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Who is responsible for the shift to a more sustainable society?

– How politicians view responsibility and accountability for environmental problems

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Abstract

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our time. Lately, an increased demand that politicians need to act stronger and faster in the fight against climate change has been heard from the public. At the same time, responsibility and accountability for the climate change question remain unclear, as well as what role different actors in society and politics should have in solving environmental problems.

Politicians represent a group in society that has been given power by the public to make political decisions. This study aims to gain an understanding, from the point of view of elected politicians, of who they think is responsible in the shift to a more sustainable society.

To reach the aim of this study, I have conducted nine semi-structured interviews with Swedish politicians. Using Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach, the study looks at how politicians represent the problem of climate change through the solutions put forth, and who is seen as responsible. Furthermore, the study looks at how the respondents view their role in solving environmental problems.

The findings offer insights to how climate change is looked upon from the point of view of politicians and sheds light on the complex issue of responsibility and accountability in the shift to a more sustainable society.

Keywords: Individualism, WPR approach, identity-protective cognition, knowledge, consumption, Swedish politics

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1 Introduction

Lately, the Swedish public has started to demonstrate a demand on politicians to act on climate change (de la Reguera et al, 2019). Distinguishing which actors have the responsibility in environmental problems is essential in order to meet the challenges that countries worldwide are facing. Still, the answers to the questions of responsibility and accountability for the shift to a more sustainable society remain unclear. Politicians represent an important actor in society that helps shape the public debate and have been given the trust of the public to rule and develop society (The Riksdag 2017, pp. 4-6). How politicians frame the discourse around environmental problems is thus of importance to gain an understanding of what solutions are put forward and how the problem is framed.

Previous studies suggest that there has been increased attention on the individual and his or her lifestyle choices when discussing environmental problems. Emmy Dahl (2014, p. 14) argues that there has been an individualization of the environmental debate, where individual lifestyles and behaviors are emphasized. The development of individualism is however not only seen as positive. Ulrich Beck considered individualization to be a threat to the welfare state, arguing that it makes the individual responsible for problems it has little control over (Dahl 2014, p. 14). Kersty Hobson argues that the debate puts the attention on the individual, instead of finding more efficient solutions to environmental problems (2002, pp. 97-101). This change in focus can be seen in different parts of society, not at least in the media debate, where topics such as flying, meat consumption, and plastic use have been seen more frequently during the past year (Kjöllér 2019; Le Moine & Manhammar 2019; Eklund 2019).

Individualism refers to the increased focus on the possibilities and importance of the individual's impact in society, as well as the decreased importance of the collective and the role of the state (Dahl 2015, p. 14). The tendency of individualism can also be seen in the report "Global warming of 1.5 °C" from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which states that in order to reach the global goal of a maximum increase in temperature of 1.5 °C, each person needs to limit their emissions to one ton per year until 2050 (The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2018a). To be able to reach that goal, the average Swede must decrease his or her emission by approximately 9 tons (The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2018a). In Agenda 2030, agreed upon by all United Nations member states in 2015, sustainable consumption and production is one of the 17 sustainable development goals (United Nations 2019a; United Nations 2019b). Target 12.8 looks to promote a sustainable lifestyle and to "(...) ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature" (United Nations, 2019b). The goal does not only focus on individuals in sustainable development but also emphasizes the role of knowledge and information in relation to the choices of the individual. Another factor pointing to the direction of individualism in Sweden is the establishment of organizations such as the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, which primary goal is to "help consumers choose environmentally conscious products" (The Nordic Swan Ecolabel, 2019).

The aim of this study is to look at who the politicians view as responsible in the shift to a more sustainable society. In order to reach this aim, I use Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach. The approach presents six questions, out of which four are addressed in this study to analyze interviews made with representatives of seven Swedish political parties. Question five, which looks at the possible effects of the problem representation, will be discussed in chapter five. How the politicians reason around how knowledge affects the behavior and choices of the individual is also looked at, and to deepen the analysis further, I will also apply the Identity-protective cognition theory. This theory suggests that one's urge to protect one's identity is stronger than the ability to absorb "true" facts and knowledge, which leads to factual knowledge being dismissed, if it challenges the person's identity or cultural commitments (Kahan 2017, p. 1).

1.1 Problem formulation and research questions

Climate change is a global problem that needs to be faced by all nation-states. The distribution of responsibility with regards to environmental problems is, therefore, an important issue that needs to be addressed also in Sweden. Politicians represent an important group in shaping the public discourse around environmental problems. In this study, politicians are therefore interviewed to gain an understanding of their problem representation and what they consider their role to be, as individuals and as people in a power position. Furthermore, the study looks at where the politicians believe that the responsibility for environmental issues lies in Swedish society. The study aims to investigate how the politicians interviewed reason about responsibilities for environmental problems.

The research questions are influenced by Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach:

- Who do the politicians view as responsible in the shift to a more sustainable society?
- What do the politicians represent the problem to be in the shift to a more sustainable society?
- What role do the politicians view themselves as having in the shift to a more sustainable society?

2 Background

Several studies have looked into the role of the individual in society and the environmental debate, suggesting that individuals have been given a more prominent role as change makers in society. In this study, I will examine how politicians look at responsibility and accountability for environmental problems. The view of the politicians is interesting to have a closer look at, as politicians not only help shape the public debate but also are assigned responsibility from the voters to act according to the public opinion.

Below I present some of the existing research and background around individualism and the individual's role in the shift to a more sustainable society. The aim of the chapter is not to present an exhaustive amount of research, but to give a brief overview of previous research and where my study can fill a gap and contribute to the field.

2.1 Individualism

Sweden has been described as an extreme country, where traditional values are viewed as less important and self-expression values are emphasized (Gourman & Swahn 2015; World Values Survey, 2015). Individualism refers to the decreased focus on society and the problems and challenges within it as a collective responsibility, and the increased focus on the individual as self-made. The freedom and choices of the individual become central, as well as the responsibilities (Dahl 2014, p. 15). The focus in environmental problems have since the 1980s also been put in a global context and through the report "Our common future", released by the United Nations in 1987, the term sustainable development was introduced to the bigger mass. Sustainable development looks at sustainability from the point of three dimensions: social, environmental and economic sustainability (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; Soneryd & Ugglå 2011, p. 32). The concept has been argued to be one of the factors for putting an increased focus on the individual, making environmental problems into lifestyle problems, due to a belief in the individual as a rational consumer (Soneryd & Ugglå 2011, pp. 32-35).

Today, the individualization of the Swedish society and the environmental debate can be seen in different parts of society. In the visionary plan of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, individuals' lifestyles and consumption are prioritized areas and should "dominate the environmental and economic debate" in Sweden by 2021 (The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2017). The non-governmental organization WWF has introduced "The 5 Bs": Bilen, biffen, bostaden, börsen and butiken (Eng: The car, the steak, the house, the stock market and the store), which highlights the importance of the individual and strives to encourage politicians to make it easier and more feasible to make environmentally friendly choices (WWF, 2019). Another non-governmental organization, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), has developed guides for the consumer how to shop sustainably (SSNC, 2019).

