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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and  
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# **Ecolabelling as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles?**

– A case of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel in Sweden through  
a paradox perspective

*Lotta Karlsson*



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**Ecolabelling as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles?**  
- A case of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel in Sweden through a paradox perspective

*Lotta Karlsson*

**Supervisor:** Hanna Bergeå, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development

**Examiner:** Erica von Essen, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development

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## Abstract

Humans' rapidly growing consumption of natural resources have caused severe damage on the planet which has led to climate change and deranged ecosystems. When looking at actions taken for establishing sustainable consumption of natural resources, ecolabelling is a possible matter to look closer into. Ecolabelling is a declaration that provides information to the consumer, through a logotype or other type of information on a product, about the environmental impact of a specific product that is concerned with one or several environmental improvements. Furthermore, ecolabels operate as the direct link between products and consumers and are intended as a means for consumers to make more sustainable choices when consuming. Even though ecolabelled products are a better alternative from an environmental perspective when consuming, they are still a part of our consumption pattern which today is too demanding for our natural resources and ecosystems. Although ecolabel organizations could be seen as suitable candidates for encouraging sustainable lifestyles due to their commitment to sustainability, paradoxes can be found in regard to their other organizational interests since organizations have to be aware of and able to manage multiple and sometimes conflicting demands and objectives in order to be successful.

This thesis explores how Ecolabelling Sweden, through the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, encourages consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and the potential consequences that may occur by doing that in regard to their other organizational demands and objectives. By using the theory of sustainability communication and the theory of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations as a theoretical lens, the opportunity was given to understand how Ecolabelling Sweden encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and to critically explore how this possibly may interfere with their other organizational demands and objectives. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with eight employees at Ecolabelling Sweden. The findings show that Ecolabelling Sweden, through the Nordic Ecolabel, can be seen as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles by accepting and identifying possible management strategies for the identified paradoxes and by improving and developing their strategies for encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles.

*Keywords:* Consumers, Ecolabel, Paradox perspective, Sustainability communication, Sustainable consumption, Sustainable lifestyles

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# Table of contents

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Aim and research questions	12
1.2 Background: Personal story	12
1.3 Existing research	13
1.3.1 Ecolabelling as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles	13
1.3.2 Paradox perspective	14
<b>2 Theoretical framework</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 Sustainability communication	16
2.2 Paradox perspective on sustainable organizations	18
<b>3 Method</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 Research design	20
3.2 Data collection	20
3.2.1 Interviews	20
3.2.2 Document	21
3.3 Data analysis procedures	21
3.4 Validity and reliability	22
3.5 Reflections about ethical concerns	23
<b>4 Findings and analysis</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?	24
4.1.1 Findings: Sustainable lifestyles	24
4.1.2 Findings: Sustainable consumption	24
4.1.3 Analysis: How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?	25
4.2 How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers?	26
4.2.1 Findings: The Nordic Swan Ecolabel's position and objectives	26
4.2.2 Findings: Consumers	27
4.2.3 Analysis: How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers?	28
4.3 How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?	29
4.3.1 Findings: Encourage sustainable lifestyles versus provide a competitive advantage on the market for license holders	29
4.3.2 Findings: United personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel versus license holders creating their own campaigns	31
4.3.3 Analysis: How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?	32
<b>5 Discussion</b>	<b>34</b>
5.1 Thesis limitations and practical implications	35
5.2 Suggestions for future research	35
<b>6 Conclusion</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>38</b>
Collected data: Interviews	40

# List of tables

Table 1. Identified themes in relation to the research questions.....	21
Table 2. Interview guide.....	41
Table 3. Translation of citations.....	43

# Table of figures

Figure 1. Developed from Smith and Lewis (2011) model “Dynamic equilibrium model of organizing”.....19

# Abbreviations

ASAP	A Sustainable Acceleration Program
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
LCA	Life Cycle Assessment
LCT	Life Cycle Thinking
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme





# 1 Introduction

Resources from nature, such as materials, water, and energy, are the basis for human life on earth. Nevertheless, humans' rapidly growing consumption of natural resources causes severe damage on the planet which has led to climate change and deranged ecosystems. These damages, in their turn, have negative effects on fresh water reserves, fish stocks, forests, fields, and species (Giljum et al., 2009). During 2016, Swedish residents were responsible for about 100 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions caused by consumption, where 44 percent of the emissions were generated in other countries due to Swedish consumption (Naturvårdsverket, 2018). This calculation includes both private and public consumption and investments (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2017).

When looking at actions taken for establishing sustainable consumption of natural resources, ecolabelling is a possible matter to look closer into. Ecolabelling is a declaration that provides information to the consumer, through a logotype or other type of information on a product, about the environmental impact of a specific product that is concerned with one or several environmental improvements (Liljenstolpe and Elofsson, 2009). A product labelled with an ecolabel can, for example, have a lower environmental impact than similar products in terms of lower emission levels. This means that products that are labelled with an ecolabel can be better, or less dangerous, from an environmental perspective than other equivalent products. However, this does not mean that ecolabelled products always are better from an environmental perspective than products without an ecolabel. Thus, ecolabel is only a tool that the producer of the product uses to signal a message to consumers (Liljenstolpe and Elofsson, 2009). After the Rio Summit in 1992, it has existed an international consensus regarding the necessity for encouraging sustainable development to the public. This consensus allowed for bringing together environmental concerns with the procedures of production and consumers' consumption patterns (Lavallée and Plouffe, 2004). Therefore, ecolabels operate as the direct link between products and consumers (Lavallée and Plouffe, 2004) and are intended as a means for consumers to make more sustainable choices when consuming (Rex and Baumann, 2006; Ratiu, 2014; Darnall et al., 2018).

The interest in environmental issues has increased globally among consumers and caused a higher awareness of our consumption patterns and its negative effects on the environment (Darnall et al., 2018). In Europe, a majority of the population thinks protecting the environment is very important. More than 94 percent express that protection of the environment is important, and among these, 54 percent express that it is very important (Eurobarometer, 2017). While the interest for environmental protection has increased, markets have developed more than 460 ecolabels in almost 200 countries within 25 industry sectors (Ecolabel Index, 2019). These ecolabels are often sponsored and/or administered by governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or business associations (Darnall et al., 2018). In Sweden, a huge number of ecolabels exist on the market. These ecolabels can be found on different products and services which mark whether the product or service is produced under better environmental conditions and/or produced under better ethical conditions (Medveten Konsumtion, 2019). The many ecolabels are varied, and some can be viewed as more reliable than others. For example, some products can appear to look like a better alternative from an environmental perspective while they, in fact, are not. This can be referred to as greenwashing which is an attempt to view products as superior from an environmental perspective by its appearance (Cox and Pezzullo, 2016). To make sure that a product actually is produced under better environmental conditions, an alternative is to look for ecolabels that follow the 14000 series by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The ISO 14000 series for ecolabels constitute of three different types of standardizations, type 1 (ISO 14024), type 2 (ISO 14021), and type 3 (ISO 14025) (Liljenstolpe and Elofsson, 2009). The three standardizations are primarily based on specific rules that are specified by the standardizations where the type 1 standardizations can be seen as the toughest since it

requires independent third-party reviewing before labelling a product (Liljenstolpe and Elofsson, 2009). In addition to the independent third-party reviewing, the type 1 standardization also indicates that the ecolabel is a voluntary, multiple criteria-based, and that it assigns a license to a certain product which authorizes the use of the ecolabel (Swedish Standards Institute, 2018). Furthermore, it also indicates an overall environmental preferability of a product within a particular product category based on a life cycle perspective where every step of the production is taken into account, from raw materials to waste (Swedish Standards Institute, 2018). According to research in this area, type 1 ecolabels also have the potential of obtaining higher trust among consumers due to their life cycle perspective, third-party reviewing, and independence (Liljenstolpe and Elofsson, 2009; Molina-Murillo and Smith, 2009; Darnall et al., 2018).

Even though type 1 ecolabelled products are a better alternative from an environmental perspective when consuming, they are still a part of our consumption pattern which today is too demanding for our natural resources and ecosystems (Giljum et al., 2009; Naturvårdsverket, 2018). In order to turn this around, we must start living more sustainably by establishing responsible consumption and production. Responsible consumption and production is one of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implemented by the United Nations and came into effect in January 2016 (UNDP, 2019a). To succeed with this goal, efficient management of natural resources and disposal of toxic waste and pollutants are important targets, as well as encouraging industries, businesses, and consumers to recycle and reduce waste and supporting developing countries to move forward towards sustainable consumption patterns by 2030 (UNDP, 2019b). Regarding sustainable production, producing and consuming type 1 eco-labels can be beneficial due to their thorough process before labelling a product or service with an ecolabel. However, regarding sustainable consumption, consuming type 1 ecolabelled products and services are not enough. In addition to consuming type 1 ecolabelled products, consumers must also reduce their consumption in order to succeed with living more sustainably (Regeringen, 2017). Therefore, it is argued that consumption of sustainable products must be presented in a holistic approach to increase focus on sustainable lifestyles (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016). That is, to incorporate both purchase-related and common human behaviors in a holistic conceptualization of everyday living (Gilg et al., 2005). Additionally, encouraging sustainable lifestyles is also identified as an important objective in the Sustainable Development Goals and in the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production (UNEP, 2016).

When looking at the concept of sustainable lifestyle, it can be defined as:

“A lifestyle that minimizes ecological impacts while enabling a flourishing life for individuals, households, communities, and beyond. It is the product of individual and collective decisions about aspirations and about satisfying needs and adopting practices, which are in turn conditioned, facilitated, and constrained by societal norms, political institutions, public policies, infrastructures, markets, and culture.” (UNEP, 2016, p. 6)

In short, sustainable lifestyles entail meeting basic needs and living well while embracing sufficiency (UNEP, 2016). Since ecolabels offer a more sustainable way of consuming and are intended as means for consumers to make more sustainable choices when consuming (Rex and Baumann, 2006; Ratiu, 2014; Darnall et al., 2018), is it so that the organizations behind the ecolabels also have the potential to encourage this holistic context, and not only consumption of sustainable products, towards consumers for increasing focus on sustainable lifestyles?

The increased public awareness and concern regarding sustainability issues have made organizations begin to consider sustainability as an essential part of their business models (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018). Although ecolabel organizations could be seen as suitable candidates for encouraging sustainable lifestyles due to their commitment to sustainability, paradoxes can be found in regard to their other organizational interests since organizations have to be aware of and able to manage multiple and sometimes conflicting demands and objectives, such as economic, social and

environmental, in order to be successful (Smith and Lewis, 2011; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018). A paradox perspective can therefore be useful since it acknowledges underlying tensions among different desirable sustainability objectives within organizations that are interdependent but yet, at times, conflicting (Hahn et al., 2015). The paradox perspective will be further developed in the theoretical framework section under the heading 2.2.

Regarding what has been mentioned, I find it relevant to explore if ecolabel organizations encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and how they manage this together with their other organizational interests. In order to explore this, I have performed a qualitative research on Ecolabelling Sweden. Ecolabelling Sweden is a state-owned and non-profit organization in Sweden who has been given the responsibility from the Swedish government to manage two type 1 ecolabels, the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and the EU Ecolabel. In this thesis, the focus is on the Nordic Swan Ecolabel since the Nordic delegations, which are responsible for this ecolabel in the Nordic countries, together have developed a brand strategy for this ecolabel since 2017. This document is useful as a starting point for exploring their activities regarding encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles.

