



Betraying the Environment in a Changing International Order

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Climate Policy in Sweden

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Abstract

Long recognized as a global climate leader, Sweden has in recent years experienced significant regression across multiple areas of climate policy. Since taking office in 2022, the Swedish government has enacted policies that stand in stark contrast to its electoral pledges, employing strategies that raise questions about the underlying motives and objectives of its climate agenda. This study examines the ideological and discursive patterns embedded within the Swedish Government's Climate Policy Action Plan (CPAP). In doing so, it demonstrates how dominant frameworks constrain possibilities for ecological sustainability and climate transformation.

Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study conducts a comprehensive analysis of how climate policy is constructed linguistically, reproduced through political and institutional practices, and situated within broader ideological and socio-economic structures. Drawing on capitalist realism and political realism, informed by a neo-Marxist ideology critique, particular attention is given to how discourses surrounding economic growth, national sovereignty, securitization, and technological managerialism shape the boundaries of legitimate climate action while marginalizing post-growth and structurally transformative alternatives.

The findings reveal that Sweden's climate discourse reproduces capitalist and growth-oriented logics while systematically excluding alternative perspectives. Ultimately, the CPAP functions not as a framework for ecological transformation, but as a mechanism for maintaining market competitiveness and state stability, thereby exposing the profound ideological limitations inherent in Sweden's green transition.

Keywords: climate policy, economic growth, environmental governance, Sweden, ideology, critical theory, critical discourse analysis, green competitiveness

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents	3
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Research Question	7
1.2 Scope and Delimitations	9
2. Background	9
3. Literature Review	13
3.1 Environmental Governance, Security, and Climate Change.....	13
3.2 Populism in Climate Change Politics	16
3.3 Structural barriers to sustainability	18
3.4 Contextualizing the Swedish Climate Paradigm	21
4. Theoretical Framework.....	23
4.1 Ideology	23
4.2 Capitalist Realism.....	25
4.3 Political Realism.....	28
5. Research Design	31
5.1 Empirical Material	33
5.2 Methodology.....	34
5.3 Method.....	35
5.3.1 Level one (textual level)	36
5.3.2 Level two (discourse practice).....	38
5.3.3 Level three (social practice).....	40
5.4 Positionality and Reflexivity	42
6. Analysis	43
6.1 Textual Analysis.....	43

6.1.1	Transitivity Patterns (who is doing what?)	43
6.1.2	Modality (how committed are they?)	46
6.1.3	Nominalization (turning action into things)	48
6.2	Discursive Practices	49
6.2.1	Cynical Reason / Enlightened False Consciousness.....	49
6.2.2	Capitalist Realism	53
6.2.3	Political Realism	58
6.3	Social Practices	63
7.	Discussion	68
7.1	Conclusion	69
7.2	Relation to Previous Research and Theoretical Contribution.....	72
7.3	Limitations & Future Research.....	73
8.	References	74
8.1	Empirical References	74
8.2	Reference List	74
8.3	Word Frequency Figure Translation	91

1. Introduction

“Man’s attitude toward nature is today critically important simply because we have now acquired a fateful power to alter and destroy nature. But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself. We are challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity, not of nature, but ourselves.” – Rachel Carson, 1962 (Krause, 2024, p.13).

This observation remains as relevant today as it was over sixty years ago. Carson describes how human extractive activities, driven by the relentless pursuit of capital accumulation, have evolved into a systemic threat to the ecological foundations upon which human life depends (Krause, 2024). Ironically, the very institutional mechanisms designed to maximize national wealth and generate well-being have become major drivers of global instability. Anthropocentric dominance now poses a threat to the global economic order itself, potentially eroding the structural foundations of the modern state (Swiss Re, 2021).

While the ecological emergency necessitates a global response grounded in solidarity, contemporary climate governance is structurally paralyzed. This paralysis stems from the direct intersection of an anarchic international system and the imperatives of capitalist accumulation (Foster, 2015). In this thesis, I argue that the interaction of these dual logics severely circumscribes the possibilities for meaningful ecological transformation. Specifically, the capitalist world economy generates an inherent demand for continuous growth and expansion, placing nation-states in a condition of permanent insecurity, competition, and the pursuit of relative power.

What is often framed as “green policy” is frequently a disguised extension of power politics, where governmental discourse is shaped by the primacy of the national interest. This dynamic reflects the way environmental governance is filtered through a state survival logics rather than ecological necessities. Drawing on Hans

Morgenthau's (1948) assertion that international politics constitutes a constant struggle for power and interest, this study recognizes that economic growth is not merely a policy preference, but a perceived prerequisite for sovereign survival. Ecological considerations are therefore systematically subordinated to the state's overarching priority of national stability.

This survivalist logic is sustained through the policy process not merely as a set of technical decisions, but as an ideological project. Within this framework, "capitalist realism" (Fisher, 2009) functions as a dominant discourse that establishes the boundaries of what is considered a legitimate or "responsible" climate policy. By integrating meaning in the service of power, the state utilizes policy texts to normalize expansion over ecological limits. To understand the trajectory of contemporary Swedish climate policy, this thesis employs a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interrogate the Swedish Government's Climate Policy Action Plan (CPAP¹) (Skr. 2023/24:59, 2023). By deconstructing the political discourse, the research uncovers how the Swedish state discursively constructs and justifies its identity as a "climate leader" while simultaneously reproducing the structural imperatives of economic expansion.

This thesis contributes to the field of environmental politics by synthesizing political realism with a neo-Marxist ideology critique to examine how climate governance is discursively constructed and maintained within the CPAP. While existing bodies such as the Climate Policy Council and the public press actively monitor whether Sweden lives up to its climate commitments, a significant gap remains in the academic literature. Specifically, little to no research applies a critical lens to the current Swedish government's action plan to expose how its language

¹ There is no official, full-text English translation of the complete CPAP, however the Swedish Climate Policy Council publishes an extensive annual review of the government's climate action plan in English. See for example: <https://www.klimatpolitiskaradet.se/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/reportoftheswedishclimatepolicycouncil2024.pdf> or the European Parliamentary Research Service briefing on the Sweden's climate action strategy: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/767174/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)767174_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/767174/EPRS_BRI(2024)767174_EN.pdf)

naturalizes existing structures and masks systemic contradictions. By addressing this gap, this study challenges narratives of Swedish exceptionalism, demonstrating how the CPAP employs a form of “lesser-evil pragmatism” that ultimately sustains the capitalist status quo.

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. Following this introduction, I outline the research questions and the overarching research aim. Chapter two establishes the empirical and global context of environmental governance and Sweden’s role. Chapter three outlines previous literature in the fields of climate governance and climate discourse. Chapter four works to define the theoretical framework and concepts utilized in the coding scheme. In chapter five, I situate the study methodologically and present the specific method used to analyze the empirical material. Chapter six is divided into three steps to analyze the CPAP, while chapter seven, presents the final discussion and empirical findings. Finally, chapter eight contains the reference list, and a translation of figure one.

1.1 Research Question

The primary objective of this thesis is to critically unmask the hidden ideological assumptions, structural boundaries, and power dynamics embedded within Sweden’s CPAP. Rather than treating the policy document as a neutral, objective tool for environmental management, this study approaches it as a discursive artifact. The aim is to examine how language is deployed to construct what is considered “legitimate, feasible, and desirable” (Fairclough, 1995) in climate policy.

To achieve this, the primary analytical aim of this thesis is to progress from an interrogation of policy discourse to a macro-analysis of contemporary climate governance as a site of ideological reproduction. By conducting CDA, this study maps how the Swedish state structures its “order of discourse” to manage and defuse systemic contradictions. The macro perspective is vital for exposing how “cynical reason” (Žižek, 2008) works in contemporary environmental governance.

It reveals a distinct gap between belief and practice: even as scientific institutions explicitly warn that Sweden is failing to meet its commitments state policy mechanisms remain fundamentally unchanged. Ultimately, this thesis aims to demonstrate how ideology operates not through a lack of awareness, but through concrete, repetitive practices. These practices are sustained by ideological fantasy structures that project an illusion of environmental leadership and power. By capturing the political imagination, these fantasies mask systemic failures, structurally ensuring that transformative action is blocked and the capitalist status quo is preserved.

Accordingly, the thesis addresses the following research questions:

Main Research Question

How do ideological assumptions embedded within the Swedish government's Climate Policy Action Plan (CPAP) shape its policy strategies, and in what ways do these assumptions produce the plan's structural limitations?

Sub-Questions

1. How are the relationships between national sovereignty, climate responsibility, and global cooperation discursively constructed in the CPAP?
2. How is economic growth constructed and legitimized within the CPAP, and in what ways does this framework marginalize or exclude post-growth or degrowth perspectives?
3. How are climate and energy strategies articulated through security and defense-related discourses, and how does this security rationality shape the state's climate policy?

1.2 Scope and Delimitations

This study treats the CPAP as a coherent governmental text produced by a single collective actor, referred to as “the government.” This is an analytical delimitation rather than an empirical claim about internal political unity. While the document is the result of cooperation between multiple political parties, the analysis does not focus on inter-party negotiations or strategic differences, but instead examines how climate policy is discursively constructed as a unified governmental position. Furthermore, the document is approached as constructing Sweden’s international role in climate governance during the period of office, particularly through representations of responsibility, ambition, and leadership within global climate action. In this sense, the analysis also considers how Sweden is discursively positioned as an actor participating in broader global climate governance structures, which can be understood in relation to prevailing neoliberal logics.

Furthermore, this is not a policy evaluation, the study does not attempt to assess the practical effectiveness, implementation metrics, or technical feasibility of the strategies outlined in the CPAP. It does not offer a quantitative performance audit, nor does it evaluate whether Sweden will successfully achieve its net-zero emission targets by the stated deadlines. Neither does it investigate the external actors, political negotiations, or lobbying efforts that shaped the document's creation. The analytical focus remains strictly dedicated to the final textual output itself, interrogating how this specific policy discourse actively reproduces systemic boundaries that filter climate governance through a state-centric, market-oriented logic.

2. Background

In the twenty-first century, climate change and biodiversity loss no longer distinct environmental anomalies. Instead, they represent a profoundly coupled systemic crisis that threatens the stability of the biosphere (Krause, 2024). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underscores that historical

greenhouse gas emissions remain deeply unequal. Therefore, resolving this crisis demands a direct structural focus on socio-economic equity and a redistribution of adaptive resources. Effectively mitigating the biosphere's vulnerability necessitates enhanced international cooperation to protect marginalized regions from bearing a disproportionate burden of the crisis (Calvin et al., 2023). Consequently, analyzing how wealthy, industrialized nations conceptualize their individual obligations within this collective global effort becomes critical.

Environmental governance operates through a complex web of institutional arrangements. Broadly defined, environmental governance encompasses the regulatory processes, institutional mechanisms, and political structures used to manage human impacts on the natural world (Agrawal et al., 2022). These include the Paris Agreement, European Union directives such as the EU's Green Deal, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Within this framework, environmental policy relies heavily on the widely cited UN definition of sustainability, which aims to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). The UN further states that "sustainable development requires an integrated approach that takes into consideration environmental concerns along with economic development" (United Nations, n.d.).

However, despite being promoted as universal blueprints for collective action, these frameworks have been widely criticized for institutionalizing and legitimizing neoliberal logics (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017; Okereke, 2006; Weber, 2017). They have contributed to important normative shifts in global governance structures but remain constrained by the limits of the prevailing socio-economic system. International treaties often include egalitarian concepts of justice, yet their core policies continue to rely on market-based neoliberal approaches (Okereke, 2006). In practice, these mechanisms frequently preserve the status quo, compelling nations in the Global South to shape their environmental strategies around international market demands rather than local ecological needs.

This perspective reflects a broader belief that the current economic model does not need to be fundamentally changed, but rather improved. However, addressing the climate crisis requires questioning this assumption. Because human societies are deeply embedded within and dependent upon the biosphere, the central challenge lies in reconciling human resource demands with the planet's absolute ecological limits (Krause, 2024). Post-growth or de-growth scholars therefore advocate a more radical rethinking of sustainability, emphasizing plural ways of living grounded in local and indigenous understandings of human–nature relations (Escobar, 1995; Hickel, 2021). In this view, sustainability is not compatible with material accumulation or economic growth. Rather, it is understood as a holistic way of living that fundamentally rejects Western development models and prioritizes balance between human and non-human life.

The environmental crisis is simultaneously unfolding within a highly volatile political landscape. This era is increasingly marked by escalating interstate conflicts and a noticeable weakening of multilateral cooperation. This fragmentation severely compromises the efficacy of modern climate diplomacy, as states increasingly retreat toward protectionist and nationalist postures (Alam et al., 2024). Global climate strategies are routinely instrumentalized as tools for state rivalry, shifting the focus of diplomacy from global ecological survival to tactical national advantage (Bremberg et al., 2025). Furthermore, this institutional decay is reflected in how international legal frameworks are handled. States, increasingly treat these agreements as non-binding, regressing into the role of “Hobbesian Leviathan” (Linera, 2026). Nations actively engage in resource-driven geopolitical competition and short-term economic expansion as core survival strategies. Through these actions they ultimately exacerbate the ecological crisis they seek to outrun (Eggestrand & Hagbert, 2025).

Within this landscape, Sweden serves as a critical, and potentially cautionary, case study. Historically, the nation has been tied to its identity as a pioneering environmental state. This “green identity” was consolidated through a “lead-by-

example” approach to climate governance (Sarasini, 2009). A key milestone of this status occurred in 2017, when Sweden adopted a world-leading Climate Act to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 (Naturvårdsverket, 2025). This legislative milestone positioned Sweden as a moral vanguard within the European Union and broader international climate diplomacy. By implementing strict domestic mandates, successive governments sought to prove that aggressive mitigation could seamlessly coexist with macroeconomic expansion (Magnusdottir & Widengård, 2025).

