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# **Taxing meat; an analysis of narratives from Swedish news articles**

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## Taxing meat; an analysis of narratives from Swedish news articles

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### Abstract

A narrative analysis was performed using news articles from Sweden to explore the narratives around taxing meat in Sweden. Online articles published between 01/01/2017 – 31/12/2018 were found using a keyword search for meat tax (*köttskatt*). Narrative analysis moves the focus from individual meanings towards the larger, societal narratives and in turn how these narratives influence people's lives. Articles were analysed using the concept of small stories, based on previous work by Michael Bamberg. The study explores which were the key actors of the meat tax discourse identified in the articles and how they were positioned in the small stories in relation to the meat tax topic. A master narrative was identified as anti-tax, farmers being made the victims in the discussion, and proclaiming that Swedish meat is environmentally friendly. Counter to this, there was a counter narrative that is pro-taxation of meat, sceptic to Swedish political will to stand up to industry and economic interests, and critical of Swedish meat and meat consumption. The actors (stakeholders) identified through various small stories as supporting the master narrative in media include farmer associations, and centre-right political groups, while on the other hand, counter narratives seen to be centre-left political groups, and environmental activists. Some actors (Swedish Green Party, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences) are positioned by storytellers as supporting both counter and master narrative. This is especially true on the issue of defining Swedish meat in its role, whether it is somehow different or not from imported, foreign produced meat. This paper adds to the literature about how meat's relationship to climate change is discussed in media and explores the opinions, views and attitudes on taxing as a method of climate change resilience. Further research could comparatively study how Swedish media on the topic differs from that of other countries.

**Keywords:** *meat tax, Sweden, online media, narrative analysis, small stories, master and counter narrative.*

## Dedication

I would like to thank all those who have lent their guidance, both professional and moral to me along this journey. I would like to thank my network of friends and family both in Europe and in Canada. Especially Kira, Miriam, Santeri, Sean, Natalie, Nich, Giovanni, Tomke, Fifina, Salvatore, and all the friends I have met during my time in Copenhagen and Uppsala. We all supported each other throughout this life chapter, and I couldn't have met better people to go through with it.

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## Introduction

The human influence on the planet's climate system is evident, and anthropogenic sources of greenhouse gases are higher than ever before (IPCC., 2014). Dealing with environmental challenges in modern society involves the navigation between a triangle of scientific, political, and media controversy. Depending on what school of thought one considers, one can frame global climate change as either solely environmental, socioeconomic, or rather a blend of these. Media plays a key role in the diffusion of information creating controversies. According to a sociological review on global climate change, a wider public is not informed by consuming scientific data directly, no matter how thoroughly stated. Rather, public understanding develops through attitudes, beliefs, values, media framing, and social movements (Zehr, 2015). Supported by this thread of thought, one immediately sees the importance in delving further into how we communicate environmental challenges.

Through a scientific lens, one might view meat production as a commodity that can be substituted, and the climate will benefit. Current meat-intensive food systems are shown to have an ever-increasing global impact on both human and environmental health often as a result of dietary change towards more resource demanding diets including more animal products (Tilman & Clark, 2014). However, opponents to the reduction in consumption believe that reducing the number of grazing animals will have unintended negative consequences for landscape management, as livestock are used to maintain heathland as part of a management strategy throughout Europe (García *et al.*, 2013).

The Paris Agreement in 2015 concluded with nearly all countries of the world signing a collective agreement to tackle climate change together, with each nation drafting their own defined, national contributions. Managing and reshaping current meat consumption is indicated as a fundamental component in tackling climate change as approximately 14.5% of the total anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are caused by livestock (FAO, 2018).

Climate policy instruments such as taxes on the consumption of goods with a high GHG footprint, such as meat, could act as useful instruments for tackling climate change (Henderson *et al.*, 2018). However, although there have been suggestions, calls, and attempts in some countries to promote the idea of a meat tax, such as the case in Denmark (The Danish Council on Ethics, 2016) and in Sweden (Lööv *et al.*, 2013), at present there currently exists no country which has any implemented any such tax.

In Sweden, there has been talk of implementing a meat tax by certain politicians and environmentalist groups (Swedish Food and Environment Information, *Svensk mat och miljöinformation*), (The Local, 2015). The Swedish Board of Agriculture has also written about several options available for what they call sustainable meat consumption, and they point to information and education, regulatory measures, and economic instruments (Lööv *et al.*, 2013). Diving into the discussion in Sweden, there has been demonstrated negative backlash to a meat tax proposal from meat producers, certain politicians, and consumers (Nordgren, 2012).

The coverage in the media in linking meat consumption to climate change has been historically slim and therefore represents a new frontier for a discursive power struggle in order to define the issue. For example, one study looking at media from the United States found that only 0.5% of articles that discussed climate change made a link to the consumption of meat (Neff *et al.*, 2009). This gap in coverage has been commented as a CO<sub>2</sub> bias, as energy and transportation sectors are widely covered as the main drivers of climate change in the media (Almiron & Zoppeddu, 2015). Nonetheless, as it is a relatively new story in media, consumers and the public are connecting to the positions of advocates, politicians, researchers and industry through media consumption.

Although taxing meat may seem like a niche and banal area of investigation on the surface, I believe that the stakes are elevated and will shape how future issues in a climate crisis will be dealt with. Taken another way, the narratives identified at the intersection of science, politics and media could be useful for understanding how readers make sense and meaning from climate change related discussions. The familiar battlegrounds of scientific controversy (is less meat better for the planet) and political (state regulation versus market regulations) are laid out in media, pitted against each other for the enticement of a good, controversial read for the public to consume.

My hypothesis is that the arena in which opposing narratives compete to define the issue on taxing meat lays across the domains of science, politics, and media, and is influenced by many socioeconomic as well as special and sensitive cultural factors. That is to say, one who refutes a tax on meat is not necessarily a climate skeptic, and moreover, one that demands a meat tax is not necessary solely interested in climate change. This is why it is valuable to understand how meat, and specifically how the idea of taxing meat is told in the media.

The aim of this master's thesis is to perform a narrative analysis of online media from Sweden on the subject of a meat tax to understand the competing narratives surrounding such a proposal as told through small stories following a framework adapted from Bamberg and Georgakopoulou to try and make sense of how individual storytellers make sense of the reality of the issue they are confronted with (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) Additionally, this thesis will look at the storytellers (those who tell their story) and the coaxers (those who bring the story to light), both terms taken and adapted from Plummer (Plummer, 2002). The research question can be summarized as the following:

- *What are the master and counter narratives about taxing meat in Swedish news articles and who are behind them?*

To approach this issue, a brief background and context section is provided for the benefit of the reader. This section will set the scientific-environmental relevance of meat, taxation (political), and the media's role in climate change coverage. Narrative as a concept is introduced and is central to the analysis. Master-counter narrative theory provides the major theoretical backdrop in which the analysis is guided, and the concept of small stories are focused on throughout the analysis to glean information and find connections and answers to the research question. Finally, the analysis is summed up in the conclusion with suggestions for further research.

## Background and Context

### Science: The environmental impact of meat

Through a natural scientific paradigm, the impact meat consumption has on the climate has been described by academic and research outlets. Besides the direct methane emissions from certain livestock, there are other factors that contribute to livestock's environmental impact. The principal ones are the amount of water, land, and energy required to support and sustain the planet's large livestock population. These resources are not only consumed directly where the livestock are raised, but often the demands are felt further up the chain in the production of animal feed (Elferink *et al.*, 2008). In 2014, a collaborative effort between the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Livestock Research Institute, the University of Oxford, and the Université Libre de Bruxelles mapped out the approximate number of livestock around the globe, and found that as of 2014, there were approximately 1.4 billion cattle, 1.9 billion sheep and goats, 1 billion pigs, and 19.6 billion chicken on the planet (Robinson *et al.*, 2014). In fact, demand for livestock feed is set to outpace the actual growth in demand for meat products, signalling an intensification in meat production (OECD *et al.*, 2018).

