



Increasing fuel taxes as an identity threat

– A case study of the social movement
Bensinupproret 2.0

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Abstract

Due to the ratification of the Paris Agreement, Sweden has committed to cut greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector with 70 % by the year 2030. One of the approaches to help reach that goal is to increase the tax price on fossil fuels, as an attempt to reduce fossil fuel consumption nationally. Similar fuel tax increases have met a lot of resistance globally, with the Yellow Vest movement in France as a close example. In Sweden, most of the resistance has appeared in Sweden's largest Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0, with its, just over, 500 000 members. In this qualitative study, I have researched how the influence of increased fuel taxes could be understood and cognitively managed, by interviewing members of Bensinupproret 2.0. The focus in this study has been on aspects beyond purely economic concerns and has been conducted with key concepts drawn from Social Representation theory as well as Identity Process theory. It is found that perceived consequences of fuel taxes concerning both societal and personal issues could be looked upon as threatening towards individuals' identities. These threats seem to enhance individual coping mechanisms, which could cause, and be the cause of, various perceptions and understandings of fuel taxes. These perceptions could consequently be causing, or at least enhancing, the need to join a community that is showing resistance against fuel taxes.

Keywords: identity threat, fuel tax, coping mechanism

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1. Introduction

The Swedish government has decided that by the year 2030, greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector in Sweden should have decreased by 70%. By the year 2045, the national goal is to have the net emissions down at zero (Regeringskansliet 2019). According to the government, a carbon dioxide tax must be adjusted to the extent and pace required to meet these targets, alongside the electrification of the car fleet and accelerated inclusion of biofuels (ibid). Emissions that occur domestically from transport have been somewhat reduced over the past years in Sweden. However, some authorities still argue that the fuel taxes need to be raised even more, to an extent that prices at fuel stations should be twice as high as what they currently are, if Sweden should be able to reach their emission targets by 2030 (Naturvårdsverket 2020, Finansdepartementet 2019). The tax increase that has already been taking place is currently far from sufficient (Finansdepartementet 2019, Trafikverket 2020). However, the already established tax increases have aroused strong feelings and outrage among Swedish citizens, with the Facebook group Bensenupproret 2.0 as a clear example.

1.1. Bensenupproret 2.0

Due to political events and global demands, the fuel price increased globally during the spring of 2018 (Lynch 2019). The rapid increase in price could be a reason for why the fuel taxes received a lot of attention during that period, as fuel taxes are the only aspect of the gross fuel price that national politicians can influence. In April 2018, the Facebook group Bensenupproret 2.0 was created. It was established by an individual who believed that the fuel prices had increased too much during a short period of time and therefore wanted to show resistance towards the high fuel taxes. A few months after the creation, the group had received over 600 000 members, which can be compared to the population in Sweden, that is just over 10 million people. It is at the time of writing, the largest Facebook group in Sweden. Bensenupproret 2.0, which also has created an association, demands fuel taxes in Sweden to be reduced for, as they state, those who live in rural areas. They are the ones most dependent on private driving and are the ones who are worst affected by the price increase (Bränsleupproret 2.0

n.d.). The association believes that the increase in fuel taxes that has already taken place is unfair. They argue that the continued price increase is an economic threat to many people, especially for those that live in rural areas and for those with low income (ibid). Different narratives about climate policies, fuel taxes and injustices are posted daily in the Facebook group. What the members in the group seem to have in common is that they mostly live rurally and that they are to a great extent dependent on their car as a means of transportation, in order to have a functional and worthy life. The tonality in the Facebook group can sometimes be perceived as quite harsh, which has resulted in several accusations of racism and threats. Therefore, the Facebook group has taken in several individuals as moderators, to help in the comment sections as an attempt to establish a forum where people are allowed to express their thoughts and emotions freely.

By studying the various posts in the group, it is clear that rural residents experience this tax increase as highly unfair and inefficient, as it is stated both in the Bensinupproret association web page and frequently repeated in the Facebook group. Through discussions and posts in the group, the members of Bensinupproret 2.0 can construct common narratives about how the current climate policies and fuel taxes have divided society into us and them, the rural areas and the big cities, and how the increased prices are unfair towards the residents in rural areas. These narratives can invite imagining how increased fuel taxes can affect rural people's views of climate policy in general, and how the increased taxes can be perceived as a threat against peoples' identities.