However, the climate trajectory initiated by the government in 2022 suggests a significant rupture in this consensus. Recent policy developments indicate a clear deprioritization of environmental commitments (Haraldsson, 2025; Sassoon, 2025). According to the Swedish Climate Policy Council (SCPC), the current CPAP lacks a credible pathway forward. National emissions are currently increasing, and key mitigation measures are being postponed. The Council’s 2025 report further states that current policies are insufficient to meet the 2030 targets and warns that, without more robust measures, Sweden is unlikely to achieve its legally binding climate neutrality target by 2045 (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2025).

In parallel, the government has terminated Sweden’s contributions to key international climate funds, including the Adaptation Fund and the Least Developed Countries Fund, which support countries most vulnerable to climate impacts. More broadly, support for climate finance has declined, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) is no longer mandated to expand climate-related aid (Wassholm, 2025). At the same time, public concern about the climate crisis remains high, with a majority of Swedish citizens expressing dissatisfaction with current climate governance (Oxfam Sverige, 2025).

This existing action gap between environmental ambitions and actual policy outcomes suggests that the barriers to sustainability transitions are not merely technical or informational, but fundamentally ideological (Kollmuss & Agyeman,

2002). Rather than resulting from a lack of knowledge or viable policy instruments, the persistence of unsustainable trajectories points to deeper structural constraints embedded within prevailing systems of governance, production, and economic prioritization. At a systemic level, unsustainable practices are not accidental or purely behavioral. They are produced through institutional arrangements and reinforced by dominant political and economic discourses (Eggestrand & Hagbert, 2025). In this sense, limited climate action reflects not only policy choices, but also the normalization of growth-oriented and market-centered logics that constrain more transformative approaches to sustainability.

3. Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature on climate discourse and the role of ideology in shaping environmental governance and climate policy frameworks. The review is organized around four central themes: the ideological foundations of environmental governance, populist discourse in climate politics, critiques of growth-oriented paradigms, and the contemporary Swedish context. By synthesizing these strands of literature, this chapter situates the thesis within ongoing academic debates, highlighting how it addresses and extends current understandings.

3.1 Environmental Governance, Security, and Climate Change

The modern architecture of environmental governance is rooted in a conceptual shift that occurred in the late 20th century. Historically, environmental issues were treated as peripheral ecological concerns, not being part of the “high politics” agenda. However, a transformation was first catalyzed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), in *Our Common Future* (1987). By framing environmental degradation not merely as a matter of biological loss but as a “central security challenge,” the WCED initiated the securitization of the

environment. The report famously posited that ecological instability could pose a greater threat to national survival than conventional military aggression from “well-armed, ill-disposed neighbors” (Brundtland Report, 1987, p.15), effectively redefining the boundaries of sovereign protection.

The securitization necessitated a move toward multilateralism, as ecological crises are inherently transboundary, defying the legal and physical jurisdictions of the nation-state. Consequently, environmental security became inextricably linked with the paradigm of Sustainable Development. As argued by (Dalby, 2010), the preservation of “ecological foundations” is a prerequisite for long-term political stability. In this context, unsustainable practices are viewed as inherently destabilizing, as they erode the material conditions, such as food systems and water cycles, necessary for social order and economic continuity.

Early academic debates focused heavily on the relationship between environmental change and violent conflict. A dominant school of thought suggested that “neo-Malthusian” resource scarcity, particularly shortages of water and arable land, would lead to inevitable social instability (Brauch, 2003; Gleick, 1992). However, this deterministic link has been heavily critiqued for being overly simplistic. Critics argue that environmental stress functions more accurately as a “threat multiplier” rather than a direct cause of war; political, economic, and social institutions play the decisive role in whether resource stress leads to cooperation or conflict (Dalby, 2010).

The limitations of the state-centric ‘resource scarcity’ model became starkly apparent in the early 21st century. While previous scholars focused on environmental wars in the Global South, events like Hurricane Katrina (2005) served as a profound ‘focusing event’ that shattered the myth of Western industrial immunity. As (Colten et al., 2008; Fussell, 2015) demonstrate, it exposed the critical fragility of infrastructure and the inability of even advanced states to protect their populations from extreme weather.

Crucially, this vulnerability framework posits that climate impacts are not socially neutral, rather, pre-existing socio-economic inequalities act as a baseline that differential institutional responses often exacerbate (Colten et al., 2008). This realization has forced a pivot in the literature from ‘reactive disaster management’ toward a broader doctrine of climate resilience. Within this context, hazards such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves are no longer treated as isolated meteorological events, but as systemic shocks that test the durability of the social contract. Consequently, the emergence of adaptation strategies (Bacon, 2010) reflects a shift in discourse from state-centered concerns with resource scarcity to a focus on vulnerability, resilience, and risk. This reframing emphasizes how environmental threats are experienced unevenly, prioritizing the protection of vulnerable populations and the social dimensions of climate risk.

Contemporary discourse increasingly situates climate security within the Anthropocene, an epoch where human agency is recognized as a dominant geological force. This discourse is characterized by the erosion of the traditional binary between natural and human history, as anthropogenic drivers, such as carbon intensification and systemic land-use modification, now function as primary determinants of Earth-system processes (Dalby, 2013; O’Brien, 2012). However (Biermann et al., 2016) argue that the Anthropocene should not be viewed as a monolithic human force, but rather as a fragmented landscape of environmental interactions that mirror existing global power imbalances.

Consequently, literature (Biermann, 2021; Dalby, 2010; Holley et al., 2018) contends that environmental policy can no longer be managed as a discrete, siloed sector. Instead, it is increasingly framed as a foundational element of systemic risk governance. Within this framework, a state’s capacity to manage energy transitions and address deep-seated social inequities is conceptualized as a core security imperative. Ecological disruption is thus understood as inseparable from the stability of social and economic systems.

A substantial body of research (Biermann, 2021; Chaffin et al., 2016; Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2021), emphasizes that ensuring long-term stability requires transformative governance, as incremental regulatory adjustments are insufficient to address the scale of the crisis. They argue that the challenge lies in how environmental governance is designed and practiced, advocating for a prioritization of systemic change in socio-ecological systems, cross-sectoral coordination, and enhanced international cooperation to manage the complex risks of Earth-system disruption. However, while the literature converges on the need for transformation, it also raises concerns regarding political feasibility and the uneven institutional capacities across diverse states (Meadowcroft, 2011).

3.2 Populism in Climate Change Politics

In recent years, scholars have increasingly examined how climate change has shifted from a scientific concern to a “badge of identity,” driving intense polarization within society. This body of research highlights that climate change is no longer treated solely as a technical or scientific issue but has become a highly politicized domain where competing ideological narratives dictate public debate and policy outcomes. A significant strand of this literature explores the growing intersection between populism and climate politics. Within this framework scholars argue that populist actors challenge expert-led governance, framing climate policy as an elite-driven agenda that fundamentally conflicts with national or “common” interests (Marquardt & Lederer, 2022). Such narratives frequently leverage distrust of scientific expertise, international institutions, and governmental authorities, thereby deepening the politicization of both climate knowledge and the policies intended to address it.

Research emphasizes that these dynamics profoundly influence both public attitudes and policymaking processes. Populist discourse often frames climate policies as economically harmful, socially unjust, or disconnected from national

priorities – narratives that foster climate skepticism and active resistance to environmental regulation. For instance, Fiorino (2022) demonstrates how populist rhetoric in the United States has reshaped political climate discourse, contributing to heightened polarization and weakening bipartisan support for climate action. More broadly, scholars argue that the rise of these narratives has complicated efforts to advance coordinated climate governance; by reframing climate action as a contested political issue rather than a shared global challenge, populism undermines the collective trust necessary for international cooperation (Lockwood, 2018; Sælen & McCright, 2025).

Furthermore, research suggests that skepticism is intrinsically linked to the ideological foundations of right-wing populism. Central to this ideology is an antagonistic framing of politics as an inherent conflict between “the people” and a perceived “cosmopolitan elite,” wherein climate science and policy serve as potent symbolic markers of this divide. In the European context, Kulin et al. (2021) examine how nationalist ideology and right-wing populism intersect to shape public beliefs. Their findings indicate that individuals who prioritize national sovereignty and cultural identity are significantly more likely to express skepticism about climate science and manifest opposition to climate related interventions.

Conversely, other scholars challenge the assumption that populism inherently leads to climate skepticism or policy opposition (Harrison, 2025; Huber, 2020). They argue that earlier research often oversimplifies the diversity of populist positions by portraying the ideology solely as an anti-expert or anti-science framework. Instead, recent studies indicate that populist actors employ a variety of discursive strategies; while some leverage rhetoric to reject climate science, others integrate environmental issues into narratives centered on economic fairness, public health, or protecting “the people” from corporate exploitation. Empirical evidence further demonstrates that individuals harboring populist attitudes may maintain a deep distrust of elite institutions while simultaneously expressing strong support for

environmental protection, provided the solutions are framed as pro-worker or anti-corporate (Huber, 2020).

Overall, a primary challenge in examining the intersection of populism and climate politics is the absence of a universally accepted definition of populism itself. Frequently characterized as a “thin-centered” ideology that lacks a standalone core, populism inevitably attaches itself to diverse political agendas, allowing it to frame climate issues in multiple ways. This conceptual ambiguity explains the varying conclusions in current research: while some studies present populism as an existential threat to climate action, others suggest it can reshape or even bolster environmental movements depending on its ideological “host.” Consequently, the impact of populism is not inherent but contingent upon how the “people” and the “elite” are defined in a given socio-political context.

3.3 Structural barriers to sustainability

The limitations of traditional environmental policy have increasingly led scholars toward degrowth perspectives, which gained significant traction within sustainability research, emphasizing the necessity of profound transformations within existing socio-economic regimes. Key contributions (Kallis et al., 2018; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010; Schneider et al., 2010) position degrowth as a fundamental critique of the dominant growth-oriented development model, arguing that continuous economic expansion is inherently incompatible with ecological planetary boundaries and social equity. Rather than pursuing GDP growth, degrowth advocates for a planned, democratic downscaling of production and consumption. Crucially, this body of work challenges the eco-modernist notion of “green growth,” contesting the belief that economic expansion can be sufficiently decoupled from environmental pressures to meet climate goals (Hagbert et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the literature highlights the necessity of structural and institutional change, cultural transformation, and new social imaginaries that decouple human well-being from material accumulation. Scholars argue that sustainability thinking must transcend the deeply embedded ideas and institutional arrangements that currently constrain contemporary politics. A critical facet of this critique is the recognition that the dominant model of sustainable development – which continues to guide global policy – often reproduces colonial patterns of extraction. As Hickel (2021) notes, economic growth in high-income countries frequently depends on the appropriation and exploitation of Southern resources, labor, and ecological space.

Consequently, much of this research adopts a macro-level approach, focusing on the systemic conditions necessary for transformative change. This involves a critical assessment of technological limits and consumption patterns; for instance, Huesemann (2011) argues that technological efficiency gains are frequently offset by rebound effects, suggesting that sustainability cannot be measured by efficiency alone but must account for total resource throughput. This systemic perspective is further supported by (Tian et al., 2026), who demonstrate that global resource use remains highly unequal, with affluent households responsible for a disproportionate share of material consumption and environmental pressure.

To challenge the dominant growth discourse, scholars have developed alternative measurement frameworks that move beyond GDP by prioritizing human well-being, equitable resource distribution, and ecological stability. These approaches assess whether societies can meet universal basic needs while remaining within biophysical limits, offering a more robust lens for evaluating sustainable development (Boskovic et al., 2026; O'Neill et al., 2018; Svenfelt et al., 2019). A landmark example is the work of O'Neill et al. (2018), which demonstrates that no nation currently achieves high levels of social well-being without transgressing multiple planetary boundaries. This empirical reality underscores the urgent need for a fundamental paradigm shift in how global "progress" is defined and pursued.

Despite its theoretical appeal, this radical reimagining of development has faced significant criticism regarding its practical application. Detractors contend that because degrowth necessitates a fundamental restructuring of the underlying logic of capitalism, it remains difficult to reconcile with entrenched institutional and political realities. Furthermore, scholars often describe degrowth as a normative and conceptually driven framework that offers limited guidance on how its principles can be enacted in real-world contexts. This lack of a “policy roadmap” raises critical questions concerning the feasibility and scalability of degrowth transitions, particularly regarding the specific governance strategies required to operationalize such a vision without triggering economic instability (Hickel, 2021a; Khmara & Kronenberg, 2020).

Building on macro-level analyses of degrowth and sustainability, research increasingly recognizes that transformative change is fundamentally contingent upon individual and community-level behaviors. Integrating a psychological and behavioral dimension is essential, as structural- and policy reforms cannot achieve sustainability in isolation. Instead, ideological orientations, core values, and cultural norms act as filters that shape how citizens exert pressure on politicians, adopt low-impact lifestyles, or participate in transformative initiatives (Buhr et al., 2018; de Leeuw, 2024). This behavioral lens suggests that for systemic shifts to take hold, they must resonate with the lived realities and psychological motivations of the public, ensuring that top-down mandates align with bottom-up values.