The Nordic Swan Ecolabel was founded in 1989 by the Nordic Council of ministers and is the official eco-label in the Nordic countries. The Nordic Swan Ecolabel is aiming at pushing the sustainable development forward by providing sustainable products and services. Towards consumers, they want to serve as a tool for helping them to choose products that have lower environmental impacts, provide them with clear and concise information about environmental products and services, and inspire them to a sustainable lifestyle where buying their ecolabelled products should be an essential part of that lifestyle (Svanen, 2019).

When looking at the Nordic Swan Ecolabel's aim, it can be interpreted as an attempt to incorporate consumption of sustainable products in a holistic context to increase focus on sustainable lifestyles. Therefore, it is relevant to explore this by looking into Ecolabelling Sweden's activities for encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles to see how it is performed and what the potential consequences may be in regard to their other organizational demands and objectives.

## 1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore how Ecolabelling Sweden, through the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, encourages consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and to further explore, by applying a paradox perspective, the potential consequences that may occur in regard to their other organizational demands and objectives. Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

- How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?
- How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers?
- How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?

## 1.2 Background: Personal story

The first time I encountered the issue, which has become the very core of this thesis, was during an internship course within the master's program Environmental Communication and Management during autumn 2018. My internship took place at Ecolabelling Sweden, and during an introductory meeting with the CEO, he mentioned the conflict between the

organization's aim to be an inspirer for a sustainable lifestyle and their other organizational interests, such as wanting their license holders to have a competitive advantage on the market. He described it as problematic for the organization's external communication and their trustworthiness as a serious environmental organization towards external stakeholders. I found this to be very captivating, and I thought it would make a great topic for my master thesis. With my bachelor's degree in media and communication science and my current studies in environmental communication and management, the issue of this thesis is also a suitable match in regard to my academic profile.

Regarding my role as the researcher of this thesis and my involvement in Ecolabelling Sweden, a discussion about this is included in the method section under the heading 3.4.

### 1.3 Existing research

In this section, some of the existing research concerned with ecolabelling as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles and paradox perspectives are presented since these research areas are the core elements of this thesis. The purpose of this section is to show examples of similar research for placing this thesis within the research field for showing what it aspires to contribute with.

#### 1.3.1 *Ecolabelling as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles*

Regarding previous research within the area of encouraging sustainable lifestyles, several examples can be found which are concerned with communication strategies for encouraging sustainability (Kruse, 2011; Reisch and Bietz, 2011; Barber, 2014; Maram and Nair, 2015; UNEP, 2016; Aversano-Dearborn et al., 2018). However, when it comes to research that explores ecolabel organizations and their capacity for encouraging sustainability, the amount decreases.

In a research from 2004, Lavallée and Plouffe state that ecolabel organizations have a very important role to play as a motivator for sustainable development. In another research from 2014, Ratiu argues in a similar way by stating that ecolabels are one of the indicators that quantify sustainable consumption, production, and development. Furthermore, Ratiu (2014) states that, by encouraging consumption of ecolabelled products, it can contribute to an efficient use of resources and environmental protection through communication, which is correct, careful, and scientifically based, about the products to consumers.

When looking for further research that is concerned with ecolabel organizations in relation to potential communication approaches for encouraging sustainability towards consumers, research can be found which is concerned with life cycle thinking (LCT) and life cycle assessment (LCA) (Nissinen et al., 2007; Kikuchi-Uehara et al., 2016a; Kikuchi-Uehara et al., 2016b; Lewandowska et al., 2018a; Lewandowska et al., 2018b). LCT is an approach for understanding the environmental impacts associated with the consumption of natural resources and waste emissions through the entire production process, from raw materials to waste, of products (Kikuchi-Uehara et al., 2016a). LCA is a standardized method to establish the environmental impacts of products and is used by a variety of organizations around the world (Nissinen et al., 2007). Common arguments in this research area are that LCT and LCA can be seen as empowering tools for consumers to make more environmentally conscious choices when consuming products or services as well as useful communication approaches for organizations to educate consumers about sustainable consumption and production (Nissinen et al., 2007; Kikuchi-Uehara et al., 2016a; Kikuchi-Uehara et al., 2016b; Lewandowska et al., 2018a; Lewandowska et al., 2018b).

These researchers argue for interesting views when it comes to ecolabel organizations' capacity for encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles. For example, Ratiu (2014) and Lavallée and Plouffe (2004) argue for ecolabels' potential in being motivators for sustainable development. However, none of them give much attention to strategies for how the communication should be planned or performed since the focus rather is on

viewing ecolabel organizations' capacity for encouraging sustainability. Regarding LCT and LCA, these approaches are interesting for exploring ecolabel organizations' contribution to encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Nevertheless, I would like to grasp a more holistic approach when exploring how Ecolabelling Sweden encourages consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles since it is argued by several researchers that consumption of sustainable products must be presented in a holistic context for increasing focus on sustainable lifestyles (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016). Moreover, none of the mentioned research applies a critical perspective which I found necessary. A critical perspective has the potential to shed light on the consequences that may occur when encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and, therefore, have to be taken into account and managed.

### 1.3.2 *Paradox perspective*

In combination with the area of research about ecolabelling as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles, there is a need to explore previous research that make use of paradox perspectives. In this area, previous research has been found that are concerned with the paradox of green consumerism (Muldoon, 2006) and the retailing paradox (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Jovanovic, 2017). I argue that these researches shed light on paradoxes from two perspectives; from a consumer perspective and an organization perspective.

In an article from 2006, Muldoon takes the perspective of consumers and examines the paradox of environmentally conscious consumption by asking if consumerism ever can be "green". Muldoon states that the challenge is not just to confront consumption, but rather to transform the structures that maintain it (Princen et al., 2002; in Muldoon, 2006). In order to succeed with that, Muldoon (2006) argues that we must allow ourselves to take time and learn more about current global sustainable issues and how to live more sustainably by asking and sharing our own experiences with friends and family, rethink our consumption patterns, buying less, paying more for products that are better from an environmental perspective, and select politicians that strive towards sustainable societies.

Regarding the retailing paradox, the perspective moves from a consumer perspective to an organization perspective. In a research from 2012, Carrero and Valor describe that retailers' typical features are their high position in the supply chain and their influence on consumption growth. However, due to retailers' important position, they also have the power to establish demands for a responsible industry which, during the past decade, is required from the society (Carrero and Valor, 2012). This dilemma refers to as the retailing paradox, which can be explained as "how to meet business objectives while demonstrating a commitment to sustainability" (Knight, 2004, p. 113, in Carrero and Valor, 2012, p. 630). In response to that, several retailers implement CSR policies since it may lead to better performances and a competitive advantage on the market (Carrero and Valor, 2012). In another research within the area of the retailing paradox, Jovanovic (2017) explores how food retail store managers engage to adopt CSR in the store assortment and how private ecobrand contribute to the green market development in food retailing within a Swedish context. The findings show that the food retailers try to influence consumers to adopt sustainable practices, and the private ecobrand are helping the stores in motivating consumers to buy ecolabelled products. However, the managers could also feel limited in their actions regarding promoting the "green" products, which Jovanovic argues could be explained by the retailing paradox (Jovanovic, 2017).

I find that this research presents interesting point of views regarding paradoxes in commitment to sustainability. For example, Muldoon (2006) states that we must think more holistic, that we must learn how to live sustainably and not just buy ecolabelled products, in order to overcome unsustainable behaviors. However, since this research is concerned with the perspective of the consumer, I find it necessary to explore this dilemma further by applying it to an organization perspective, thus the perspective of Ecolabelling Sweden, to see how they handle it as a sustainable conscious organization. When looking at the

research concerned with the paradox of retailing (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Jovanovic, 2017), much attention is drawn to the benefits of ecolabels and how these can be beneficial for organizations from a market perspective as well as a sustainable perspective. However, little attention is paid on the holistic approach of sustainability which Muldoon (2006) discusses the importance of. For this reason, I find it necessary to explore the paradox perspective further. By exploring the experiences of Ecolabelling Sweden, the possibility is given to understand how their commitment to sustainability is managed in relation to their other organizational interests and to what extent this may interfere with their aspiration to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles.

## 2 Theoretical framework

In this section, the theoretical framework is presented of which this thesis is situated in. The theoretical framework will later guide my analysis of the collected data. Since I am interested in Ecolabelling Sweden and how they encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles, it is relevant to elaborate on the theory of sustainability communication in order to explore if their activities correspond. Moreover, since I want to explore the paradoxes that exist within Ecolabelling Sweden to see if they have any consequences for their aim to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles, it is also relevant to elaborate on the theory of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations. By using the theory of sustainability communication and the theory of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations as a theoretical lens, the opportunity is given to understand how Ecolabelling Sweden encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and to critically explore how this possibly may interfere with their other organizational demands and objectives.

### 2.1 Sustainability communication

Communication plays a significant role when it comes to changing an individual's or a community's behavior from passive, but yet aware, into an informed and active behavior. Therefore, communication is a key approach in several activities when practitioners want to create social mobilization for sustainability (Aversano-Dearborn et al., 2018). However, when wanting to create social mobilization for sustainability, practitioners encounter a broad range of challenges. The most immediate challenges within this area is confronting the dominant culture of consumerism which encourages endless cycles of individual desire as well as the social and political priority of economic growth (Barber, 2014). Therefore, when practitioners want to use communication for creating social mobilization for sustainability, these issues must be taken into account by providing a new narrative for replacing the traditional and limitless growth/consumerist model from the industrial society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Barber, 2014).

Even though there is a dominant culture of consumerism in today's society, the growing public awareness regarding sustainability issues is an important factor that has put pressure on organizations to consider and rebuilding their business models (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018). When rebuilding business models, the communication side of marketing plays an important role since it allows organizations to view their differences from other organizations when it comes to their sustainability efforts and the opportunity to change consumers' behavior (UNEP and Global Compact and Utopies, 2005). Therefore, in their strategic communication, organizations must go beyond the focus on profit, market share, public image, and return on investment to an expand focus which involves their social identity in a long-term vision (Ottman, 2010).

The new narrative for communicating about sustainability requires a process that deals with the causes of sustainability issues and possible solutions with the goal to achieve a mutual understanding. Thus, sustainability communication's main task is to introduce an understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment in a social discourse to make people aware of the consequences of human action with the goal to establish a responsible human interaction with the natural and social environment (Godemann and Michelsen, 2011). In this context, communication should be empowering and emancipatory by confronting people with different views of the world and problem definitions and stimulate learning processes that may make people reflect and change their initial view of the world and problem definitions (Aversano-Dearborn et al., 2018). In theory, this means that sustainability communication crosses a wide range of communication fields. With its roots in environmental communication, it expands further and includes health, development, political, and marketing communication to develop a transdisciplinary framework for implementing an understanding of these interrelated



knowledge areas (Barber, 2014) and to create a new understanding of the relationship between science and society (Thompson Klein, 2004). In regard to this, a holistic approach is useful when encouraging sustainability. A holistic approach means that practitioners must involve a holistic approach of sustainability in their communication activities for making it more understandable and accessible for consumers (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016). That is, to incorporate both purchase-related and common human behaviors in a holistic conceptualization of everyday living (Gilg et al., 2005).