1.2. Related research

The political background and demands that Bensinupproret 2.0 articulates can be compared to other social movements. Previous research has, among others, been concerning how cultural heritage and polarization affects discourses around sustainable transitions (Martin and Islar 2021). In their research, Martin and Islar (2021) have investigated how cultural and socio-economics framings and understandings of terms like sustainable transition can cause forms of resistance, by looking at the Yellow Vests in France. They discovered that different discourses regarding sustainability, in their case 'the end of the month vs the end of the world', can generate unexpected opposition towards a fossil-free transition. Adam-Troijan et al (2021) have further investigated how collective action can stem from social identities and group identities, also looking at the example of Yellow Vests. They confirm evidence for social media to play an important role in collective action when self-categorization and verification within the collective group are strong. Jost et al (2018) have researched the role of social media in social movements, stating there is evidence that social media platforms facilitate

opportunities for emotional exchange including motivation and encouragement for protest activities, by focusing on emotions like identification, anger and (in)justices. Emotions such as fear and shame have been connected to the rise of right-winged groups by Salmela and von Scheve (2017). They argue that emotional processes that negatively affect individuals' identities could contribute to individuals search for self-esteem in aspects that seem to be more secure, such as identification with nationality and religion, among some. These processes are claimed to be contributing to the increase of right-wing populism in society. Murtagh et al (2011, 2014) have examined how threats towards people's identities could contribute to resistance to change their traffic-related behaviour, specifically focusing on identity processes within individuals in the UK. Brieger (2019) researched how identity and strong identification can, on the other hand, increase people's support for environmental protection. It was discovered that surrounding support and appreciation can intensify environmental considerations and sustainable behaviour. By doing this research I attempt to complement previous studies by focusing on how shared meaning-making and the sense of a threatened identity could contribute to resistance towards increasing fuel taxes within a social media context. My intention with this study is to add an additional viewpoint to the research by studying the perspectives of members within Bensinupproret 2.0. As a lot of research regarding resistance towards fuel taxes has focused on social movements like the Yellow Vests, among others, I believe my focal point on a Facebook group within a Swedish context can be useful. It can provide a supplementary viewpoint of the same problem - resistance towards increasing fuel taxes in a society that requires a rapid shift from fossil fuels. Hopefully, this study will provide further insights for future research in the transition towards a fossil-free civilization.

2. Problem Formulation, Aim and Research Questions

2.1.1. Problem formulation

Regulations and law proposals that are created to change the behaviours of citizens in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions can have various effects on people depending on how they experience and understand these regulations. The different experiences and understandings can in turn be connected to how people react and respond to these regulations. The group Bensinupproret 2.0 was created as a response to the increased fuel taxes, to show that there is a collective will to resist them. Since the fuel price (including the taxes) presumably will continue to increase as the target date of reducing the transport-related emissions is getting closer, there is a need to understand how the transport politics can be developed in the most optimal way possible. If further price increases continue to evoke resistance with the public, the focus should be put on the aspects which makes people want to resist these taxes, to make transport politics more inclusive and flexible. Hopefully, this study can contribute with insights into how climate politics can acknowledge and include rural inhabitants in the work towards minimizing the GHG emissions from the transport sector, by studying how individuals' identities are affected by increasing fuel taxes.

2.1.2. Research aim

In this paper, I will examine why increased fuel taxes can create the need for resistance in the case of Sweden and Bensinupproret 2.0. I will investigate the underlying meanings of increased fuel taxes that may lead to resistance, by studying how members of the group are understanding and making sense of the phenomena and if/how they experience this as threatening towards their sense of identity. Therefore, my research questions will be the following:

2.1.3. Research questions

1. What concerns seem to be the main distraught and engagement in Bensinupproret 2.0?
2. Could these concerns be understood as threats to the interviewees' identities or lifestyles?
3. If so, how do the interviewees cope with the concerns that seem to be threatening?