To understand why society remains tethered to unsustainable systems, research must look beyond rational economic choices to the deep-seated ideological narratives that shape our collective desires. De Leeuw (2024) draws on the “promise of happiness” ((Ahmed, 2010) to argue that large-scale extractivism and growth-oriented projects function as powerful cultural fantasies. This “fantasy of alignment” - the belief of a green future where we can maintain high-consumption lifestyles - creates a psychological “comfort zone.” Which makes the radical downscaling proposed by degrowth feel like a threatening transgression rather than

a liberating shift, effectively foreclosing the consideration of alternative, simpler ways of living.

This ideological “fantasy” further create a persistent “value-action gap”. Even when we care about the planet, our daily habits are driven by a mix of personal convenience and social status (Batool et al., 2024; Bosone et al., 2022; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). To avoid the guilt of this contradiction, we use - making excuses like “my actions don't matter” or “the system is rigged” - to shield ourselves from discomfort. This mental defense allows us to keep the “promised lifestyle” of the growth economy while ignoring its environmental cost. Ultimately, research suggests that while current systems are designed to reward egoistic incentives, cultivating altruistic and biospheric values offers a more resilient foundation to ensure long-term sustainability (De Groot & Steg, 2009).

3.4 Contextualizing the Swedish Climate Paradigm

In addition to global theoretical debates on climate politics and degrowth, it is essential to contextualize the Swedish climate paradigm for situating current policy shifts within a specific institutional and discursive trajectory. Sweden has long been characterized in academic literature as a “pioneer” or “frontrunner” in environmental governance, rooted in the logic of ecological modernization (EM) - the belief that economic growth and environmental protection are mutually reinforcing. The framework construct a narrative of a “positive-sum game,” shifting the focus from “polluter pays” to “pollution prevention pays,” and framing green technological development as a driver of industrial profitability and national competitiveness. By assessing monetary value to ecosystem services and internalizing environmental costs into resource decision-making, EM seeks to dissolve the perceived conflict between the economy and the biosphere. For decades, the Swedish state has acted as a “market maker” for eco-technological innovations, successfully persuading both industry and the public that “green growth” represents the primary pathway to a prosperous future. This narrative

fosters a powerful “win-win” expectation that underpins the Swedish national identity, rendering any move toward downscaling both unnecessary and economically irrational (Lundqvist, 2000).

Moreover, institutional research suggests that this discourse masks a “post-political vision” - a structural hierarchy in which modern sustainable development avoids genuine political conflict, reframing environmental issues as technical fixes that can be addressed without fundamentally transforming society (Hilding-Rydevik et al., 2011). Practical research shows that, within Swedish strategic planning, environmental considerations are frequently sidelined or “balanced away” when they come into direct conflict with goals for infrastructure or industrial development. This suggests that the environment is integrated into the state apparatus only insofar as it does not obstruct the primary directive of economic growth. Consequently, Swedish climate policy is characterized by institutionalized incrementalism; rather than responding to the urgent scientific imperatives of the climate crisis, policymaking is guided by political feasibility and the maintenance of social consensus (Dupont et al., 2024). This results in a framework of high-level, symbolic commitments coupled with weak implementation mechanisms, enabling the state to preserve its international standing while avoiding disruptive structural reforms.

Further institutional pressure emerged from EU membership following the 2019-2021 climate policy breakthrough. With the introduction of the European Green Deal and the subsequent European Climate Law (2021), the Union transitioned from a framework of aspirational targets to a legally binding mandate for climate neutrality by 2050. While this shift formally constrains national policy by limiting Sweden’s room for maneuver, it also reshapes the discursive conditions under which climate policy is articulated and justified (Dupont et al., 2024). In this process, tensions emerge between supranational obligations and national policies, particularly as the government seek to reconcile climate targets with competing priorities such as economic growth, energy security, and short-term investments.

Consequently, these dynamic risks rendering climate commitments increasingly symbolic, as politicians navigate these competing demands.

4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter functions as a conceptual guidebook, defining the theoretical tools used to examine the CPAP. It provides a theoretical deep dive into selected concepts to reveal the ideological foundations of contemporary climate policy.

4.1 Ideology

Examining political processes through the lens of ideology is essential for understanding why climate policy often reflects structural persistence rather than transformative change. This thesis adopts a Marxist perspective, asserting that political processes are not neutral administrative tasks but are fundamentally expressions of material conditions and class-based structures. In this context, climate policy is viewed as a ‘site of struggle’ where the requirements of compound capital accumulation (Harvey, 2014) collide with the material reality of a planet pushed beyond its ecological limits. This struggle is further complicated by the legacy of fossil capital, where the very structures of modern production are historically anchored in carbon-intensive energy sources, making transformative change a challenge to the system’s core stability (Wellum et al., 2026).

However, while these overarching structures set the stage, the specific trajectories of policy are shaped by the actors within them. Therefore, this study understands that political actors operate strategically (maximizing their interests and navigating institutions) within these constraints. Actors are assumed to be ‘bounded rational’ agents who maximize their interests and navigate institutional incentives, yet they always do so within the ideological and material boundaries dictated by the dominant mode of production (Ostrom, 2011; Wright, 1994). Consequently, the

policy process is not merely a reflection of structural will, but a result of strategic navigation through a landscape of institutionalized power relations.

Ideology in climate governance is not merely a collection of shared myths or a “worldview” that one chooses to adopt. Rather, it serves as the constitutive discourse that defines the horizon of political possibility. It determines not only how the climate crisis is perceived but bounds the range of legitimate policy responses. Consequently, ideology functions as a discursive filter that coordinates how actors interpret social reality, shaping both the institutional goals and the rationalized means of policymaking (Stevenson & Dryzek, 2012).

This role of ideology as a discursive filter builds upon, yet evolves from, traditional Marxist accounts of “false consciousness” (Marx & Engels, 2022). Here, the state apparatus is seen to internalize the interests of ruling socio-economic structures, reproducing them as the universal “common good” to maintain hegemony (Baumann, 2025; Leiter, 2024; Meyerson, 1991). Under this classical model, ideology critique relies on the logic of “demasking,” lifting the veil to perceive reality as it truly is (Žižek, 2008). However, by viewing ideology as a constitutive discourse the analysis moves beyond binaries of “true” and “false” interests. It recognizes that the material and ideological boundaries of capitalism render some climate policy alternatives unthinkable even to well-intentioned actors.

In the context of contemporary climate change, the problem is no longer a lack of information or awareness (enlightened consciousness). Theorists argue that ideology now operates through “cynical reason” or “enlightened false consciousness” (Sloterdijk & Huyssen, 2012). Here, the subject is fully aware of the ecological crisis and contradictions of the current system yet continues to act as if that system were sustainable. As Žižek notes, the formula has shifted “they know very well what they are doing, but still, they do it” (Žižek, 2008, p.25).

This shift explains why structural misrecognition persists. Social actors often perceive institutions (e.g., global markets, legal systems) as neutral mediators rather

than political tools, failing to recognize that the stability of these systems depends on this very paradox. This ignorance is no longer an accidental lack of information; it is a functional requirement built into the institutional norms and policymaking (Althusser et al., 2014; Eagleton, 1991; Žižek, 2008).

This dynamic is particularly visible in modern climate policy. While governments and corporations widely acknowledge the urgency of the crisis, their responses remain trapped within the logic of unsustainable systems. In this post-political context, scientific exposure loses its transformative power because awareness is already built into the system (Swyngedouw, 2011). Cynicism thus functions as a stabilizing force, sustained by ideological fantasies such as green growth or technological salvation (Pohl & Swyngedouw, 2023), which structure public desire. These narratives do not need to be true or even fully believed to function they serve to organize collective action while effectively justifying and even necessitating systemic inaction.

4.2 Capitalist Realism

The concept of capitalist realism, as articulated by Mark Fisher, describes a discursive and ideological regime that sets the boundaries of political and economic thought. It operates as a totalizing framework in which capitalism is constructed not merely as the premier system of governance, but as the only coherent, viable, and imaginable horizon for human organization. Within this view, market imperatives acquire the status of an *ontological necessity*- a “business ontology” that treats capitalist logics as the natural, immutable conditions of social reality itself (Fisher, 2009, p. 24). As Fisher famously observes:

“It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Fisher, 2009, p. 1).

This tension is especially pronounced in the context of environmental crisis, where ecological breakdown becomes increasingly thinkable while systemic

transformation remains politically constrained. The dynamics of continuous economic expansion, capital accumulation, and market integration are thoroughly naturalized, presented as inevitable laws of nature rather than historically contingent arrangements. Rather than operating through overt coercion, capitalist realism functions as a structural default that quietly organizes state institutions, policy paradigms, and the textures of everyday life, pre-emptively containing alternatives to the neoliberal order (Fisher, 2009).

This systemic paralysis directly dictates how contemporary society confronts environmental degradation, fracturing the dominant response into two deeply complementary logics: macro-level technocratic managerialism and micro-level ethical individualization. One hand, the institutional apparatus rarely treats environmental catastrophe as a systemic failure to be overcome, but rather as an unavoidable externality to be administered through existing market frameworks. On the other hand, the structural burden of addressing ecological collapse is simultaneously privatized and displaced onto the individual (Fisher, 2009).

As Fisher observes, framing climate change as a matter of personal ethical choices where “we all have to do our bit” (Fisher, 2009, p. 73) ultimately ensures that no centralized entity takes responsibility. The root cause of the crisis thus remains an “impersonal structure” oriented toward infinite growth, which is fundamentally incapable of exercising ethical restraint. By reducing a structural crisis to a series of individual moral duties, this framing obscures the systemic character and deflects attention from its technocratic management. It further prevents the emergence of a collective political subject capable of challenging the entrenched system (Fisher, 2009, p. 77).

This displacement operates through a foundational “fantasy structure” inherent to capitalist realism. Grounded in Žižek’s notion of disavowal (Žižek, 2008), this structure does not require outright denial of climate change, instead it regulates daily behavior through practical compliance. Fantasy structures, in Fisher’s sense,

are unconscious frameworks of belief and desire that make capitalist reality feel coherent and unavoidable. Rather than superficial illusions, they are institutionalized narratives and affective patterns such as meritocracy, consumer sovereignty, and the dictate that “there is no alternative” (TINA), continually reinforced by institutions such as schools, media, and workplaces (Fisher, 2009, p. 58).

Over time, these discourses sediment into naturalized background assumptions that shape what appears possible, what counts as success, and how failure is interpreted. In this way, capitalism persists through everyday routines that reproduce it at the level of behavior, even in the presence of cynical awareness. The system does not require subjective belief, only practical compliance, and it is through this gap between knowledge and action that capitalist realism consolidates itself into an unbreakable reality (Fisher, 2009, p. 20).

Paradoxically, while neoliberal capitalism denounces the “red tape” of the state, it simultaneously proliferates what Fisher terms “market Stalinism” (Fisher, 2009, p. 30). This refers to a regime in which marketization does not eliminate bureaucracy but instead multiplies it in the form of measurement, audit, and performance management. Under this bureaucratic matrix, the promise of frictionless market coordination gives way to complex systems of reporting and verification. Rather than displaying direct responsiveness to physical outcomes, governance becomes increasingly organized around the production of auditable representations of those outcomes (Fisher, 2009, p. 48).

Environmental governance exemplifies this shift by allocating vast resources to ensure that carbon emissions, air pollution, and ecological impacts are translated into standardized reporting architectures. This growing appetite for rating systems and league table comparisons has institutionalized a widespread “audit culture” that extends far beyond the state (Shore & Wright, 2015). Under the guise of accountability, these mechanisms do not resolve environmental problems, instead, they reorganize what Fisher terms the “slow cancellation of the future,” (Fisher,

2013, p. 13), capturing and mediating institutional action through the same calculative logics that drive the crisis itself. The result is a form of disciplinary homogeneity in which the qualitative reality of environmental degradation is obscured by the apparent quantitative success of audit culture (Bui et al., 2020; Fisher, 2009).

The strength of this regime lies in how its discourses delimit what is possible, rendering post-growth or non-extractive futures as inherently naïve, utopian, or irresponsible (Rooksby, 2012; Wilder, 2022). The core contradiction of capitalist realism lies in its ideological self-presentation as functional despite producing structural dysfunction and social suffering. Where this regime demands a reflexive political pessimism, alternative perspectives locate emergent within the system's structural “cracks” (Wilder, 2022). Crucially, these perspectives are defined by a strategic refusal: they explicitly reject the preexisting blueprints of market-led “green growth” and the cosmetic metrics of managerial audit. Rather than capitulating to market constraints, they elevate experimental practices organized around care, sufficiency, and collective autonomy. They also expose the neoliberal order as a historically contingent anomaly rather than an immutable law of nature. Ultimately, this juxtaposition serves as a vital diagnostic tool for this thesis. It shifts the analytical focus away from whether the empirical material reflects policies that are “feasible” under existing market conditions, serving instead to deconstruct how these discourses either replicate the capitalist status quo or articulate a future beyond a mere extension of the failing present.

4.3 Political Realism

In the contemporary epoch of the Anthropocene, the reality of the climate crisis raises fundamental questions about the nature of power, human supremacy, and the systemic limits of global cooperation. This ongoing ecological crisis is deeply rooted in the dominance of “anthropolitics,” a paradigm of political and socio-

economic organization centered on the exploitation and domination of both human societies and the more-than-human-world (Ruuska et al., 2020).

Within an international arena organized around sovereign states, efforts to combat this crisis are consistently constrained by the anarchic struggle for power. The current neoliberal system, driven by the expansionary imperatives of global capital and the pursuit of relative gains (Grieco, 1988), makes climate multilateralism a persistent challenge.