Meat consumption is water intensive. For example, the total water footprint of pork is double that for the production of pulses and upwards of four times as large as that for the production of grains (Gerbens-Leenes *et al.*, 2013). Most of this water is required for the production of feed as livestock need vast quantities of nourishment, as feed consumption

represents 98% of the water use in meat production, while a remaining, small portion is used for drinking water, mixing water for the feed, and service water (Bailey *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, the land use for producing animal protein is much higher than that of plant protein production, as consideration must be taken for direct grazing area or land used to grow feed for livestock into consideration (Eshel *et al.*, 2014).

In Sweden, in 2017 data show that the consumption of meat has actually plateaued and dropped slightly by 2.6% (equivalent to 2.2 kg per capita) (Jordbruksverket, 2018). This, however, is contrasted with the large increase of meat consumption between 1990 and 2017 of an overall increase of 41% (*ibid*). This increase of consumption has been fueled by increasing imports of meat to Sweden primarily from Germany, Denmark, Ireland and Brazil (2116% increase in beef imports alone between 1990 – 2005), however, the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from meat *produced* in Sweden has dropped (Cederberg, 2009). Despite the increase in foreign meats, consumers often choose Swedish meat for their marketed superior quality and environmental record when advertised (Jordbruksverket, 2018). Figure 1 shows the market share Swedish produced meat has in meat consumption within Sweden.

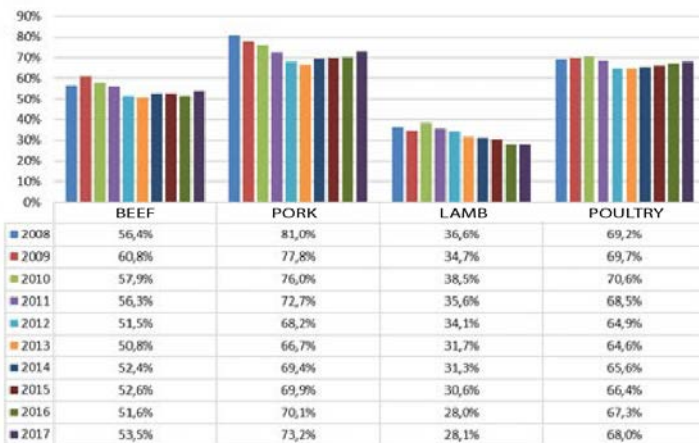


Figure 1. Share of Swedish meat consumption from 2008 – 2017. Categories from left to right are Beef, Pork, Lamb, and Poultry. Based on an adjustment from Swedish Board of Agriculture and Statistics Sweden (Jordbruksverket, 2018).

Also present in the discussion of meat is the use of antibiotics, particularly in the amount found in foreign meat imports, as Sweden has highly restrictive use of antibiotics compared to other countries (Engström *et al.*, 2007).

## Politics: Taxing meat

Since the monitoring costs are relatively high and that there currently exists limited potential for technical solutions to emissions, it has been suggested that taxing foods with a high environmental impact could serve as beneficial policy instrument (Wirsenius *et al.*, 2011). One method of handling the environmental challenges created by the meat sector is to set a Pigouvian tax which would deal with the marginal damage costs. The idea is to set a price on the CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent on the meat, similar to how it is applied in other sectors. One model using a price of €60 per ton CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent found that approximately 32 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent could be reduced, and that reduction could be increased six-fold, should the accompanying land from reduced agriculture use instead be converted into growing material for bioenergy (Wirsenius *et al.*, 2011). The rationale is that the material grown (lignocellulosic crops) would displace coal in power and heat generation. Even more remarkable is that these estimates were done with taxes only applied to ruminant meat (from cattle, goat, and sheep). A broader tax analysis on food was performed using Sweden as the area of study, where researchers applied a tax model to seven different animal product groups (beef, pork, chicken, milk, fermented products, cream, cheese) and found that a 12% decrease of GHG, nitrogen, ammonia and phosphorus from the livestock sector is possible (Säll & Gren, 2015).

Some proponents of climate taxes on food believe that both positive climate and health effects from the tax can be achieved without an increased tax burden on the consumer, however, to do so would require an overhaul of the entire tax system (Edjabou & Smed, 2013). Undoubtedly, there is concern from meat producing industries as they do not want to be hampered by regulation, especially as food systems are a global affair, and changes in

Sweden could put producers, sellers, and consumers at an economic disadvantage.

To recap, the existing literature of studies done on taxing foods based on their environmental impact has branched from only looking at environmental considerations, to also include nutritional and equity factors as well. Principally, it is a balancing act between environmental considerations, health and nutritional considerations, as well as social and equity factors.

## Media: Climate change and narrative

It is necessary to clearly define what media and news means within the context of this thesis. The media has an important role to play in shaping public opinion and we must look into the media's role in forming opinion. Additionally, it is worth acknowledging that not all media is equal in their ability to penetrate public opinion and dialogue. The upper elite media actors and their political backers have "habitual access" from their inherent political value, while on the other hand smaller actors must use "disruptive access" to drive their points (Shehata & Hopmann, 2012). In other words, journals and newspapers that are not major outlets must be slightly more provocative or take on positions outside of the major sphere of public opinion. Therefore, it is important to understand how opinions may be informed and influenced in the digital age and the formation of public opinion is complex. Media has a large influence in attitudes and behaviours by choosing what to report and to what bias (Colaioni & Castellano, 2015). Although the word *narrative* is relatively general, in social sciences it can be described as constructed non-fiction, for example, what discourse an institution transmits on an issue (Moezzi *et al.*, 2017). Narrative is a central component to this discussion on the environment within the media. In order to set the stage for the current context, a brief history of environmental coverage in the media is necessary.



## Climate change in the media

In the 1970s, the early days of media coverage on climate change, the topic was centred on a global cooling (Weart, 2008). The coverage then evolved in the late 1980s, covering issues such as ozone depletion, droughts, floods, and heatwaves (Boykoff, 2009). In recent decades, there has been steering of media coverage of climate change issues to include more political and economic viewpoints, taking power away from the scientific viewpoint to become the dominant voice in climate change (Carvalho, 2007). This shift, identified by Carvalho, describes “experts” and “counter experts” given voices and promote specific worldviews with an underlying ideological view. By the 1990s, a time when the human impact in regards to climate change was becoming more concrete (IPCC., 1996), right-leaning newspaper outlets started to promote a suspicious attitude towards climate change (Carvalho, 2007).

Focusing back on the triangle of domains mentioned in the introduction, one study from the United Kingdom looked at the discussion of climate change in the media, and identified that climate science, policy, as well as activity within the public all play an active role in shaping media discussion, however, journalism, including tabloid coverage, plays a pivotal role in the ongoing narrative (Boykoff, 2008).

In Sweden, there has been one study that looked into the communications of climate change specifically in the magazines *ATL-Lantbrukets Affärstidning* and *Land Landbruk*. It found that in these farming specific articles, the narrative is not one of doom and gloom as is typically associated with other newspapers and tabloids, rather farming magazines reported climate change in a balanced view, and in some cases, identified new opportunities, rather than challenges for farmers (Asplund *et al.*, 2013).

Despite the prevalence of research done on climate change and the media, there is a gap present in food and specifically the impact of meat (Almiron & Zoppeddu, 2015). Research has pointed out this gap in the

literature and identifies five key components as to why media are slow to address meat's contribution to climate change: History, information, framing, advocate interest, and industry response (Neff *et al.*, 2009). To summarise the findings, the link between food systems and climate change came relatively late after the coverage of other sectors (*ibid*). Additionally, food coverage is framed as an individual choice, and business-framed articles receive more attention than individual-framed ones (*ibid*). Meanwhile, advocacy groups for climate change did not want to alienate their supporters, thinking that reducing meat would not be accepted by the majority of the public, and finally, the food industry has kept a relatively low profile, by framing itself as an ally of climate change solutions (*ibid*).

The current analysis at hand will focus on the present-day situation of Swedish media coverage on meat and its relevance to climate and taxation. Swedish press can be divided into several segments (Weibull & Jönsson, 2007):

- Metropolitan morning dailies (*morgontidning*) from the major metropolitan areas – *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm), *Göteborgs-Posten* (Gothenburg), and *Sydsvenskan* (Malmö).
- Tabloid dailies or evening papers (*kvällstidning*) *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* for the Stockholm area and *GT* serving Gothenburg and *Kvällsposten* in Malmö.
- Regional and local papers outside of the large metropolitan areas.
- Low-frequency papers that are published only one or two times a week.
- Free dailies distributed such as *Metro* distributed in cities.