Soneryd & Uggla (2011, p. 46) argues that there has been a shift in responsibility from the state onto the individual in the Swedish society. They say that concepts such as solidarity and citizenship have been replaced by rational choice, consumption, and lifestyle. In an individualistic society, individuals should find their own way by freedom of choice, rather than being controlled of the state. Instead, norms in society are supposed to steer the direction of the individual and what is the “correct” way of acting in a certain situation (Soneryd & Uggla 2011, p. 12). At the same time, this freedom has another side to it: responsibility. In an individualistic society, there is a great belief in the individual and his or her ability to make responsible and well-grounded decisions. Individuals have the right to choose how to live their lives, but at the same time, they are affected by norms and values around them. Individuals have the right to choose how they want to act, but they are not free from judgment and impact when doing so (Soneryd & Uggla 2011, pp. 42-44).

This view of individualism is supported by Emmy Dahl, who argues that there has been an increased individual responsibility for solving environmental problems. According to Dahl, this leads to individuals being given responsibility of the development of environmental problems, which they have to solve by changing their behavior by themselves (2014, p. 14). In interviews with individuals in Sweden, Dahl maps out how they reason around their responsibility for environmental problems (Dahl 2014, p. 29).

In “Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity”, Ulrich Beck (1992, p. 136) claims that the individualization has led to more responsibility being put on to the individuals to shape their own lives. Institutional conditions are in an individualistic society a consequence of the decisions of the individual, not conditions that affect them. It is thus no longer possible to talk about fate as a contributing factor of change, but instead, the reason is personal failure. Norms that used to guide the individual have been lost to the liberation of the traditional social contexts (Beck 1992, p. 128). Soneryd & Uggla (2011, pp. 11-12) instead talks about how shared norms, worldviews and ways to be are exchanged by an increased perception of freedom and responsibility of the individual.

Little research has been made on how individual politicians view their role in solving environmental problems. Rebecca Willis has however conducted several studies around politicians’ views on climate change. In a recent study, Willis looks at the values and motivations of politicians in the British parliament, as well as their views of their roles as people in a position of power, regarding climate change (Willis 2018a, p. 476). In “Constructing a ‘representational claim’ for action on climate change”, Willis looks at how the politicians talk about climate change questions in public. The conclusion is that low public support leads to a “representative dilemma” for the politicians, who feel constrained to talk about the issue (Willis 2018b, p. 941). Scientific evidence in itself is not a motivator to talk about climate change, but instead, politicians try to legitimize acting on climate change by presenting the problem in a way that feels meaningful to the ones that the politicians are representing (Willis 2018b, pp. 941, 955).

All the more research has been made on the connection between individual behavior and knowledge. Leon Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory is maybe one of the most famous theories of individual behavior, and suggests that people cannot act environmentally friendly in one area and not in another, due to the inconsistency in thoughts and action, causing them to either abandon the pro-environmental behavior or incorporate other pro-environmental behaviors (Crompton & Thøgersen 2009, pp. 15-16; Schulz 2014, p. 112). P. Wesley Schulz argues that there is little evidence supporting a link between knowledge and a change in behavior, and talks about other factors as important to change behavior, such as social norms, feedback and reducing barriers (Schulz 2014, pp. 108-109, 112). A more effective solution than information is, according to Schulz, to make it easier for the individual to change behavior (Schulz 2014, p. 113).

2.1.1 *The individual as a consumer*

The individualism of the environmental debate has a particular focus on the individual as a consumer, and since the 1960s, the lifestyles of individuals have been closely connected to consumption (Soneryd & Uggla 2011, p. 12). Although sustainable consumption, which is understood as “doing more and better with less” (UN 2019), has been given increased focus lately, statistic shows that the CO₂ emissions from consumption have remained more or less the same (The Swedish Environmental Protection, 2018). Soneryd & Uggla (2011, p. 61) highlights the importance of looking at sustainable consumption in its bigger picture. For the individual to consume sustainably, societal factors and the structure of society need to be taken into account. Dahl (2014, p. 21) argues that the debate today focuses on how individuals should change their behavior towards making more sustainable consumption decisions, instead of discussing the presuppositions needed for the individuals to act environmentally friendly. This, according to Dahl, is a depoliticization of environmental problems.

Hobson (2002, p. 96) highlights the increased focus on the individual as a consumer since the 1980s and talks about how sustainable consumption is being framed as “common sense”. She argues that there is a consensus worldwide in political communities regarding climate change, in that it is believed to be strongly linked to consumption, although the reason how to tackle the problem is debated (Hobson 2002, p. 97). The individual is viewed as a good or bad citizen through his or her consumption, and by gaining knowledge of how the products they buy and consume is affecting the planet, individuals are expected to change their lives accordingly. When framing the problem as something that can be solved through consumption, relying on the individual to make the “right” choices, a solution is found within the existing neoliberal system. Neoliberalism refers to the idea that governments are not able to provide social welfare or create economic growth, but instead, the free market and individuals should be the actors responsible for creating this (Bockman 2013, p. 14). The neoliberal system puts the consumption of the individual in focus and changes the balance between individual and state, where the role of the state is toned down (Hobson 2002, p. 100). Hobson argues that this increased attention on the individual as a consumer steers the focus towards the individual and away from finding potential, more effective solutions to solve environmental problems (2002, pp. 97-101).

2.2 Identity-protective cognition theory

In order to gain further understanding of what role knowledge plays in changing the behavior of the individual, the identity-protective cognition theory (IPC) will be used in this study. The IPC theory, developed by Dan M. Kahan (2017), suggests that how people choose to credit or dismiss information depends on if the facts presented are in line with the identity of the individual. Instead, individuals selectively choose to accept information that fits with their group and dismisses information that is threatening the individual’s status in the group. Kahan shows that the perception of how trustworthy an expert is regarded to be depend on if the expert’s view fits with the view of the individual (Kahan 2017, pp. 1-2).

The theory suggests that individuals misinform themselves to protect their own identity and the identity of the group that they are members of. The individual then looks for evidence to support that identity, giving a bigger illusion of polarization between the two “sides” of an argument. The misinformation, which happens consciously or unconsciously, is a way of protecting oneself from dissonance from valued groups. In addition, all attempts to shed light on the misinformation will only strengthen and certify the false impression and help strengthen the polarization. This strengthening of the misinformation is not only affecting the individuals already misinformed but can also spread to the mass opinion (Kahan 2017, pp. 4-5). The misinformation can be either due to political and economic interests or, as will be argued in this study and which Kahan himself emphasizes, motivated consumers who seek to protect their lifestyles and identities (Kahan 2017, p. 6). Thus, one’s

identity and the urge to protect that identity is argued to have a bigger effect on individual behavior than the knowledge presented by experts, if that knowledge does not match with the individual's identity. Kahan connects the theory to global warming, saying that whether individuals believe in climate change or not demonstrates who they are, their cultural identity and their worldview (Kahan 2015, p. 11).