Historically, this political terrain has been dominated by a dialectical contest between two foundational schools of thought – realism and idealism – each diverging sharply in their ontological assumptions about human nature, the behavioral patterns of international structures, and the boundaries of political life (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 3).

The idealist school holds that a moral political order is achievable, viewing environmental degradation not as inevitable, but as a result of ignorance or institutional failure (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 4). In contrast, the realist tradition used in this thesis recognizes international politics as an anarchic, zero-sum environment shaped by self-interest and inevitable conflict. Rather than chasing absolute perfection, realism seeks a pragmatic balancing of interests and the management of power. Guided by historical precedent, realists argue for practical arrangements to limit the excesses of power and pursue the “lesser evil” over abstract ideals (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 4-5). By grounding this theoretical framework in the primacy of power, this thesis moves beyond the utopian hope for global altruism to scrutinize how states navigate climate policy to secure survival and relative advantage.

Central to this framework is the understanding that whenever states operate within international politics, they do so by striving for power. Morgenthau defines this force clearly:

“When we speak of power, we mean man’s control over the minds and actions of other men. By political power we refer to the mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large” Morgenthau et al., (2006, p.13).

In the context of the climate crisis, this “control” is increasingly exercised between those who hold authority and those subjected to it. Through the enforcement of the neoliberal order, status-quo powers deploy dominant climate narratives to maintain their domestic and international standing. Rather than prompting a structural re-evaluation of the industrial architectures driving ecocide, this arrangement tethers the imperative of biological survival to the continued expansion of the market, effectively commodifying the crisis to preserve existing power relations (Korab-Karpowicz, 2026, p. 17). To operationalize this power dynamic within climate governance, this thesis draws on two realist analytical ideas rooted in an offensive strategic rationale and a defensive security narrative.

The first strategy captures the offensive dimension of realist statecraft, framing the climate transition as an arena for global competition of relative gains. Under these conditions, international environmental agreements are viewed not as triumphs of universal ethics. They are understood as fragile, negotiated truces where the imperative of state preservation constantly recalibrates what is politically possible. The pursuit of “green” initiatives is a strategic prioritization, a prudent effort to manage the destabilizing effects of a changing climate while maximizing relative gains to outcompete foreign rivals (Morgenthau et al., 2006, p. 155). States seek to dominate clean-technology markets, set international green standards, and capture critical resource supply chains. Crucially, universal climate rhetoric functions as a moral camouflage; states champion global green standards not out of altruism, but to weaponize economic interdependence, forcing rivals into asymmetric dependencies (Korab-Karpowicz, 2026, p. 20-22).

Furthermore, the second idea (defensive realism) shifts the analytical focus toward state preservation. defensive realism. It demonstrates that international climate commitments are entirely subordinated to the baseline logic of national survival, defense, and vulnerability reduction. This framework examines how states utilize energy infrastructure not as a tool for environmental stewardship, but as a critical line of defense to insulate the state from foreign shocks, safeguard domestic resilience, and ensure continuous military readiness (Cristol, 2009). In international politics, national interests are inherently tied to the maintenance of core baseline security. Achieving this security demands robust self-sufficiency to mitigate systemic vulnerabilities, sever dependencies on volatile foreign supply networks, and prevent adversaries from weaponizing asymmetric resource relations for geopolitical blackmail (Morgenthau et al., 2006, p. 18).

While cosmopolitan climate frameworks present treaties as objective moral imperatives, they are frequently instrumentalized by dominant states to justify their own strategic paths. This mirrors Carl Schmitt's rejection of liberal legalism in favor of decisionism - the conviction that law is ultimately determined by political authority and the exigencies of survival rather than abstract rules. Here, the "political" becomes all-encompassing. Climate governance is reduced to an instrument of *realpolitik*, where binding agreements are not tools for global correction, but a reflections of defensive strength by them who wield it (Sosnowski, 2025, p. 197).

5. Research Design

The empirical analysis contributes to research by deepening our understanding of the topic, directly guided by the central research question and theoretical framework. In alignment with Gerring (2011, p. 30), it embraces the dual goals of social science: exploration and appraisal. A qualitative case study methodology is uniquely suited for this endeavor, as it facilitates an in-depth, contextually

embedded exploration of a bounded phenomenon (Yin, 2018). However, because case studies within policy and development contexts frequently face scrutiny regarding their rigor, this research design explicitly addresses critical quality control standards, specifically data accuracy, internal validity, reliability, and delimited generalization (Gerring, 2016).

Careful attention is given to transparency in data collection and analysis, enhancing the study's reliability by allowing other researchers to evaluate the consistency of the research process. Internal validity is addressed through a theoretically informed analytical framework that connects empirical observations to broader causal mechanisms and explanatory concepts (Gerring, 2016). Rather than seeking universal laws, the study aims to identify plausible relationships and processes within the selected case, an approach consistent with interpretive and explanatory case study traditions (Yin, 2018). In this regard, the case study approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how institutional dynamics, actor perspectives, and contextual conditions interact in shaping outcomes (George & Bennett, 2005). Such contextual sensitivity is especially important in social science research, where political and historical settings shape both actors and institutions (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Finally, while the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable, the study seeks to inform wider conceptual and theoretical debates through analytical generalization (Yin, 2018). As Gerring (Gerring, 2016, p. 60-64) argues, the strength of case study research lies in its capacity for intensive analysis and conceptual refinement rather than statistical representativeness. By situating the case within broader theoretical discussions, the research aims to generate insights that may be transferable to comparable contexts or inform future studies of similar phenomena. In this sense, the value of the case study lies in its ability to provide rich empirical detail and theoretically grounded interpretations that advance scholarly understanding (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2018).

5.1 Empirical Material

The empirical material for this study is the 2023 Swedish Climate Policy Action Plan (CPAP). The material was selected because it is constructed by the Government and serves as a comprehensive document that provides the principal strategic blueprint for achieving national and international climate targets (Regeringskansliet, 2021; Naturvårdsverket, 2026).

“In the communication, the government presents how climate policy work should be conducted during the term of office, including the decided and planned measures that the government intends to implement... that are required in order for the national and global climate goals, as well as Sweden’s climate commitments towards the EU, to be achieved” (Skr. 2023/24:59, 2023, p. 1).

It represents the authoritative discourse of the Government and State, as it both proclaims the government's implementation strategies and Sweden's positioning in relation to the international arena. Furthermore, the material provides an ideal case for critical discourse analysis, as it obscures the underlying ideological tensions being navigated within the presentation of a nuanced climate action plan.

As the Swedish Climate Policy Council provides an annual technocratic evaluation of the plan’s efficacy and goal-alignment (Klimatpolitiskrådet, n.d.), this study complements existing evaluations by treating the CPAP as a discursive and ideological text. Given the comprehensive nature of the policy document, a preliminary close reading led to the deliberate choice to focus analytical attention on the core chapters. Specifically, chapters two, three, four, five, and seven, which outline strategic policy areas, implementation frameworks, and sector-by-sector climate actions, were prioritized for intensive analysis. These specific sections were selected because they contain the dense, value-laden language where institutional priorities, governance mechanisms, and Sweden’s international role are most explicitly negotiated.

However, during the coding process in NVivo, relevant codes naturally emerged within other sections of the document. Where these instances occurred, the surrounding context was carefully considered and evaluated in direct relation to the study's specific sub questions. This balanced approach ensured that while high-density chapters were prioritized, the analysis did not compromise the document's overarching narrative integrity.

5.2 Methodology

The first question to address is why discourse analysis is an appropriate method for studying climate policy. Discourse analysis focuses on how texts – and the processes through which they are produced and interpreted – shape understandings of social and political phenomena. This includes how meanings are constructed around problems, actors, and solutions, and how these constructions are connected to relations of power that privilege certain interpretations while marginalizing others (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Therefore, this framework is well suited to addressing the research question, as it enables an examination of how “ideological assumptions are constructed and articulated” within the empirical material.

This study adopts a post-structuralist interpretative methodology, which serves as both an ontological and epistemological position. It challenges assumptions of objectivity by viewing social reality not as existing independently of language, but as continuously constructed through discursive practices that are inseparable from power relations. From this standpoint, knowledge is never neutral. Rather, what is accepted as “truth” emerges from historically and culturally specific configurations of meaning and authority that define what is perceived as possible, legitimate, or governable (Hajer, 1997; Sharp & Richardson, 2001).

Building on this foundation, the study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Norman Fairclough. Fairclough conceptualizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a relational, dialectical, and transdisciplinary approach to

studying discourse. Rather than treating discourse as an isolated object, CDA analyses the complex relations between discourse and other social elements such as institutions, power relations, and material practices. Discourse is understood as a social practice concerned with the production of meaning, embedded within and shaped by these broader relations, while simultaneously contributing to their reproduction or transformation (Fairclough, 2013, p.23-24).

These relations are dialectical in the sense that discourse and social structures are mutually constitutive: discourse is both shaped by, and shaping of, social reality. CDA does not analyse discourse “in itself,” but the interplay between the internal features of texts and their external relations to wider social processes. This relational perspective also underpins CDA’s transdisciplinary character, as it draws on and integrates insights from linguistics, sociology, and political analysis in order to account for how meaning-making is connected to power and social organization (Fairclough, 2013, p.25-27).

5.3 Method

Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the analytical framework for this research. The framework enables an examination of the CPAP across three interconnected dimensions: the textual level, which concerns the linguistic organization of the text; discourse practice, which involves the production and interpretation of text; and social practice, which refers to the broader social context in which the discourse is embedded. By systematically engaging with these three dimensions in relation to one another, the analysis moves away from treating policy as a neutral transmission of information. Instead, it focuses on the political and ideological dimensions of the document within broader relations of power and domination (Fairclough, 2013, p. 198).

5.3.1 Level one (textual level)

The textual “micro-analysis” focuses on different aspects of sentence structure within the text. This study is organized around transitivity, modality, and nominalization (Bergström & Boréus, 2012). A word frequency query was conducted in NVivo to identify the 50 most recurring terms (see **Figure 1**). This linguistic “skeleton” serves as an empirical tool, providing a visual overview of dominant syntactic patterns.



Figure 1: Word frequency query of the 50 most recurring terms in the CPAP

To ensure data cleanliness, words shorter than five letters were excluded, and terms were stemmed so that variants (e.g., “government” and “government’s”; “emission” and “emissions”) were grouped.

Within CDA, the grammatical system of transitivity is utilized to examine how language represents experience. Following Halliday & Matthiessen (2013), this is

operationalized by balancing two complementary perspectives: the transitive model and the ergative model. The transitive model investigates who is doing what to whom by tracking the entity positioned as the active, volitional actor - the driving force of change – versus the goal, which is treated as passively impacted by these actions. In the context of climate discourse, this model exposes how responsibility for ecological damage is assigned or obscured.

Meanwhile, the ergative model analyzes the relationship between a process—such as “emission reduction” and its medium (the core entity experiencing that change, which in this case is the emissions themselves). Specifically, it exposes whether a text includes an external agent that actively causes the change, or whether the transition is discursively framed as happening autonomously. Tracking these grammatical choices reveals which entities are celebrated as powerful, responsible drivers of climate action, and which political choices are stripped of an explicit subject. This is a tactic that effectively obscures state accountability (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013, p. 576-577).

Alongside transitivity, the grammatical system of modality is used to evaluate the actor’s degree of commitment to, and validation of, a given statement (Fairclough, 2003, p. 164). It works by distinguishing between epistemic modality, which denotes levels of certainty and truth (e.g., “will,” “might,” “could”), and deontic modality, which denotes degrees of necessity and obligation (e.g., “must,” “should,” “ought to”). For instance, analyzing whether state objectives are framed through absolute deontic necessity (“Sweden must achieve climate neutrality”) or through weak, conditional epistemic possibilities (“measures could contribute to future targets”) reveals how urgently the state views its obligations. Decoding modality exposes the tension between a government's public rhetoric and its actual structural commitment, revealing where a state asserts non-negotiable governance and where it intentionally builds in discursive loopholes that defuse legal or political accountability (Fairclough, 2003, p. 167-168).

Finally, the grammatical concept of nominalization is utilized to analyze how processes and actions are represented in the text. Nominalization is the linguistic process through which a verb or action is transformed into a noun, turning a dynamic event into a static entity (Fairclough, 2013, p. 143). For instance, converting an active clause where specific actors take responsibility (“the government is reducing emissions”) into a noun phrase (“emission reductions are taking place”) effectively deletes the agent, erases the timeline, and mystifies cause and effect. Evaluating nominalization allows this study to identify where the CPAP uses abstract, subject less processes such as “the green transition” or “sustainable growth” to mask underlying structural conflicts, present political choices as inevitable natural phenomena, and subtly absolve any actor of direct accountability (Fairclough, 2013, p. 144).

5.3.2 Level two (discourse practice)

To operationalize Norman Fairclough’s approach to discourse practice, this study employs a deductive coding scheme (see **Table 1**) derived from the theoretical framework introduced in chapter four. This top-down implementation ensures that textual features are systematically evaluated against pre-determined ideological and structural formations (Meyer, 2001, p. 18-19).

Fairclough argues that analyzing discourse practice requires looking beyond isolated linguistic features to examine how different discourses and genres are intersect within a single text. At this level, the analysis focuses on the immediate processes of situational meaning-making, as well as the broader structural blending of these communicative forms. Fairclough refers to this as interdiscursivity, highlighting how texts actively draw upon, blend, and rework existing conventions, discourses, and prior texts. Thus, this study examines which discursive practices the CPAP relies on, how they are articulated together, and what underlying ideological assumptions they reproduce (Fairclough, 2013, p. 200).