In addition to newspapers, organizational media such as magazines produced by businesses and associations also have a large degree of importance in Sweden (Weibull & Jönsson, 2007). These media publish content on a variety of topics including some specialized in agriculture such as *Land Lantbruk*.

Historically speaking, Swedish media have shown external pluralism through competing papers with different political affinity, however, over the last several decades Swedish media has undergone some depolarization, becoming more like the Anglo-Saxon tradition of media (Ots, 2009). Pluralism in media refers to number of voices, both political and cultural, contributing at the societal level, and given an opportunity to forward their message (Cavallin, 2000). Despite this depolarization, press subsidies have maintained a political diversity in the media landscape and Swedes still place a high degree of trust in their media and Sweden ranks highly in freedom of press (Wadbring, 2019). Articles in this study have been selected from a variety one outlets in order to get representation where possible from all of these five categories.

## Theoretical Framework

To understand the narrative present in Swedish media on taxing meat, the analysis is structured primarily on a master-counter narrative theory nestled within narrative theory. Central to the understanding and use of narrative is that it is fundamentally retrospective in its nature (Freeman, 2015). The current events of media are essentially an unfolding plot that are episodic in nature and thus represent a small portion or a window into a much larger narrative. In the study at hand, one could argue that the media debate on taxing meat in Sweden fits into a larger discussion on what course of action society should or should not take on climate issues. From the view point of readers of media, narrative is fundamental to the process of human meaning-making (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Therefore, as it is human beings who read the news and engage with media, narrative placed aptly at the centre of our understanding is a suitable starting scaffold.

Traditional narrative analysis involved telling a story and having it been judged on how close to the *truth* that story is deemed. However, a more recent and sceptical approach has developed supported by postmodern thought (Blumenreich, 2004). With this in mind, and taking a postmodern critical approach, we can explore the meaning-making of the articles on the meat-tax controversy against the backdrop of this controversy's cultural and social context.

## Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis moves the focus of an analysis from individual meanings towards the larger, cultural narratives and in turn how these narratives or stories influence people's lives (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001). Narrative analysis has its roots in social constructionism and the narratives or stories that emerge in analysis are as a result of the socially constructed world. In contrast to a realist position, where stories of one's life or surroundings are regarded as a reflection of life events, truth is not the object of analysis, instead narrative analysis is concerned with the question of "how" (Gilbert, 2008). Therefore, the aim of a narrative analysis is not one single truth, but rather, bringing forward many truths or narratives (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001).

One of the challenges of narrative analysis is the "right of representation" and the "crisis" of validity (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). If we believe that there is no single "truth", then we are faced with a multitude of co-built narratives and distilling those into single conclusions is difficult. However, in the context of the current study at hand, narrative analysis provides the platform for bringing forth the struggles and different competing axioms, which are locked in a power struggle to define the reality of the issue at hand – taxing meat in Sweden. While discourse analysis may focus on the means and purpose of speech, narrative analysis can instead highlight the here-and-now effect of language used in political or controversial debate (Hermwille, 2016). While narrative analysis may be criticized for its lack of providing us a barometer for predicting how future events will play out, narrative analysis embraces the historical nature of reality and thereby reveals a deeper foundation of meaning and current understanding (Freeman, 2015).

When analysing the source material, social context of the narrative is important, *i.e.*, they are not produced in a vacuum and their context may shape their production. Bamberg refers to this as the social matrix of possibilities (Bamberg, 2004). In the case of news articles, I will distinguish three social groups based on the work of Ken Plummer – the "producer",

“coaxer” and “consumer” (Plummer, 2002). *Producers* in this analysis are the ones who tell their story, these are the quoted people and stakeholders in articles that have been interviewed and the writers of opinion pieces or debates (*ibid*). In the context of this thesis, I will use the terminology, *storyteller*, in lieu of producer to avoid confusion with food production. *Coaxers* are those that bring out the story or narrative, they are the writers of the articles who have specifically selected quotes to use, angles to approach the narrative with for publishing (*ibid*). Finally, consumers are the group that receives and consumes these articles and stories (*ibid*). Work from media studies has also aptly stated that it should not be overlooked that the producers (storytellers) and coaxers are also part of the consumer group (Pinson, 1998).

## Master and counter narrative and narrative theory

Narrative theory is concerned with political and historical as well as ethical dilemmas (Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2008). Within narrative theory, both master and counter narratives can be identified. One central criteria of the master narrative is that it provides people a way to relate with what is perceived as the status quo or normal experience (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Master narrative is defined as an existing social and cultural form of interpretation, a worldview that is inherited from the Enlightenment (the triumph of pure knowledge, liberty and infinite progress) and is a form of legitimizing the status quo (Bamberg, 2005). These master narratives simplify multi-dimensional issues into binary, straight forward issues instead of acknowledging the complex array of social actors, experiences, and culture surrounding an issue (Aldridge, 2006). Although certain master narratives are backed and grounded in rigorous research, others are steeped in our collective and individual consciousness and have not been challenged with critical analysis (Espino, 2008). The narratives that are opposite or divergent from the master narrative are termed counter narratives who’s aim is to deconstruct or offer an alternative to the dominant narrative (Stanley, 2007).

Therefore, counter narratives, conversely, are those stories that run opposite to the status quo, and are critical in their positioning. They are stories which people live and speak and provide resistance, whether directly or indirectly to the status quo and master narrative (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Taken together, both the culturally dominant, master narratives and their challengers in counter narratives may be experienced and voiced individually but flow into common meanings (*ibid*). So, on one hand we should expect a block of themes emerge within the data that conforms to the master narrative, while on the other hand, we will have smaller narratives approaching the issue of a meat tax from a more multi-faceted dimension, borne out of their criticism to the master narrative.

### Small stories, positioning and the social matrix of possibilities

To explore master and counter narratives, I do not overlook the importance of *small stories*. Small stories, told in passing or produced in media as quotes offer the real story of lived lives, as although they are individual, they are created against the backdrop of a social matrix of understood or perceived possibilities (Bamberg, 2004). While traditional narrative analysis has put a major emphasis on life stories, or key episodes forming big stories; contrastingly, small stories is a big-tent term that promotes overlooked narrative activities including not only speaking about past, present, future or even hypothetical instances (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). In short, small stories help shape the fragments of conversation and attach them to construct a sense of the individual.

Bamberg claims that “due to intrinsic social forces, people place or position themselves in ways described as roles in relation to one another.” (Bamberg, 1997). Moreover, by doing this, storytellers “produce” themselves in a situation in terms of a social being (*ibid*). Therefore, we can understand that one does not simply make up their own positioning in a vacuum, but rather as part of a social matrix of possibilities and understandings that form the context in which the storyteller’s lived experiences and world that he/she exists in is positioned. Positioning may

happen in different forms, however, forms of positioning according to Bamberg can be focused as (*ibid*);

- “How are characters positioned relative to stated events?”
- “How does a storyteller position themselves to a perceived audience?”
- Positioning in regard to self-reflection – “Who am I?”

In the present thesis, the most appropriate form to comment on the positioning of actors within the produced small stories is at the first bullet point, ‘how are characters (actors) positioned relative to stated events.’



## Methodology

This study was carried out to identify the on-going narratives concerning taxing meat in Swedish news articles and understanding what actors are behind them. Additionally, power struggles in the narratives were analysed with positioning. The narrative is hypothesised to unfold along three domains, scientific, political and media. As a relatively recent phenomenon of study, I have chosen to analyse news articles on the topic, rather than conduct face to face interviews as the base of analysis on this topic to gain a broad perspective. To understand the phenomenon, the theory of master and counter narratives were central theoretical underpinnings.

## Data Collection

The data analysed are online news articles from Sweden. The articles examined specifically contained the keyword *meat tax* (*köttskatt*). News articles were accumulated by performing a search on Retriever's Media Archive database using the specific keyword. Articles selected are from the five major categories of Swedish press outlined in the background section. Briefly again, these included metropolitan morning dailies (*morgontidning*), tabloid dailies/evening papers (*kvällstidning*), regional and local papers outside of the large metropolitan areas, low-frequency papers that are published only one or two times a week, and free dailies distributed such as in cities.