The motivated-public model (Kahan 2017, p. 7)

The model shows how the public consists of motivated consumers, who search for information that will support the beliefs that are characteristic to the cultural group, which they are a part of. This demand for information from motivated consumers creates an opportunity to spread the misinformation further. The spiral can be broken by retaking control over the information (Kahan 2017, pp. 6-7).

3 Research design

3.1 Theory

In this study, I have conducted interviews with politicians in order to gain an understanding of who they view is responsible for environmental problems. Below I present the methodology for examining this. Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach is used to guide the analysis, following the questions presented in the approach.

3.1.1 *The "What's the problem represented to be?" approach*

Bacchi's approach is focused on critically problematizing policies, and she argues that looking at how the problem is framed in a policy is essential to governing processes. The WPR approach takes its starting point from the premise that how a subject talks about solutions of a problem demonstrates what they believe that the problem is and thus, what needs to be done to solve it. Bacchi presents six questions in her framework, out of which four will be used in this study. Besides studying how the problem is formulated and talked about, it also focuses on what is *not* talked about, i.e. the silences. Additionally, the approach is useful to critically study assumptions and "truths" that are not contested by the respondents. The questions have been used as a foundation when analyzing the interviews, presented in chapter four, except for number five, which will be discussed further in chapter five. The two questions that I will not address in this study are number three and six. Question three investigates how a certain problem formulation has become dominant and what conditions this has emerged in (Bacchi 2009, p. 11). Since it is not in the scope of this study to look at the historical background of the problem, this question will be dismissed in the study. Question six builds on question three and will therefore not be taken into account.

The first question, "*What is the problem represented to be?*" provides the help of gaining an understanding of how the politicians understand and articulate the problem in the shift to a more sustainable society and what the politicians think needs to change. The WPR approach builds on the idea that how a problem is presented demonstrates how the problem is being thought about (Bacchi 2009, p. 3).

The second question of the approach is "*What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the problem?*", which strives for a reflection on underlying meanings and re-emerging concepts and categories, as well as what is not questioned, such as taken-for-granted knowledge (Bacchi 2012, p. 22; Bacchi 2009, p. 5). Question number two is asked to find the "conceptual logics", which are meanings that have to be in place for the problem representation to make sense (Bacchi 2009, p. 5).

In the fourth question, the researcher asks *what is left unproblematic in the problem representation, where the silences are and if the problem can be thought about differently* (Bacchi 2012, p. 21). The problem representations are looked at critically, where the

silenced perspectives are highlighted and the limitations of the problem representation are shown (Bacchi 2009, p. 13).

Question five looks at *what effects are produced by this representation of the problem* (Bacchi 2012, p. 21). Here, the researcher critically looks at what effects these representations have on groups or members of groups in society. There are three different kinds of effects: discursive effects (limits on what is allowed to be thought and said), subjectification (how subjects are made up in discourse) and finally lived effects (how the effects impact life and death) (Bacchi 2009, p. 15).

According to Bacchi, research that looks at problematisation is less concentrated on finding solutions to the researched problem, and more interested in the problem itself (Bacchi 2015, p. 4). Bacchi is critical to the view that problems are something set, waiting to be fixed (Bacchi 2009, p. 3). The WPR approach focuses on the ways in which subjects are formed within the discourses they exist, which forms their understanding of problems (Bacchi 2015, p. 5). Bacchi views discourses as “socially produced forms of knowledge that set limits upon what it is possible to think, write or speak about a ‘given social object or practice’” (Bacchi 2009, p. 35). By using the WPR approach, the researcher thus works “backwards” when looking at policies. In the case of this study, the problematisation is used to gain an understanding of how the politicians describe the problem and where the problem representation and responsibility lies in the shift to a more sustainable society. In addition, the approach is useful to shed light on the underlying, shared views of the politicians on taken-for-granted knowledge within the discourse, as well as what is not problematized. Bacchi’s WPR approach is especially concerned with policies, which will not be the case in this study. The approach is however useful since it provides a framework for gaining an understanding of how different actors shape the problems in different ways, which has effects on how the discourse around environmental problems is constituted. Furthermore, Bacchi’s work is set in the arena of politics, which this study also is.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Data collection

The empirical data in this study is made up of nine semi-structured interviews with Swedish politicians. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for in-depth knowledge on the thoughts of the respondents and at the same time enabled the interviews to be focused on the aims and research questions of the study. The choice of interviewing politicians was made for the purpose of understanding who has the responsibility for environmental problems, from the standpoint of people in a position of power in society. The data was conducted in Uppsala during February and March 2019.

In Sweden, there are eight political parties in parliament during the period 2018-2022 (The Riksdag, 2019). In this study, one or two elected members from seven political parties were interviewed. The politicians interviewed were profiled in questions regarding environmental problems and represent their parties on different levels in society. To reach the aim of the study, the politicians interviewed needed to be somewhat knowledgeable about environmental problems and climate change. One party, the Sweden Democrats, is missing in the study, due to difficulties in finding a representative with knowledge in environmental problems available at the set time frame. This is however not viewed to have a big impact on the results since the study does not aim to contrast and compare the answers between the different political parties. Due to practical reasons, there is a greater amount of local politicians from Uppsala municipality presented in the study, however, some are active on a national level and some work as Parliamentarians within the European Union (EU). In the table below, the respondents are introduced as of their current work. Several of the respondents have however been on all or several levels at some point in their

career and moved back and forth between the local and national level, which is why they will only be introduced as respondent 1-9, sometimes from a certain party, in this study.

Gender	5 men, 4 women
Party affiliation	2 Centre Party, 1 Christian Democrats, 2 Green Party, 1 Left Party, 1 Liberals, 1 Moderate Party, 1 Swedish Social Democratic Party
Mandates (as of May 2019)	5 local, 1 regional, 2 national, 1 EU level

Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face and two interviews were made on the phone since that was preferred by the respondents. The interviews were recorded, with approval from the respondents, and later transcribed and analyzed according to the methodological and theoretical framework, as described by the WPR approach. All interviews were made in Swedish since that was the mother tongue of all respondents. All quotes used in the study have been translated to English, but the transcriptions are available in full in Swedish. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes, depending on the time available of the respondents. The politicians have been made anonymous and were told that they would be so at the beginning of the interview. The choice of anonymizing the participants was made for the politicians to be able to speak more freely and on a more personal level. Since the participants are public figures, there could be a risk for them associated with publishing their names.

Although the politicians represent seven different parties and are active on different levels in the Swedish society, these nine interviews cannot be said to represent politicians as a whole, and more politicians could have been interviewed to gain a wider picture. Although the politicians are representatives of their parties, the thoughts and reflections are their personal ones. Since it is not this study's aim to map out the standpoints of the political parties or make a comparison between the parties, the findings should not be generalized to politicians as a whole or be viewed as the standpoints of the political parties. The limitation of nine interviews was made due to the time available while conducting this study.