3. Theoretical approach

3.1. Social Representation Theory (SRT)

Originating from the early work of Moscovici in 1961, the theory of social representations has through the years been adopted by a multitude of researchers. Höijer (2011) describes SRT as systems of knowledge, understandings and values that are shared and constructed by and between individuals, groups and societies, which are in some way connected to symbolic or cultural objects. The focus within SRT rests between an individual's knowledge, feelings and values, and a group's shared values, cultures, and rules (Höijer 2011; Jaspal et al. 2014) The processes within SRT are dynamic and can be influenced by different entities. Buijs et al. (2012) argue that social representations, i.e., perceptions and meaning making, are constantly developed through groups' social processes. An example of a dynamic process could be when a social group is somehow met by danger or a threat; together, this group can create an understanding of the threat, as well as try to reduce the threat, which in Identity Process Theory (mentioned later) is called a coping strategy. Through the social interactions, the group can create a perception of the threat by naming the phenomenon as well as add traits of characters to it, by relating it to something familiar and already existing (Wagner et al. 1999, Buijs et al 2012). In this process, when the group becomes familiar with the new phenomenon together, some type of anchoring or objectification takes place (Höijer 2010). The approach of meaning-making and understanding of threats is applicable for this study, as increasing fuel taxes could be looked upon as threatening.

With the help of anchoring, we can create understanding, value and meaning to an object or phenomenon, by comparing it with well-known objects or phenomena that already have a meaning or function for us (Jaspal et al. 2014). Through objectification, we materialize thoughts by linking them to some type of object or person (Höijer 2010; Jaspal et al. 2014). It is worth noting that although these representations are created from social contexts it does not imply that everyone in a certain social context shares identical anchorings or objectification (Breakwell

2015). By examining a particular groups' shared thoughts and values it is, however, possible to discover common representations which help to anchor meaning, narrative and understanding about different phenomena (McLamore and Uluğ 2020). The reason why I have found this theory useful is that as Moscovici et al. (2013) summarize: "The primary function of social representations is the construction of social objects that provide a stable pattern of meanings for social actors." (p. 188). In other words, the theory of social representations could help investigate how understandings and opinions regarding certain phenomenon are shared and co-constructed between individuals and social groups, which could be applied for the Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0.

3.2. Identity Process Theory (IPT)

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, the word 'Identity' defines "who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others" (2021). One's identity is shaped by the way a person experiences and makes meaning of oneself by connecting their identity to certain objects or events. This process of constructing the identity is based on reflections around for example phenomena we are familiar with or through events that we have experienced (Wenger 1988). Shortly speaking, the total identity of an individual is based on both group memberships, relationships to individuals, displays of representations and our behaviour (Jaspal et al 2014). In the origin work of Breakwell (1986), the process behind the identity formation was named to be Identity Process Theory (IPT). Identity process theory deals with and describes how one's identity undergo processes when it is facing challenges in different ways (Jaspal et al 2020). Within IPT it is proposed that the identity of an individual is the product of societal structures and social interactions as well as individual aspects like memory and consciousness (Breakwell 1993, 2010).

The structure of one's identity is based on firstly the process of *assimilation-accommodation*, which functions as a memory to structures of values, attitudes, and social networks (Breakwell 1993). The assimilation function refers to the collection of new information that could be incorporated in the parts of one's identity, whereas the accommodation serves as the adjustment of the information to the identity structure (Breakwell 1988). Secondly comes the process of evaluation, which holds the assessments of value (positive or negative) towards parts that entail compositions of one's identity over time (Breakwell 2010, Sablonnière and Osborne 2014). These functions are in turn based on what Jaspal et al (2020) entitle as "motivational principles" (p. 3) that will affect the total identity: *continuity*, *distinctiveness*, *self-efficacy*, and *self-esteem*. These principles can be described as the following: continuity is based on the psychological ability

to maintain one's identity based on what has happened in the past, present, and will happen in the future (Murtagh et al 2014). Distinctiveness further refers to one's ability to differentiate oneself from others (Jaspal et al 2020). Self-efficacy entails the belief and trust in one's ability to have control and knowledge about causes that could have an impact on one's life (Stets and Burke 2014). Self-esteem refers to one's social and individual worth, the motive to find agency and meaning in one's life (Jaspal et al 2020, Stets and Burke 2014). Oren and Bar-Tal (2014) confirm that these principles do not have to be restricted to solely individuals' identities and cognition, it can also be used on a group level, i.e., group self-esteem and group efficacy could likewise be applied and investigated.

