiency, and risk mitigation” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.96). Though a circular economy is a step away from the traditional, linear economy, it is still motivated by neoliberal ideas such as innovation and economic value (Niskanen and McLaren 2021, p.2). The circular economy is a concept that fits well with the NE norm-complex and captures the notion that the entrance of new ideas are regulated by existing societal rules and practices (Bernstein 2001, p.188). The concept, though it points to awareness of the environmental concerns caused by the traditional capitalist system, is still engraved with ideas of growth and market oriented behavior. Another example of this is the circular use of minerals and Swedish mines, which are introduced as a possibility for an increased level of self-sufficiency of metals and minerals within the EU. Such metals are often key resources in technologies crucial for a green transition and a Swedish contribution can thus lead to enhanced security and a reduced dependency on a third party (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.15). Here, Swedish minerals are framed as a means through which the EU as a whole can achieve heightened security as well as a green transition. Once again nature is turned into an economic asset in order to save it and is viewed in terms of its ability to perform a service for the EU (Dent 2022, p.9).

The 2019 text speaks similarly about the transition to a circular economy, writing that it “requires changes throughout value chains where innovative production methods, recycling techniques and circular business models are developed” (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.47). The sentence is overflowing with language that still points towards an economic system still built and motivated by growth, which indicates the level of institutionalization of the NE norm-complex. Growth contains such political authority that it still permeates a concept which is trying to move away from a traditional capitalist model (Bernstein 2001, p.30).

The second most referred to term of this element was “Resource efficiency” at 31 times and was also often discussed in terms of a solution to environmental problems. The 2023 text points to the challenge of reducing GHG emissions in a cost-effective and competitive neutral way in agriculture. Environmental policies *must not* hinder the competitiveness of the sector, but “resource efficiency can result in both lower greenhouse gas emissions and increased profitability in agriculture.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.189). Like previous terms, neoliberal norms seem integrated in the sentence and show a strong link between the environment and economics (Bernstein 2001, p.48). This is also the case in the 2019 text where increased resource efficiency through new business models is mentioned as of importance for sustainable circular waste management (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.95). Such language also indicates the will for a greening of the economy, where investments in technology and sustainable consumption are framed as necessary (Carter 2018, p.242).

Though monetization and privatization of nature was the element that performed the worst in the quantitative stage of the study, it is still evident that it has some normative influence over the Swedish climate action plans. Nature was more often than not viewed through an anthropocentric lens in terms of its service-providing capacities. There were signs pointing towards awareness of the environmental implications of the traditional capitalist system, however this was still permeated by ideas of growth.

5.4 Market-based instruments

Finally, the element of market-based instruments was referenced 563 times with a frequency of 1.3 times per page. The term repeated the most in this element was “EU ETS” which appeared 143 times. When referred to, this term often frequented in positive contexts and as part of a solution to environmental issues. In the 2023 text they write that “The government assesses that the EU ETS will continue to be an important instrument for significantly reducing emissions between 2030 and 2040, and intends to work towards maintaining ambition in the legislation.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.47). The quote speaks clearly of Sweden’s attitude towards the trading scheme and the environmental incentives it can lead to. Further, there is endorsing language for EU ETS 2, a new emission trading system for heating of buildings and road transport, which targets sectors where emission reductions so far have been insufficient. It is underlined that Sweden should contribute to, and support this EU development (ibid, p.65). The EU ETS 2 will be introduced in 2027 or 2028 and thus a majority of GHG emissions in Sweden will be covered by emission trading systems, and “The government views this positively and assesses that pricing of emissions should primarily occur at the European level to increase cost-effectiveness in governance.”. (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.66). Once again, the regulative and deontic functions of the NE norm-complex shine through, regulating Sweden’s positive approach towards emissions trading and carbon pricing and providing them with a justification for it – cost-effectiveness. It also shows how institutionalized the norm is as it possesses an ability to define a state interest for Sweden to participate to a high degree in such a system (Bernstein 2001, p.5 & 30).