3.2.2 Analysis of data

The material from the interviews with the politicians has been analyzed with the help of Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach and by the presented research questions. Bacchi (2009, p. 1) argues that to be able to understand how the issue is thought about, there is a need to look at what the problem is represented to be in a particular policy. As I am not studying policies here, but interviews with politicians, the approach is used in order to gain an understanding of how the politicians view the problem in the shift to a more sustainable society. Bacchi (2013, p. 23) argues that by first analyzing what solutions are offered, it is possible to distinguish what the problem is represented to be is. Thus, by looking at what solutions the politicians give to reach a more sustainable society, the problem and questions about accountability were made clearer. The goal of the WPR approach is not to solve problems, but to shed light on the problematisation of questions, to understand how certain understandings of a problem shape the way it is talked about (Bacchi 2009, p. xvi). Thus, this study's aim was not to propose solutions but to gain an understanding of how the politicians view the responsibility for environmental problems in society today through how the problem is presented.

The data was analyzed after all the interviews were conducted and transcribed. The interviews were first coded through the research questions, where everything related to the research questions or Bacchi's WPR approach was included. By doing so, it was possible to distinguish commonly brought up themes in the nine interviews. The material was then

scanned again, focusing on the discovered themes, and then placed in a matrix to more easily gain an overview of what had been said around the specific themes.

The foundation of the analysis was the main question in the WPR approach: “What’s the problem represented to be?”. By focusing on the problem formulation, rather than problem-solution, the study tried to distinguish the taken-for-granted knowledge, to gain a deeper understanding of the discourses of the politicians. By not asking the politicians directly how they viewed the solution of the problem, but instead talk about responsibility for environmental problems in general, the politicians could speak more freely about the issues, rather than putting the focus and responsibility on the respondents, making them feel less “targeted”.

In a qualitative study, the research is interpretative and the integrity of the researcher is essential for the quality of the study (Creswell 2018, p. 183; Kvale 1997, p. 218). It is important to highlight that how I have picked out the themes in the material, as well as how I have analyzed them, is a reflection of my thoughts, values, and interpretations. I have therefore tried to be as transparent as possible throughout the study.

In the chapters below I will present the general themes found in the study.

4 Results & analysis

In this chapter, the main results of the nine interviews with the politicians will be presented, as well as an analysis, structured from the presented research questions with inspiration from Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach. Through the analysis, two themes emerged: the role of the individual as a consumer, and the role of knowledge and social norms in changing individual behavior. The first chapter is divided into different sections, where the first section introduces the respondents' views on the individual's role and responsibility in the shift to a more sustainable society, as well as the particular focus on the individual as a consumer. After that, a section of a group viewed as having less responsibility, parents with young children, is presented. Following, a section that wishes to answer the question of what the politicians view the problem to be is presented. How the politicians frame the solution of the problem will be discussed according to the two most prominent solutions: knowledge and social norms. Finally, the self-experienced view of their roles as politicians and public figures will be presented.

4.1 Who is responsible?

Below, the answer to the first research question: "Who do the politicians view as responsible for shifting into a more sustainable society?" will be presented and analyzed from the findings of the interviews with the politicians.

4.1.1 *The individual as a responsible actor*

When interviewing the politicians, discussions about individuals' lifestyles and consumption behavior quickly arose. Travel patterns, such as the usage of cars or flying were commonly discussed topics, but the views on this differed greatly between the respondents. Seven respondents talked about the individual as a consumer and the importance of making it easier for individuals to consume more environmentally friendly or offer better solutions. When being asked the question "do you believe that there is too much or too little pressure on the individual today?", three politicians said that there was too little pressure on the individual, while one respondent thought there was too much focus on the individual in the debate. Others were not certain when being asked the question, but when talking about possible solutions, the focus on the individual was clear for some of the respondents. Two respondents discussed how individual freedom also means having responsibilities towards society. When being asked the question "do you think it is mostly up to the individual or to society to meet the environmental crisis?", one respondent argued:

"I think that society (...) has gone too much towards that people only have a lot of freedom to do things, but in order for society to work, there are also some responsibilities that one has towards society." (Respondent 2, 2019-03-13)

Individualism means that the individuals view themselves as more responsible for their own lives, as well as a sense of feeling free and less connected to a certain social context (Soneryd & Uggla 2011, p. 12). The effect of this freedom in an individualistic society was in the interviews contrasted by the responsibility being put on the individuals. One respondent talked about society as a shared project that all individuals have a responsibility for and rights within, and not only personal liberties. This view is closely connected to collectivism, sometimes seen as the opposite of individualism, where the role of the individual is less emphasized and the role of the state is more highlighted (Dahl 2014, p. 14).

When discussing the role of the individual and the public debate in Sweden today, one respondent talked about the importance of actions of individuals and argued that today's society not only gives the individual more responsibilities but also leads to an increased amount of power for the individual:

“I guess it has always mattered what individuals do, but today we live even more in this, like... influencer society.” (Respondent 3, 2019-02-26)

The respondent continued to argue that anyone could become an influencer and influence the lives and choices of other individuals. The statement strengthens the view of the respondent's image of how much an individual can affect society. It shows a belief in the individual as a change maker in the environmental debate and the effect that the individual is believed to have. The faith in the power of the individual was demonstrated in other ways throughout the interviews, such as consumption patterns and the individual's effect on the behavior of other individuals. Despite this belief, some respondents did not feel like they had a big impact on people in their everyday lives. One respondent talked about his engagement as an individual:

“I have the same troubles as most other people that want to (...) try to live sustainably (...). I wish I could do more myself.” (Respondent 2, 2019-03-13)

When looking at individuals as a group, several politicians talked about ways in which individuals can change their lives in order to live more sustainably, such as choosing more environmentally friendly alternatives when shopping for groceries or using public transport instead of the car. At the same time, when connecting it to themselves or colleagues, there seemed to be a greater understanding of the problems as systematic, rather than the responsibility of one person. Two politicians mentioned that some individuals are viewed as more responsible than others. For example, one politician from the green party argued that politicians from her party have more responsibility and pressure in their everyday lives, as profiled in environmental problems, than politicians from other parties. Another respondent talked about how celebrities are sometimes more pressured to live more environmentally friendly than politicians in a high position.

When discussing the responsibility of the individual, two topics stood out as the most discussed ones: consumption and travel, which I will discuss further in the following sections.