An important factor in sustainability communication is to identify specific target groups for increasing the chances of making the communication more successful (Kruse, 2011; Barber, 2014; UNEP, 2016; Avrsano-Dearborn et al., 2018). Successful communication is often accomplished when the practitioners reflect the target groups interests and their economic and cultural context in the message and therefore, the message has a better chance of being acted upon (Bennett and Jessani, 2011; Kruse, 2011; UNEP, 2016). When the message is being acted upon by the target groups, they, in their turn, may distribute the message further to people in their vicinity and contribute to the degree and quality of the attention the message receives (Barber, 2014). Therefore, it is important that the target groups already are involved in the issue of which the message aims to shed light on to increase the relevance and attractiveness of the message (Barber, 2014; Maram and Nair, 2015; UNEP, 2016). Although the message should be directed to specific target groups, the recognition of different ways of living sustainably is still an important matter. If this is not understood, the message can be misinterpreted and make people believe that it only exists one alternative for how one can live sustainably. Therefore, the message should acknowledge the diversity of sustainable lifestyles (UNEP, 2016).

To be able to create social mobilization for sustainability, the process of communicating for sustainability should also be seen as a two-way communication, which is interactive, transactional, and constructive, rather than a one-way communication, which is transmissive and instrumental (Reisch and Bietz, 2011; Barber, 2014; Avrsano-Dearborn et al., 2018). In contrast to one-way communication, two-way communication includes the target groups of the message in a collaborative process with the practitioners which allows for a constructive dialogue, an active engagement, and an understanding of the target groups (Ottman, 2010; Reisch and Bietz, 2011; Barber, 2014; UNEP, 2016). By understanding and involving the target groups in the process, a relationship between the practitioners and the target groups can emerge and result in higher trust in the organization of the practitioners as well as in their message, and the target group may also work more actively in achieving the organization's goals (UNEP, 2016). For an organization, trustworthiness is essential for being heard and building relationships with the target groups. Therefore, it is important to strive for transparency which allows the target groups to get to know the organization of the practitioners better (Barber, 2014). The collaborative process further aims at providing the target groups with a sense of agency and empowerment, which can be defined as a sense of individual ownership over one's lifestyle choices and a conviction of being capable of achieving change, both individually and systemically, as well as awareness of the consequences that one's actions have and could have (Avrsano-Dearborn et al., 2018). These factors are thus important when encouraging sustainability for achieving actual change (Reisch and Bietz, 2011; Avrsano-Dearborn et al., 2018).

When communicating for sustainability, it is also important to set out clear objectives which should reflect what the practitioners want to achieve (Bennett and Jessani, 2011; Kruse, 2011; Barber, 2014). The clearer the objectives are, the better are the chances of choosing the most effective methods and strategies for creating social mobilization for sustainability (Barber, 2014). When having a clear objective, it is important to present a clear vision of what is possible, or of what has to be improved, as a result of making sustainable lifestyle choices (UNEP, 2016). While it is important for a message to recognize the extent of the problem, an excessive focus on the problem can backlash since

people tend to disengage when they find it hard to see how things can be improved. Therefore, it is important to focus on efforts that set clear, positive, and aspirational goals by visualizing possible action to increase motivation for engagement in sustainability (UNEP, 2016).

## 2.2 Paradox perspective on sustainable organizations

Paradox is an old concept that commonly has been used in Western and Eastern philosophy (Smith and Lewis, 2011). The concept can be defined as “contradictory yet interrelated elements (dualities) that exist simultaneously and persist over time” (Smith and Lewis, 2011, p. 387). These elements are underlying tensions which seem logical individually but irrational and inconsistent when juxtaposed (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Today, when the world gets more and more global and new social demands create more dynamic and complex milieus, a paradox perspective becomes useful as a critical lens to understand and manage contemporary organizations. Therefore, organizations must continuously perform efforts to meet multiple and different demands in order to succeed with long-term success (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Since contemporary organizations are expected to contribute to a more sustainable society (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018), a paradox perspective can be useful since it acknowledges tensions among different desirable sustainability objectives, such as environmental, social, and economic concerns, that are interdependent but, at times, conflicting (Hahn et al., 2015). By acknowledging and managing paradoxes, organizations have the possibility to succeed with establishing conflicting sustainability objectives parallel to each other and thus, achieve superior contributions to sustainable development (Hahn et al., 2018). Although a focus lies on sustainability, the paradox perspective does not intend for organizations to deny their profit orientation. Rather, it focuses on balancing the different objectives together and, by doing that, provide market benefits with moral initiatives through sustainability issues (Hahn et al., 2016). Moreover, by managing conflicting demands, organizations have a better chance of maintaining their trustworthiness among stakeholders (Scherer et al., 2013).

Tensions emerge as soon as an organization is created. By defining what the aim is of the organization, it is also defined what the aim is not, and that applies to every decision that is made within the organization. Therefore, the organization results in a system of interrelated tensions which often can be perceived as complex (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, the system of interrelated tensions does not only involve members of the organization but also external stakeholders since the organization has to address the demands of such parties if they want to achieve success (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

For viewing the sequence of events when managing paradoxes within organizations, I have chosen to make use of Smith and Lewis (2011) model “Dynamic equilibrium model of organizing” (see figure 1) since it is commonly used within the research area of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations (Scherer et al., 2013; Hahn et al., 2015; Van Der Byl and Slawinski, 2015; Hahn et al., 2018). Although tensions exist within an organization from the very beginning, they may remain latent, or even ignored, until milieu factors or cognitive efforts emphasize them. When that happens, the latent factors become salient to the employees and are therefore in need of a response in terms of management (Smith and Lewis, 2011). These responses can both be managed in negative and positive ways, so called vicious and virtuous cycles. Vicious cycles occur when employees react in a defensive way and strives for consistency, experiences emotional anxiety due to the salient tensions, or when the organization is too slow when it comes to managing the salient tensions. On the other hand, when the salient tensions are handled in a positive way, virtuous cycles occur as a strategy of acceptance which invites for opportunity and a creative management of the salient tensions. To be able to attend to conflicting demands parallel to each other, employees need to embrace paradoxical cognitions which reflects an

ability to recognize and accept the salient tensions and to remain emotionally calm. The organization also need to possess dynamic capabilities in order to perform the necessary changes (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

The dynamic equilibrium model of organizing suggests a managerial approach to paradoxes by involving complementary and interwoven strategies for acceptance and resolution which are key factors for managing paradoxes in organizations (Smith and Lewis, 2011). By accepting organizational paradoxes, employees are able to experience a convenience with the paradoxes which enables more complex and challenging resolution strategies. These resolution strategies, in their turn, involves seeking responses to the paradoxes by splitting and choosing between the conflicting demands or by finding synergies that can manage the demands parallel to each other (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Smith and Lewis (2011) thus argue for a combination of these strategies, a purposeful repetition between the alternatives to be able to ensure simultaneous attention to the demands over time. By performing such management, the organization has to involve consistent inconsistency as they shift focus frequently and dynamically. Consequently, employees make decisions in the short term while remaining fully aware of accepting paradoxical tensions in the long term. Although consistently inconsistent management strategies are described to be a successful approach of managing organizational paradoxes, it is not an easy task to achieve benefits from these paradoxes. There is always the threat of vicious cycles which requires that employees are cautious as they repeat between acceptance and paradoxical resolution strategies (Smith and Lewis, 2011).

Finally, Smith and Lewis (2011) state that the outcome of a successful management of paradoxical tensions points to varied possibilities for organizations. For example, it enables learning and creativity, fosters flexibility and resilience, and releases human potential within the organization.

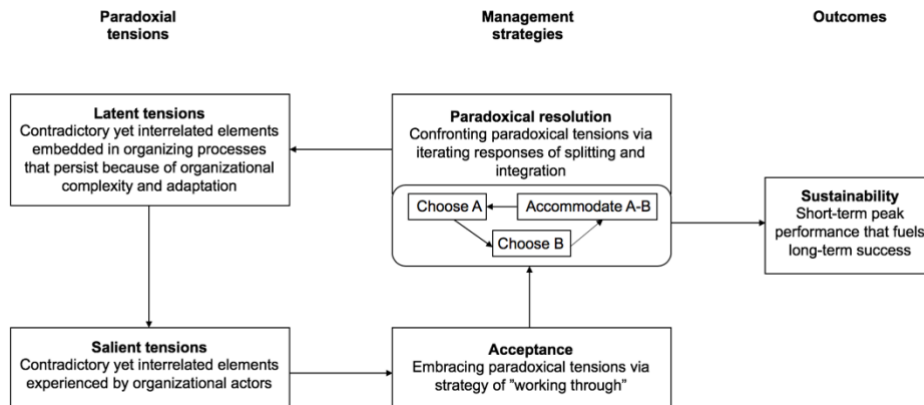


Figure 1: Developed from Smith and Lewis (2011) model "Dynamic equilibrium model of organizing".

## 3 Method

In this section, the research design and the data collection procedures used for this thesis are presented. Moreover, validity, reliability, and ethical concerns in relation to the explored area and my role as the researcher of this thesis are discussed.

### 3.1 Research design

In this thesis, a qualitative approach is used for exploring how Ecolabelling Sweden encourages consumer to adopt sustainable lifestyles and the potential consequences of doing that as an organization with multiple demands and objectives. A qualitative approach is useful when wanting to explore and understand a social or human problem and the meanings individuals or groups assign to the problem (Creswell, 2014). The data is usually collected through the individuals involved in the social or human problem which the research aims to explore (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.2 Data collection

#### 3.2.1 Interviews

Since the data usually is collected through the individuals involved in the research problem in a qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), I have performed eight interviews with people working at Ecolabelling Sweden. Five of the interviewees were women and three were men. Six interviews were collected face-to-face at Ecolabelling Sweden's office and two were collected over skype. The reason for having two skype interviews was due to inconvenience in meeting up during the field work. However, the ambition was to perform face-to-face interviews at Ecolabelling Sweden's office since the setting usually has a great impact on people as it provides us with a meaning of the world (Creswell, 2014). Nevertheless, I found that the two interviews over skype went well, and I was able to understand and interpret the interviewees' answers.

By performing qualitative interviews, the possibility is given to choose participants who are most suitable to shed light on the research problem (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2015). The interviewees were therefore selected based on their working roles and competence of the concerned issue in order to collect relevant information. Six of the interviewees were selected because they worked at the marketing and communication department which are responsible for communication activities and other activities towards consumers. The other two interviewees were selected because of their competence in business development and sustainability issues within the organization. Since these interviewees constitute a majority of the people at Ecolabelling Sweden that are concerned with the issue of the thesis, I find it possible to argue that eight interviewees were enough in order to collect relevant data.

The interviews were designed in a semi-structured way since I wanted a certain structure during the interviews to be able to stick to the aim of the research. However, I also wanted the interviewees to feel invited to speak up their mind on the issue. Furthermore, I also organized the interviews in a semi-structured way since there was a possibility of me not being fully aware of certain perspectives of the research problem. Therefore, I had the possibility to ask different sub-questions during the interviews if an interviewee would mention something of value for the research. The interview guide (see appendix 1) was divided into two parts where the first concerned questions regarding the Nordic Swan Ecolabel with focus on sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles and the second part concerned questions regarding the internal document Brand Strategy.