Furthermore, the 2019 text contains multiple phrases with the aspiration to tighten the EU ETS legislative framework, for example “The government has pushed for a tighter regulatory framework for the EU ETS, which combined with the Industrial Leap and the carbon tax is assessed to contribute to long term emission reductions.” (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.34). On multiple occasions, it is made clear that the Swedish government ought to work proactively at the EU level to achieve such a reconstruction of the framework and should take on a leading role in such a

process (ibid, p.29, 53, 55, 60). Not once is the EU ETS mentioned in a negative context, and when it is criticized it is because it is not deemed ambitious enough by the government. They state that: “The EU ETS is a well-functioning policy instrument, and Sweden should work to ensure that the EU’s emission trading system continues to effectively price carbon dioxide emissions from the industry.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.131).

The language concerning the term “Emissions trading” is just as affirming as the framing of EU ETS. For instance, a Swedish climate strategy is paraphrased in which it was proposed that Sweden should advocate for the EU to use overarching systems, such as emissions trading, as the main tools to achieve the agreed emission targets. The government also clarifies that Sweden should contribute to the new emissions trading system (i.e EU ETS 2) from the start (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.46 & 69). It is clear that MBIs, like the EU ETS, are clearly favored over command and control regulations and are also endorsed by their cost-effectiveness. Like Dent writes, it is clear that the EU ETS allows environmental policies to venture into new areas (Dent 2022, p.10). With the right ambition, emissions trading is framed as a superior measure to reach the Paris agreement and the government often underlines Sweden’s willingness to be at the forefront of such ambition (e.g Regeringskansliet 2019, p.29).

One of the terms mentioned the fewest times was “Property rights” which occurred 3 times in total and therefore only had a frequency of 0.007 times per page. However, looking closer at the context in which the term appears it is evident that it stems from neoliberal views. In the 2019 text they write that “The government has appointed an inquiry to explore the possibilities and propose measures for strengthening ownership rights to forests,” and “The purpose of the inquiry is to safeguard and strengthen private ownership of forests by enhancing legal certainty for landowners and companies” (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.97). The government, as creator and guardian of an institutional framework, endorses and protects the neoliberal idea that a flourishing society should lean on entrepreneurial freedoms, individual liberty and private property rights (Harvey 2007, p.2). In the 2023 text “Property rights” are only mentioned one, and like in the 2019 text it is in the context

of forests: “In accordance with the proposal for strengthened ownership rights, flexible protection methods, and increased incentives for nature conservation in the forest based on voluntary principles...” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.192). More than just endorsing property rights, the sentence also speaks of voluntarism regarding environmental responsibility which falls in line with the first element of this study concerning the ideological principles of NE (Dent 2022, p.8).

Finally, “Energy taxes” and “Carbon taxes” were referenced 35 and 45 times respectively. Embodying the role as the ‘pioneer’ MBI, the taxes were frequently referred to in terms of objectives with the obvious ability to incentivise market behavior: “However, high fuel taxes reduce the overall use of fuel.” (Regeringskansliet 2023, p.66). Though carbon taxes sometimes are criticized as less efficient than for example emissions trading (e.g. *ibid*, p.65), they are also mentioned in the context of being beneficial to the green transition (e.g. *ibid*, p.64). Over all, carbon taxes are mentioned in less skeptical terms in the 2019 text compared to the 2023 one. For instance they write that “The carbon tax contributes to a cost-effective reduction of emissions and should continue to form the basis for the management of carbon dioxide emissions in the non-trading sector.” (Regeringskansliet 2019, p.53).

To summarize, the texts frame MBIs as relevant and preferable when it comes to tackling climate change. Primarily, emission trading is spoken of as an important instrument which will incentivize carbon reductions.

6. Discussion

In this chapter the results of the analysis' four sections will be summarized and compared to each other. Further, the implications of the results are discussed in the context and in comparison to existing literature. Ultimately this chapter will draw conclusions which answer the research question.

This thesis has conducted a two stage text analysis of two Swedish climate action plans, one from 2019 and the other from 2023, to explore how a NE norm-complex can be used to understand such domestic policies. While the two texts should be viewed as a fruitful sample of the Swedish government's stance on climate change policies, this thesis has limited ability to generalize the results to other countries or even Sweden as a whole. Future research in this area could therefore consist of publications by [Swedish] government agencies to produce a more extensive picture of how much can be explained by a NE norm-complex. It could also be of interest to conduct similar studies of text published by governments in other Nordic countries for a comparative perspective on the outcome of the analysis.