4.1.2 The individual as a consumer

The respondents often talked about the power of individuals in terms of consumption. One respondent stood out from the rest of the respondents and did not mention the individual as a consumer a single time during the interview. Three respondents mentioned the importance of the individual's consumption power, but one respondent was indecisive if the main responsibility was on the consumers or the producers. Helping the individual, or the consumer, to choose the most environmentally friendly option was viewed as an

important part of the role of the politicians. To act environmentally friendly or not was sometimes discussed in terms of acting in a “right” or “wrong” way. To increase the probability of the consumers choosing the “right” products, one respondent talked about spreading information as a first important step in shifting to a more sustainable society:

“What is necessary for the consumers to be able to make an informed choice, regardless of if it is about the environment or other things, are knowledge and facts (...).” (Respondent 4, 2019-02-21)

Some points stand out in this interview. Individuals are referred to as consumers, highlighting the role of consumption to solve environmental problems. Consumer organizations and administrative authorities were mentioned by the respondent as responsible for sharing this information to the individuals, thereby decreasing the responsibility of politicians in spreading information. The respondent talked about knowledge as a taken-for-granted factor leading to changed behavior and, thereby, a different outcome in what action is taken. The role of knowledge was a commonly brought up theme throughout the interviews and will be discussed further in the following chapters.

The respondents also discussed consumption in terms of how politics could give the conditions for individuals to choose the pro-environmental option. One of the solutions being discussed was green tax-shifting policies, which four respondents from three different parties mentioned as a positive policy instrument. Green tax-shifting policies were explained as making it easy to choose the “right” option and at the same time punish the “bad” choice. This is done by taxing the less environmentally friendly choice, by the so-called polluter-pays principle (imported meat produced with a big amount of antibiotics was given as an example) and invest the tax money saved into more sustainable solutions (SOU 2013; Fores 2012). The proposition can be argued to go hand in hand with the individualistic view of society, where the individual is seen as a change maker with the ultimate responsibility but is through the proposal given the preconditions needed by politics to make the “right” choice.

Consumption was however not only talked about in terms of what was going to be consumed but also in quantity. Three respondents talked about how they believed that there is a lack of focus on over-consumption in today’s society. One respondent believed that the view on consumption needs to change and highlighted the amount of consumption and the effect on the climate. Another respondent discussed how people in general should be less afraid of talking about over-consumption and how the deeper discussion around how consumption affects humans is missing in the societal debate:

“It is very hard to politically go in and moralize over peoples’ lives. It is more like, every person needs to think ‘do I get that much happier?’(...) We are an individualistic country. Family is not important, religion is not important, culture is not important. (...) You have to fill that [gap] yourself somehow, and then you go shopping.” (Respondent 6, 2019-02-28)

The respondent argued that a debate regarding over-consumption is missing and mentioned that there is “consumption hysteria” in Swedish society today. At the same time, he mentioned multiple times that it was not the role of politicians to decide what people should do or to put up laws that reduced consumption. Instead, the respondent argued that people should think about their own behavior, which makes the question a matter of individual choice.

4.1.3 *The car – a symbol of freedom?*

When discussing how a shift to a more sustainable society could be reached, a commonly brought up topic among the respondents was travel habits, especially connected to the individual’s usage of cars. It was one of the most emotional topics for the respondents and

there was a clear dividing line between the different politicians, where some believed that technology and a change of fuels was the answer to more sustainable travelling, and others argued that the focus needs to be on the individual's travel habits. To use public transport or cycling were brought up as two alternatives from the respondents who talked about travel habits, while others discussed the need for increased usage of electric cars and other fuels, such as biofuels. One politician talked about the discussion around the car in society and the lack of focus on the travel patterns:

“It is not only the new cars that are going to solve the problems of the old cars. There is too little focus on the travels. We talk about cars and we talk about fuels, but we don't talk about the travels.” (Respondent 4, 2019-02-21)

By highlighting the travel habits instead of the fuels, the respondent shifted the focus and responsibility onto the individual. Another respondent was critical to this view and argued that limiting the usage of cars is not the answer:

“The environmental movement has often claimed that the way we are living is wrong, that we should turn back the clock 40 years, that we are going to stop driving cars and things like that and I've been interested in that because I don't think that we should stop driving cars, although I think that we should drive electric vehicles and not dirty diesel and gasoline cars.” (Respondent 6, 2019-02-28)

The respondent viewed the usage of cars as an obvious part of modern society. To reduce the usage of the car would, according to the respondent, be to turn back time. The two statements represent a clear dividing line between the responses from most politicians. At the same time, both views can be argued to ascribe to individualism. While the first statement shifted the responsibility onto the individuals and their lifestyles by arguing that individuals should move away from the habit of using the car, the second statement focused on the rights of the individual. The respondent proceeded to argue that:

“It is an incredible symbol of freedom, the car, and it has meant so much to people and I think that it is going to be like that in the future as well.” (Respondent 6, 2019-02-28)

The freedom of the individual is an important part of individualism and to have a car was viewed by the respondent as an important part of modern society. Three respondents talked about the inconsistency from politics when it comes to transmitting knowledge of what is the most pro-environmental fuel and two respondents argued that politics needs to be better at setting long-term goals, for the individual to be able to make the most environmentally friendly choice.

4.1.4 *Life as a parent*

As previously demonstrated, some respondents shifted responsibility to the individual, often in terms of travel behavior and consumption. When talking about individual choices, one group was however viewed as having less responsibility. Some of the politicians who viewed the individual's choices as important and believed that knowledge was a valuable tool to reach change were more understanding of parents with young children, who were believed to have less time and thus were excused for certain less environmentally friendly behaviors. Two everyday situations were especially highlighted: grocery shopping with children and driving children to daycare or practice. Two of the respondents talked about going grocery shopping with small children. Both respondents mentioned that it takes more time to buy more environmentally conscious products:

“Let’s say you are a parent with young children and have just picked them up from daycare and then you are going into the store and like... now I want palm oil free [products] (...) from a grocery shopping that would have taken 20 minutes, you have to add half-an-hour and that time just doesn’t exist in our everyday life today (...).” (Respondent 2, 2019-03-13)

The respondent connected shopping environmentally friendly products, in this case palm oil free products, to time, implying that it is more time-consuming. The extra time it takes does not fit into a stressful modern society, according to the respondent. The reason for the increased amount of time was seen as an information problem, where it is not clear enough which products contain palm oil and which do not. Another respondent shared this view:

“I understand that when you are walking around choosing and then... I mean parents with young children... quickly in to buy groceries... That’s the way it is.” (Respondent 9, 2019-03-13)

The answers from the respondents indicate that parents of young children have less time, and because of that, they are not expected to live as environmentally friendly as other individuals, regardless of if they have the knowledge or not. Both respondents took for granted that choosing environmentally friendly products would be more time consuming than choosing other products. Another respondent was understanding of the need for using a car when having children, and offered a solution on how to still be able to become more environmentally friendly and use the car less:

”A lot of people are saying (...) ’I have to drive the kids to practice’ (...),” but maybe I don’t do that every day of the week. Maybe there is one day when I can take the bike.” (Respondent 4, 2019-02-21)

The statement is more critical than the previous two, but again the respondent is demonstrating a common trend: when participating in an activity involving one’s children, it is more accepted to choose the less environmentally friendly alternative. This tendency became even clearer in the statement of a fourth respondent when discussing an increase of the gasoline tax and the potential effect it could have:

“We [the respondent and spouse] can take an increase of one krona, but a single mom can’t. Should only kids with parents with a good economy that lives in a villa have that right [to play sports] or is it important if everyone can join?” (Respondent 6, 2019-02-28)

To be environmentally friendly seemed to be important to the respondents, but not when the environmentally friendly option might cause negative effects on the lives of children, according to the four respondents. Having children is thus a reason to be less environmentally friendly. The respondent made the politics of a tax increase into a justice question: all children should have the same opportunities. The respondent took the argument of the car even further, saying that without a car, it is not possible to attend certain activities, in this case, football. To be environmentally friendly were viewed by the respondents as more complicated in terms of time-consumption or financially than choosing the less sustainable option. In conclusion, it was by some respondents seen as a sacrifice to choose another alternative than the car.