The interviews were performed in Swedish since this was the interviewees' native language and thus, is the official language used at Ecolabelling Sweden. Therefore, the

used citations from the data in the findings and analysis section are translated into English. The translations can be found in appendix 2. All the interviews were recorded which was approved by all interviewees. This made it possible for me to be more active during the conversations. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 50 minutes.

### 3.2.2 Document

As mentioned earlier, some of the interview questions were based on an internal document from the Nordic delegations of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel called Brand Strategy. The purpose of this was to get more insight into the organization's stated key elements and how they planned to perform their activities towards consumers. When taking part of this document, I made an analysis by comparing the content with the theory of sustainability communication. Moreover, I asked the interviewees to give concrete examples of the things stated in the document in order to find out if they actually practiced what was stated.

## 3.3 Data analysis procedures

In the process of analyzing the collected data, I started by transcribing each interview. The next step included reading through each interview and organizing the data under each research question for preparing the data for the analysis (Creswell, 2014). After the organizing, I read through the empirical material again and started hand coding. I did the coding by bracketing text segments and writing a word in the margins of the documents that represented a specific category (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, in Creswell, 2014). The categories were therefore decided during the analysis procedure of the collected data which is a traditional and commonly used approach in social science (Creswell, 2014). The choice to create the categories from the collected data was made because the material could highlight new perspectives that could turn out to be of importance for the major findings. The categories were later merged together into a smaller number of themes which represents the major findings of the thesis (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, they are used as subheadings in the findings and analysis section. Since some of the themes were based on categories that highlighted new perspectives, the third research question were slightly adapted for being able to account for the new perspectives that emerged from the collected data. The identified themes, which aspire to answer the research questions, are presented in table 1.

*Table 1: Identified themes in relation to the research questions*

<b>How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?</b>	<b>How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers?</b>	<b>How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?</b>
Sustainable lifestyles	The Nordic Swan Ecolabel's position and objectives	Encourage sustainable lifestyles versus provide a competitive advantage on the market for license holders
Sustainable consumption	Consumers	United personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel versus license holders creating their own campaigns

The themes “Sustainable lifestyles” and “Sustainable consumption” aspire to answer the first research question, “How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?”. The themes “The Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s position and objectives” and “Consumers” aspire to answer the second research question, “How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers? At last, the themes “Encourage sustainable lifestyles versus provide a competitive advantage on the market for license holders” and “United personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel versus license holders creating their own campaigns” aspires to answer the third research question, “How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?”. The paradox “Encourage sustainable lifestyles versus provide a competitive advantage on the market for license holders” was identified before the data was collected through my earlier experience at Ecolabelling Sweden and interactions with the employees, while the paradox “United personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel versus license holders creating their own campaigns” was identified by me from the collected data.

### 3.4 Validity and reliability

In qualitative research, validity refers to the attempts of the researcher to check for the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014) from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, and the readers (Creswell and Miller, 2000, in Creswell, 2014) by making use of certain procedures (Creswell, 2014). Regarding reliability, it refers to the degree which the findings of a research are independent of accidental circumstances of their making (Kirk and Miller, 1986, in Silverman, 2015). For the possibility to prove and provide accurate data in this thesis, I have used multiple strategies for validating the findings (Creswell, 2014). The first strategy used was to perform several interviews with people working at Ecolabelling Sweden. By performing several interviews, I could examine the data from several perspectives and, therefore, establish a coherent justification for the themes that occurred (Creswell, 2014). For making sure that my transcriptions of the collected data corresponded with the interviewee’s stated opinions, I used a method called “respondent validation” where the interviewees were given the opportunity to read through their transcribed interviews before analyzing them (Silverman, 2015). Furthermore, I also used a method called “member checking” which means letting the interviewees read through and comment on the major findings of the interpreted data (Creswell, 2014). I did this by emailing the interviewees and asked for their input on the findings and analysis section. No information was changed in a way that affected the original findings. Another strategy was to aim at providing a rich description of the used theories, the design of the thesis, and the presented findings for the reader. By doing that, the thesis has hopefully been provided with transparency and, therefore, the findings have become more reliable (Creswell, 2014; Silverman, 2015).

As mentioned in the introductory section, I have done an internship at Ecolabelling Sweden's communication and marketing department. After my internship, I started working part-time at the same department. Since I have been involved with Ecolabelling Sweden since last autumn, I have spent a longer period of time in the setting and with the people used for collecting the data. Therefore, I have been able to develop a deeper understanding of the organization of which this thesis focuses on. Thus, the more experience a researcher has with the interviewees in their setting, the findings have the possibility to be more accurate and valid (Creswell, 2014). However, my previous experience with Ecolabelling Sweden may also lead me to look for findings that supports my position and, therefore, influence my interpretations of the data in a non-valid way (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, my position may also affect my ability to criticize Ecolabelling Sweden and their work. Nevertheless, this is something I have been aware of during the whole process and, therefore, led me to take necessary actions by, as mentioned above, using multiple strategies for validating the findings.

### 3.5 Reflections about ethical concerns

An important part of ethical concerns in research involving interviewees is anonymity. In this thesis, the interviewees had the option to be anonymous if they wanted to. When asking the interviewees about anonymity, one of the interviewees preferred to not have her/his name in the thesis. Therefore, I decided to make all interviewees anonymous for not risking revealing who that person was. Due to the anonymity, the interviewees are called Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, etcetera. The interviewees received their number after the order in which the interviews were conducted, and they have the same number throughout the thesis. Since this thesis focuses on Ecolabelling Sweden and the employees' perception and understanding of the explored issue, it is not depending on revealing specific working roles, names, or gender in relation to a specific interviewee. Therefore, the anonymity is not a problem for the reliability of the findings (Esaiasson et al., 2012).

Another ethical concern in this thesis was the possibility of exposure of sensitive information (Creswell, 2014). For example, the Brand Strategy document is an internal document containing information that could be regarded as sensitive. Therefore, before reading and using it as a base for the interview questions, I was given the approval to use it by Ecolabelling Sweden's head of communication and marketing department. Moreover, since this is an internal document, it was not possible to publish the document as an appendix in the thesis. However, by looking at the interview guide, the opportunity is given to see what information is used since the second part of the interview guide is based on some the content of the document.

## 4 Findings and analysis

In this section, the findings from the collected data and analyzes of that material are presented. The subheadings represent the major findings, thus, the chosen themes, which are categorized under the research question of which each theme aspires to answer. Each theme begins with presenting the views of the interviewees at Ecolabelling Sweden and ends with an analysis of the interviewees' expressed perspectives and opinions by using the presented theories in the theoretical framework of this thesis.

### 4.1 How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?

Under this heading, the analysis is based on the theory of sustainability communication in order to explore and identify how well the interviewees' views on encouraging sustainable lifestyles correspond with the used theory.

#### 4.1.1 Findings: Sustainable lifestyles

All interviewees stated that encouraging sustainable lifestyles was an important part of their communication activities towards consumers for being able to achieve engagement for more sustainable attitudes and behaviors. They thought Ecolabelling Sweden could be of great help in guiding and inspiring consumers to sustainable lifestyles by making sustainable choices.

When asking the interviewees about Ecolabelling Sweden's view of sustainable lifestyles, it appeared so that the organization did not have a set definition for how they viewed it. Even though all interviewees had a similar view of the concept, that it was something bigger and involved more than sustainable consumption, they were unsure of how the concept was defined on an organizational level. One interviewee, who was clear about that the concept was not defined on an organizational level, expressed the following about how she/he perceived the concept:

“As we have done so far, without actually having defined lifestyle, it has been a lot about how we consumers behave, think, and how we act based on how we think. Preferences and such, and how that creates one's lifestyle. But I think there may be other issues that we should consider. Yes, I think it is very important that we discuss what lifestyle means because it is a broader concept than just consumption.” (Interviewee 3, 2019-03-13)

According to a majority of the interviewees, Ecolabelling Sweden has mostly referred to sustainable consumption when communicating about sustainable lifestyle towards consumers since this is their area of expertise. Therefore, they have limited their communication to this area. However, a minority of the interviewees stated that they require new efforts in order to shed light on a broader area of sustainability to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles, as Interviewee 3 stated in the citation above. Such new efforts were, according to these interviewees, in the planning.

#### 4.1.2 Findings: Sustainable consumption

When talking about sustainable consumption, all interviewees stated that this was the area of which they contribute to the most, through their tough criteria for products and services and their communication activities towards consumers, when it comes to sustainability. A majority of the interviewees stated that we live in a society characterized by consumption. When stating this, different views on how overconsumption should be handled by Ecolabelling Sweden occurred. A majority of the interviews thus stated that they should highlight a broader perspective of sustainability. One interviewee, who thought



Ecolabelling Sweden should highlight a broader perspective of sustainability, stated the following:

“It is also important for us that we address other issues, such as sustainable lifestyle, overconsumption, sustainable consumption, and perhaps sometimes non-consumption. But above all, how consumption can be made sustainable, that is important for us. Because, it is not certain that you need to consume, but you should choose the Nordic Swan Ecolabel when you have decided that you really need to buy something.” (Interviewee 3, 2019-03-13)

A minority of the interviewees stated that they did not think that reducing the consumption was Ecolabelling Sweden’s primary mission but rather to challenge companies to produce products that are a better alternative from an environmental perspective so that consumers can make environmentally conscious choices when consuming.

#### *4.1.3 Analysis: How does Ecolabelling Sweden view sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?*

When looking at what was stated by the interviewees when talking about sustainable lifestyles, it is possible to identify an attempt of wanting to view sustainability in a more holistic approach for increasing focus on sustainable lifestyles towards consumers for making it easier to adapt their lifestyle choices to more sustainable. According to the theory of sustainability communication, this is argued to be necessary and important for making consumers understand the importance of living more sustainable and, therefore, make it more accessible (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016). However, when talking about sustainable lifestyles, the concept was mainly referred to as sustainable consumption since this was their area of expertise. Although the interviewees view the two concepts as different, that sustainable lifestyles involve more than just sustainable consumption, it was not quite visible when they explained their communication activities towards consumers. Nevertheless, a minority of the interviewees expressed that they require new efforts for being able to shed light on a broader area of sustainability and that this was in the planning which proves that they have an awareness regarding this issue. Interviewee 3 also had an interesting statement regarding Ecolabelling Sweden’s communication activities regarding sustainable lifestyles towards consumers. She/he stated that they have taken into consideration how consumers behave, think, how they act based on how they think, and how that creates one’s lifestyle. This is relatable to the holistic approach of sustainability, that is, to incorporate common human behaviors in a holistic conceptualization of everyday living (Gilg et al., 2005).

Even though all interviewees viewed sustainable lifestyles in a similar way, it seems like Ecolabelling Sweden does not have a set definition for the concept which was clearly expressed by Interviewee 3. The other interviewees also hesitated before answering the questions and referred to their own understanding of the concept. Interviewee 3 expressed that this could be a problem when encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles since the employees may have different understandings of what it means and, therefore, they must talk internally and decide a common understanding of the concept. When communicating something towards consumers, it is generally argued that it is important to set out clear objectives which should reflect what the practitioners want to achieve (Bennett and Jessani, 2011; Kruse, 2011; Barber, 2014). If the objectives are clear, the chances increase for choosing suitable methods and strategies for communication that engages consumers (Barber, 2014). Ecolabelling Sweden’s aim of wanting to inspire consumers to sustainable lifestyle can be seen as an objective, but without a clear definition of what it means, it may be difficult to plan and carry out a strategy. Especially since the concept of sustainable lifestyles is very broad (UNEP, 2016) and, therefore, can be understood in many different ways depending on who is interpreting it. With this in mind, it can be argued that Ecolabelling Sweden has to be clearer about their view of sustainable lifestyles so that consumers do not think that they repress some things that are included. As it is

argued in the theory of sustainability communication, the messages should acknowledge the diversity of sustainable lifestyles. Otherwise, messages can be misinterpreted and make people believe that it only exists one alternative for how one can live sustainably (UNEP, 2016).