IPT suggests that individuals act in compliance with these principles to protect themselves from phenomena that appear to be threatening (Murtagh et al 2014). According to Breakwell (2010), threats towards one's identity can occur when some of these four motivational principles cannot somehow adapt to the assimilation-accommodation or evaluation processes. To clarify, a phenomenon could appear as threatening when an individual believes that some sort of social or structural change requires a modification of one's identity, which will affect or destabilise any of the motivational principles (Sablonnière and Usborne 2014). Important to note is that individuals experience and evaluate these threats differently, as the perception of what is threatening is highly subjective (Jaspal et al 2020).

In this research, the focus has been aimed towards how potential threats deriving from increasing fuel taxes can affect the self-esteem and self-efficacy of the members of the Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0. Stets and Burke (2014) argue that the concepts of self-esteem and self-efficacy would together make up what is the total motive of feeling worthy and acceptable, to find meaning and purpose in one's life (ibid). Martiny and Rubin (2016) state that, according to the self-esteem hypothesis developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals act in order to maintain positive self-esteem, which in turn protects their motivational principles that build the identity. Individuals are able to increase their self-esteem, when confirmed or approved by other members of a group, or when the role they identify with is verified (Cast and Burke 2002). On the contrary, to accept or experience a phenomenon as a disadvantage (in this case increasing fuel taxes) could mean that a person is understanding oneself as a victim. This understanding could damage one's sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem (Tyler and Smith 1995).

As previously stated, within IPT is one's identity partly based on social interactions and connections. Murtagh et al (2011) explains this by exemplifying

that the role or identity as a parent comes with certain expectations deriving from society, regarding how a parent should act and behave. An individual will internalize the social expectations and norms that surround the parenting role and behave within these boundaries, as they also expect other parents will do. When being faced with a threat or challenge that is having an impact on aspects of the role that one identifies with, individuals use what is described by Breakwell (1988) as coping strategies or coping mechanisms. These coping strategies can arise when the individual wants to restore the sense of having stable motivational principles. In other words, when an individual feels that parts of what they identify with are somehow threatened by an external threat. These coping strategies operate by either modifying or removing what seems to be threatening or triggering, in various ways (Sablonnière and Osborne 2014, Murtagh et al 2011).

Coping strategies or mechanisms can derive differently depending on how the individuals are experiencing and evaluating the threat, which can have different outcomes on the individual's psychological well-being (Jaspal et al 2020). These strategies can arise on different levels; intrapsychic levels, interpersonal levels or on an intergroup level (Jaspal 2014). On the intrapsychic level, the coping strategies include either denial of the threat, reconstruction of what it stands for, or even confronting what seems to be threatening (Murtagh et al 2011). Another intrapsychic coping strategy could be what De Hoog (2013) describes as biased processing; when individuals choose to defend or shape a belief to make it applicable for their own identity or self-definition, which could undermine the threatening aspects of the phenomenon. This process is assumed to lead to a biased understanding of the case. On an interpersonal or intergroup level, the coping strategies can come in the forms of attempts to modify relationships to avoid exposure, increase the social status of the group one feels belonging to, favour the so-called ingroup (where one "belongs") prior to the outgroups, or, within one's ingroup, create biased processing of information (Jaspal et al 2020, Martiny and Rubin 2016, de Hoog 2013). According to Murtagh et al (2011), the examples of strategies above could be named as deflecting strategies. They argue that these strategies also could contribute to resistance to change a certain behaviour, which has been studied in the case of transport-related activities in the UK (ibid).