Data were selected within a specific window of time from 1 January 2017 – 31 December 2018 for a total of 53 articles. This material had the strict criteria that it had to specifically contain the relevant keyword and where multiple newspapers published the same article, the one that appeared first chronologically in the search results was selected.

Articles that mentioned only animal welfare and not specifically a tax on meat were not included, nor were ones that focused on alternative or vegetarian diets without the mention of a meat tax. Emphasis is placed on identifying small stories, storytellers, coaxers, positions, actors, and the message forwarded. Only the texts themselves were analysed, and comments on articles were ignored as not all the articles examined featured user comments.

## Data Analysis

The data were analysed by going through the material and identifying appropriate small stories. The distinct small story presented positions of actors from a distinct storyteller in a distinct context. The storyteller and the coaxer of these small stories were identified, including the actors mentioned in the small story and how they are positioned to one another. Societal connection makes the small story possible to bring forward, and this was highlighted under the social matrix of actors.

The data was firstly read and grouped based on whether the storyteller and coaxer of the article had positioned either a positive or a negative attitude towards a meat tax. This led to the influence on grouping the small stories as either belonging to the master or counter narrative. Secondly, the definition of a subcategory was created and was based on counter narrative theory, using the criticism of identified master narratives and reading into the positioning of the actors. Throughout the process of analysis, NVivo 12 software for qualitative data was used as tool for organizing these data.

These smaller sub-categories were labelled as following;

- Master Narrative
  - Anti-taxation
  - Farmers as victims
  - Swedish meat is environmentally friendly
  
- Counter Narrative
  - Pro-taxation
  - Political scepticism
  - Sweden is part of the problem

*Table 1. Exploration chart of the material. Main information from articles and their description.*

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actors positions in the small story
	Coaxer				
Article name	Underlying producer of the small story whose interests and views are voiced throughout	Actors mentioned by the storyteller that are supportive of their narrative	Actors mentioned by the storyteller that are opposed to their narrative	Societal connection that makes the small story possible to bring forward. The world that the actors represent	How a storyteller positions the actors mentioned in their story
	That who develops the story through media.				

Table 1 highlights how the material was explored. Identifying the original article source, the storyteller and coxer of the small story. Any actors mentioned and whether they were defined as aligned to the storyteller's view or opposed. An overview of the social matrix that the actors, and in some cases, the storyteller and coaxers exist in, and finally the positioning of the actors as told by the small story. Additionally, to the categories indicated in Table 1, the small stories will also be classified as whether they are contributing to the overall master or counter narrative on the topic. This connection is to be determined by their underlying position either for or against a meat tax.

## Results

The first stage of this analysis has been to describe the master and counter narratives on a meat tax in Swedish news articles. The small stories were attributed, primarily in the form of quotations from the storyteller, and the coxer of the story was identified. In the majority of cases, the coxer was identified as the publisher or the journal, and sometimes as the journalist via the newspaper or magazine company. The small stories were then connected back to Bamberg's distinction of master and counter narratives. Afterwards, the grouping of small stories was further divided into subcategories of master and counter narratives according to relating themes that emerged.

To give a brief synopsis of the analysis results, a master-counter narrative positioning emerged in media related to a meat tax in Sweden. The master narrative is against a meat tax. Storytellers that frame the issue through a master narrative lens tended to belong to business, agriculture groups, or centre and centre-right political organizations. In brief, the master narrative is anti-tax and pro-production. On the other hand, the counter narrative is pro-tax, and is created by individuals belonging to centre and centre-left political groups, animal-rights groups, and vegan/vegetarian diet promoting groups who challenge and criticise the legitimacy of the master narrative.

Some unexpected results include some actors, such as the Swedish University of Agriculture Sciences (SLU) and the Green Party, getting positioned by storytellers in both master and counter narratives on taxing meat in Sweden, for example, commenting on meat consumption not being

sustainable, however, promoting Swedish meat is the most environmentally friendly.

## *Breaking down the master narrative on taxing meat*

### Anti-taxation

The first category is filled with entries detailing the financial plus legal complications and concerns around the implementation of a meat tax. Entries in this field deal with the economic cost as reasoning against any policy action in addition to trivializing stakeholders that suggest this course of action as lacking a full understanding of Sweden's societal needs.

The first small story displayed in Table 2 mentioned that a meat tax would not be possible according to both European Union and World Trade Organization law, using jargon to show the reader that proponents of a meat tax are not competent law makers. The coxer of this story is a magazine that writes for the Swedish agricultural sector (*Land Lantbruk*). From this excerpt, the storyteller sees himself as a defender, protecting the status quo. The storyteller of this small story, Christopher Fjellner, a member of European Parliament from the Moderates positions the Green Party as an actor against his worldview, and taxing meat would not work with current regulation or solve antibiotic use.

*“A Swedish meat tax is not likely to reduce the use of antibiotics and it also violates the regulations of both the EU and the WTO”* (Fjellner, 2018).

Secondly, in the next small story the storyteller is a citizen, who defined himself as a “carnivorous-aged pensioner” and lamented how a tax on meat will only end up hurting the economically less fortunate while the rich would have no problem continuing their eating habits. *“A meat tax would also not affect the well-off as hard as the economically less well fortunate”* (Olsson Olsén, 2017). The backdrop of this story is that he insists the problem is with agricultural producers, and that they instead should be the target of

government policy and not consumers directly. The story is coaxed by the daily tabloid, *Aftonbladet*.

Lastly, the third small story in this subgroup comes from a young farm entrepreneur who believed a meat tax would harm those producers who are already committed to sustainable production, and that consumers would instead shift to cheaper, imported meats.

*“A broad meat tax risks affecting farmers who have sustainable meat production. However, there have been proposals for more specific taxes on meat from animals treated with a great deal of antibiotics which I think would have been better”* (Widenheim, 2018).

This story is coaxed by the metropolitan daily, *Göteborgs-Posten*, and mentions farmers, specifically those who are already committed to sustainable farming as being aligned with her position and narrative.

Table 2. Anti-taxation small stories.

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actor positions in the small story
	Coaxer				
"Tax on meat nothing more than placards politics"	Christopher Fjellner MEP* Moderates	The Moderates, European Union	The Green Party†	Conservative or liberal politics politician, inherently given space to talk about trade issues from a point of authority.	EU/WTO vs incompetent meat tax proposal makers
	Land Lantbruk				
Perennial debate about the meat tax	Arne Nilsson Pensioner Citizen	Low income consumers	High income consumers	The problem is how those on a fixed or low income would be more adversely impacted.	Rich vs poor meat consumers; poor hit by meat tax
	Aftonbladet				
Märta Jansdotter: "I would	Märta Jansdotter Farmer	Sustainable farmers	Foreign meat producers	Storyteller believes agriculture can be	Biologically unsustainable/

\* Actor said to support the master narrative position

† Actor said to support the counter narrative position

argue that a cow that goes out and eats grass is climate smart"	Caroline Widenheim via Göteborgs-Posten			green if it is in a local context	sustainable meat producers; sustainability should not be targeted
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### Farmers are the victim

The second subcategory of master narratives that emerged was the significance of meat producers and farmers in Sweden, and how it is wrong to tax meat as it would hurt Swedish farmers and consumers. The subthemes in this section frames Swedish farmers as victims in this debate and marginalizes activists and vegans as radicals.

Table 3. Farmers as the victim small stories

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actors positions in the small story
	Coaxer				
Known animal activists get million contribution by the state	Åsa Coenraads MP Moderates	The Moderates	Vegan and animal rights activists	Centre-right political actor projects value of law and order while activists must use extreme tactics for exposure	Politicians defend status quo over everything vs activists use of unconventional tactics to get their point across
	ATL Agricultural Business Magazine				
KD: The government of a rural hostile policy	Penilla Gunther, MP Christian Democrats	Swedish farmers, Christian Democrats	Green Party	All actors mentioned want what is best for Swedish farmers, however, the path to move forward is debated.	Green Party wants more veggie culture vs Christian Democrat support for continued meat availability for
	DI Dagens Industri				



					schools, elders, and hospitals
Protect your farmer, he is needed	Mikael Bengtsson Political Commentator			Politicians, farmers, and citizens should cooperate, follow the democratic process and the best result will happen	Cooperation from all parts of society to get the optimum outcome
	Norran				

The first referenced small story in Table 3 comes from a Member of Parliament from the Moderates bench. A centre-right political party in Sweden. She is calling for law and order and calling into question the legitimacy of any dealing with an organization advocating for animal rights and vegan food because one of its members had been arrested while engaged in activist activity on a farm property.