Sustainable consumption is described by the interviewees as their area of expertise where they have the possibility to contribute the most when it comes to sustainability issues due to their criteria documents and in their communication towards consumers. However, the interviewees expressed different views on their mission when it comes to sustainable consumption. A majority of the interviewees thought that one of Ecolabelling Sweden's most important mission was to make the consumer more aware of overconsumption and non-consumption, while a minority of the interviewees thought that informing about non-consumption and overconsumption was not their primary mission. When looking at the theory of sustainability communication, it is argued that a new narrative is necessary for replacing the traditional and limitless growth/consumerist model from the industrial society of the 20th century for succeeding with creating social mobilization for sustainability (Barber, 2014). The new narrative should involve a process of communication that deals with the causes of sustainability issues and possible solutions (Godemann and Michelsen, 2011). Therefore, it is important, as the majority of the interviewees stated, to inform the consumers about overconsumption and non-consumption. This is in line with what Godemann and Michelsen argue (2011) since overconsumption can be identified as a cause for sustainability issues and non-consumption can be identified as a solution for managing sustainability issues.

## 4.2 How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers?

Under this heading, the analysis is based on the theory of sustainability communication in order to explore and identify how well Ecolabelling Sweden's objectives, position, and choice of target groups correspond with the used theory.

### 4.2.1 Findings: The Nordic Swan Ecolabel's position and objectives

All interviewees stated that one of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel main objectives is to function as a guide and an inspirer for consumers in their consumption choices for choosing products that are environmentally conscious. In regard to this, a majority of the interviewees also stated that they want to inspire consumers to use the products correctly.

In order to succeed with engaging consumers in sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles, trustworthiness was a recurrently used word among the interviewees. Transparency was stated as their highest currency for achieving trust among consumers. For achieving transparency, a majority of the interviewees mentioned their criteria documents which are available for everyone to read on their webpage. However, these documents can be long and difficult to understand. Therefore, a majority of the interviewees stated that they work actively with making the complex accessible by shortening down the documents. Other than that, the interviewees did not express any difficulties with being transparent. However, one interviewee mentioned that they do not mention the disadvantages with a product when presenting it towards consumers, which then proves a lack of transparency when informing consumers. This interviewee stated the following:

“[...] of course, we do not say “Buy this makeup, it contains palm oil.” [...] we do not talk about it even though we know that in some cosmetic products we allow it. But if we receive questions and criticism about it, we want to reply to it as good as possible.” (Interviewee 1, 2019-03-08)

Another identified factor for succeeding with engaging consumers in sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles was to create a personality for the Nordic Swan

Ecolabel. In previously performed surveys, analysis, and in interaction with their license holders, the Nordic delegations of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel found that consumers and license holders only thought of them as an ecolabel without any specific qualities. According to some of the interviewees, this was problematic if they wanted to succeed with being an inspirer for sustainable lifestyles. Therefore, they wanted to develop the Nordic Swan Ecolabel into a trademark for enabling the ecolabel to be associated with a certain personality. One interviewee stated the following regarding the importance of building a trademark around the Nord Swan Ecolabel:

“[...] that is our number one challenge, that we need to move from an ecolabel to a trademark for our stakeholders. And a trademark is in need of a built-in and strong personality that stands for something [...]” (Interviewee 4, 2019-03-13)

When reading the Brand Strategy document, I found two words, *positive* and *solution-oriented*, which aimed at describing the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s personality. My attention got caught on these two words specifically since they are mentioned as two important factors in the theory of sustainability communication. When asking the interviewees about these words and why they were important for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s personality, some confusion occurred among a majority of the interviewees because they did not quite recognize the words in the explained context. However, after explaining that these words were rather explanatory words for describing one of the main qualities, all interviewees stated that these qualities were important for achieving engagement from consumers. In regard to this, a majority stated that they have to recognize the extent of the problem, but also encourage consumers to act by providing concrete examples in a positive context.

#### 4.2.2 Findings: Consumers

When asking the interviewees about the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s selected consumer target groups, which are identified in the Brand Strategy document as “the environmentalist”, “the health-focused” (primary target groups), and “quality and safety” (secondary target group), all of them stated that these were the social groups that had a behavior and interest that correspond with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s interest and, therefore, had the best chance of building a relationship with and engage through their communication activities. In identifying these groups, they had performed consumer surveys and analyzes.

When asking the interviewees about their aim of wanting to provide tips to their target groups on how they can inspire others to adopt sustainable lifestyles, which is mentioned in the Brand Strategy document, all of them agreed that people tend to listen more to people in their vicinity than on an organization of which they may not be interested in. In that way, their messages have a better chance of being spread to a larger audience. However, even though all interviewees stated that providing tips was important for spreading their message to a larger audience, a majority of the them had a hard time of giving a concrete example of how they performed this in practice towards their consumer target groups. Nevertheless, a minority of the interviewees stated that they tried to provide concrete tips through their social media channels and communicate in a sense that would inspire the reader to gather the family or friends in some kind of activity.

When asking about Ecolabelling Sweden’s activities towards consumers when trying to inspire and inform about sustainable lifestyles, all interviewees gave concrete examples of different campaigns, activities in social media, or other activities that aimed at providing information and tools adapted to specific target groups for making it more accessible to engage in sustainable lifestyles. One of the interviewees, who mentioned a project which aimed at, among other things, building a relationship with an important target group, stated the following:

“We will also develop more and more major projects. We have, for instance, ASAP [A Sustainable Acceleration Program] which, first and foremost, turns to university students. And I think that project describes very well how we both are target group-oriented and how we engage and involve, for us, an important target group. In this way, we strengthen the

relationship with this target group, but we also give them the tools for how they themselves can develop within sustainable lifestyles and consumption, both professionally and, of course, as the future consumers.” (Interviewee 4, 2019-03-13)

#### 4.2.3 Analysis: How does Ecolabelling Sweden view their position and objectives towards consumers?

All interviewees agreed that one of their main objectives was to function as a guide and inspirer for consumers when consuming for making it easier for them to choose more sustainable products. This corresponds well to what is stated in the introduction, that ecolabels are intended as a means for consumers to make more sustainable choices when consuming (Rex and Baumann, 2006; Ratiu, 2014; Darnall et al., 2018).

Regarding the interviewees statement about the importance of being trustworthy and transparent, all the interviews stated that trust was one of their highest currency. Therefore, they had to be transparent towards external stakeholders which they did not find any difficulties with. When looking at the theory of sustainability communication, it is argued that trustworthiness is essential for building relationships with target groups. Therefore, transparency is important for organizations to strive for since it allows the target groups to get to know the organization better (Barber, 2014). However, one can wonder if it is that simple to be completely transparent towards external stakeholders? For example, when presenting a product labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel towards consumers, Interviewee 1 stated that they do not inform about the disadvantages with a product for making it more appealing. Therefore, it is possible to argue that it may decrease consumers’ trust in the organization if the disadvantages with a product are discovered since transparency is essential for achieving trust among consumers (Barber, 2014). Nevertheless, it is quite self-evident that one presents the advantages with a product when informing about it towards consumers for making it more appealing. However, it may be problematic for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel's trustworthiness if it is not being well-managed by the employees.

Another important factor that I was able to identify from the interviews for succeeding with engaging consumers in sustainable lifestyles was the intention to create a personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. According to the Nordic delegations of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s analysis, surveys, and interactions with license holders, it was implied that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel was only seen as an ecolabel and not as a trademark with a certain approach and personality. This can be seen as an attempt of wanting to build a more holistic approach for making consumers identify them with other values, such as an inspirer of sustainable lifestyles, than just as an ecolabel. This statement is also possible to identify with the benefits of viewing sustainability in a more holistic approach for creating social mobilization for sustainability (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016). Moreover, the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s desired personality was described with qualities such as *positive* and *solution-oriented*. When asking the interviewees about this, they all stated that this was important for achieving engagement from consumers. Therefore, in their communication activities towards consumers, they tried to provide positive and solution-oriented messages with the aim to establish engagement for sustainability. To be positive and provide solutions in one’s communication activities is argued in the theory of sustainability communication to be important for increasing engagement in sustainability (UNEP, 2016). Although it is also important to recognize the extent of the problem (UNEP, 2016), people are in need for aspirational and positive goals and advice on possible actions for engaging in sustainability. Otherwise, people tend to disengage since they cannot see how things can be improved (UNEP, 2016).

In order to make the communication activities engaging, it is important to identify target groups of which the message is aiming to engage (Kruse, 2011; Barber, 2014; UNEP, 2016; Avrsano-Dearborn et al., 2018). The Nordic Swan Ecolabel have identified three social groups of which they consider as their target groups. These target groups have been chosen since their interests, according to their analyzes and surveys, collide with the Nordic Swan

Ecolabel's interests. Therefore, the interviewees identified these target groups as the most suitable target groups for their messages since they have a better chance of attracting an interest from them. This is described as necessary for performing a successful communication (Bennett and Jessani, 2011) since the message has a better chance of being acted upon if the practitioners know where the target groups' interests lie and view these interests in their message (Bennett and Jessani, 2011; Kruse, 2011; UNEP, 2016).

Regarding providing tips to the Nordic Swan Ecolabel's target groups for how they can inspire people in their vicinity to adopt sustainable lifestyles, all interviewees stated that this was important for the possibility for their messages of being spread to a larger audience. In the theoretical framework, this is described as beneficial if an organization wants its target groups to contribute to the degree and quality of the attention the message receives (Barber, 2014). Therefore, it is also important that the target groups should be involved in the issue of which the message aims to shed light on to increase the relevance and attractiveness of the message (Barber, 2014; Maram and Nair, 2015; UNEP, 2016), which the interviewees at Ecolabelling Sweden seem to be aware of.

When looking at what was stated by the interviewees regarding Ecolabelling Sweden's activities towards consumers with the aim to inspire and inform about sustainable lifestyles, it was stated that they want to create target group-oriented content and provide information and tools. Interviewee 4 also mentioned one example of an activity, ASAP, that extended over a longer period of time where one of their objectives was to involve and strengthen their relationship with one of their target groups. This described objective is argued to be fruitful for achieving trust among the target groups (UNEP, 2016). By building a relationship with the target groups and inviting them to a collaborative process, the target group may also work more actively in achieving the organization's goals since they feel more included in the process (UNEP, 2016). Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine to what degree the communication activity invited the target group into a collaborative process, which is important for achieving a constructive dialogue, an active engagement, and an understanding of the target groups (Ottman, 2010; Reisch and Bietz, 2011; Barber, 2014; UNEP, 2016). However, Interviewee 4 mentioned that they had interviewed the participants (their target group) and asked for feedback on the communication activity which they should take into consideration when developing and improving the next edition of ASAP. This can thus be interpreted as an attempt of establishing a collaborative process with the target group. Interviewee 4 also mentioned that they want to provide tools for how the target groups themselves can develop within sustainable lifestyles and consumption, both professionally and as future consumers, through the mentioned activity. This can be seen as an attempt of trying to empower the target groups in taking control over their lifestyle choices and providing them with a conviction of being capable of achieving change, which is argued to be important when encouraging sustainability (Reisch and Bietz, 2011; Avrsano-Dearborn et al., 2018).