Table one outlines the operationalized coding scheme, detailing the core discursive categories, their operational definitions, and examples of linguistic anchors used to identify them during data analysis.

Table 1: Thematic Coding Scheme

Category	Discursive Strategy / Description	Example
Cynical Reason / Enlightened False Consciousness	A strategy of fetishistic disavowal where the existential threat of climate change is intellectually acknowledged but practically ignored through symbolic policy measures that maintain the status quo.	“We rapidly need to transition... expanding gas extraction is a necessary bridge.”
Market Logic as an Ontological Necessity	Framing of capital accumulation and industrial growth as universal laws of nature; a necessity for social and biological existence that cannot be questioned.	“Economic growth is the foundation for a green transition.”
There is no Alternative (TINA)	A discourse asserting that systemic transformations, such as degrowth or indigenous perspectives, are politically or economically unfeasible. Any alternative to the current system is framed as unrealistic or utopian.	“Alternative or non-extractive futures are non-rational and irresponsible.”
Market Stalinism / Bureaucratic Simulation	A discourse prioritizing the public performance of symbolic policies; metrics, indicators, and long-term targets, over tangible ecological	“This is a framework for continuous evaluation and investigative

	results. By fixating on procedural milestones and quantifiable goals, the discourse conceals material passivity, maintaining an image of success while avoiding the structural changes necessary for actual carbon reduction.	mandates,” “Sweden sets the global standard for reporting, metrics, and administrative transparency.”
The Green Race (Offensive Power & Relative Gains)	The strategic pursuit of dominance in the global energy transition to secure relative gains and build asymmetrically weaponized dependencies. By controlling green tech, a state dictates terms to rivals.	“Outcompete foreign rivals,” “Winning the green tech race,” “Technological leadership.”
Vulnerability Reduction (Defensive Security & Resource Survival)	The strategic drive for energy and resource autonomy to eliminate external vulnerabilities in a zero-sum international system. The focus is on material survival: securing critical supply chains and preventing adversaries from using energy as a geopolitical weapon. Climate action is driven by prudence, not altruism, to protect state sovereignty.	“Energy independence,” “Secure critical mineral supply,” “Insulate from foreign markets,” “Strategic resource stockpile.”

5.3.3 Level three (social practice)

Building upon the analysis of interdiscursivity, the next “macro-level” of this framework identifies the discursive event as a form of social practice. This dimension recognizes that discursive blending is inherently political, since

institutional spaces are constituted through conflict and negotiation. As Fairclough notes:

“Opposition and struggle are built into the view of the ‘orders of discourse’ of social institutions as ‘pluralistic’, each involving a configuration of potentially antagonistic ‘ideological-discursive formations’ (IDFs), which are ordered in dominance” (Fairclough, 2013, p.66).

At this level, discourse is analyzed across three interconnected layers of social organization. The first layer is the immediate situational context, which refers to the specific interactional conditions of a discursive event (Fairclough, 2013). However, this layer is not included in this study, since the aim is not to examine how the CPAP was designed or what may have occurred during the negotiations. Instead, the analysis focuses on the discursive material itself and the broader societal and institutional contexts in which it is produced and interpreted.

The institutional context refers to the organizational settings in which climate policy texts are produced, including the roles of specific governmental or supranational bodies, internal hierarchies, and formal procedures that guide policy drafting. While the wider societal “context of culture,” refers to the broader ideological and cultural frameworks through which meanings become socially intelligible and legitimate (Halliday & Hasan, 1997; Malinowski, 1923).

To theorize the mechanisms of power operating across these levels, Fairclough draws upon Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony. He implies that the possibilities of semiotic creativity are structurally constrained by the shifting state of hegemonic relations. Consequently, in periods of stable hegemony, discursive creativity is tightly regulated, reinforcing dominant institutional norms. Conversely, during periods of hegemonic contestation, a creative explosion of resistant discursive practices emerges. By synthesizing hegemony and interdiscursivity, this level of analysis evaluates whether the CPAP reproduces a stabilized, dominant institutional

ideology or serves as a site of active discursive struggle and resistance (Fairclough, 2009, p. 201).

5.4 Positionality and Reflexivity

As a researcher, I view subjectivity not as a bias to be eliminated, but as an analytical resource. Because a researcher is never an objective, detached observer, traditional notions of absolute objectivity are replaced by reflexive and emotional awareness (Davies & Spencer, 2010, p. 12). My positionality is that of a “partial insider” (Stacey, 1988), I am situated within the same contemporary Swedish growth-oriented political-economic structures and cultural norms that this study examines. While this insider status provides valuable contextual insight, my academic training in sustainability and social theory allows me to maintain critical distance, questioning taken-for-granted assumptions and expose the ideological underpinnings of the text.

Navigating this dual role is essential for upholding both research ethics and validity. Ethical responsibility demands transparency regarding how my social position and underlying assumptions shape data selection and textual interpretation (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2023, p. 76). To ensure the validity and rigor of the analysis, I employ a structured, methodical approach. This includes maintaining a clear audit trail of analytical decisions, systematically documenting coding choices, and continuously reflecting on potential biases (Tracy, 2025, p. 229). Balancing insider insight with systematic reflexivity ensures that the critique of CPAP ideology remains transparent, rigorous, and ethically grounded.

Methodologically, analyzing a document available strictly in Swedish introduces distinct analytical constraints. Because the government provides no definitive English counterpart, the text must be translated by the researcher. External computational tools and artificial intelligence (AI) were utilized to translate the material. This approach ensured that the core vocabulary was comprehensively

captured while minimizing human selection bias. However, this absence of official translated terminology forces a reliance on secondary interpretations or subjective translation choices, which inherently introduces risks of semantic shift. For a nation that markets itself as a global leader in climate action, the lack of an authoritative multilingual text creates an unnecessary layer of interpretive ambiguity for international researchers.

6. Analysis

This chapter applies Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (as detailed in chapter five) to analyze the CPAP at its textual, discursive, and social dimensions.

6.1 Textual Analysis

6.1.1 Transitivity Patterns (who is doing what?)

A transitivity analysis of the text reveals a clear discursive division of labor regarding climate action. By categorizing the verbs into distinct process types, a pattern emerges where the responsibility for physical, material action is structurally separated from the responsibility for strategic thought. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, while “regeringen” (the Government) and “Sverige” (Sweden) are positioned as the central protagonists of the text, their agency is rarely tied to material processes of concrete execution. Instead, the state's agency is heavily funneled through mental, verbal, and relational processes, framed through nominalized terms such as “bedömning” (assessment) and “förutsättningar” (conditions). This grammatical configuration effectively shifts the state's role from a physical actor executing climate solutions to an administrative authority evaluating them.

This distribution indicates a profound asymmetry in how accountability is assigned across society. While the government remains the most prominent and visible actor, its dominance is restricted to these cognitive and administrative spheres.

Meanwhile, the actual material objectives associated with other participants, such as “företag” (companies), “hushåll” (households), or are constructed as elements within broader, often impersonal processes of transition.

In most of the analyzed passages, the government does not function as a material actor that performs physical work. Instead, it is consistently constructed as a senser (assessing needs) or a sayer (declaring intent). This is structurally reinforced through the repetitive use of the “assessment” header, which creates a discursive buffer between the government and the physical world:

“The Government’s **assessment**: The Climate Convention and the Paris Agreement **should form** the basis...” (p.26).

“The Government’s **assessment**: There is untapped potential for Swedish companies...” (p.82).

“Government’s **assessment**: The separation and use of carbon dioxide (CCU) **can contribute** to the climate transition in a broader perspective” (p.126).

“However, if the countries of the world were to strengthen their collective climate policies [...] the **assessment** instead is that warming would be around 1.7 degrees Celsius by the end of the century” (p.20).

The last passage further illustrates how the potential for success is framed through a relational process (“the assessment... is”) and a conditional “if”. By positioning “the countries of the world” as the primary actors, the government can remain a passive senser of a global hypothetical rather than a participant in the material reduction of emissions. By utilizing the mental process of assessing, the text circumscribes the government’s agency within an intellectual and diagnostic domain. This establishes a managerial architect role; the Government provides the cognitive framework and defines the conditions under which the transition occurs yet remains syntactically detached from the material implementation.

This non-realization is further reinforced by relational processes, where climate challenges are framed as fixed conditions rather than areas for active intervention. Such constructions establish a sense of factuality, naturalizing the document's core growth-oriented logic, as in:

“The climate transition **can only** succeed if it takes place in a growing economy” (p.10).

The modal construction “can only” expresses a strong necessity, associating the success of climate action directly to economic growth. In this instance, growth is not presented as a policy choice but as a precondition for climate action. By foregrounding conditions, the government's role is positioned primarily as a facilitator operating within predefined economic constraints. This framing shift political action toward a technocratic framework, where climate governance is treated as a matter of managing conditions rather than enabling contestable political choices.

In contrast, when the text shifts its focus to households and businesses, the grammar transitions into material processes (the language of physical action). Here, the actor is no longer the Government:

“It is households and businesses that... **carry out** the climate transition” (p.11).

In this instance, the verb “carry out” functions as a quintessential material process. By grammatically linking the physical labor of the transition to private actors, the CPAP effectively outsources the government's material agency. This creates a lopsided accountability structure where the government retains the power of “assessment” (a mental process that cannot fail, only be revised), while the material responsibility for execution is shifted onto citizens, the market, and other countries.

6.1.2 Modality (how committed are they?)

While transitivity patterns reveal a structural division of labor, the analysis of modality indicates the government's degree of commitment to that labor. In the CPAP, modality is characterized by a strategic shift from the imperative (must) to the normative (should). This shift is evidenced by the 520 instances of the modal marker "bör" (should), while only 53 instances of the marker "måste" (must) are present. The fact that the government employs the imperative nearly ten times less frequently than the normative is telling; it suggests that within the CPAP, the climate transition is framed as a series of aspirational possibilities rather than a set of categorical necessities. By marginalizing the language of obligation, the text effectively de-escalates the climate crisis from a state of emergency requiring mandatory action to a manageable, yet non-binding, long-term project:

"In this document, the Government sets out how climate policy work **should** be conducted... in order to improve the conditions for households and businesses to make the decisions required to **achieve** the goals" (p.1).

This opening manifesto sets the terms of the discourse by projecting the government's own work as the matter of normative "should," while relocating the burden of "achieve" onto the private decisions of citizens. Conversely, high-affinity modality represented by the 468 instances of "ska" (will) is strategically displaced onto external actors or distant timelines:

"The Government **appointed** an inquiry to propose a strategy for how **Sweden will achieve** negative greenhouse gas emissions after 2045" (p.8).

This structure creates a temporal modality gap. The government's own agency is restricted to a completed administrative act in the past tense "appointed", which requires no further executive momentum. Meanwhile, the high commitment "will" be displaced onto the national proxy "Sweden" and deferred to a distal timeframe (2045). By separating the administrative act from the material outcome, the text projects an illusion of progress. The government can remain detached from

immediate accountability, while maintaining a discursive image of leadership, all without committing to the immediate, high-affinity actions required to reach the stated goals.

Even in the rare instances where high-affinity modality is employed, it is often used to deflect agency. For example, the text states that:

“The agricultural sector’s emissions ... These emissions **must** be reduced **over time** for Sweden and the EU to meet their climate commitments” (p.189).

Here, the imperative “must” is not directed at the government’s own actions, but instead projected onto an external sector and a vague timeframe (“over time”). This reinforces the pattern of discursive displacement, where language of necessity is reserved for non-state actors, while the government’s own role remains limited to the normative domain of should and assessing.

The ideological hierarchy of the document is most clearly revealed in the selective application of high-affinity modality. While climate measures are predominantly framed through the normative “should”, the imperative “must” is reserved for economic stability:

“The climate transition **must** take place within a growing economy where people can live free lives” (p.215).

By assigning the language of absolute necessity to economic growth while maintaining a language of suggestion for climate action. The Government establishes a hierarchy of priorities, where the climate transition is not an independent goal, but a conditional one, subordinated to the ontological requirement of a growing economy.

6.1.3 Nominalization (turning action into things)

While modality and transitivity reveal the shifting responsibility between actors, the use of nominalization serves to obscure the very nature of the climate action itself. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, the term “omställning” (transition) dominates the document’s vocabulary. Throughout the text, the transition is treated as a fixed entity (a noun), rather than the active verb “to transition.” Within the CPAP it allows the government to present complex, disruptive processes as abstract, manageable “objects,” effectively backgrounding the institutional and political effort to enact them:

“An effective and legitimate **climate transition** requires balanced and well-considered long-term measures in order to be sustainable in the long run” (p.240).

This sentence constructs the actor not as the government, state or even the public, but as the “climate transition” itself. This nominalization attributes agency to an abstract process that “requires” certain conditions, thereby backgrounding the social actors responsible for fulfilling them. The addition of evaluative adjectives such as “effective”, “legitimate”, and “balanced” introduces a normative, yet indeterminate, framework of assessment. Climate measures are not anchored in scientific criteria alone but in the discursively constructed notion of “balance.” Because this terminology remains linguistically undefined, it serves to legitimize political caution and diffuse institutional accountability.

The strategy of reification (treating a social process as a physical fact) is further extended:

“The most important **development** in this second climate policy action plan is the clear focus on ensuring that all measures taken form part of a broader plan to reach net zero” (p.17).