*“When you do not respect democratic decisions, then I think it is animal rights terrorism. And extremist groups that take the law into their own hands are a threat to society” (Nilsson, 2018a).*

Her story is coaxed by ATL, a farming business magazine and through choice of language she associates activists with terrorism. In her story, she compares animal rights activists to extremist or terrorist organizations. This story shows how readers are meant to view environmental or animal rights activists – as terrorists that do not respect democratic processes i.e., they cannot be reasoned with.

The second story in this subgroup is from another politician, this time from the centre-right group, the Christian Democrats. Here the audience gets an economic agenda set by the news outlet, as they choose to home in on the current financial situation of Swedish farmers.

*“MP (the Green Party) wants to introduce a ‘meat tax’ for foreign breeders who use antibiotics regularly, in order to improve competition for Swedish meat farmers. The question is how to do it, since it also wants to introduce a ‘veggie-norm’ for public kitchens*

*where meat should be optional. Pulling Swedish meat off the menu at elderly homes, hospitals and schools hardly benefits the meat farmers.” (Gunther, 2018).*

She positions herself opposite of the Green Party, to be on the side of Swedish farmers. If Green Party policies should be perceived as hostile to farmers, then she wants to clearly state that she and the party she represents is an ally to farmers.

The storyteller of the third small story is a political commentator, Mikael Bengtsson, and his story is coaxed by the regional newspaper he writes for – *Norran*. He writes that the issue of taxing food shouldn't be based only on environmental factors, but also based on our health.

*“Politicians need to tackle the issue of not whether ‘unhealthy’ foods should be taxed more heavily than ‘useful’ ones. It involves public health, and our environment. There has been talk of the sugar tax, meat tax and a bunch of other taxes. That is the path, through the democratic system” (Bengtsson, 2018).*

Farmers should be thanked and protected for providing food in his story and he positions himself as one that believes in a sound democratic process for guiding these decisions.

## Swedish meat is environmentally friendly

The final frame that emerged in the pro-tax, pro-production narrative was that Sweden already produces sustainable meat, especially compared to foreign imported meats available within Sweden. Therefore, action on Swedish producers at present is not worth the economic sacrifice. Producers in Sweden argue that focus should be placed where Swedish producers are already ahead competitively – addressing the antibiotic use in livestock production. The theme is also formed by arguments insisting that Swedish farmers are already doing their fair share for ecological and sustainable meat production and therefore should not be faced with a tax.

Table 4. Swedish meat as the best alternative small stories

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actors positions in the small story
	Coaxer				
Meat tax will not solve the climate challenge	Patrik Holm Thisner - HK Scan	HK Scan, Swedish meat producers	Foreign meat producers	Acknowledgement that Swedish meat industry is perceived as sustainable and that Swedish exists within a common EU market.	Swedish meat vs foreign meat
	ETC				
Debate on tax decreasing carnivory	Anders Karlsson professor of meat science, SLU	SLU, Swedish meat producers	Foreign meat producers	Positive opinion of Swedish products. Swedish professor of meat promoting Swedish meat.	Swedish meat vs foreign meat
	Per Gustafsson via Skaraborgsbygden				
The brand strengthened broadly	Linda Segerblom, Communication Chief LRF	Swedish farmers	Citizens critical of Swedish farmers	Farmer group organizing their message so that they do not face criticism all the time and instead show the value of their work to the public.	Swedish farmers vs misinformation and critics
	Land Lantbruk				

The first storyteller Table 4 is Patrik Holm Thisner, a representative of HK Scan - a major meat producer in the Nordic countries. This article is coaxed out by ETC by allowing it to feature in its publications as a debate article. "A meat tax will only mean that Swedish sustainable meat will be driven out for imported meat" (Holm Thisner, 2018). His positioning could be to generate sympathy in the Swedish public, and rationalise that Swedish meat is already some of the most sustainable in the world and that by putting a tax on meat, consumers will be driven to foreign meats, while being cheaper for consumers, could come with the baggage of more pesticide and antibiotic uses.

Secondly, a story told by Professor of Meat Sciences at SLU, Anders Karlsson, insists that consumers when given the option should opt for Swedish meat. The article is coaxed by Per Gustafsson of Skaraborgsbygden.

*“It is important to think about what to buy, and one should buy Swedish meat” (Gustafsson, 2017).*

The positioning of the storyteller, considering the power held in his position, that he is an expert on the subject of meat, and could see himself as one to give reasonable advice to the public consumer.

Lastly, Linda Segerblom produced a story to an audience in the farming community that farmers need a new communication strategy moving forward. The story is coaxed by *Land Lantbruk*, a farming news outlet.

*“We are forced all too often to go on the defence with matters like meat tax and owning and operating properly. We need a position shift. It's the image we're going to put and to be clear that we need to produce a cost-effective and predictable manner” (Segerblom, 2017).*

Her story indicates that resources should be used effectively, and that farmers should have to constantly be on the defensive side of things, especially when it comes to taxing meat.

## *Breaking down the counter narrative on taxing meat*

### Pro-taxation

The first storyteller in shown in Table 5, Elin Rööös, from SLU, details how a general climate tax should be implemented, however, education is a fundamental component of the set up, and is necessary for acceptability according to her.

*“Our demand for meat tax is more an educational approach, but we would rather see a general climate tax which also includes food. Then you also get down to farming because it is so costly” (Nilsson, 2018b).*

This story is coaxed out by ATL, a farming media outlet, and her positioning is to define herself as an educator and discuss the issue with all stakeholders at the table in order to tackle such a complicated and multifaceted problem.

Table 5. Pro-taxation small stories

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actors positions in the small story
	Coaxer				
Vegan activists in SLU group on climate tax	Elin Rööös SLU	SLU		Seeing oneself as a mediator or neutral yet informed perspective and bringing together opposing forces on an issue.	Information and education vs uninformed action
	ATL				
Swedish meat causes just as much greenhouse gas emissions	Jonas Paulsson – Meatless Monday	Meatless Monday	HKScan	A debating opinion piece responding to a pro-Swedish meat article written by a HK Scan (producer) executive. Call out culture.	Vegan and climate activism vs meat production
	ETC				
Faced with a tax on meat	Jonas Norberg	Concerned citizen		Suggesting for taxing based idea for treating meat as petrol and taxing the economic externality	Hope for rationalism and good governance
	Länstidningen Östersund				

Secondly, we see a small story from Jonas Paulsson, member of Meatless Monday, and organization promoting vegetarian and vegan alternatives. This story is coaxed by ETC in their debate format, allowing contributors to respond to one another.

*“Instead of fighting meat taxes and other policy instruments for sustainable agriculture HKScan should embrace development and*

*search conversion support future vegetable meat production”*  
(Paulsson, 2018b).

Here the storyteller positions himself against a member of HKScan, a meat production company, and is critical of the Swedish government for what he believes is siding with that company instead of promoting sustainable agriculture and more vegetable production instead.

Lastly, brought to life and coaxed by a regional newspaper, *Länstidningen Östersund*, storyteller Jonas Norberg hopes for a repeat in history where, just like petrol, Sweden will introduce a tax on meat as well. “*Sweden introduced a petrol tax in 1924. My hope is that the meat tax introduced in some form during the next term*” (Norberg, 2017). His position here is to draw a parallel to the situation that caused a tax on petrol, and perhaps view the externalities of meat production and consumption the same as that of petrol.

### Political scepticism

The second category of counter narrative, political scepticism, collects arguments that society is currently evolving towards a more plant-based world, however, there is a lack of political will to challenge the status quo and citizen initiative will not be enough on its own to make that change. Here Jonas Paulsson of Meatless Monday is very vocal in favour of a meat tax. He points out that youth are changing and that governments have not reflected their changing attitudes. Paulsson, who’s articles are featured in several different publications (*ETC, Borås Tidning, Dagens ETC, Expressen, Göteborgs-Posten, Sundsvalls Tidning, Piteå-Tidningen, Miljömagasinet, Motala & Vadstena Tidning*) is the most prolific contributor to the counter narrative of meat in Sweden. As a representative of a very small organization within Sweden, his goal is primarily to expand the issue and by doing so, gain further legitimization for his organization’s cause and agenda.