4.2 What's the problem represented to be?

In the following section, I will answer the second research question “What is the problem represented to be?”, as followed by the WPR approach.

4.2.1 *More knowledge will solve it*

In the interviews, a commonly brought up theme was knowledge in relation to making pro-environmental choices. When discussing the individual and the choices of the individual as a consumer, six respondents mentioned knowledge and information as important factors of changing individuals' behaviors and lifestyles. Knowledge was often talked about in general terms and how the politicians, society or authorities could share information about environmental issues and climate change at large, but also how to spread consumer information to the public. There seemed to be a great belief in knowledge as a changing factor, but how the information and knowledge should be given or transferred to the individual was seldom talked about, as well as if knowledge leads to a change in behavior. According to the IPC theory, identity preservation of one's group is a stronger driver of change for the individual than the knowledge given by experts, and can therefore have an effect on if the individual decides to take in the information or not (Kahan 2015, p. 11). One respondent talked about the importance of consumer information:

“Politics and society, I think, need to try to increase the consumer information as much as possible, but there is also an individual responsibility to inform oneself.” (Respondent 5, 2019-02-25)

Whether it is society or politics that should distribute the information or the individuals' own responsibility to gain information, the respondent demonstrated the belief that knowledge is necessary for individuals to make more environmentally friendly decisions in their everyday lives. According to the respondent, there is a lack of consumer information today. Looking again at the identity-protective cognition theory, knowledge is not viewed to be enough to get people to act, but might on the contrary even lead to more resistance and polarization if the politicians or experts are trying to shed light on the misinterpretation (Kahan 2017, pp. 4-5). When arguing that more information is needed, the politicians put the responsibility on to the individuals, which will act in line with what fits their identity and not necessarily according to the information that is given to them (Kahan 2017, p. 4). One respondent gave an example of an environmental problem where identity might be a factor in why there are many different voices in the debate:

“Some people have the view that organic [food] is better, but if you look at it scientifically, it's not always better. It depends, as with many other things, and it's because we want to simplify the picture (...) you choose a view that maybe isn't completely true because it makes it easier to convey.” (Respondent 9, 2019-03-13)

The respondent believed that the reason for the misinterpretation or sharing of false information in the debate about organic food was because it would make it easier to share that image in the debate. According to the IPC theory, the issue is a matter of which group identity the debater ascribes to. In order to protect one's status in the social group of which one ascribes to, people might unconsciously select or disregard certain information (Kahan 2017, p. 1). The misinformation leads to a polarization of the factual question, which creates economic or political opportunities (Kahan 2017, p. 6).

Five politicians expressed concern in putting blame on individuals and “moralize” over people's lives. Instead, the politicians highlighted the importance of listening to the public and gaining an understanding of what questions are important for the voters. There was a fear of being viewed as a politician that wants to tell the public how to live their lives.

Instead, informing the public was a more attractive solution. In that way, the public has the foundation of making the “right” decisions themselves. The fear of moralization and making people feel guilty leads to another brought up topics in the interviews: societal norms.

4.2.2 *Social norms will solve it*

Besides knowledge, important factors for individuals to act more environmentally friendly, according to the respondents, were social norms, shame, and values in society. Social norms are in this study viewed as a set of informal rules, based on shared beliefs, which influence the behavior of the individual. Social norms differ from legal norms, which are enforced by the legal system (Fiori 2018, p. 199). A certain pressure from society was mostly viewed as a positive way to get people to act more environmentally friendly. One politician stood out in the discussion regarding knowledge, saying he did not think that knowledge automatically led to a more environmentally friendly behavior. He connected his thoughts to his expertise in the area, being educated in and working with environmental questions, and the lack of “living as he learns”. When discussing his struggles in living an environmentally friendly life, the respondent discussed how societal peer pressure had changed his behavior:

“This is the first year I am joining Flygfritt [Eng: Staying on the ground] and trying that out and I have to say that I feel like that is because it is a pressure from the societal debate and a norm. I feel that there is a change in the societal norm regarding travels and such.” (Respondent 8, 2019-02-22)

Another type of pressure mentioned was shame, which all four female respondents mentioned. Three out of the four respondents were positive to shame as a way to change individual behavior. One respondent compared doing harm to the environment to hitting children, claiming that the shaming of the issue has made it taboo and thus created a change in the way people behave. Another respondent talked about the efficiency of shaming in society:

“Shame is one of our most efficient human systems to get people to not do something. More efficient, I think, than taxes and stuff.” (Respondent 3, 2019-02-26)

When discussing shame, it was in three out of four cases connected to travels, and often to flying. The increased focus on individuals’ flying habits and flying as being a source of high emissions was talked about in positive terms from three politicians, who argued it had increased the awareness of the issue. One politician said it has started to become more taboo to fly, which she viewed as a positive development. Shame was seen as having a great impact on behavioral change and was talked about as a possible solution in decreasing the environmental impact of individuals. As previously stated, Beck argues that a more individualistic society undermines the effect of social norms and values. The norms that used to guide the public have been lost and replaced by freedom and the ability to shape one’s own life (Beck 1992, p. 128). Based on Beck, the effect of shaming would thus be expected to not have as big of an impact in a more individualistic society. The one respondent who talked of shaming in negative terms believed that the shaming could lead to an increased division in society and did not believe that it would have an impact on changing society.

4.3 Politicians' views on their own roles in the climate change debate

How the respondents include themselves in the problem formulation is an important part of the WPR approach (Bacchi 2012, p. 22). According to Bacchi, how one formulates a problem is a form of subjectivity, which influences the view of others and ourselves. Thus, the politicians' views of their roles are of importance to look into. In the following chapter, I will answer the third research question in the study: how the politicians view their roles in the shift to a more sustainable society.