### 4.3 How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?

Under this heading, the analysis is based on the theory of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations in order to identify how Ecolabelling Sweden perceives and potentially manage the identified paradoxes.

#### 4.3.1 *Findings: Encourage sustainable lifestyles versus provide a competitive advantage on the market for license holders*

One of Ecolabelling Sweden's identified paradoxes is their objective of wanting to be an inspirer for sustainable lifestyles versus their objective of wanting to provide their license holders and their products and services labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel a competitive advantage on the market. These two objectives can be seen as paradoxical

because they are contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011). The objective of encouraging sustainable lifestyles involves, among other things, a reduced consumption (Regeringen, 2017) which the objective of wanting to provide license holders with a competitive advantage on the market, thus, selling more of the products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, contradicts.

When addressing this paradox by asking the interviewees about their view of working for encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles as an ecolabel organization and, at the same time, that they have to manage other organizational demands and objectives, such as demands from license holders, and if this could be problematic in some way, the interviewees stated different views. While a majority of the interviewees confirmed the two objectives as paradoxical, that is, they acknowledge both objectives, a minority denied the two objectives as paradoxical since they only acknowledge one of the two objectives. Moreover, while some of the interviewees who confirmed the paradox saw it as problematic for their communication activities towards external stakeholders, another interviewee, who also confirmed the paradox, did not see it as problematic and argued for an opportunity for managing both objectives at the same time.

One interviewee denied the two objectives as paradoxical since she/he only acknowledge the objective to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles. This interviewee stated that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel does not own the products that are labelled with the ecolabel. Therefore, they do not have any obligations towards their license holders when presenting the products towards consumers. This interviewee stated the following:

“We can communicate in that way, because we do not have any products of our own [...]. The message to consume correctly but consume less, I think it is quite logical in a sense. I think our time is mature enough to bring these two messages together, because there is a higher awareness that we must reduce our extraction of resources, and we have also begun to notice a change in behavior within various areas.” (Interviewee 5, 2019-03-13)

Another interviewee confirmed the two objectives as paradoxical. However, this interviewee was more concerned with their objective to provide their license holders with a competitive advantage on the market. She/he stated that they cannot urge people to consume less since their justification of existence is based on the license holders. This interviewee stated the following:

“[...] it is not that we urge people to not consume because our justification of existence is based on companies that want to label their products or services with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. And we want our customers to do well. We want companies and consumers to buy their products and services that are labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel.” (Interviewee 2, 2019-03-13)

One interviewee, who also confirmed the two objectives as paradoxical, viewed it as something problematic for their communication activities towards consumers since they want to fulfill both objectives. This interviewee stated the following:

“We want to keep our customers [license holders], and we also want more customers who chooses to label their products and services. But it is really difficult to encourage people to buy these products when we also want to encourage them to not buy too much. We just want them to change their behavior from buying the bad, for example, batteries, to buying the good batteries, and that is very difficult of course. [...]. But right now, we have the trend with us in some way, that it is becoming more and more common that you want to show that you actually are engaged in sustainability work [...]. But it is, of course, very difficult. It is easier to talk about it than to see the effect of it.” (Interviewee 1, 2019-03-08)

Another interviewee also confirmed the two objectives as paradoxical. However, she/he rather saw it, in today's society, as a great opportunity in managing both objectives for increasing their, as well as their license holders, trustworthiness among consumers. This interviewee stated the following:

“I see it as our most important role for being able to be trustworthy, that we talk about responsible consumption and clarifies responsible consumption. Just like having a healthy attitude towards food, consumption is about not consuming more than you need and choosing sound products and services. I would like us to try to influence our own customers, the license holders, who together with us make the products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel visible, to do so as well. I am convinced that they will gain trust and customer loyalty by doing that. “Buy no more than what you need of this product.” And I see that this trend is coming.” (Interviewee 7, 2019-03-14)

#### *4.3.2 Findings: United personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel versus license holders creating their own campaigns*

The final paradox, which I identified from the collected data, was the Nordic delegations of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel’s ambition to create a united personality and voice around the ecolabel to be able to inspire and guide consumers towards sustainable lifestyles versus their desire for the license holders to create their own campaigns for their products and services labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. This can be identified as a paradox since the two factors are contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Ecolabelling Sweden is working on creating a united personality and voice for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel on the market. At the same time, the license holders have the power to create their own narrative around their products and services labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel in their campaigns, which then may contradict the personality and voice created by the Nordic delegations of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel.

A majority of the interviewees wanted the license holders to have the power to decide the narrative of their campaigns since Ecolabelling Sweden does not have enough resources. However, one interviewee stated that she/he would like Ecolabelling Sweden to provide certain guidelines towards the license holders when they created their campaigns in order to increase the market shares for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. Nevertheless, none of the interviewees expresses an explicit awareness of the paradox.

One interviewee expressed that the most important thing for Ecolabelling Sweden is how the license holders use the ecolabel on their products. Otherwise, she/he stated that they liked it when the license holders decided over their own campaigns. However, it could sometimes be problematic if they were not given any heads up before a campaign was released. This interviewee stated the following:

“The most important thing for us is how they [the license holders] use the ecolabel, that it is used correctly [...]. Otherwise, we like when they take their own initiatives [...]. But of course, sometimes we think that they are saying the wrong things [...] We do not have any demands, but it would have been nice if they sometimes informed us, for example with Preem, that they could have said “we are going to release a huge campaign with Gunde Svan”. Because after that campaign, we received a lot of e-mails where people were wondering how we can label diesel with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. In that case, we could have been prepared on receiving criticism. But it is more a question of resources, that we must be prepared on the effects of things that our customers do.” (Interviewee 1, 2019-03-08)

Another interviewee stated the importance of having a united voice for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel for being trustworthy, which proves the issue of not managing the paradox. This interviewee expressed the following:

“There are many different strategic documents that build on this with the personality, and one of these documents is our brand platform which defines our core values, our vision, and mission. That is like a base in all work, and we have to think about that in our daily communication so that we both live as we learn, but also so we do not find a new voice or that we become someone else. We must have some fundamental values. It should always be included.” (Interviewee 4, 2019-03-13)

One interviewee, who mentioned a possible way to manage the paradox but did not specifically express an awareness of the paradox, stated that Ecolabelling Sweden should

work together with the license holders for increasing the market shares for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. Since Ecolabelling Sweden has limited resources in creating campaigns on their own, the interviewee argued that they should provide information and guidelines so the license holders can combine the Nordic Swan Ecolabel's message together with the license holders' message in their campaigns. However, it is quite unclear to what degree the interviewee thought of the importance of having a united voice for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. This interviewee stated the following:

“I strongly believe that we should work with consumer campaigns in the future together with our license holders. [...]. And we cannot market on our own if we are to succeed in increasing the market shares for the products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. The license holders need to talk about the Nordic Swan Ecolabel in their marketing, and then they must tell us what they need when it comes to facts and data for their messages so that we can help them with that. Then, they can show their messages in their own channels and twist the message so that it suits their own personality. If we succeed with that, we will reach market budgets for several hundred million instead of one at a few million that we have today.” (Interviewee 7, 2019-03-14)

#### **4.3.3 Analysis: How does Ecolabelling Sweden perceive and manage their paradoxical demands and objectives?**

When addressing the paradox “Encourage sustainable lifestyles versus provide a competitive advantage on the market for license holders” during the interviews, the interviewees argued for different views. According to Smith and Lewis's (2011) model, the paradox can be identified as a latent tension for the interviewees who did not acknowledge the paradox. However, for a majority of the interviewees, the paradox was acknowledged but lacked acceptance and management. In this case, the paradox can be viewed as a salient tension (Smith and Lewis, 2011). The one interviewee who did give an example of a possible way to manage the paradox and who also saw it as an opportunity for Ecolabelling Sweden and the license holders, gave the impression of viewing the paradox as a virtuous cycle by accepting the paradox and by suggesting possible strategies for managing the paradox (Smith and Lewis, 2011). This interviewee stated that it was necessary to manage these two objectives at the same time for achieving trust among the consumers, which correspond well to what is stated in the theory of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations, that organizations have a better chance of maintaining their trustworthiness among stakeholders if they manage conflicting demands (Scherer et al., 2013). Moreover, if managing and balancing these two objectives at the same time, Ecolabelling Sweden and their license holders can provide market benefits with moral initiatives through sustainability issues (Hahn et al., 2016). However, since a majority of the interviewees treated the paradox as a salient tension and the one interviewee who confirmed the paradox talked about possible ways of managing it and not Ecolabelling Sweden's own management strategies, it is possible to argue that the paradox between the two objectives is not being managed.

A majority of the interviewees acknowledged both objectives. While some of them were more concerned with encouraging sustainable lifestyles, others were more concerned with providing their license holders with a competitive advantage on the market. Therefore, it is possible to argue that a majority of the interviewees did not accept the paradox. However, Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that by accepting and managing identified paradoxes, it can contribute to varied possibilities such as learning, creativity, flexibility, and resilience within an organization.

The paradox “United personality for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel versus license holders creating their own campaigns” was discovered when coding the data and, therefore, I did not address it during the interviews. Therefore, it is not possible to account for how the interviewees would view the paradox if it had been addressed. Nevertheless, since a majority of the interviewees mentioned the importance of having a united personality and voice for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and also wanting the license holders to create their own



narrative around their campaigns, they were thus aware of the two factors. When looking at Smith and Lewis (2011) model, the paradox can be identified as a latent tension for a majority of the interviewees since they did not acknowledge the paradox between these two factors. Regarding Interviewee 7 who mentioned a possible way to manage the paradox but who did not specifically express an awareness of it, there are some difficulties in identifying if the tension was latent, salient, or accepted by the interviewee. However, her/his argument to work together with license holders to create consumer campaigns can be identified as a possible paradoxical resolution (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Nevertheless, this cannot be identified as an actual management strategy by Ecolabelling Sweden since the interviewee talked about possible ways of increasing the market shares for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. Moreover, it was also unclear how the interviewee thought of the importance of having a united voice for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel since she/he was talking about twisting the message of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel so that it would fit the license holder's personality.

Another interesting point of view with the statement that was made by Interviewee 7 was that she/he talked about reaching larger market budgets if Ecolabelling Sweden would work together with the license holders in creating consumer campaigns. When stating this, the interviewee translated their possibility of reaching out to a larger audience into money. This statement is interesting since one may argue that the interviewee would be more interested in reaching out to a larger audience with their message of sustainable lifestyles since this corresponds better with Ecolabelling Sweden's aim of wanting consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles (Svanen, 2019).

## 5 Discussion

In this section, the analyzed findings are placed in a broader context and discussed in relation to literature and existing research that are presented in earlier sections of this thesis. Furthermore, the limitations of this thesis and suggestions for future research are discussed.