The first storyteller in Table 6 is from a citizen referred to as Calle, and their story is coaxed by the news outlet, *SVT Nyheter*. In their story, they say that politicians should move to tax meat the same as gasoline.

*“I think politicians should start taxing meat in the same way as we have taxes on gasoline” (Winberg, 2018).*

For positioning, they view themselves as a concerned citizen, and direct the responsibility of dealing with a solution on to politicians.

In the following small story, storyteller Johan Ehrenberg tells that there is a problem that no one is acknowledging, that the political leaders of Sweden will not force any change in meat production, because to do so would challenge economic powers. This story is coaxed partly by *Dagens ETC* as it is featured in their publication, but additionally by the storyteller himself as it is his opinion piece.

*“The elephant in the room is the unwillingness of politics to force a change in production. The challenge namely, the economic power” (Ehrenberg, 2017).*

His positioning is one of scepticism. Although he supports the idea of a meat tax, he believes that it will have little impact overall if the means of production are not changed.

The third storyteller, Jonas Paulsson, positions himself as the hero or champion of the veggie movement, stating how policy should be adapted and that the current, meat-centred normative policy should evolve into one that favours vegetables, including reducing VAT on those products.

*“The time is ripe for a clear climate policy that sends meat norm of history dunghill: Meat tax, reduced VAT on green and a new environmental goal of greatly reduced meat consumption” (Paulsson, 2018a).*

The coaxer of this is the freely distributed *Metro Skåne* newspaper. Lastly, Paulsson is again the storyteller, however, in this small story, he positions himself as a champion of the *vegovågen* (veggie-wave), indicative a wave of life that opposed to a meat-centric society. *“Despite the strong vegovågen (veggie-wave), it does not have enough consumer power to drive down animal product consumption” (Paulsson, 2017a).* This story is coaxed and featured in *Dagens ETC*.

Table 6. Scepticism about political will to challenge industry.

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actors positions in the small story
	Coaxer				
Politicians snob expert demands for meat tax	Calle, Citizen Commentator	Concerned citizens about climate change	Government	Public forum asking different parties their opinion on taxing meat to deal with climate change	Government is slow to react to citizen concern.
	SVT Nyheter				
Anders Wijkman's major problems	Johan Ehrenberg	Climate change advocates	Business, Government	Criticism that changing consumption doesn't do much good and production should tackle instead	Government does not want to reduce business growth, conflict between sustainability and economics.
	Dagens ETC				
Meat tax and reduced VAT on green – the future	Jonas Paulsson Meatless Monday	Youth	Government, Farming industry	Letter to the editor, accepting comments about society from everyone	Making vegetables more affordable and meat more expensive
	Metro Skåne				
How will the Green Party to increase the proportion of vegetarian food?	Jonas Paulsson Meatless Monday	Youth, Veggie consumers	Government, Farming industry	Citizens should not be entirely responsible for climate action; government power must act.	Power of consumption vs regulation. Not even and no change can happen without regulation.
	Dagens ETC				



## Sweden is part of the problem

The last part of the counter narrative details the critical nature some storytellers have to Sweden's role in consumption, and are critical of Swedish meat, that it is no different than any other production of meat and that all meat production should be treated the same.

In the first story, Jonas Paulsson tells a story critical of the Swedish Green Party's environmental policy spokesperson, Stina Bergstrom, criticizing her words for calling Swedish meat more environmentally friendly when compared to other meat produced. For him, meat is meat.

*“Her argument is that Swedish meat has better environment, animals and food safety than foreign meat. Bergstrom has no factual support for the allegations. Swedish meat is just as climate damaging as other EU meat”* (Paulsson, 2017b).

Lastly, the storyteller is the founder of the Feminist Initiative political party, Gudrun Schyman. She brings to light the question of Sweden's consumption in the world and proposes a tax on meat in order to reduce that figure.

*“Today, four globes are required for Swedish consumption. It does not hold. We propose a tax on meat and animal products, and reduced VAT on vegetables”* (Schyman, 2018).

She positions herself as one who speaks not only for the minority interest in Sweden, but also in her view, at the world stage as she speaks about Sweden in a global context.

Table 7. Swedish meat and its role in climate change

Material	Storyteller	Actors aligned	Actors opposed	Social matrix of actors	Actors positions in the story
	Coaxer				
MP's meat nationalism damages the environment, animals and humans	Jonas Paulsson Meatless Monday	Meatless Monday	The Green Party, Swedish meat producers	Criticism of the Green Party for being hypocritical, Swedish democracy allows for citizens to criticize their governments.	Climate activists vs Green political party
	Dagens ETC				
Radical climate action required	Gudrun Schyman, Feminist Initiative	Feminist Initiative	Over-consumptive (high income) Swedish consumers	Political platform to speak not only for the problems facing Sweden but for the global problems for underrepresented persons.	Feminist Initiative vs Swedish over-consumption
	The Environment Magazine (Miljömagasinet)				

To summarize, several narrative themes emerged out of the small stories examined to contribute to the master and counter narrative. These narratives positioned several issues. Firstly, environment versus economy – to whom is the government beholden to? The master narrative is not in favour of taxing meat, believes Swedish meat is the most environmentally friendly, and that farmers are victims. Counter narratives are in favour of a meat tax in Sweden and frame the issue as a natural cultural shift, supported by changing opinion in youth, however, there is an air of scepticism towards political for any concrete action. A struggle between the master and counter narrative is how Swedish meat is defined – where master narrative stakeholders maintain Swedish meat is the superior alternative and the most climate-friendly, counter narratives challenge this, framing Swedish meat as no different than meat produced anywhere else in the world on climate impact.

## Discussion

The articles examined had a broad range of opinions on the issue of a meat tax. I have organized the viewpoints expressed in the articles into what I believe are large, and suitable umbrella groupings that fall along a continuum of narratives and stories. The first stage of this discussion is to answer the question - what are the narratives about taxing meat in Swedish news articles and who are behind them? Secondly, to investigate the power struggles and positioning of these competing narratives in Swedish media.

A story told two different ways – the message forwarded.

In compiling the analysis of small stories – we see two major narratives emerge. Recalling back to the theoretical framework set up in section 3.0, a master narrative driven story spawns a counter narrative through criticism and challenges to that master narrative (Stanley, 2007). On the one hand, some narrative elements on taxing meat came from contributing stories that argued for the implementation of a meat tax due to environmental impact and animal welfare concerns from the meat production process. However, on the other hand, other stories promoted status quo preservation and economic arguments of supporting domestic farmers, therefore refuting the idea of a meat tax in Sweden. The analysis also revealed various power struggles, pitting different groups and values against one another. Environment versus economy, the economically well-off versus youth, pensioners, and the economically less fortunate, and whether Swedish meat is environmentally

responsible and sustainable or part of the problem. Through conducting the analysis, I propose a synthase of the narratives, produced by stitching together the actors and positioning from the various small stories.

Firstly, the master narrative is said to provide a level of familiarity and relatability to readers as normative (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004). Therefore, what I deem to be the master narrative, that is, the current, and normative stance on the issue of taxing meat in Sweden: Sweden does not need a tax on meat, doing so would only harm Swedish industries and not help solve any environmental issues. Farmers are already doing their part, yet they are blamed for everything. If only people understood that Swedish meat is already some of the most sustainably produced meat in the world, then they would realize that taxing meat will not only make it harder for those who are already struggling financially, but also remove sustainable meat options in favour of cheaper, imported meats.

Secondly, borne from criticism and challenges to the master narrative, counter narratives are critical and challenge what is said in the master narrative on taxing meat. Their positioning serves as a deconstruction, critical of the master narrative (Stanley, 2007). Therefore, I propose the following story to summarize the counter narrative: Sweden should be a leader in adopting a meat tax, doing so will help lower meat consumption and thereby lowering the climate impact related to meat. Politicians need to have the courage to stand up to economic interests and do more for climate change and listen to youth. Sweden consumes too much already, and to say that Swedish meat is any different than imported meat is simply not true.