Increasing petrol taxes could be looked upon as threatening for many people. Not only can they appear as threatening towards peoples' financial situations, but they can also appear as threatening towards aspects of the roles and identifications that people have a connection with. Based on the fact that the (just over 500 000) members in the Facebook group are not only affected by the social representations

that are occurring in the group but also in their community, their families, their social spheres, different understandings of the fuel taxes will arise. Moscovici et al. (2013) clarify the connection between identity and SRT as follows: “the person who takes on an identity is himself or herself a product of a representational system” (p.192). Therefore, the combination of SRT and IPT is applicable, since it gives the opportunity to investigate how social representations and individual belief systems can help individuals make sense of the threatening effects that can arise from increased fuel taxes. However, though representations are shared between individuals, they are still understood and customized to fit what the individual finds best suitable for their own identity, including their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Breakwell 1993). Islam (2014) concludes that a various number of studies have shown that when different groups pose some sort of threat towards each other, the connection to the respective identity intensifies. Assuming that the members of Bensinupproret are experiencing the increased fuel prices as a threat to their identities, I find the combination of theories to be useful.

4. Methodology and Data collection

By performing a qualitative analysis, it is possible to examine how individuals' opinions and experiences can provide insights into human behaviour (Yin and Retzlaff 2013; Creswell and Creswell 2018). Therefore, an inductive qualitative analysis has been executed for this study. A qualitative analysis was necessary as it made it possible to study how people experience their individual realities in regard to increasing fuel taxes. The philosophical approach in this analysis has been based on the epistemological assumption that there is no single reality, but several different, socially constructed realities (Moon and Blackman 2014). The epistemological starting point in this method was based on a relativistic view of the world, where my role as a researcher was to largely take part in the view of the world that the interviewees present, to understand their contextual meaning (Singh 2019). As Singh (2019) describes, a relativist believes that there are only subjective perceptions of what the truth is, and it varies between people. Therefore, the use of interviews fit well with my research, as it invited me to study narratives presented by the interviewees, whose subjective worldview I got to analyse and take part of.

4.1. Interviews

4.1.1. Finding interviewees and ethical considerations

In order to analyse representations that have been expressed in the Facebook group, members of the group were asked to participate in interviews. The process of finding interviewees was conducted stepwise. The administrators of the Facebook group were contacted to get approval to advertise for voluntary participants in the Facebook group. The administrators were also asked and if they knew of people (who were members of the group) who could consider participating. Thereafter, an advertising post was put on the Facebook group's wall, asking if any of the members would be interested in participating in an interview. The members that wanted to partake in interviews were asked to contact the researcher, to book time for the interview. Through this procedure, the members were able to freely decide if they wanted to participate or not, without

any external pressure from the researcher or other group members. The names of the interviewees have been exchanged with code names to ensure anonymity. Further, all information that could in any way refer to the identities of the interviewees has been changed or deleted in the transcripts. All interviewees had before the interview agreed upon being recorded and the interviews to be transcribed. The recordings were then deleted after the transcription had been executed.

4.1.2. Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for this study were that the interviewees had to be members of the Facebook group, and above 18 years of age. The purpose of this broad inclusion criterion was to gather participants strategically to ensure that the selected participants were relevant to the issues (Bryman 2012). The geographical location of the participants in the study varied, as well as their age. This variation in resident point, as well as scattered age, was intended to increase the credibility of the research. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), the more varied the focus group is, the more varied the perspective is, which will increase the credibility of the study. In total, seven members of the Facebook group were interviewed.

4.1.3. Semi-structured interviews

To collect information, I chose to use semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. This choice was made in order to invite the interviewees to discuss in their own words and explain their answers to the questions asked (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). This type of information gathering was important from an analytical perspective, as the purpose of the study was to find how individuals together create narratives and understanding about higher fuel prices. By inviting the interviewees to communicate how they experience different phenomena, I as an interviewer was able to follow their reasoning, without guiding their answers (Tsoukalas 2006).

Six interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings, where the interview participants had the opportunity to sit in a safe place, without feeling pressured or uncomfortable. One interview was conducted via phone, under the same conditions as the Zoom meetings. As the interviews took place on either Zoom or via phone, there were limited opportunities for me to study the body language of the interviewees, which may have affected the information transfer during the interviews to a certain extent. The interviews were between 40-110 minutes long and were recorded to enable transcription.