In the findings section of this thesis, it was stated by the interviewees that one of the Nordic Swan Ecolabel main objectives is to function as a guide and an inspirer for consumers in their consumption choices for choosing products that are produced under better environmental conditions. This reflects what is stated in other research within this area, that ecolabels operate as the direct link between products and consumers (Lavallée and Plouffe, 2004) and are intended as a means for consumers to make more sustainable choices when consuming (Rex and Baumann, 2006; Ratiu, 2014; Darnall et al., 2018). By encouraging consumption of ecolabelled products, it can contribute to efficient use of resources and environmental protection through communication, which is correct, careful, and scientifically based, about the products to consumers (Ratiu, 2014). However, in order to succeed with establishing a more sustainable consumption, it is argued that we have to transform the societal structures that maintain the dominant culture of consumerism (Princen et al., 2002; in Muldoon, 2006) which encourages endless cycles of individual desire as well as the social and political priority of economic growth (Barber, 2014). Even though it is better from an environmental perspective to sell more of ecolabelled products than non-ecolabelled products, there is a need to present a holistic approach of sustainability, that is, to incorporate both purchase-related and common human behaviors in a holistic conceptualization of everyday living (Gilg et al., 2005), for making the consumers understand the problem with overconsumption and to create social mobilization for sustainability (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016). When looking at the findings, they do indicate that Ecolabelling Sweden wants to establish a more holistic approach of sustainability by encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Although the interviewees had different opinions about this, a majority wanted to involve information about overconsumption and non-consumption in their communication activities towards consumers, which is in line with the explained holistic approach. However, since some of the interviewees also stated that their strategies for involving sustainable lifestyles in their communication activities towards consumers were still in the planning, it is possible to assume that Ecolabelling Sweden may present more of a holistic approach of sustainability in their communication activities in the future.

When looking at Ecolabelling Sweden's other organizational objectives and demands, such as providing the license holders with a competitive advantage on the market, it can be identified as a conflicting objective against their objective of encouraging sustainable lifestyles. Since the paradox between these two objectives was predominantly confirmed but treated as a salient tension and, therefore, lacked acceptance and management, it could be seen as an obstacle for addressing sustainable lifestyles in Ecolabelling Sweden's communication activities towards consumers. Thus, risking ending up in a vicious cycle (Smith and Lewis, 2011). This dilemma of feeling limited in encouraging sustainability due to other organizational demands and objectives is in line with what is stated in existing research, that practitioners may feel limited to encourage sustainability due to, for example, economic constraints (Jovanovic, 2017). However, if the paradox between the two objectives would be accepted and managed by discovered synergies that could handle the objectives parallel to each other, the possibility to find a paradoxical resolution could occur (Smith and Lewis, 2011). In that case, Ecolabelling Sweden could feel more comfortable in viewing a more holistic approach of sustainable lifestyles for making it more accessible towards consumers (Gilg et al., 2005; Muldoon, 2006; Rakic and Rakic, 2015; UNEP, 2016) and implementing a new narrative that is necessary for creating social mobilization for sustainability (Barber, 2014). If the paradox would be accepted and managed, the employees at Ecolabelling Sweden may also feel more comfortable in addressing both objectives parallel to each other (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, it may be so that

our time is mature enough to bring these to objectives together, as stated by some of the interviewees, since contemporary organizations in today's society are expected to contribute and improve to a more sustainable society (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018). This could be seen as a beneficial opportunity for Ecolabelling Sweden to manage these to objectives parallel to each other but, at the same time, keeping an awareness of their paradoxical nature for being prepared for possible conflicts.

Regarding the holistic approach of sustainable lifestyles, which the findings demonstrated was desirable to present for Ecolabelling Sweden, the objectives of wanting a united personality and voice for the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and wanting the license holders to create their own campaigns was another identified paradox. The aspiration for a united personality and voice could be seen as an attempt of wanting to build the holistic approach of sustainability for making consumers identify them as a trademark with values such as an inspirer for sustainable lifestyles. However, by letting the license holders create their own campaigns with their products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, it may lead to an accountable amount of voices connected to the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. By acknowledging and accepting this as a paradox, Ecolabelling Sweden could have the possibility to manage the paradox (Smith and Lewis, 2011) by, as stated by Interviewee 7, working together with the license holders when creating consumer campaigns. However, regarding the limited resources which were identified in the findings, this may be difficult to perform in practice. Nevertheless, this paradox is something that should be considered by Ecolabelling Sweden since it could interfere with their desire to build a holistic approach of sustainable lifestyles for making consumers see them as an inspirer for sustainable lifestyles.

## 5.1 Thesis limitations and practical implications

With the aim of this thesis in mind, the goal was not to generalize the findings, but rather to explore Ecolabelling Sweden's view on their communication activities towards consumers for encouraging sustainable lifestyles and the possible consequences of doing that in regard to their other organizational demands and objectives. Thus, the main idea with qualitative research is to explore and understand the particular description and themes developed in a certain setting (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, since this area of research is quite unexplored in earlier research, as stated in the existing research section, I found it relevant to focus on one specific case for exploring the research area on a basic level.

In regard to practical implications, I believe that the findings of this research can shed light on the importance of managing organizational paradoxes. Instead of treating paradoxes as latent or salient (Smith and Lewis, 2011), organizations can benefit, both internally, by increasing possibilities such as learning, creativity, flexibility, and resilience (Smith and Lewis, 2011), and externally, by gaining more trust among stakeholders (Scherer et al., 2013), from acknowledging and managing conflicting demands and objectives parallel to each other.

## 5.2 Suggestions for future research

Since this area of research is quite unexplored, it would be interesting to apply the theory of paradox perspective on sustainable organizations on different cases for critically exploring how organizations are managing their paradoxical demands and objectives and how it could be handled differently and, thus, give it more acknowledgment than it has today. Since contemporary organizations in today's society are expected to contribute and improve to a more sustainable society (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018), a paradox perspective can be useful since it is argued to acknowledge underlying tensions among different desirable sustainability demands and objectives (Hahn et al., 2015). Therefore, this perspective can be of great help for organizations in their sustainability

work and for gaining or maintaining their trustworthiness among stakeholders (Scherer et al., 2013). Furthermore, since this study aimed at identifying organizational paradoxes, future studies could focus on exploring how strategies could be designed for managing organizational paradoxes by applying it on specific cases.

## 6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how Ecolabelling Sweden, through the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, encourages consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and to further explore, by applying a paradox perspective, the potential consequences that may occur in regard to their other organizational demands and objectives. When looking at Ecolabelling Sweden's communication strategy and activities for encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles, it is possible to state that they predominantly corresponds with what is stated in theory of sustainability communication for creating social mobilization for sustainability. Even though some of the interviewees stated that Ecolabelling Sweden is at the beginning of a big strategic change regarding the Nordic Swan Ecolabel and, therefore, a lot of work is still to be accomplished, their ambition to encourage sustainable lifestyles and their strategic plans for getting there are mostly corresponding with the theory of sustainability communication. However, a united definition of sustainable lifestyles within the organization is needed for making the objective clearer and, thereby, more understandable for consumers (UNEP, 2016). A closer relationship with their consumer target groups is another aspect which Ecolabelling Sweden could develop further by inviting the consumer target groups into more collaborative processes. This is fruitful for achieving trust among target groups, and the target groups may also work more actively in achieving the organization's goals since they feel more included in the process (UNEP, 2016). Furthermore, the identified paradoxes are not properly accepted by the interviewees which can lead to complications for Ecolabelling Sweden's aspiration to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles. Nevertheless, by accepting and identifying possible management strategies for the identified paradoxes, as well as other possible paradoxes, and by improving and developing their strategies for encouraging consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles, Ecolabelling Sweden, through the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, can be seen as a means for encouraging sustainable lifestyles. By addressing a holistic approach of sustainability and managing paradoxical tensions, organizations have a better chance of meeting the sustainability demands of external stakeholders (Carrero and Valor, 2012; Barber, 2014; Hahn et al., 2018), and, thus, have the possibility to achieve superior contributions to sustainable development (Hahn et al., 2018).

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## Collected data: Interviews

- Interviewee 1. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-08).
- Interviewee 2. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-13).
- Interviewee 3. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-13).
- Interviewee 4. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-13).
- Interviewee 5. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-13).
- Interviewee 6. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-14).
- Interviewee 7. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-14).
- Interviewee 8. Ecolabelling Sweden. (2019-03-15).

The recordings of these interviews are in the researcher's possession.



# Appendix 1: Interview guide

*Table 2: Interview guide.*

## **Part one: Questions regarding the Nordic Swan Ecolabel with focus on sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles**

Introductory questions:

- What is your role at Ecolabelling Sweden?
- How Long have you been working here?

According to you, what is ecolabels' task towards consumers?

How does Ecolabelling Sweden work towards consumers, what do you want to achieve?

The Nordic Swan Ecolabel is an independent type 1 ecolabel according to the international standardization ISO 14024.

- What does that mean?
- Is this communicated towards consumers, and if it is, how is it communicated?

If we look at the UN's global sustainability goals, the Nordic Swan Ecolabel focuses primarily on goal no. 12, Sustainable Consumption and Production. The fact that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel contributes to sustainable production feels quite obvious since you set out requirements for a sustainable production for the products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. But when it comes to sustainable consumption...

- What does that mean for you?
- What does the Nordic Swan Ecolabel contribute with when it comes to sustainable consumption?

You mention that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel should function as an inspirer for sustainable lifestyles.

- How would you as an employee at Ecolabelling Sweden describe sustainable lifestyle?
- How would you describe sustainable lifestyles in comparison to sustainable consumption?
- How do you inspire consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles?

You mention that the products which are labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel should be a natural part of a sustainable lifestyle.

- In what way do these products contribute to a sustainable lifestyle?

How do you think it works to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles as an ecolabel organization and that you also, at the same time, must manage other organizational demands and objectives, such as demands from license holders?

- How do you manage this?
- Is it in some way problematic, or does it only have positive effects?

Regarding your communication activities or other activities towards consumers, when do you feel like you have succeeded in implementing a successful communication activity or other activity?

- How do you find out about this?

## Part two: Questions regarding Brand Strategy

You mention that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel has a personality that, among other things, are positive and solution-oriented.

- What does it mean that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel has a personality?
- What does it mean that the personality is positive and solution-oriented?
- How do you go about in your communication towards consumers to convey this?

You mention that you strive to be transparent and that it is of great importance for being able to achieve trust among consumers.

- How do you go about in achieving transparency towards consumers?
- Could you think of an example where you would find it difficult or problematic to be transparent towards consumers?

You have chosen three consumer target groups, two primary, environmentally conscious and health-conscious consumers, and one secondary, consumers who are quality and safety conscious.

- How did you come to the conclusion that these are your primary and secondary consumer target groups?

For all consumer target groups, you mention that the Nordic Swan Ecolabel should use clear communication, through relevant channels, with targeted messages, and deliver on the aspects that each consumer target group cares about the most in order to increase the Nordic Swan Ecolabel's relevance.

- Why do you work in this way?
- How do you perform this in practice?

For the environmentally conscious and health-conscious consumers, you mention that you want to offer tips on how they can inspire and influence friends and family to live sustainably.

- Why is that important?
- How do you perform this in practice?
- If you were to give me a tip on one or more communication activities or other activities, targeted at consumers, where the focus is on sustainable lifestyles, which one would you then recommend?

Concluding question:

- Is there something you would like to add or comment, or do you have any other remarks?

## Appendix 2: Translation of citations

Table 3: Translation of citations.