Who are the actors in the story?

In the struggle to define the issue at hand, I expected three dimensions to interface – science, politics and media. Within the media articles examined, a number of actors were identified via storytellers and coaxers.

Table 8. Summary of actors and their support of master and counter narratives

Actors supporting master narratives		Actors supporting both master and counter narratives	Actors supporting counter narratives	
Political				
Christopher Fjellner MEP Moderates, Åsa Coenraads MP Moderates	Penilla Gunther MP Christian Democrats	The Green Party	The Green Party	Gudrun Schyman, Feminist Initiative
The Green Party	Swedish government			
European Union				
Farming and production associated				
Märta Jansdotter Farmer	Linda Segerblom, Communication Chief LRF			
Patrik Holm Thisner - HK Scan	Sustainable farmers			
Business interest groups	Swedish meat producers			
Civil society				
Low income consumers	High income consumers	Vegan and animal rights activists	Jonas Paulsson	

			Meatless Monday
		Citizens critical of Swedish farmers	Calle, Citizen Commentator
		Youth	Concerned citizens about climate change
		Foreign meat producers	Veggie consumers
Academia			
	Anders Karlsson professor of meat science, SLU	SLU	Elin Rööf SLU

As reflected in table 8, the most prominent actors mentioned in the media were political groups. Several storytellers mention political parties and government in their small stories, giving a large degree of salience to the issues from a political perspective. Political parties as actors in the narrative fell into several categories. Firstly, we had political parties represented as looking out for the interest of farmers, as was the case for storytellers from the Moderates and the Christian Democrats. Åsa Coenraads Member of Parliament from the Moderates states:

*“When you do not respect democratic decisions, then I think it is animal rights terrorism. And extremist groups that take the law into their own hands is a threat to society” (Nilsson, 2018a).*

Through this small story, she is effectively positioning animal activists to the equivalent of terrorists, and by having a panel discussion on the topic that includes anyone from this group should be discredited. Additionally, Penilla Gunther, Member of Parliament from the Christian Democrats states that:

*“In the countryside, farmers are struggling for profitability. MP (the Green Party) wants to introduce a ‘meat tax’... The question is how to do it, since it also wants to introduce a ‘veggie-norm’ for public kitchens where meat should be optional. Pulling Swedish meat off the menu at elderly homes, hospitals and schools hardly benefits the meat farmers” (Gunther, 2018).*

Both these instances position these two political groups as decidedly against any action involving taxing meat. In the later example, another political party, the Green Party of Sweden, is mentioned as an actor in the narrative that wants to change the status quo, to create a “veggie-norm” in society, and ultimately, in the opinion of these two speakers, do harm to Swedish meat producers and farmers. Additionally, the founder of the party Feminist Initiative, Gudrun Schyman, connects overconsumption to the need for a meat tax.

*“Today, four globes are required for Swedish consumption. It does not hold. We propose tax on meat and animal products, and reduced VAT on vegetables” (Schyman, 2018).*

After political parties, the most featured group of actors stems from storytellers and coaxers from agricultural production groups (HKScan) and farmers, and industry specific magazines (*ATL Lantbrukets Affärstidning, Land Landbruk*). These actors are not said to refute the science of climate change in the small stories; rather, their primary narrative is the financial and economic stability of the agricultural sector in Sweden, and secondly, to promote Swedish meat as the most environmentally friendly meat option available to consumers. In one article, story teller Märta Jansdotter conveys that she believes sustainable production in Sweden should be supported and that by implementing a broad meat tax, sustainable meat operations would suffer, resulting in less sustainable meat available for consumers (Widenheim, 2018). In contrast, opponents to this would like the issue to be

framed in a more binary fashion, as Jonas Paulsson of Meatless Monday writes “*Swedish meat is just as climate damaging as other EU meat*” (Paulsson, 2017b). Therefore, if we are to say that a counter-narrative is grown out of criticising a master-narrative, these narrative challenges the perception of what sustainable meat means and how that definition is interpreted by consumers – is it sustainability for the operation, the planet, or consumer health? I would place the actor mentioned from Meatless Monday as most opposed and polarized and serving as the counter foil to the position of the producers and farmers.

Thirdly, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) is mentioned in various stories as an actor. However, the positioning of SLU as an actor changes depending on who is telling the story. For example, in one small story, storyteller Elin Rööf, is seeking a broad consensus in information and eventually support for a meat tax (Nilsson, 2018b), while a colleague of hers, Anders Karlsson, is cited by another storyteller as supporting consumers to choose Swedish meat as the best alternative for consumers (Gustafsson, 2017). This difference in positioning is not totally unexpected, as narratives do not define one single truth.

I would group the final set of actors as ordinary citizens. This last group of actors in the narratives are not united in their positioning and have different opinions on the issue at hand. Inputs to the narratives from these actors range from supporting the idea of a meat tax and believe that meat should be treated the same as gasoline as one storyteller mentions (Winberg, 2018), or they oppose a tax as they are concerned it would put additional financial pressure on pensioners or low-income (Olsson Olsén, 2017).

### Swedish media as coaxers

In the background section, it was mentioned that Swedish media maintains a high degree of pluralism, allowing contributions from many different facets of society (Ots, 2009). The variety in storytellers and coaxers who together bring forward the small stories are consistent with this and come from discrete areas such as political, industry, civil society, media, and education. Moreover, the Swedish media landscape is well represented as contributions



to the topic of taxing meat come from all major categories of newspapers (metropolitan dailies, tabloid dailies, regional and local papers, low-frequency papers, and free dailies) as well as magazine publications.

Lastly, table 9 provides an overview list of the coaxers throughout all the articles examined. The list is divided into those supporting the master narrative, the counter narrative, and those that are identified as supporting both.

Table 9. Summary of coaxers and their support of master and counter narratives

Coaxers supporting master narratives		Coaxers supporting both master and counter narratives	Coaxers supporting counter narratives	
<i>Aftonbladet</i>	<i>Land Lantbruk</i>	ETC/DagensETC	The Environment Magazine ( <i>Miljömagasinet</i> )	<i>SVT Nyheter</i>
<i>DI Dagens Industri</i>	Caroline Widenheim via <i>Göteborgs-Posten</i>		<i>Metro Skåne</i>	Johan Ehrenberg <i>Dagens ETC</i>
Mikael Bengtsson Political Commentator <i>Norran</i>	ATL Agricultural Business Magazine		Jonas Norberg <i>Länstidningen Östersund</i>	
Per Gustafsson via <i>Skaraborgsbygden</i>	ETC			

In the analysis of the media articles, the coaxers have a role to play as they are the ones responsible for bringing the story to light. Therefore, it is worthy to mention the positioning had by the coaxers and this plays along in the Swedish media landscape. On taxing meat, coaxers tended to be seen as bringing narratives to life that were either master or counter, but not usually both. As mentioned in the introduction, there was an expectation that media

would play out as one of the three domains in which polarization on the topic would occur. To some extent, this analysis supports that a certain degree of polarization on taxing meat in Swedish media coaxes exists. However, one exception to this is ETC/DagensETC, which coaxes small stories that support both master and counter narratives on taxing meat. This is done through their debate platform, where individual contributors submit articles and are allowed the debate a topic and the public can follow, read and form their own conclusions on the topic.

Overall, from the prospective of a media consumer, interested on the topic, Swedish media coaxes a variety of narratives on taxing meat and is not homogenous. Coaxing outlets tended to forward multiple small stories along similar narrative lines, illustrating that the debate on defining the issue of a meat tax is still on-going within Swedish media.

#### What about Swedish meat?

Connecting back to previous literature identified in the review section, Neff and colleagues stated that diet related news articles from the United States related to climate change focused much more on individual and personal factors such as diet (Neff *et al.*, 2009). In the present study, Swedish articles have moved past the discussion from personal individuals, to a higher up, more salient issue that requires the attention of higher agents of power within society for one decision or another. Notably, these conflicts are not centred on whether or not people should decide if eating meat or an alternative is best. Rather, in Swedish media examined this is argued as a societal decision to be made by politicians, and to depending on the narrative, support either the wellbeing of the Swedish farming industry, or focus on climate action.