4.2. Qualitative content analysis

As an analysis method, qualitative content analysis was chosen. Qualitative content analysis was useful in this case, as the method is based on narratives as well as interaction and consensus between the interview participant and the observer (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). Qualitative content analysis can help the researcher understand what is experienced and said by participants in an interview, by focusing on two parts: the manifest and the latent (ibid). The manifesto includes what the interviewee says, or what is written in a text. Examining the latent provides an opportunity to understand the underlying sentences in what has been said or written. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) argue that both parts require a certain analysis, but at different levels when it comes to undertones and abstraction. The qualitative content analysis focuses on the language use of the interviewees, with attention directed to the contextual meaning (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). After the interviews had been conducted, they were transcribed directly, where all forms of statements or actions had been documented (e.g., sighs, pauses, brakes). All content from the transcripts was used, to avoid exclusion of data and to increase the credibility of the study (Graneheim and Lundman 2004).

4.2.1. Coding and analysis

For coding, the software program MAXQDA was used. All the transcripts were uploaded to the software before coding. The transcripts were read through several times before they were coded, to be able to study underlying meanings and sentences that could otherwise unintentionally have been left out (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Throughout the coding, whole sentences that were important for the issue (meaning-bearing units) were coded. Comments about what could be latent (underlying) meanings were noted throughout the coding. After all the transcripts had been coded, they were condensed into one final excel-sheet where triangulation and comparison of codes were performed to find common themes (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Whole quotes have, as previously stated, been included in the analysis to increase its credibility (Graneheim and Lundman 2004). The analysis of the transcripts was performed by drawing on the key concepts of social representation theory and identity process theory. In order to strengthen the arguments and reasonings within this study, descriptions of what is commonly posted in the Facebook group have also been included. This was done to further exemplify representations that occur in the Facebook group, and how they are shared with the interviewees. It will be mentioned throughout the text when these are used.

4.3. Limitations of the study

Some questions that were posed to the interviewees could be looked upon as leading questions. Even though these were asked unintentionally, they could still affect the way the interviewees had intended to respond. This aspect could therefore have affected the result of the interviews and analysis. During a few interviews, there were also some external disturbances, such as people in the background, bad connection, and loud noises. These interferences could have either disrupted the interviewees or affected the transmission of thoughts between interviewer and interviewee. Another aspect that could be accounted for is that the interviewees' recognition of the results was not considered, which could limit the credibility of the study (Graneheim and Lundman 2004, Bryman 2012).

As a researcher, I have tried my best to leave my personal values and understandings outside of this study. However, there is still a risk that I have based some conclusions on my own subjective perceptions, which could have affected the results and discussions of this paper. Due to my experiences with living in the countryside with transport constraints, but also my great interest in environmental and climate problems, there is a risk that I might make incorrect assumptions. Conversely, there is also a chance that my own experiences (that I shared with my interviewees) made the participants feel more confident in their knowledge, which could have improved the transmission of their thoughts and feelings.

5. Analysis

In order to acknowledge the research questions comprehensively, two themes have been developed and will be discussed to answer the research questions - ‘What concerns seem to be the main distraught for engagement in the Bensinupproret 2.0’, ‘Could these concerns be understood as threatening to what the interviewees identify with?’ and ‘If so, how do the interviewees cope with the concerns that seem to be threatening?’ The two themes are described as societal concerns and individual concerns.

The **societal concerns** refer to general representations of the issues with increasing fuel taxes, which were expressed among the interviewees. These understandings are not necessarily restricted to being just within the Facebook group, they could also be expressed in other social constellations like engagement with neighbours, family, co-workers, and friends. This theme represents mainly the participants’ societal opinions and understandings of the taxes, as well as about injustices, and political discussions. This part deals with social representations and commonly understood phenomena. The aspects brought up have been expressed several times and therefore seem to be shared among most of the interviewees. Tendencies of coping mechanisms and identity processes connected to these concerns will be brought up to a certain extent.