In the first stage of the analysis a quantitative content analysis was conducted and it became evident that the four elements had varied salience in the texts. The element Green growth and sustainable development was the most salient and was referenced 770 times with a frequency of 1.78 times per page. This element also contained the term "Climate goals" which was the individual term most frequently referred to. Further, this first stage analysis showed that the element of Monetization and privatization of nature deviated from the others and was only referred to 146 times with a frequency of 0.34 times per page. It also became clear that there were not any substantial differences between the two texts in terms of how frequent certain elements or terms were. The only difference that stands out is the salience of the

element Green growth and sustainable development which had a 1.4 frequency in the 2023 text and a 2.26 frequency in the text from 2019, which is a 61 percent increase.

Before all else, it should be stated that the NE norm-complex could be observed in all four normative elements of the study, even though some had a higher result in the quantitative stage of the analysis than others. It was clear that the Swedish government's views on economic growth and the climate clearly lined up with those of a devout neoliberal environmentalist. Throughout the texts, growth and competitiveness were referred to in an uncritical manner and framed as the only legitimate path towards climate protection. This is reminiscent of the Munsch and De Ville study (2019) which investigated the EU negotiations on an EGA in 2016 and showed that negotiations have increasingly evolved in a 'trade first' direction and put strong emphasis on free markets.

When diving deeper into the texts it quickly became clear that a majority of the terms were used and framed in an overbearingly positive way. At times climate change was framed as a catalyst for the entrance of Swedish inventions and technology on the international market, and therefore the triumph of Swedish companies (e.g. Regeringskansliet 2023, p. 10 & 180). Further, the 2023 text early on constructed, or rather took part of a framework where competitiveness and market-oriented solutions were seen as the only legitimate approach to tackling climate change (ibid, p.10). As stated above, this clearly speaks to the institutionalization of the neoliberal norm. It enjoys such political authority that it is instantly established as the only correct way forward and is not contested once (Bernstein 2001, p.30). This becomes particularly interesting when considering the fact that certain policies or products were rarely mentioned as being good for the environment simply because of that fact. Instead there was always a clause about the policy or product also promoting growth and competitiveness, once again hinting at the fact that climate change is only seen as a component of the market, which lines up with the findings of Sarasini (2009). The only time there was some skepticism against growth capitalism was when discussing the concept of circular economy. There, the consequences of consumerism were brought up and clearly written about with negative connotations. However, even the concept of circular economy was still

infested with promises of continued growth and a thriving market. If anything, this underlines the absolute power of the neoliberal norm and its ability to continue to define concepts and interests of states. It is not possible to invent brand new economic systems because the ideas must fit into the existing norm-complex. New systems brought to light have been allowed to do so because they are already tied to the network of norms that control the entrance of new ideas. The concept of a circular economy is accepted and seen as legitimate because it already fits with the norms that steer environmental governance (Bernstein 2001, p.188).

Furthermore, when looking closer at the term “Climate goals” it became evident that Sweden’s “urge to get ahead” was indisputable in the climate action plans. The term was referred to in almost every chapter and subsection of the texts which indicates a certain degree of priority for the Swedish government. As Zannakis (2013) discussed this may very well point to the country’s long tradition of being committed to the environmental crisis. Like stated earlier, the government also underlined the importance of funding development programs for poorer countries and helping them onto the global market. Such ideas, which fall in line with the NE norms, also conform with Zannakis findings and what he describes as Sweden’s willingness to show that a developed country can take climate responsibility.

The study with the most prominent interest to this thesis is the text analysis conducted by Dent (2022). Even though there were some alterations to his analytical framework for this thesis, putting the two results in comparison to each other is of interest. To begin with, the outcome of Dent’s quantitative analysis resulted in lower frequency per element over all than this analysis. The element that was most often referred to in his study was market-based element with a frequency of 1.27 per page, and was simultaneously the only element which scored lower than in this thesis. Similarly to Dent’s study, the element of Monetization and privatization of nature had the lowest outcome. However, just like he writes, NE appeared to have a rather strong normative influence “albeit quite narrowly focused” (Dent 2022, p.18), and nature was often framed through an anthropocentric lens where its service-providing capacities were highlighted. Like stated earlier, growth and competitiveness were frequently discussed in an uncritical manner in the climate action plans, findings

which line up with those in Dent's analysis. Though the two studies are somewhat different, the overall findings correspond with each other and can to a certain degree show the normative influence of the NE norm-complex on various regulatory levels.