Here, “development” and “focus” function as nominalizations that replace active governing. By transforming the act of leading the climate transition into a series of

static nouns, the government presents the existence of the plan as the primary achievement. The “focus” becomes a product to be delivered rather than a continuous effort to be sustained. This effectively shifts the discourse from the urgency of emissions reduction to the completion of administrative frameworks. Together, these linguistic strategies construct a discourse of planned inaction. The government is positioned as a visionary architect that assesses and defines, while the material burden and accountability of the transition are consistently displaced onto non-state actors and future timelines.

6.2 Discursive Practices

In this second stage of the analysis, I interpret the text as a discursive practice. The examination focuses on how the text is produced and consumed as a strategic instrument of governance. The coding scheme (see **Table 1**) is used to explore how the CPAP navigates the inherent tensions between economic growth, sovereign interests, and ecological limits. Ultimately, this stage of the analysis reveals how the document functions to stabilize the constitutive horizon of Swedish climate policy, legitimizing a framework of hegemony.

6.2.1 Cynical Reason / Enlightened False Consciousness

To analyze the CPAP through the lens of cynical reason (Sloterdijk & Huyssen, 2012; Žižek, 2008), is to examine a state of enlightened false consciousness. This is the condition where the government is fully aware of the objective truth (the severity of the climate crisis and the inadequacy of current measures) yet continues to act in a way that contradicts that knowledge. The plan is not built on ignorance, but on a split between scientific recognition and political practice.

The Enlightened Scientific Alibi

The “enlightenment” within the CPAP is explicitly documented in chapter three, where it serves as an intellectual alibi (p.17-25). This proves that the subsequent

policy decisions are not born of ignorance but are made with full awareness of the escalating ecological reality. In the chapter called “Current state of knowledge about climate change” (p.17), the government acknowledges that “earth’s warming continues unabated” (p.17) and cites the IPCC to attribute proof that climate change “clearly can be connected to human emissions of greenhouse gases,” (p.17). Through this demonstration of scientific literacy, the government positions itself as a rational, “enlightened” actor, which is a prerequisite for the cynical logic that follows.

Furthermore, the government demonstrates the tangible, localized consequences of climate change by noting that “changes in precipitation patterns, shrinking glaciers, rising sea levels, and rapidly declining Arctic Sea ice” (p.18) are observable facts. Crucially, the plan acknowledges that changing weather patterns have had, and will continue to have, profound effects on the domestic landscape. The CPAP specifically highlight how extreme weather events, such as flooding and storms, have already disrupted vital infrastructure (including road, rail, and air transport) and continue to threaten land-based industries (e.g., forestry and agriculture) that are foundational to the Swedish economy (p.18-19). This detailed recognition of domestic vulnerability reinforces the image of a government that is fully “enlightened” regarding the immediate risks of climate change. However, in the context of cynical reason, this awareness does not serve as a catalyst for action, but rather as the intellectual foundation that makes the subsequent policy disconnect possible.

The Cynical Disconnect: Policy vs. Knowledge

The transition from scientific recognition to legislative practice is operationalized through a strategic substitution of immediate mitigation for long-term technological speculation. This substitution is first manifested in the text through references to the restructuring of the transport sector’s obligations via the (Govt. Bill 2023/24:28), which mandated a drastic lowering of the Biofuel Blending Mandate.

While the CPAP acknowledge the carbon-mitigating efficacy of biofuels, this legislative retreat represents a material concession to the fossil-fuel-dependent status quo (p. 94).

This move is rationalized through a discursive shift where the climate crisis is reframed as a question of social inequality and regional justice. In the government's assessment, they state that climate policies "affect different parts of society in different ways" and must therefore be implemented in an "acceptable manner" to avoid "harmful effects" (p. 21). From a CDA perspective, this is a populist appropriation of the equality discourse, where the government constructs a conflict between climate mitigation and social welfare to justify its paralysis.

In chapter seven, "Conditions for the climate transition," the government further argues for this reduction by dismissing previous legislation as having placed a "disproportionately strong emphasis" (p.70) on domestic transport targets, without enough regard for other societal objectives. By labeling earlier climate measures as disproportionate, the government effectively subordinates the established scientific emergency to the demands of short-term economic stability and political convenience:

"To help phase out fossil fuels, several pieces of the puzzle must be analyzed and assembled effectively" (p.62).

The metaphor of "pieces of the puzzle" exemplifies this cynical posture by reducing a civilizational emergency to a mere administrative task of reassembly. By framing the removal of functional climate measures as an act of "effective assembly," the government creates an ideological void in its immediate climate strategy. The logic is further codified through a strategic elevation of nuclear expansion. By positioning nuclear energy as the cornerstone of its climate strategy, the government engages in a discursive maneuver that allows for the maintenance of "business-as-usual" while simultaneously claiming radical environmental stewardship.

The deployment of cynical reason is most visible in the temporal architecture of the plan. The government acknowledges the scientific consensus regarding the urgency of the climate crisis, yet it prioritizes a solution (large-scale nuclear reactors) that cannot feasibly contribute to the grid for another 15 to 20 years. In the introduction to the CPAP, the government identifies nuclear expansion as one of the three pillars forming the foundation of its climate policy:

“In Sweden, expanded nuclear power is the single most important measure for enabling us to reduce our emissions nationally” (p.10).

This creates a “fetishistic disavowal” where the government knows very well that immediate emission reductions are required, yet through the fetish of nuclear power, it acts as if the climate crisis is a problem solved in the future. The nuclear promise functions as an ideological alibi, justifying the dismantling of immediate effective measures under the guise of a more “robust” long-term technical fix.

Furthermore, the nuclear discourse exemplifies the cynical reduction of a socio-political crisis to a mere technocratic challenge. By framing the climate issue exclusively as a problem of “clean baseload power,” the state bypasses the more difficult ideological questions regarding consumption patterns, transport intensity, and the limits of infinite growth. This is the hallmark of cynical reason: a strategy of systemic preservation. It signals to the citizenry that no fundamental change in lifestyle or economic structure is necessary, provided the invisible infrastructure of energy production is eventually replaced.

The cynicism lies in the fact that policies is not designed to solve the immediate crisis but to manage the perception of the crisis, thereby neutralizing the political pressure for more disruptive, immediate climate action. Consequently, the CPAP can be read not as a roadmap for decarbonization, but as a sophisticated ideological instrument for managing the tension between ecological necessity and political inertia.

6.2.2 Capitalist Realism

In the introduction to the CPAP, the discourse of climate change is immediately woven into the framework of capitalist realism. Here, the discourse functions as a boundary-setting strategy that establishes what is considered a “realistic” response to the crisis. The climate transition is not framed as a transformative shift, but as a project that must be made compatible with the existing economic order.

The Naturalization of Capital: Market Logic as Ontological Necessity

In chapter two, entitled “Climate policy as a driver for a growing economy,” the government sets the stage for the climate policy plan by depicting economic growth not as a political choice, but as an ontological necessity for ecological survival. The discourse establishes a symbiotic, almost biological relationship between capital accumulation and climate mitigation, explicitly asserting that:

“The climate transition presupposes growth, but it also drives growth” (p.10).

“The climate issue can only be solved in an economy that is growing and characterized by increased competitiveness, growth, strengthened preparedness, and resilience” (p.10).

These examples shows this presupposition - that indefinite economic expansion is a prerequisite for environmental preservation - functions as an established, self-evident truth. By utilizing the exclusionary and modalized phrase “can only be solved,” the discourse enacts a total naturalization of market logic. A causal mechanism is thus constructed in which the physical survival of the biosphere is made entirely contingent upon the sustained survival of the capitalist superstructure.

This naturalization serves a clear ideological function; it reterritorializes the climate crisis. Instead of acknowledging climate change as a material consequence of systemic overproduction that might necessitate a fundamental transformation of the prevailing economic order, the text reframes the crisis as a technocratic

management challenge. By filtering the crisis through concepts like “strengthened preparedness” and “resilience” the CPAP ensures that the market remains the ultimate horizon of political possibility. The core ideological paradox lies in the fact that the primary structural driver of ecological collapse is discursively engineered into its only viable cure. Through this semantic inversion, the discourse effectively neutralizes any radical political imagination that would seek to prioritize planetary boundaries over capital accumulation, reducing climate governance to a mechanism for preserving economic business-as-usual.

The government further shifts accountability away from the state by individualizing and marketizing the climate transition. The discourse treats public support and long-term commitment, as elements that exist outside of state mandate, noting that if a possible transition is to take place:

“It assumes that individuals and companies can act, innovate, consume, invest, finance and produce in a more climate-smart way and that prosperity increases” (p. 10).

This decentralized trajectory is further reinforced by framing the transition as an aggregate of “decisions made at kitchen tables and in boardrooms” (p.10). Within a CDA framework, this language serves a clear accountability function, effectively privatizing systemic obligations. By portraying the transition as a micro-level process carried out by private consumers and corporate actors rather than a macro-level, centralized mandate enforced by public governance, the text constructs the capitalist market as the only natural and viable arena for change.

The discourse solidifies this market logic by prioritizing strategies that treat “stable and growing household finances and a favorable business climate” (p. 11) as absolute non-negotiable prerequisites for environmental action. This framing aligns the CPAP with the structural mechanics of a corporate business plan, one that systematically privileges the health of the capitalist economic order over immediate ecological necessity. Consequently, biosphere preservation is stripped of its status

as an unconditional public good, leaving the climate transition entirely contingent upon the continued prosperity and uninterrupted capital accumulation of the prevailing macroeconomic system.

Closing the Horizon: The TINA Doctrine

The articulated strategies within the CPAP are highlighted in chapter seven, where the document acknowledges the magnitude of the task by stating that:

“To enable a structural transformation on the scale implied by the green transition, a number of systemic shifts are required across several of society’s fundamental technical systems, such as electricity generation, industrial processes, material recycling, transport, land use, etc” (p.57).

Meanwhile, the text describes a “structural transformation,” this shift is immediately neutralized by the narrow, technocratic definition of what these systems entail: “electricity generation, industrial processes, material recycling, transport, land use, etc.”. By defining the “system” exclusively through its technical and infrastructural components, the discourse effectively forecloses alternative conceptual frameworks that would acknowledge non-capitalist or socio-ecological strategies.

Within the CPAP, the environment is strictly constructed as a “resource base” for industrial processes, thereby marginalizing the Sámi perspective and other worldviews that conceptualize nature as a living entity with intrinsic value.

This discursive exclusion is a central mechanism of the TINA doctrine. It effectively works to exclude Indigenous stewardship and holistic ecological models from the list of “rational” or “functional” systems. Even as the document repeatedly refers to the government creating conditions for a more equal climate transition and social justice, this inclusion is strictly instrumentalized to serve the needs of industrial expansion. The government asserts that it is “important that citizens, civil society, and businesses throughout the country have the prerequisites to be part of

the development” (p.58), yet the underlying motive is revealed to be logistical rather than ethical. The text explicitly links equality to the necessity of public “acceptance,” warning that without it, it will be “difficult to expand electricity production and power grids according to the needs” (p.58) of industry and transport actors.

The TINA doctrine’s dependency on industrial expansion in Northern Sweden necessitates a parallel discursive strategy that systematically neutralizes Indigenous opposition. This erasure is structurally evident in the text's distribution of salience: the Sámi people are mentioned only twice in the entire CPAP. When they finally appear (p. 61), they are not positioned as active, sovereign partners in the transition, but are instead discursively constructed as an administrative and legal obstacle to be managed. Although the text acknowledges that the Sámi have lived in Sápmi “since time immemorial” and possess constitutional protection, this superficial recognition is immediately neutralized by framing their very existence as a source of “conflicts of interest” (p. 61) regarding industrial infrastructure.

By labeling the survival of Sámi culture as a localized, competing “interest” that conflicts with the macro-level imperatives of the “climate transition,” the government effectively instrumentalizes the broader ecological crisis to rationalize ongoing colonial extractivism. Through this rhetorical maneuver, the Sámi perspective is stripped of its historical and constitutional weight and reduced to a quantifiable variable in a technocratic cost-benefit analysis. Their ancestral rights are transformed into an administrative “puzzle piece” that must be managed through the state's Act on Consultation (2022:66) a mechanism deployed not to foster deep democratic deliberation, but to ensure that green capitalist expansion remains uninterrupted, “efficient,” and structurally “accepted” (p. 62).

Furthermore, the discursive placement of the Sámi people within a policy section shared alongside “gender equality” and “public awareness” (p. 61) serves a distinct depoliticizing function. Instead of treating Sápmi as a distinct geopolitical territory

occupied by a people possessing inherent sovereign rights, the discourse relies on a strategy of categorical flattening. It groups fundamental Indigenous rights together with generalized public information, campaigns and corporate-style civic engagement efforts.

This hegemonic co-optation reaches its logical conclusion in the final sentences of the passage, where the state invokes the democratic-sounding necessity of a “broad anchor” and heightened “public awareness” (p. 62) as strategic tools to guarantee that industrial transitions can proceed without local friction. By doing so, the text reveals a calculated awareness of the legal and ethical violations inherent in expanding green infrastructure on occupied lands. It resolves this tension by cloaking aggressive industrial expansion in the progressive rhetoric of international climate governance and the Paris Agreement. This strategic appropriation provides a superficial moral alibi for what operates, in effect, as state-sanctioned green colonialism.