The **individual concerns** refer to worries about how increasing fuel taxes could affect individual aspects, i.e., understanding of how it will affect them personally. These results have been based on concerns that have something to do with the interviewees’ behaviour, situation, or hobbies/interest. Simply put, this section will focus on personal concerns which address aspects of the identity formation process. However, due to the connection between social representations and identity processes, these are also assumed to be at least affected by social representations within either the Facebook group or other social constellations, as the theme above. Tendencies of coping mechanisms will also be pointed out.

Finally, various examples of **coping mechanisms** to manage the appeared threats will be analysed and discussed with results from the interviews. The end of this section will discuss how representations from the sections societal and individual

concerns can be addressed concerning self-esteem, self-efficacy, and coping mechanisms.

5.1. Societal concerns

5.1.1. Punishment taxes and an unjust tax system

All interviewees expressed an understanding behind the purpose of fuel taxes; people will try to use less fuel due to the increasing price on fuel by either changing their driving behaviour or by investing in a greener car, which in turn will reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from private transport. However, there was a clear perception that these taxes affect people differently depending on their financial status and their geographical point of departure, which some argue to be unfair. All the interviewees said that the taxes have a larger impact on those that may not have a choice regarding driving. Those that for some reason cannot take public transport or cannot afford to buy a more sustainable car are, due to the taxes, put in a financial position they have trouble avoiding.

One interviewee expressed, even though they did not either live in the countryside or have a car, they could understand the emotional pressure those most affected and upset by the increasing fuel taxes felt. *“I would think that they have the feeling that you are taxed for something that you cannot influence. That one's way of life may be, this might be far-fetched but, that one's way of life in some way is wrong as well.”* (IP4) This sentiment, that the unfair impact of the fuel taxes means that some lifestyles are looked down upon, reflects views commonly expressed and reproduced in the Facebook group. Some of the interview participants perceived the taxes as a punishment for their lifestyle choices, on their financial situation or similar. They expressed that they have no possibility of changing their travel behaviour, and therefore, they have to pay for these taxes. *“Blame yourself for driving, blame yourself for living in the countryside, blame yourself for needing the car. It's only a punishment, because I don't have another choice.”* (IP7) This argument that the person expressed could, though, be argued as a contradiction. The purpose of having punishments is often to give punishment when a person has made the wrong choice, i.e., the person did have a choice. In this matter, it is assumed that all interviewees have chosen where they are living. Concluding, it is not an issue with not having a choice - it is a matter of having done what society believes is the wrong choice that you are being punished for.

The aspect of being punished for your choice of lifestyle could be a representation developed from discussions in the Facebook group. As described by Høijer (2011), the process of anchoring takes place when people together are making

meaning and understanding of something unfamiliar by relating it to something familiar. By anchoring what the effects of fuel taxes could be, the members of Bensinupproret 2.0 (that express this argument) have conducted meaning-making about why these taxes are affecting them specifically. For some, it seems to have resulted in the understanding that it is their way of living the politicians believe is problematic, and the reason for why they are being punished. By characterizing the fuel taxes as a punishment for living rurally, they have created an understanding of the taxes as threatening, which also could reinforce the identity of being a rural resident, as previously described by Islam (2014).

There was a general perception that these taxes have different consequences depending on where you live and that people living in rural areas where there is a less connected public transport system (or no public transport at all), face unjust consequences. There was a concern for people who travel long distances to, for example, their work, supermarkets, or doctors. It was argued that they would have to move or make other drastic lifestyle changes if the fuel price were to increase too much. One stated the following: *“We kind of need to have the car to be able to get to work. I don’t know how to solve it. It’s just like, my God, do I have to resign and apply for another job to be able to afford to go to work?”* (IP2) This person argued that due to the increased taxes they soon might not be able to afford to go to work, and therefore it could be necessary to change job mainly for the location of it. There was a general understanding and concern that due to the slow but steady increase of fuel tax since the 1980s, the prices will continue to increase, and the situation will probably be even worse in the coming years.