To conclude, it is clear that the NE norm-complex carries a significant level of explanatory power over the Swedish climate action plans. It provides a frame through which reasons behind the need for growth, the aim towards climate goals and the ever repeating sanctimony of competitiveness are given. The norm-complex highlights how difficult it is for brand new ideas to enter the system, and offers a clear explanation as to why the 'green' concept of a circular economy still circles around growth. Because of the scope of the thesis it is difficult to generalize these results to a high degree, but it still informs and expands on the theory of a NE norm-complex in the sense that it *can* be used to understand domestic policies as well as international.

List of references

- Alvehus, J. (2023). *Skriva uppsats med kvalitativ metod*. 3rd ed. Stockholm: Liber AB.
- Beckman, L. (2005). *Grundbok i idéanalys: Det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*. Stockholm: Santérus förlag.
- Bernstein, S. (2001). *The compromise of liberal environmentalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bernstein, S. (2002). Liberal Environmentalism and Global Environmental Governance. *Global Environmental Politics*, 2(3), pp.1–16.
- Boréus, K. and Kohl, S. (2018). Innehållsanalys. In: K. Boréus and G. Bergström, eds., *Textens mening och makt*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp.49–92.
- Brundtland Commission (1987). *Our Common Future*. Suffolk: Oxford University Press.
- Carter, N. (2018). *The Politics of the Environment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dent, C.M. (2022). Neoliberal Environmentalism, Climate Interventionism and the Trade-Climate Nexus. *Sustainability*, 14(23), p.15804.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su142315804>.
- Energimarknadsinspektionen (2021). *Energiskatt*. [online] ei.se. Available at: <https://ei.se/konsument/el/elmarknaden/energiskatt> [Accessed 8 May 2024].
- Energimyndigheten (2023). *Greenhouse gas reduction mandate*. [online] www.energimyndigheten.se. Available at: <https://www.energimyndigheten.se/en/sustainability/sustainable-fuels/greenhouse-gas-reduction-mandate/> [Accessed 8 May 2024].
- European Commission (2023a). *EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS)*. [online] European Commission. Available at: https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en [Accessed 7 May 2024].
- European Commission (2023b). *What is the EU ETS*. [online] climate.ec.europa.eu. Available at:

https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets/what-eu-ets_en [Accessed 7 May 2024].

Fayaz-Farkhad, B., Jung, H., Calabrese, C. and Albarracin, D. (2023). State policies increase vaccination by shaping social norms. *Scientific Reports*, [online] 13(1), p.21227. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-48604-5>.

Harvey, D. (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kiel, R. (2007). Sustaining Modernity, Modernizing Nature: The Environmental Crisis and the Survival of Capitalism. In: R. Krueger and D. Gibbs, eds., *The sustainable development paradox: Urban political economy in the United States and Europe*. Guilford Press, pp.41–65.

Musch, M. and De Ville, F. (2019). Paradigms in the trade–climate nexus: ‘liberal environmentalism’, the Environmental Goods Agreement and the role of the EU. *Europe and the World: A law review*, 3(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ewlj.2019.11>.

Nash, S.L. and Steurer, R. (2021). Climate Change Acts in Scotland, Austria, Denmark and Sweden: the role of discourse and deliberation. *Climate Policy*, 21(9), pp.1–12. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2021.1962235>.

Niskanen, J. and McLaren, D. (2021). The Political Economy of Circular Economies: Lessons from Future Repair Scenario Deliberations in Sweden. *Circular Economy and Sustainability*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s43615-021-00128-8>.

O’Donoghue, T. and Farrelly, T. (2022). Mixed methods or mixed up: a critical exposition on interpretive research undertaken within mixed methods’ studies. *Irish Educational Studies*, pp.1–16. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2022.2148265>.

Penić, S., Mostovoy, N. and Halperin, E. (2024). Beyond personal emotions: How emotion norms shape policy support in the context of violent conflict: Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*. [online] doi:<https://doi.org/10.1037/pac0000741.supp>.

Regeringskansliet (2019). *En samlad politik för klimatet – klimatpolitisk handlingsplan*. [online] Regeringskansliet. Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2019/12/prop.-20192065> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024].