4.3.1 *Knowledge bearers?*

As previously demonstrated, a common view among the politicians was the belief in knowledge as a factor of change. Knowledge was by some respondents seen as the solution of how to get individuals to act more environmentally friendly in their everyday lives. Except for the response of one politician, who did not believe in knowledge as a factor for change, it was not questioned whether an increased amount of knowledge does, in fact, lead to change. Furthermore, when discussing the question of what the roles of politicians are in the shift to a more sustainable society, spreading knowledge and information was a common answer, mentioned by six respondents. While it was not always clear that the politicians would be the ones that would spread the knowledge and information viewed as needed in order to make more environmentally friendly choices, two respondents viewed knowledge sharing as an important part of being a politician. When being asked in what way the respondent felt that she had power and could have an effect in the shift to a more sustainable society, one politician talked about the politicians' roles as knowledge bearers:

“People can't always act environmentally friendly because they don't know what one can do, so I think that there is a big opportunity to contribute in many ways.” (Respondent 5, 2019-02-25)

The role of the individual was again highlighted and the respondent believed that she had a responsibility to share information, due to the platform she had access to as a politician. One respondent shared the view of knowledge as important but argued that it was not up to politicians to provide the public with information. Instead, politics needed to make it possible for other actors to spread knowledge:

“It is not up to politicians to tell people that as I see it, it is more about knowledge in society, to spread knowledge, but of course we need to give the foundational prerequisites from the politics for research and science.” (Respondent 1, 2019-02-20)

The views of the two respondents thus differed in who was seen as responsible for spreading the knowledge needed to the individuals. Where one respondent viewed it as an important part of the job, the second thought that the assignment was someone else's. The view of the need for knowledge was however shared by the two respondents, as well as knowledge being an important factor of changed behavior. When discussing different ways of showing good examples of how to live more sustainably, one politician said that it was important to always have the approval of the public in perusing to push a question. The politician viewed that he had that approval when it came to environmental problems, although he believed it was important not to push the question too far.

4.3.2 *Making it easier to do the "right" thing*

One topic the respondents often came back to in the interviews was how to make it easier for individuals to make more environmentally friendly choices, often in terms of transport

or consumption. To make it easier to do the right thing (Sv: lätt att göra rätt) was mentioned by seven out of nine politicians, although the views on how to achieve it differed. One politician mentioned the difficulties in always making an informed choice and how price setting could help the individual to choose the more environmentally friendly alternative:

“There are very few people who can keep all knowledge alive and make the right choices all the time (...) and that is when the price is a clear signal (...) that is probably the most important thing we can do in order for every individual to contribute.” (Respondent 9, 2019-03-13)

For the individual to be able to choose the most environmentally friendly option, knowledge was considered important, but according to the respondent, the price could be a good indication in case there was a lack of, or an overwhelmingly amount of, knowledge. Thus, the respondent believed that it was important for politics to help give the direction of which good would be the most environmentally friendly to buy through adjusting the price. Another respondent had a similar argument, saying that the state has a responsibility to make sure that it is easy to choose the more environmentally friendly option. One respondent believed that it is difficult for the individual to choose the more sustainable option, highlighting the systematic changes he believed needed to be made:

“It is a great failure in the steering systems in society (...) it is still so much easier financially to do the wrong thing, so I believe that that is something we can do concretely that we have to work much more with.” (Respondent 8, 2019-02-22)

The main reason for choosing a product is believed to be the price, according to both respondents above. In order to steer the consumption in the wanted direction, the politicians put suggestions such as tax-shifting policies forth.

4.3.3 *Showing a good example, but not too extreme*

When connecting the responsibility to themselves as individuals and public figures, two politicians argued that being too much of an idealist could be counterproductive when trying to reach the goal of a more sustainable society. As a response to the question “why do you think that it is difficult for people to change to a more sustainable lifestyle?” one respondent said:

“I don’t think it’s difficult, but I think that there are many people that think it’s hard because the ones that are the most prominent propagandists to live a sustainable life, are so radical that you think it’s difficult.” (Respondent 4, 2019-02-21)

Another respondent shared this view, arguing that the best example and role model might not be the most environmentally conscious person. The respondent argued that she is not living “too” environmentally friendly because of the risk of distancing herself from the bigger mass, who would not be able to identify themselves with the respondent if she was living in a way that was too far away from the average person, as she saw it. At the same time, she believed that she did affect people’s behavior through her knowledge:

“I can’t either, although I want to, make the right choices all the time because I don’t have that capacity (...) I’m not always the best example, but I (...) have knowledge and inspiration that can make other people do good things, so if everyone does a little bit more good things, we will come a long way.” (Respondent 9, 2019-03-13)

The response shows a belief in the possibilities of the individuals to make a change. At the same time, the respondent did not feel like she could do as much as she wanted in her

own life, due to the prerequisites given in society. Although the respondent was positive to the difference she could make on other people's lives, most respondents did not believe they had such an effect on people around them. Another respondent did not believe that he could have a big effect on others and talked about that there was a need of change in the societal structure, for individuals to change their lifestyles and become more environmentally friendly.

5 Discussion

In the following chapter, I will discuss the results and answer the three questions of the study: “Who do the politicians view as responsible for shifting into a more sustainable society?”, “What do the politicians represent the problem to be in the shift to a more sustainable society?”, and finally “What role do the politicians view themselves as having in the shift to a more sustainable society?”. The chapter aims to put the study into a larger context and discuss limitations and possible future research.

The first research question asked was “*Who is responsible in the shift to a more sustainable society?*“. The findings show that the individual is one actor pointed out as carrying responsibility, mostly in terms of lifestyle choices. Many respondents put the focus and responsibility on to the individual, for example by talking about individuals’ consumption habits and travel patterns. Some respondents did however not view that the focus in the societal debate regarding environmental issues was too focused on the individual. On the contrary, the responses of five politicians indicated a belief that there should rather be more, not less, focus on the individual. How the politicians viewed the debate and how they portrayed responsibility thus differed. The politicians’ view of the societal debate is contradictory to previous studies, arguing that the emphasis on the individual in the debate has increased (Soneryd & Ugglå 2011, pp. 9-13; Dahl 2014, p. 14). Politicians represent a group who has the power to steer the debate and by not seeing the focus on the individual and at the same time put the individual in focus as a responsible actor, the politicians are reinforcing the individual as a responsible actor.

The solutions put forth in this study are, as shown, in many cases directly connected to lifestyles. Hobson (2002, pp. 100-101) views the emphasis on consumption as being in line with the neoliberal society, as it does not threaten consumption, and thereby growth, or individual lifestyles. It should therefore not be seen as surprising that the respondents contributed to strengthening the view of individuals as citizen-consumers, being a part of the discourse of neoliberalism. The study also found that one group in society, parents, was sometimes excused to make less environmentally friendly choices. A common explanation was the lack of time the group was considered having. When being environmentally friendly disrupts everyday life, it seems more accepted that the less environmentally friendly option is chosen. The solutions put forth were often compatible with the modern lifestyle and rarely challenged to its core.