Quantitative Facades: Market Stalinism and the Bureaucracy of Transition

The final layer of the capitalist realism paradigm is the deployment of market Stalinism. This manifest itself through a discursive obsession with administrative output (targets, indicators, and investigations) that serves to stimulate intense climate action while material passivity. Within the CPAP discourse work to translate the climate crisis into a series of technical and bureaucratic tasks, creating a quantitative facade where the production of “results” on paper takes precedence over actual emissions reductions. The government’s assertion that:

“Efforts should therefore be made where we achieve the greatest emissions reductions — climate policy needs to become more cost-effective” (p. 10)

This serves as a prime example of market Stalinism. Within this framework, the existential threat of climate change is reduced to a problem of capital allocation and fiscal optimization. By prioritizing “cost-effectiveness” over absolute reduction, the

discourse transforms climate action into a quantitative exercise. This language functions as a neutralizing strategy. It allows the state to dismiss radical or immediate domestic interventions by labeling them “inefficient” or “costly.” The demand for efficiency becomes a bureaucratic tool for procrastination, ensuring that the state can maintain a façade of intense climate management (producing reports, audits, and metrics) while avoiding the political friction of material systemic change.

Furthermore, the role of politics is reduced to a purely supportive function: to create “frameworks, conditions, and incentives” so that emissions can be phased out in a “controlled and efficient manner” (p. 10). This language signals that the climate must adapt to the requirements of capital, not the other way around. The government’s primary duty is no longer to lead an emergency response, but to ensure that the transition serves “long-term competitiveness” and is “socioeconomically efficient” (p. 10).

The logic is further internalized through the replacement of material action with a self-perpetuating cycle of internal monitoring and “mapping.” This is exemplified in the government’s assessment of available financial support. While acknowledging a “flora of financial support” and an “untapped potential” for investment, the proposed solution is not to simplify the system or increase funding, but rather that “further analysis is needed regarding the possibility of facilitating the dissemination of information” (p. 83). By constantly calling for new platforms, investigations, and information-sharing models, the government produces an aesthetic of intense activity.

6.2.3 Political Realism

While capitalist realism exposes the underlying economic fantasies of the CPAP, the document is also deeply rooted in political realism. Based on Morgenthau’s

classical principles, the climate transition is also discursively reframed, through a rational of global competitiveness and national security.

The Green Race: Offensive Power and Relative Gains

The term “competitiveness” (konkurrenskraft) is used 85 times throughout the CPAP, a linguistic saturation that signals the role of political realism as the document’s second ideological and discursive foundation. In CDA, this obsession reveals that the term is not merely a descriptive economic objective but a hegemonic keyword being used by the government. Therefore, the climate transition cannot be treated as a purely cooperative global effort, but as a site for achieving relative gains.

In the CPAP, the government is primarily concerned with the nation’s power position in relation to others. The climate crisis is discursively reframed into a global race where “winning” is defined by industrial dominance and the capture of future markets. The government’s rhetoric suggests that for Sweden to succeed, it must not only decarbonize but do so in a manner that increases its relative strength against rival nations. This is explicitly stated as a core ambition of the plan:

“Sweden is in a unique position to take advantage of the growth potential and geopolitical benefits that the green transition represents” (p.57).

By framing the transition as something to be “taken advantage of,” the discourse moves away from an ethics of planetary care and into the realm of statecraft and power maximization. The “unique position” of the Swedish state is not presented as a mandate for selfless leadership, but as a strategic asset to be exploited for relative gains.

The government’s recurring ambition to “promote an industrial sector that is competitive and growing in a fossil-free world” (p. 10). Demonstrates this zero-sum logic. By tethering climate action so tightly to competitiveness, the discourse ensures that the transition is only “rational” if it results in a net increase in national

power. The “enlightened” recognition of a shared planetary threat is thus funneled into a nationalist pursuit, where the goal is not merely to mitigate carbon, but to ensure that Swedish industry captures the market shares of its rivals:

“Swedish companies have clearly demonstrated a willingness and an ability to take on a leadership role in the global transition, thereby combining climate benefits with growth and competitiveness” (p.57).

This focus on relative gains creates a discursive closure that subordinates ecological ethics to the requirements of statecraft. When the government argues that Sweden’s primary contribution to the Paris Agreement is through its “export-led green transition,” it is asserting that the climate can only be saved if it serves the Swedish national interest. The cynicism lies in the fact that the state uses the universal language of environmentalism to mask a traditional realist strategy: ensuring that the Swedish state emerges from the transition not just “green,” but more powerful and economically dominant than before.

Furthermore, in chapter four “International Climate Work” (p. 25), it signals a definitive shift in how the government conceptualizes Sweden’s global responsibility. Even as the first paragraph starts by acknowledging the Paris Agreement and its three goals (mitigation, adaptation, and finance), there is a rapid shift to national interests. The core message is defined as a duality of “urgency and opportunities,” (p. 26). While “urgency” is attributed to global responsibility, “opportunity” is explicitly defined as “new jobs and growth” (p. 26).

International engagement is discursively constructed as a platform for “leadership” and “political engagement” (p. 26). The text asserts that initiatives can take many forms, ranging from “a declaration or a statement” to more structured collaborations. Allowing for a more performative and less binding form of global involvement. It further states that “the establishment of new financial institutions should be avoided” and that “existing structures should be used as efficiently as possible” (p. 26). Consequently, the Government positions the state as a strategic

power actor rather than a traditional donor. The goal is no longer to redistribute wealth to address historical climate injustices, but to “shape the international discussion” (p. 26) to ensure that global market conditions favor the Swedish export-led transition. In this discursive landscape, international solidarity is effectively replaced by green statecraft, where the climate crisis serves as an arena for maintaining and expanding national hegemony.

Vulnerability Reduction: Defensive Security and Resource Survival

In the CPAP, the drive toward a post-carbon society encounters a definitive structural limit; its implementation is fundamentally bounded by the traditional imperatives of the territorial defense. This friction represents the classic realist dilemma based on the survival of the state versus the transformation of the state. By categorizing the Swedish Armed Forces as a “sector of vital societal importance” (p. 57) that is exempt from the transition pace of civil society, the government invokes a logic of sovereign survival. This discourse prioritizes relative military power over ecological mandates. The document’s insistence on the necessity of “continuous, robust, and field-grade fuel” functions as a non-negotiable strategic requirement, ensuring that the state’s ability to project force remains its primary objective. Within this framework, the Armed Forces occupy a “realist enclave,” a space governed by the “autonomy of the political sphere,” where the laws of military necessity operate independently from the normative goals of the broader green transition.

This security logic is not confined to the military apparatus; it permeates the government’s approach to resource extraction and energy dependency. The plan recontextualizes the shift away from fossil fuels as a move toward geopolitical autarky, asserting that Sweden must eliminate its reliance on foreign imports to mitigate “geopolitical risks and disruptions in supply chains” (p. 99). Within this realist framework, the expansion of nuclear power can be seen as a strategic

imperative rather than a mere environmental choice. The government explicitly notes that:

“The most important prerequisites for the transition are a secure and cost-effective supply of fossil-free energy” (p. 14).

“Nuclear power is a prerequisite for achieving the climate goals” (p. 15).

“Increased availability of nuclear power strengthens the reliability of supply in the Swedish electricity system” (p. 15).

By shifting the national objective toward a “fossil-free” rather than “renewable,” the government elevates nuclear energy to the role of a central pillar of national energy security. Likewise, the intensification of domestic mining are rebranded as a strategic imperative. By framing the “supply of critical raw materials” (p. 99) through the lens of national security, the government effectively securitizes the landscape. In this realist hierarchy, the survival of the sovereign through energy independence and “robust” preparedness takes precedence over climate interests, including the land rights of the Sami people, proving that the “green” transition is, in practice, a strategic reconfiguration of state power.

The discourse of sovereign survival in the CPAP is further spatialized through Sweden’s strategic positioning in the Arctic and Barents regions. The government identifies the northern parts of Sweden, Norway, and Finland as having “unique opportunities to lead the green transition” (p. 29). However, this leadership is framed not merely as ecological stewardship, but as a strategic response to a shifting geopolitical landscape following “Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022” (p. 30). As Russia retreats from Barents cooperation, Sweden interprets the green transition of industry and energy systems as a means to fill this regional power vacuum.

In this context, climate policy is instrumentalized as a form of soft power with hard security implications. By leading the “green transition” in the European Arctic,

Sweden seeks to consolidate its influence and presence in a sensitive border region where traditional multilateralism has collapsed. This reflects Morgenthau's realist assertion that states must adapt their pursuit of power to the specific historical and geographical circumstances of their time (Sosnowski, 2025).

6.3 Social Practices

The final stage of Fairclough's model (the explanation) situates the CPAP within the broader societal structures from which it emerges. This section seeks to explain *why* these discursive patterns exist and *what* social functions they serve.

The Institutional Context

These institutional alignments are analytically important because they reveal how climate policy is not developed in isolation but is shaped through established governance frameworks. By situating the CPAP within these structures, the study identifies a strong alignment between the Swedish climate strategy and international and EU-level policy, particularly binding agreements such as the Paris Agreement (p. 36, 42, 48, 50...) and EU climate policy (p. 12, 14, 20, 21...).

In relation to the EU framework, the government conceptualizes the European Union not as a site of environmental collaboration, but fundamentally as an expansion of the domestic economic arena. The empirical material explicitly frames the EU internal market as the natural territory for domestic capital, stating that "the internal market is Swedish companies home market" (p. 39). Moreover, regulations created at the EU level "can contribute to significantly greater climate benefit and competitiveness than that created at the national level" (p. 39). This framing relies heavily on a discourse of scale to project national economic interests onto a global canvas. The state leverages the EU's geopolitical and economic weight to externalize its market-driven climate logic:

“The EU's size also means that decisions made jointly within the EU often affect companies throughout the world and thus have global effects on emissions” (p. 39).

Consequently, the European Commission's Green Deal is naturalized within this competitive framework. While the text notes that the Green Deal aims to pave the way for a transition to climate neutrality and a “prosperous Europe” it explicitly these ecological targets to economic expansion.

The broader climate plan and the binding targets of the European Climate Law (such as the 55% net reduction by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050, p. 41) are treated as predictable market architectures. They are “absolutely central for Sweden to contribute to the fulfillment of the Paris Agreement's goals,” however the government positions the state not as an autonomous regulator of environmental degradation, but as a market facilitator. This strategic repositioning reconfigures the metrics of responsibility and accountability. By outsourcing ecological duties to the EU internal market and corporate actors, the state externalizes its ethical responsibility. Climate action is no longer constructed as a direct obligation between the democratic state and its citizens. This framing diffuses political accountability across a complex, transnational network. If emissions reductions are contingent on global market behaviors and supranational structures, domestic policymakers are insulated from blame.

Furthermore, on an institutional level, the discourses of securitization and competitiveness function to protect the structural integrity of the Swedish state amid global instability. This is clearly manifested in the state's strategic reliance on “multilateral and multidisciplinary methods for cooperation” (p. 29) to project its economic and geopolitical power. Within this framework, global climate governance is systematically retethered to resource and energy security. This is illustrated by the state's alignment with the International Energy Agency (IEA), whose mandate has shifted to explicitly focus on global net-zero emissions “alongside a continued focus on energy security” (p. 29). Through initiatives like

the Clean Energy Transitions Program (CETP), the state embraces a logic of regulatory expansion, targeting high-emitting middle-income countries like India, China, and Indonesia (p. 29). By utilizing the policy architectures of the OECD and IEA, the Swedish state positions itself to drive a “desirable policy development” abroad. Crucially, this external influence is weaponized to normalize and export specific domestic industrial interests, explicitly leveraging organizations like the Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA) and the IAEA to “strengthen the development of nuclear power internationally” (p. 29).

This outward projection of market-driven interests operates in tandem with a regional strategy of institutional securitization. The Nordic region, the Arctic, and the Barents region are explicitly conceptualized as “natural channels” (p. 29). The Nordic Council's vision of becoming “the world's most integrated and sustainable region by 2030” (p. 29) is thus translated from an ecological ambition into a state-led mechanism to institutionalize green market hegemony. By framing the Nordic region as a “pioneer” (p. 29), the state naturalizes a highly competitive, export-oriented model of green growth designed to showcase “Nordic green solutions... to the rest of the world” (p. 29).

Importantly, this discourse of pioneering market leadership functions as a protective mechanism against geopolitical fragmentation. The text explicitly acknowledges that the structural integrity of regional governance has been severely compromised by “Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine... and Russia's recent announcement that they are leaving the Barents Council” (p. 30). By positioning Swedish green industrial leadership as the primary mechanism to “protect and preserve” (p. 30) vulnerable regions, the state utilizes climate policy to project power and maintain a strategic foothold in a contested geopolitical zone.

The Societal Context

Beneath these institutional arrangements lies the wider societal “context of culture” the deeper ideological and cultural frameworks that define the Swedish state's identity and dictate which meanings are socially intelligible and legitimate. The CPAP actively constructs a specific narrative of Swedish national identity, rooted in a form of ecological exceptionalism and techno-nationalist leadership. The text explicitly links state identity to international prestige and leadership is not defined by climate transformation, but by an elite performance of global vanguardism. The state positions itself as a moral entrepreneur whose primary duty is to “gather ambitious actors”. The narrative naturalizes the state's alignment with corporate interests by celebrating domestic industry as an inherent part of the national character:

"Swedish companies are innovative and are at the absolute forefront of the green transition" (p. 30).

Consequently, leadership is translated into the soft power of regulatory export and market design. The text emphasizes that it is vital for Sweden to “be involved in shaping the international discussion on conditions and policy development regarding targets, policy instruments, trade, and market conditions for industry from a global perspective” (p. 30).