- Regeringskansliet (2023). *Regeringens klimathandlingsplan – hela vägen till nettonoll*. [online] Regeringskansliet. Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/skrivelse/2023/12/skr.-20232459> [Accessed 22 Apr. 2024].
- Reinhardt, A. and Eitze, S. (2023). Breaking the endometriosis silence: a social norm approach to reducing menstrual stigma and policy resistance among young adults. *Psychology & Health*, pp.1–23. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2023.2277838>.
- Sarasini, S. (2009). Constituting leadership via policy: Sweden as a pioneer of climate change mitigation. *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, 14(7), pp.635–653. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11027-009-9188-3>.
- Teorell, J. and Svensson, T. (2007). *Att fråga och att svara. Samhällsvetenskaplig metod*. Malmö: Liber.
- UNFCCC (2015). *The Paris Agreement*. [online] United Nations Climate Change. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement> [Accessed 7 May 2024].
- Watkins, D. and Gioia, D. (2015). *Mixed methods research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Yin, R.K. (2003). *Case study research: design and methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Zannakis, M. (2013). The blending of discourses in Sweden’s ‘urge to go ahead’ in climate politics. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics*, 15(2), pp.217–236. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10784-013-9235-0>.
- Zelli, F., Gupta, A. and van Asselt, H. (2013). Institutional Interactions at the Crossroads of Trade and Environment: The Dominance of Liberal Environmentalism? *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 19(1), pp.105–118. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-01901009>.

Appendix

Detailed chart of the results of the quantitative content analysis

English	Swedish			Climate action 2023	Climate action 2023	Climate action 2019	Climate action 2019
		Refs. tot	Freq. tot	Refs	Freq (p/pg)	Refs	Freq (p/pg)
Ideological principles, concepts, theories		432s		239/245s		193/197s	
Liberalization	Liberalisering	2	0.004	1	0.004	1	0.005
Competitiveness	Konkurrens	51	0.12	32	0.13	19	0.1
Comparative advantage	Konkurrenskraft	203	0.47	126	0.53	77	0.4
Freedom	Frihet	2	0.004	2	0.008	0	0
Free trade	Frihandel	15	0.03	8	0.03	7	0.04
Market based	Marknad	274	0.63	154	0.64	120	0.62
TOTAL		547	1.27	323	1.35	224	1.16
Green growth and sustainable development							
Sustainable development	Hållbar utveckling	30	0.07	6	0.03	24	0.12
Economic growth	Tillväxt	111	0.26	60	0.25	51	0.26
Climate goals	Klimatmål	377	0.87	172	0.72	205	1.06
Green growth	Hållbar tillväxt	11	0.03	8	0.03	3	0.02
The Paris Agreement	Parisavtal	241	0.56	88	0.37	153	0.79
TOTAL		770	1.78	334	1.4	436	2.26
Monetization and privatization of nature							
Climate-friendly goods and services	Klimatvänliga varor och tjänster	8	0.02	5	0.02	3	0.02
Environmental goods and services	Miljövaror och tjänster	1	0.002	0	0	1	0.005
Resource efficiency	Resurseffektivitet	31	0.07	19	0.08	12	0.06
Ecosystem service	Ekosystemtjänster	5	0.01	1	0.004	4	0.02
Circular economy	Cirkulär ekonomi	101	0.23	59	0.25	42	0.22
TOTAL		146	0.34	84	0.35	62	0.32
Market-based instruments							
Carbon taxes	Koldioxidskatt	45	0.1	11	0.05	34	0.18
EU ETS	EU ETS	143	0.33	79	0.33	64	0.33
Emissions trading	Utsläppshandel	69	0.16	46	0.19	23	0.12
Carbon dioxide equivalents	Koldioxidekivalenter	78	0.18	24	0.1	54	0.28
Carbon prices	Prissätt.	87	0.2	72	0.3	15	0.08
Carbon border adjustmentns	Gränsjusteringsmekanismen	10	0.02	8	0.03	2	0.01
Property rights	Äganderätt	3	0.007	1	0.004	2	0.01
Energy taxes	Energiskatt	35	0.08	15	0.06	20	0.1
TOTAL		469	1.09	255	1.07	214	1.11