Also contained in the background section, researchers from Spain and Italy mentioned a CO<sub>2</sub> bias in the media for those countries when discussing meat and climate (Almiron & Zoppeddu, 2015). In the Swedish articles investigated, there does not appear to be a mention of such a scientific controversy that negates the effect of meat production and consumption on the climate, nor a deflection of climate issues to other sectors such as energy, or transportation.

The attitude from storytellers that contribute to the master narrative confirm previous research; as mentioned in the background section, Swedish producers were noted to see climate change as a new economic opportunity and a challenge to overcome (Asplund *et al.*, 2013). In the present study, a branding issue is communicated by one storyteller, writing for *Land Lantbruk*, as an obstacle that has put the meat producers into a corner (Segerblom, 2017). There is, however, no clear agreement between the narratives on whether there is a greater impact on climate from Swedish versus imported meat. Rather, the positioning of the master narrative is that Swedish meat is a better and more sustainable option, while foreign meats are worse for the environment and animal welfare. The message forwarded from the master narrative is that Sweden is not a major contributor to environmental problems caused by meat production, rather a source of innovation and best practice. Producers in Sweden argue that focus should be placed where Swedish producers are already ahead competitively – addressing the antibiotic use in livestock production in foreign meat (Holm Thisner, 2018). The story insists that Swedish farmers are already doing much better than farmers at a sustainable point of view, and that taxing those farmers would lead to flooding the market with unsustainable meat from abroad. Stakeholders from industry are quoted in articles mentioning that Sweden is already at the forefront of producing the most sustainable meat in the world with the least use of antibiotics. “*Sweden has one of the most sustainable animal production methods in the world*” (*ibid*). This story is a continuation of the master narrative that Sweden is a country that does well for the world and that its meat production is different from that of other countries. This could be supported, as Sweden has some of the strictest policies when it comes to antibiotic use (Engström *et al.*, 2007). The debate between meat industry and a major opponent play out in *DagensETC*. Mentioned in section 2 of this thesis, previous research agrees to some extent with this narrative, as Cederberg demonstrated that there was a decrease in GHG emissions from meat produced in Sweden in the recent decade (Cederberg, 2009).

Furthermore, the present study confirms some of the work started by another study that looked at the stakeholders in meat production, consumption and climate mitigation in Sweden. They found that industry

representatives, political groups, government agencies, and climate advocacy groups agree that meat has an effect on the climate, however, they also agreed that Swedish meat is more climate-friendly compared to imported meat (Lerner *et al.*, 2013). Although stakeholders of that study agreed on several topics, there was disagreement in how much political steering should play in meat consumption, and the most controversial topic was the idea of a meat tax (*ibid*). This power struggle is again displayed in the current study where it appears that views on taxing meat are debated, however, serious climate action on meat production/consumption should be dealt with so long as there is no economic loss according to the majority of news articles. Small stories that contribute to this narrative position Swedish meat as the best alternative, and for those working in the Swedish meat production industry, they insist that the communication of this has to be made more clearly. This is a story not only forwarded by those who work in the meat production industry but also one researcher from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences professor of meat science, Anders Karlsson, also promotes this idea in his statements, and positions himself as an educator to the public on this issue.

On the other hand, there is an attempt to define Swedish meat just the same as meat produced anywhere else. As mentioned in the results section, the Green Party has been accused in the media of “meat nationalism”. *i.e.*, being critical of the climate impact of foreign meat, but not that of Swedish meat, by Jonas Paulsson of Meatless Monday. This message details the critical nature some storytellers have to Sweden’s role in consumption, and are critical of Swedish meat, that it is no different than any other production of meat and that all meat production should be treated the same. It should be noted that the purpose of this thesis is not to determine whether Swedish-produced meat is a “better” alternative compared to other meats. To do so would require a fully fleshed out definition of what is meant by “better”. Rather, it is the perception and the construct of Swedish meat that is of interest.

## Limitations of the study

This study used Swedish media to analyse the narratives surrounding the topic of taxing meat in Sweden. The time window investigated included two years, 2017 – 2018. Media was restricted to communications in newspaper and online articles of media outlets; however, it did not include an analysis of communications directly from stakeholder's own internal networks – such as organization websites, communications, and policy documents. Additionally, only articles that specifically mentioned taxing meat were investigated. Although a broader study that includes all mentions of meat could be interesting for future study, I believe it more telling to have firstly studied attitudes and opinions about taxing it as a mitigation method.

## Conclusion

In this analysis, I have explored the concept of a tax on meat through the lens of online media articles. The media provide narratives of status quo and counter arguments to meat, politicizing it and highlighting several power dynamics of environment versus economy, farmers versus activists, and the value of domestic Swedish versus import meat. Actors represented in small stories found in the media on taxing meat included government and political parties, direct and indirect producer organizations and farmers, activist groups, research groups, and members from the general public. This thesis helps fill in the gap of literature concerning meat taxation as it is represented in media as narrative analysis within Swedish media on the topic of taxing meat is a relatively unexplored issue.

The central question of this paper has been to explore different categories of media narrative on taxing meat, highlighting the message and narrative forwarded through the lens of small stories. I have identified an alignment of stories amongst agriculture groups and some centre-right political parties (the Moderates and Christian Democrats) contributing to the master narrative, while climate activists and left-leaning political parties support a counter narrative in favour of taxing meat. These narratives are, however, not mutually exclusive to stakeholder organizations, and there is a struggle within organizations for a concrete position on reducing meat consumption. This revelation indicates that there is not one accepted truth on what meat represents to Swedish society, and the hegemonic powers to define it are in a struggle to define the issue.

The narratives had been expected to occupy an intersection between scientific, political, and media dimensions. To this end, there is a polarization to varying degrees across each of these dimensions. Scientifically, stakeholders attempt to define the problem as either local and due to antibiotics, or global and related to overall meat consumption. Politically, issues raised by actors are concerned with the value taxing food which some argue would further increase disparity amongst rich versus poor citizens. Finally, within media, although there seems to be a balance of opinions represented across types of magazines, tabloids and newspapers, where consumers can read arguments from all perspectives and are therefore tasked to form an opinion on the issue after reflecting on their own life and social situation. Moreover, the categories identified in the analysis are not meant to be taken as the only truths in the debate, nor are they all mutually exclusive from one another. Readers may also perceive this as they consume these media.

Swedish media consumers are presented with a smorgasbord of competing narratives on what to think about when taxing meat is discussed in the media. The environmental impact of meat is relatively new in the sphere of public information and debate. As with other aspects of climate change, there is still debate about where the responsibility lies – to consumers or to producers? Future analysis of the topic in Sweden could build upon this current research and continue to analyse these internal media outlets, plus interviews from key informants from the identified stakeholders. Additionally, although this analysis only focused on Sweden, the debate on taxing meat is present and ongoing in other countries, and the topic would benefit from an expanded analysis of media found in other countries.

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## Popular science summary

When issues are discussed within a media context, we as the reader are offered a catered and constructed version of reality. This reality could exist in a social set of conditions far from that of our own reality. In order to deeper understand an issue, it is important to discuss it from multiple angles, including from different social strata of society.

In this study, media articles from Sweden were examined using narrative analysis to determine what the master and counter narrative on taxing meat in Sweden are. In order to guide the analysis, the concept of small story was employed, to capture a nuanced and potentially overlooked item in discussion and dialogue. Small stories are those told in passing, perhaps minimalized or lost in bigger, over-arching topics. Through this method, it was uncovered that the dominant, master narrative discussing taxing meat in Sweden is that: Sweden does not need a tax on meat, doing so would only harm Swedish industries and not help solve any environmental issues. Farmers are already doing their part, yet they are blamed for everything. If only people understood that Swedish meat is already some of the most sustainably produced meat in the world, then they would realize that taxing meat will not only make it harder for those who are already struggling financially, but also remove sustainable meat options in favour of cheaper, imported meats.

In contrast, the counter narrative that challenges this is: Sweden should be a leader in adopting a meat tax, doing so will help lower meat consumption and thereby lowering the climate impact related to meat. Politicians need to have the courage to stand up to economic interests and do more for climate change and listen to the youth. Sweden consumes too much already, and to say that Swedish meat is any different than imported meat is simply not true.

By learning about *how* we discuss issues in society, perhaps we can eventually design a way that takes into account a wider spectrum of opinions and voices that are often not represented may become more salient.