English translation	Original	Reference
<p>“As we have done so far, without actually having defined lifestyle, it has been a lot about how we consumers behave, think, and how we act based on how we think. Preferences and such, and how that creates one’s lifestyle. But I think there may be other issues that we should consider. Yes, I think it is very important that we discuss what lifestyle means because it is a broader concept than just consumption.”</p>	<p>“Som vi hittills har gjort, utan att egentligen ha definierat livsstil, så har det handlat mycket om hur vi konsumenter beter oss och tänker och hur vi agerar utifrån hur vi tänker. Preferenser och så, och det gör ju ens livsstil. Men det kan finnas andra frågor tänker jag som vi bör fundera över. Ja, jag tror att det är jätteviktigt att vi diskuterar vad livsstil innebär eftersom det är ett bredare begrepp än bara konsumtion.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 3, 2019-03-13</p>
<p>“It is also important for us that we address other issues, such as sustainable lifestyle, overconsumption, and sustainable consumption, and perhaps sometimes non-consumption. But above all, how consumption can be made sustainable, that is important for us. Because, it is not certain that you need to consume, but you should choose the Nordic Swan Ecolabel when you have decided that you really need to buy something.”</p>	<p>“Sen är det ju också viktigt för oss att vi tar tag i dem här andra frågorna som hållbar livsstil, överkonsumtion och hållbar konsumtion, och kanske ibland icke-konsumtion. Men framförallt hur konsumtion kan göras hållbar, det är viktigt för oss. För det är ju inte säkert att du behöver konsumera, utan du ska ju välja Svanenmärkt när du har bestämt dig för att du verkligen behöver köpa något.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 3, 2019-03-13</p>
<p>“[...] of course, we do not say "Buy this makeup, it contains palm oil." [...] we do not talk about it even though we know that in some cosmetic products we allow it. But if we receive questions and criticism about it, we want to reply to it as good as possible.”</p>	<p>“[...] det är klart att vi inte går ut med "Köp det här sminket, det innehåller palmolja." [...] vi pratar inte om det även fast vi vet att i vissa kosmetiska produkter så tillåter vi det. Men kommer frågor kring det och kritik kring det så vill vi besvara det så gott det går.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 1, 2019-03-08</p>
<p>“[...] that is our number one challenge, that we need</p>	<p>“[...] det är utmaning nummer ett, att vi behöver</p>	<p>Interviewee 4, 2019-03-13</p>

<p>to move from an ecolabel to a trademark for our stakeholders. And a trademark is in need of a built-in and strong personality that stands for something [...].”</p>	<p>gå från en miljömärkning till att våra intressenter ska se Svanen som ett varumärke. Och ett varumärke behöver ha en inbyggnad och stark personlighet som står för nånting [...].”</p>	
<p>“We have, for instance, ASAP [A Sustainable Acceleration Program] which, first and foremost, turns to university students. And I think that project describes very well how we both are target group-oriented and how we engage and involve, for us, an important target group. In this way, we strengthen the relationship with this target group, but we also give them the tools for how they themselves can develop within sustainable lifestyles and consumption, both professionally and, of course, as the future consumers.”</p>	<p>“Vi har exempelvis ASAP [A Sustainable Acceleration Program] som först och främst vänder sig till universitetsstudenter, och det projektet tycker jag beskriver väldigt väl hur vi både är målgruppsinriktade och hur vi, engagerar och involverar en, för oss, viktig målgrupp. På så vis stärker vi relationen till den här målgruppen, men vi ger dem också verktygen för hur de själva ska utvecklas inom hållbar livsstil och konsumtion, både yrkesmässigt men också givetvis som de framtida konsumenterna.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 4, 2019-03-13</p>
<p>“We can communicate in that way, because we do not have any products of our own [...]. The message to consume correctly but consume less, I think it is quite logical in a sense. I think our time is mature enough to bring these two messages together, because there is a higher awareness that we must reduce our extraction of resources, and we have also begun to notice a change in behavior within various areas.”</p>	<p>“Vi är väldigt fria att kommunicera så, för vi har inga egna produkter [...]. Budskapet att konsumera rätt men konsumera mindre, jag tycker att det är ganska logiskt ändå. Jag tror att vår tid är mogen för att föra ut dem två budskapen samtidigt för att det finns en högre medvetenhet om att vi måste minska vårt resursuttag, och man har även börjat märka en beteendeförändring inom olika områden.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 5, 2019-03-13</p>
<p>“[...] it is not that we urge people to not consume because our justification of existence is based on companies that want to label their products or services with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. And we want our customers to do</p>	<p>“[...] det är ju inte så att vi uppmanar människor att inte konsumera, för vårt existensberättigande bygger ju på företag som vill Svanenmärkta sina varor och tjänster. Och vi vill ju att det ska gå bra för våra kunder. Vi vill ju att företag</p>	<p>Interviewee 2, 2019-03-13</p>

<p>well. We want companies and consumers to buy their products and services that are labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel.”</p>	<p>och konsumenter ska köpa deras varor och tjänster som är Svanenmärkta.”</p>	
<p>“We want to keep our customers [license holders], and we also want more customers who chooses to label their products and services. But it is really difficult to encourage people to buy these products when we also want to encourage them to not buy too much. We just want them to change their behavior from buying the bad, for example, batteries, to buying the good batteries, and that is very difficult of course. [...]. But right now, we have the trend with us in some way, that it is becoming more and more common that you want to show that you actually are engaged in sustainability work [...]. But it is, of course, very difficult. It is easier to talk about it than to see the effect of it.”</p>	<p>“Vi vill ju behålla våra kunder [licensinnehavare], och vi vill ju också ha fler kunder som väljer att miljömärka sina varor och tjänster. Men det är ju verkligen svårt att uppmuntra människor att köpa dessa produkter när vi även vill uppmuntra till att man inte ska köpa för mycket. Vi vill bara att de ska förändra sitt beteende från att köpa de fula, tillexempel, batterierna, till att köpa de bra batterierna, och det är väldigt svårt såklart. [...]. Vi har ju trenden med oss på något sätt just nu, att det blir mer och mer vanligt att man vill visa upp att man faktiskt gör ett hållbarhetsarbete [...]. Men det är såklart jättesvårt. Det är ju lättare att prata om det än att se effekten av det.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 1, 2019-03-08</p>
<p>“I see it as our most important role for being able to be trustworthy, that we talk about responsible consumption and clarifies responsible consumption. Just like having a healthy attitude towards food, consumption is about not consuming more than you need and choosing sound products and services. I would like us to try to influence our own customers, the license holders, who together with us make the products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel visible, to do so as well. I am convinced that they will</p>	<p>“Jag ser det som vår viktigaste roll för att vara trovärdiga, att vi pratar om ansvarsfull konsumtion och tydliggör ansvarsfull konsumtion. Precis som med att ha ett hälsosamt förhållningssätt till mat så handlar konsumtion om att inte konsumera mer än man verkligen behöver och att välja sunda varor och tjänster. Jag ser gärna att vi försöker påverka våra egna kunder, licensinnehavarna, de som tillsammans med oss synliggör Svanenmärkta produkter, att också göra det. Jag är övertygad om att de vinner i trovärdighet och kundlojalitet på det. “Köp</p>	<p>Interviewee 7, 2019-03-14</p>

<p>gain trust and customer loyalty by doing that. “Buy no more than what you need of this product.” And I see that this trend is coming.”</p>	<p>inte mer än vad du behöver av den här varan.” Och jag ser att den här trenden kommer.”</p>	
<p>“The most important thing for us is how they [the license holders] use the ecolabel, that it is used correctly [...]. Otherwise, we like when they take their own initiatives [...]. But of course, sometimes we think that they are saying the wrong things [...]. We do not have any demands, but it would have been nice if they sometimes informed us, for example with Preem, that they could have said “we are going to release a huge campaign with Gunde Swan”. Because after that campaign, we received a lot of e-mails where people were wondering how we can label diesel with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. In that case, we could have been prepared on receiving criticism. But it is more a question of resources, that we must be prepared on the effects of things that our customers do.”</p>	<p>“Det som är viktigast för oss är hur de [licensinnehavarna] använder märket, att det används på rätt sätt [...]. Annars tycker vi om när de tar egna initiativ [...]. Det har såklart hänt att man har tänkt att de säger de fel saker [...]. Vi har ju inga krav på dem, men det hade varit skönt om de ibland hade informerat oss, exempelvis Preem, att "nu ska vi gå ut med en jättestor kampanj med Gunde Swan". För efter det har vi fått in väldigt mycket mejl där folk undrar hur vi kan Svanenmärka diesel. Då hade ju vi kunnat varit beredda på att det kanske kommer lite kritik. Men det är ju mer en resursgrej, att vi måste vara beredda på att det kan bli snackisar om vissa grejer som våra kunder gör.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 1, 2019-03-08</p>
<p>“There are many different strategic documents that build on this with the personality, and one of these documents is our brand platform which defines our core values, our vision, and mission. That is like a base in all work, and we have to think about that in our daily communication so that we both live as we learn, but also so we do not find a new voice or that we become someone else. We must have some fundamental values. It</p>	<p>“Det är ju många olika strategiska dokument som bygger på det här med personlighet, och ett av dessa dokument är vår varumärkesplattform, det som definierar våra kärnvärden, vår vision och mission. Det ligger som en grundplatta i allt arbete, och det är sånt som vi måste tänka på i all daglig kommunikation vi gör så att vi både lever som vi lär men också så att vi inte hittar på någon ny röst eller att vi ska vara någon annan. Vi måste</p>	<p>Interviewee 4, 2019-03-13</p>

<p>should always be included.”</p>	<p>ha några fundamentala grundvärderingar. Det ska alltid finnas med.”</p>	
<p>“I strongly believe that we should work with consumer campaigns in the future together with our license holders. [...]. And we cannot market on our own if we are to succeed in increasing the market shares for the products labelled with the Nordic Swan Ecolabel. The license holders need to talk about the Nordic Swan Ecolabel in their marketing, and then they must tell us what they need when it comes to facts and data for their messages so that we can help them with that. Then, they can show their messages in their own channels and twist the message so that it suits their own personality. If we succeed with that, we will reach market budgets for several hundred million instead of one at a few million that we have today.”</p>	<p>“Jag tror mycket på att vi ska arbeta med konsumentkampanjer framöver tillsammans med våra licensinnehavare. [...]. Och vi kan inte heller marknadsföra på egen hand om vi ska lyckas öka marknadsandelarna för Svanenmärkta produkter. Licensinnehavarna behöver tala om Svanenmärkningen i sin marknadsföring, och då måste de berätta för oss vad de behöver för fakta och data för deras budskap så att vi kan hjälper dem med det. Sen får de gå ut med budskapen i deras kanaler och twista till budskapen så att det passar deras företagspersonlighet. Lyckas vi med det kommer vi åt marknadsbudgetar för flera hundra miljoner i stället för en på några miljoner som vi har idag.”</p>	<p>Interviewee 7, 2019-03-14</p>

# Appendix 3: Picture of deleted reference

Since Ecolabelling Sweden has changed their webpage after I gathered the information from the mentioned reference below, the webpage is no longer available. Therefore, a picture of the deleted reference is provided.

Svanen (2019). *Why Ecolabelling?* Available at: <http://www.svanen.se/en/About-us/Why-Ecolabelling/> [2019-01-08].