This techno-nationalist identity operates as a core component within a broader, deeply entrenched global order that the CPAP actively reinforces. The text maps out a specific geopolitical and spatial hierarchy of emission responsibilities, stating that while the climate issue is global, “it is primarily populous countries leaving poverty behind that are increasing emissions” (p. 11). By explicitly targeting expanding economies such as China, India, and Brazil, the discourse performs a vital ideological deflection. It systematically constructs the climate crisis not as an inherent byproduct of centuries of Western capital accumulation, but rather as a contemporary crisis driven by the demographic and economic expansion of the Global South.

Within this naturalized global order, the Swedish state positions its own domestic ambition as contingent upon external market efficiency and economic survival. The text reveals a strict calculation of conditional sustainability, arguing that global compliance is necessary “for Sweden to be able to continue towards ambitious goals on conditions that are legitimate based on beneficial impact and economic sustainability” (p. 11).

This structural hierarchy is further reinforced through the marketization of global development aid. The text establishes a clear ideological sequence for “developing nations”:

“Climate aid needs to be directed toward creating conditions for a transformation in economic growth. Poverty needs to be reduced and prosperity increased so that climate action can be prioritized” (p. 12).

By asserting this rigid causal chain, the text operates on the cultural assumption that ecological awareness is contingent upon economic growth, marginalizing alternative non-capitalist pathways to climate resilience.

Finally, alternative perspectives (indigenous knowledge and Sámi perspectives), are not merely ignored but are discursively excluded. Because these worldviews often prioritize land stewardship and finite resource management over industrial expansion, they represent a “logic” that contradicts the neoliberal requirement for continuous growth. By failing to integrate these perspectives, the CPAP ensures its discourse is not challenged by any competing rationalities. The language of the CPAP reinforces inequality by presenting the industrialization of indigenous lands as a “natural” and “unquestionable” necessity for national survival. The government makes the interests of the dominant group appear universal, thereby delegitimizing indigenous claims as obstacles to a “global good.” Consequently, the plan fails to disrupt the status quo and include alternative perspectives.

7. Discussion

The CPAP can be understood as a linguistic framework that helps stabilize the current economic order and existing power structures in the face of the transformative demands of the climate crisis. The discourse is clearly shaped by ideological fantasies about what is considered possible within the limits of neoliberal politics and maintaining the status quo. Although the government presents its initiatives as climate-oriented efforts, these policies appear to be driven by underlying motives primarily connected to strategies of green industrial competitiveness, securitization, and national sovereignty. Climate action is therefore framed less as a transformative ecological project and more as an opportunity to strengthen economic and geopolitical positioning.

One of the most striking findings in the material is the strong influence of defense-oriented rhetoric and military associations. References to preparedness, strategic autonomy, energy security, and national interest suggest that climate policy are increasingly intertwined with broader security agendas. In this context, nuclear power is positioned as a central pillar of the future energy system and is represented as a technologically advanced and almost inevitable solution to climate change. The discourse surrounding nuclear energy is not only constructed as a necessary climate strategy, but also as essential for preserving industrial strength, national security, and energy resilience.

At the same time, the absence of alternative perspectives is highly noticeable. Ideas that challenge the dominant logic of economic growth, industrial expansion, and technological modernization are largely excluded from the material. I was unable to identify any significant counter-discourses or linguistic patterns indicating resistance to growth-oriented ideology or to the institutional frameworks shaped by dominant international actors. As a result, the discourse remains confined within narrowly defined political and economic boundaries, where climate policy is legitimized primarily insofar as it aligns with the existing neoliberal system.

This bounded framing is further reinforced through a clear logic of responsibility displacement. The government is positioned as a managerial authority that primarily coordinates and enables rather than transforms, while responsibility for climate action is increasingly shifted onto private actors, the EU, households, and other nations. Sweden is simultaneously constructed as a global climate pioneer, which functions to justify a limited scope of further domestic action. International engagement is thus largely confined to non-binding forms of influence such as knowledge sharing, strategic communication, and participation through existing structures like the EU internal market. Beyond these channels, the emergence of new financial commitments or expanded cooperative initiatives is notably absent or actively discouraged.

The discourse therefore reflects not ignorance, but a form of ideological management in which acknowledgment of the climate crisis coexists with the continued reproduction of the very systems contributing to it. This dynamic perfectly illustrates how cynical reason operates within the existing institutional system. The actors involved are no longer suffering from an ideological blindness or a lack of ecological awareness, they participate in the practice leading up to this outcome. Yet, instead of allowing this awareness to disrupt the status quo, cynical reason allows them to neutralize the radical potential of climate action. Ultimately, the acknowledgment of environmental collapse does not spark systemic transformation. Instead, the crisis is absorbed by the existing framework, reinforcing the absolute necessity of the current order and ensuring that power dynamics remain entirely unchanged.

7.1 Conclusion

This study has examined how ideological assumptions are constructed in the Swedish Government's Climate Policy Action Plan (CPAP). In particular, it aimed to answer the questions of how economic growth, securitization, and responsibility were articulated and shaped in the Swedish climate policy discourse. By applying

a three-dimensional framework of critical discourse analysis, the study has systematically exposed and exemplified how these meanings are produced at the textual level, how they are embedded within broader and overlapping discursive practices, and how they relate to wider socio-political practices and ideological foundations. Across these levels, the findings indicate that Sweden's climate policy is constructed through a consistent framing of ecological governance within dominant economic and political structures. Consequently, the policy text functions less as a tool for ecological disruption and more as a mechanism for systemic reinforcement, preserving the status quo.

Regarding **SQ1**: (national sovereignty, climate responsibility, and global cooperation), the empirical material reveals a profound ideological tension managed through a clear pattern of responsibility displacement. On the textual level, the Swedish government actively constructs an identity for the state as an ambitious, eco-modern 'climate pioneer.' However, this discursive positioning undergoes a strategic shift when moving from abstract leadership to concrete implementation. The actual burden of climate action is systematically displaced away from state mechanisms and onto private actors, individual households, and international counterparts. By linguistically shifting accountability, the state preserves its moral authority as an environmental leader while simultaneously absolving itself of direct interventionist obligations.

At the level of discursive and social practice, this displacement relies heavily on a logic of institutional confinement. Global and regional cooperation is not framed as an open-ended path toward transformative ecological solidarity; instead, it is strictly restricted to pre-existing, market-friendly architectures, such as the EU internal market and the Paris Agreement. Alternative, more radical models of transnational resource redistribution or heavily binding structural mandates are notably absent or actively marginalized within the text. Consequently, the discourse functions as a powerful tool for hegemony maintenance. By filtering environmental commitments through the preservation of state sovereignty and competitive advantage, the policy

text ensures that global cooperation is systematically deprioritized whenever it clashes with the immediate demands of the national interest.

Regarding **SQ2:** (legitimation of the economic growth paradigm), the CPAP strongly legitimizes a growth-oriented framework while systematically excluding alternative post-growth perspectives. At the textual level, economic growth is frequently represented as an ontological necessity. By linguistically pairing environmental progress with economic expansion, the text establishes a discursive dependency where ecological preservation is made entirely contingent upon continuous capital accumulation. At the level of discursive practice, the policy limits the available discursive space for alternative climate imaginaries. Paradigms that fundamentally question the sustainability of perpetual growth – indigenous knowledge or Sámi perspectives –are completely omitted or rendered unthinkable. Ultimately, the text ensures that environmental concern does not destabilize existing market hierarchies; instead, the climate crisis is weaponized to justify and further entrench the very economic imperatives that drive environmental degradation.

Regarding **SQ3:** (security and defense-related discourse), climate and energy strategies are increasingly articulated through a geopolitical lens. The CPAP strongly legitimizes a framework where ecological governance is entirely subordinated to the preservation and expansion of state power. The state is positioned as a managerial authority prioritizing stability, competitiveness, and energy security. At the textual level, the climate crisis is reframed from a purely ecological emergency into a threat-multiplier that directly endangers national sovereignty. By deploying vocabulary rooted in “preparedness” and “strategic autonomy,” the text elevates technological interventions, such as nuclear power, to the status of national defense imperatives.

At the level of discursive practice, this intense focus on security and geopolitical survival severely restricts the available space for non-strategic climate policies. The role of the state is narrowed to that of a chief security officer and market facilitator,

whose primary duty is to ensure that domestic industries possess the competitive edge required to outperform international rivals. In a world implicitly characterized by anarchic competition, the CPAP aligns the climate crisis to ensure that the state's primary objective remains the fortification of its own geopolitical position, the protection of its industrial core, and the maximization of its power relative to other actors on the global stage.

7.2 Relation to Previous Research and Theoretical Contribution

The findings of this study can be related to several strands of existing research on environmental governance, ideological critique of growth-oriented paradigms, populist climate discourse, and the Swedish policy context. First, in relation to historical analyses of environmental governance, the results support the argument that contemporary climate policy is increasingly embedded within several political sectors. The CPAP reflects a continuation of governance structures where environmental concerns are integrated into economic and strategic priorities, rather than positioned as fundamentally transformative projects.

Second, the findings resonate with ideological critiques of the growth paradigm, particularly research arguing that “green growth” narratives often function to stabilize rather than challenge existing economic systems. This supports the argument in the literature that climate governance is frequently constrained by an implicit commitment to growth, even when addressing ecological limits.

At the same time, the study extends existing research by highlighting the strong securitization of climate discourse within the Swedish context. While previous studies have noted the integration of climate and security agendas, this analysis shows a particularly pronounced convergence between climate policy, defense rationalities, and energy security discourse, especially through the framing of nuclear power as a strategic and stabilizing technology. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how climate governance is increasingly articulated

through national security logics in contexts perceived as technologically advanced and politically stable.

The study contributes to the Swedish context literature by showing how Sweden's self-image as a climate pioneer functions discursively to legitimize continuity rather than transformation. This positioning enables responsibility displacement, where Sweden is constructed primarily as an exemplary, knowledge-based, and EU-integrated actor, while deeper structural commitments and new financial initiatives are downplayed or excluded.

Finally, the broader implication of these findings is that climate policy discourse may contribute to the stabilization of existing socio-economic structures under the appearance of transformative action, with important consequences for how responsibility, urgency, and political possibility are distributed, potentially limiting the scope for more radical climate interventions.

7.3 Limitations & Future Research

This study is primarily limited to a critical discourse analysis of the Swedish Government's Climate Policy Action Plan (CPAP) as a textual and policy document, meaning that it focuses on the representation and construction of climate policy rather than its actual implementation or material outcomes. As a result, the analysis cannot assess whether or how the identified discursive patterns translate into concrete policy practices, institutional behavior, or measurable climate impacts. In addition, the study is limited to one national policy document, which restricts the possibility of broader generalizations beyond the Swedish context or across different policy arenas and time periods. Methodologically, the reliance on a qualitative discourse analytical framework also means that the findings are interpretative in nature and shaped by the researcher's analytical lens, rather than statistically generalizable.

These limitations point to several important avenues for future research. First, further studies could investigate the relationship between discourse and implementation by examining how the managerial, securitized, and growth-oriented framing identified in this study is translated into policy practice and institutional decision-making. Second, comparative research across different national contexts would be valuable in order to explore whether similar discursive configurations appear elsewhere, or whether Sweden represents a specific case within broader patterns of climate governance. Third, future research could also examine how alternative imaginaries of climate governance, particularly post-growth or de-growth perspectives, are marginalized or excluded not only in official policy documents but also in political debates, media discourse, and institutional settings. Finally, additional work could further develop understanding of how responsibility displacement and Sweden's self-positioning as a climate pioneer operate across different policy domains and levels of governance, particularly in relation to EU frameworks and international climate negotiations.

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8.3 Word Frequency Query Translation

Swedish Word	English Translation	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage
aktörer	actors	7	106	0,11%
andra	others	5	235	0,25%
användning	use	10	91	0,10%
arbetsmaskiner	working machines	14	91	0,10%

åtgärder	measures	8	312	0,33%
bedömning	assessment	9	260	0,27%
behöver	need	7	234	0,25%
bidra	contribute	5	229	0,24%
delar	parts	5	91	0,10%
dess	these	5	141	0,15%
drivmedel	fuel	9	114	0,12%
energi	energy	6	99	0,10%
enligt	according to	6	132	0,14%
europiska	European	10	93	0,10%
fordon	vehicles	6	136	0,14%
fossilfri	fossil-free	9	94	0,10%
företag	companies	7	146	0,15%
förslag	proposals	7	137	0,14%
förutsättningar	conditions	15	180	0,19%
globala	global	7	121	0,13%
gröna	green	5	124	0,13%
hållbara	sustainable	8	112	0,12%
innebär	means	7	165	0,17%
internationella	international	15	106	0,11%
klimatomställningen	the climate transition	19	193	0,20%
klimatpolitiska	climate policy	15	124	0,13%
koldioxid	carbon dioxide	9	93	0,10%

kommer	will	6	200	0,21%
kunna	be able to	5	201	0,21%
laddinfrastruktur	charging infrastructure	17	130	0,14%
länder	countries	6	100	0,11%
mellan	between	6	109	0,11%
minska	reduce	6	252	0,27%
nationella	national	10	96	0,10%
olika	different	5	133	0,14%
procent	percent	7	155	0,16%
regeringen	the government	10	432	0,46%
samtidigt	simultaneously	9	92	0,10%
skälen	the reasons	6	103	0,11%
stora	large	5	116	0,12%
styrmedel	policy instruments	9	107	0,11%
sverige	Sweden	7	525	0,55%
under	during	5	189	0,20%
uppdrag	assignment	7	127	0,13%
utsläpp	emissions	7	355	0,37%
växthusgaser	greenhouse gases	12	129	0,14%
vilket	which	6	108	0,11%