Looking at the second question, “*What do the politicians represent the problem to be in the shift to a more sustainable society?*“, the study found that the consumption of products with a big environmental impact was seen as problematic, as well as over-consumption and travel habits. One solution put forward to reduce the impact of consumption was to spread knowledge. Several politicians believed that knowledge was one of the main factors of changing an individual’s behavior. The WPR approach allowed the study to find assumptions and look at what was left unproblematic, which enabled a more critical view of what was said in the interviews. The study showed that knowledge as a factor of change remained uncontested, and was a taken-for-granted fact. This view on knowledge as an

immediate changing factor stands in contradiction to the identity-protective cognition theory, which states that an increased amount of knowledge does not always lead to a change in behavior in line with the knowledge received. Instead, it could have the opposite effect, depending on if it goes against or confirms the identity of the individual (Kahan, 2017). As mentioned earlier, other previous research strengthens the view of how knowledge does not automatically lead to behavioral changes, such as the cognitive dissonance theory. The theory states that the individual wants to be consistent in his or her actions and if two actions are not in line with each other, the individual will either change his or her behavior or thoughts about the action (Crompton & Thøgersen 2009, pp. 15-16; Schulz 2014, p. 112). P. Wesley Schulz's research in knowledge and behavior also states that there is no clear link between knowledge and behavioral changes and suggests other solutions, such as a change in norms and providing the individual with feedback (Schulz 2014, p. 115). Norms and shame were other factors believed to lead to a change of behavior in this study, according to the politicians. The idea of norms being a factor of change is thus confirmed by previous research but is expected to decrease with an increasing amount of individualism (Beck 1992, p. 128).

The answer to the third research question "*What role do the politicians view themselves as having in the shift to a more sustainable society?*" shows that there seems to be an ambiguity of the roles of politicians around environmental problems. The findings show that all politicians in the study believed that politicians have a responsibility in the shift to a more sustainable society, but the extent of the responsibility differed, as well as what role they actually have. Spreading knowledge was by some seen as an important task, while some said it was not the role of politics. Many did not see themselves as inspiration to others around them and were afraid to go too far away from the norm in terms of lifestyle choices, due to the risk of distancing themselves from the voters. According to Dahl (2014, p. 21), there is a lack of political focus on the presuppositions that the individuals need to be able to make pro-environmental choices. This turned out not to be the case in this study. In fact, the task of making it easier for the individual to choose the "better" option was one thing that most of the respondents had in common, and which seven politicians mentioned in their interviews. There was a fear from several respondents of being viewed as a politician that moralized over the lives of individuals, which led several respondents to talk about other, possible solutions. This strengthens the view of the importance of individual choices, as well as how the politicians were looking for solutions to make it easier to make pro-environmental choices in everyday life.

Question five looks at *what effects are produced by this representation of the problem*. Subjectification effects refer to how subjects are constituted in discourse (Bacchi 2009, p. 15). According to Bacchi (2009, p. 17) representations of a problem often mean that there is built in assumptions around who is responsible for the perceived problem. In the case of this study, individuals were a group pointed out as responsible, mostly through their lifestyle choices, such as consumer behavior and travel habits. Dahl (2014, p. 14) argues that the effect of this emphasis on individuals is that individuals are made responsible to solve problems that they have no power over. According to Dahl, the belief in the individual's power to solve environmental problems is embedded in a political message (2014, p. 19). Hobson (2002, p. 111) puts forward a similar argument, saying that this view of the individual's consumption as an important factor for change places the individual involuntarily in a position of political power. Individuals are thus regarded as consumers, who express their political concerns through their ways of consuming. The WPR approach also suggests that the subjectification leads to divisions, both between groups and inside the individual. In this study, the respondents talk about individuals who make the "right" choices by choosing pro-environmental products and who travel consciously, and individuals who do not.

5.1 Limitations and further studies

This study focused on looking at the views of politicians on responsibility in the environmental debate in Sweden. No comparison has been made between the answers of the respondents and the policies of the parties they are representing. This was a conscious limitation made to be able to focus on the personal views of the respondents and to gain an understanding of the problem from the point of view of the people in a position of power, rather than the differences between political parties. It was also explained to the respondents before the interviews that they would be made anonymous and that the study did not aim to make comparisons between political parties, which I believe made the respondents dare to speak more freely.

Due to a limited amount of time while conducting the study, the politicians that were contacted and interviewed are mostly active around Uppsala municipality. In Uppsala, the local politicians are located in the same building and meet each other frequently. This could have had an effect on how the politicians view the “problem” and what topics were brought up in the interviews. For future studies, it could therefore be of interest to look at politicians in different municipalities, as well as to compare the politicians’ views on their role to how the individuals view the roles of the politicians.

As previously mentioned, previous research on politicians’ views on their professional role in the shift to a more sustainable society is limited. This study aimed to help fill that gap. What role the politicians believe themselves to have and what solutions they put forth, depends on what they view the problem to be, and thereby who they view as responsible. To know the views and reasoning of individual politicians is of importance since they have been given power as representatives of the citizens (The Riksdag 2017, pp. 4-6). The findings show that how the politicians’ view their role differed greatly, but more research is needed to understand the actions (and inactions) of politicians. Rebecca Willis’ (2018a; 2018b) studies find that politicians are afraid of acting outside their mandate, something that was also mentioned in this study. The politicians are chosen by the public, but can as easily be replaced. This is likely to have an effect on the problem formulations by the respondents, as well as the presented solutions. The politicians need to put forth solutions that are in line with what the public demands, or else they will be voted out.

6 Concluding remarks

This study looked at who is made responsible for environmental problems in Sweden, from the point of view of politicians. This was made possible through the usage of Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?" approach. The approach looks at how the solutions put forward gives an understanding of how the problem is formulated, rather than finding possible solutions (Bacchi 2012, p. 23). The study wished to shed light on that how solutions are presented is a result of what the problem is made out to be, which in this study was viewed to be the lifestyles and consumption habits of individuals.

The analysis of the study supports the claim of previous research, showing that there is a focus on the individual as both a problem and a change maker in the environmental debate (Dahl 2014; Soneryd & Uggla 2011). If the solution is presented as providing the consumer with knowledge and information, the problem is viewed as an individual one, mostly in connection to the consumption behavior of the individual. It puts the responsibility on to the individuals, which are assigned to solve problems they do not have control over. Some groups in society were however excused for behavior that leads to a bigger environmental impact, due to lack of resources. The group that was pointed out was parents with young children.

The study also looked at the respondents' views on their role as politicians. The results show that the view of the role differs greatly between the respondents, and while some see themselves as knowledge bearers, some are more focused on putting up taxes and regulations to support the more environmentally friendly option. Politicians are not the only actors who are faced with dealing with climate change. They do however have an important role in society as representatives of the people. This study wanted to point to where the problem in solving environmental issues is viewed to lie, which can help gain an understanding of how to move on forward.

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