One interviewee expressed this concern by putting a number to it: *“if diesel or petrol will cost SEK 50 / litre, what do I have to give up in life to be able to afford to drive?”* (IP7). The image of how the situation will become worse creates a lot of insecurity among some of the interviewees, regarding not only how they are living, but also about how life in the countryside and rural communities will have to change or perhaps even disappear. Even though the interviewees argued that the taxes are, and have been extremely high, their biggest concern was still how the taxes will negatively affect them in the future. The need for control in one’s life is an important aspect, according to IPT. Self-efficacy, being one of the motivational principles that build up one’s identity, is negatively affected when individuals feel they have no or less control over situations (Stets and Burke 2014, Jaspal et al 2020). One way to find out what the future will be like is to jointly discuss and resonate to create an understanding of what will happen, as could be the reason why Bensinupproret 2.0 has gathered so many members. There was a common will among the interviewees to find out how one will be affected in the future by the fuel taxes. As explained by some of the interviewees, joining the

Facebook group has been a way to see how others are dealing with the increasing taxes. Seeing how others are managing their lives with increasing taxes could give insight into how one could have control over the situation.

One interviewee expressed concern about the northern part of Sweden, where there are long distances between communities, and jokingly concluded their reasoning by saying *“I have seen (in the Facebook group) many who live in Norrland, for example, where they have maybe 50 km to the store. Then I guess we make something else out of Norrland, if it is not possible for people to live there.”* (IP1) This person demonstrated that due to the complications even higher petrol taxes could bring, people in rural areas probably would need to move. This could in turn result in an empty countryside with even further distances to travel between communities, which for this person seemed worrying.

Applying Social Representation Theory (SRT), it is assumed that the members of Bensinupporet 2.0 have tried to make sense of how the increasing taxes will affect them in the future, by the processes of anchoring and objectification. As Jaspal (2014) described the function of SRT, by making meaning of something unfamiliar by relating it to something well-known, people try to make sense of the foreign phenomena. In this case, it is indicated that the members have tried to understand firstly the reasons behind the taxes. Secondly, what the effects will be if the fuel taxes were to increase even more, by relating what the effects could be with a similar phenomenon that has caused issues in the past. Here, the role of self-efficacy enters. By understanding what the effects of fuel taxes could be, the members can understand what they will do or change to keep control over one's life, in order to maintain a sense of self-efficacy. The notion of an unfair tax system invites individuals to create a shared identity amongst those that experience the same thing. According to Jaspal et al (2020), feeling a membership and connection to a group will decrease one's feeling of vulnerability towards what seems to be threatening. This aspect could further explain how Bensinupporet 2.0 has gotten such a large number of members. This facet will be discussed more thoroughly under the headline 'coping mechanisms'.

5.1.2. Underlying reasons behind the taxes

Some argued that there is a different demand behind this tax, other than reducing the emissions. There was for example a perception that the tax burden has slowly but steadily been moved from high-incomers to low-incomers, and from the cities to the countryside.

Even though they argue that this is an environmental question and an environmental tax, if

you scratch the surface, you see that it has nothing to do with the environment, absolutely nothing. There are two million ways to reduce emissions, and this is not one of them. Instead, it's just a matter of getting money in and shifting the tax burden from high-income earners. (IP3)

The argument for this perception was that the politicians only want to increase incoming money for the treasury and to switch the tax burden from high to low-incomeers. It was further a perception that they have been doing this, slowly, for many years so no one would notice. The argument is based on the fact that money from the fuel taxes does not directly go to environmental benefits or traffic benefits, but instead, goes to the treasury. The understanding that the taxes are not benefiting the climate could further be a product of the anchoring about how unnecessary and unfair the fuel taxes are. By having the belief that there is something wrong with how the taxes are conducted, one will be able to reduce the notion that it is something wrong with one's behaviour. The way the taxes were explained by this person could imply that a coping strategy has contributed to biased processing for this person to help reduce the threat. The blame that was put on one's identity has instead been put on the politicians conducting the taxes, as well the tax itself.

Another interviewee stated that the reason behind the taxes is simply to remove motoring in Sweden completely: "*They dismantle everything they can out of motoring, in all directions and edges.*" (IP6). This person argued that 'they', what could be argued as the out-group, are simply implying that motoring is wrong and should be removed. This person had previously said that they used their car a lot and had been working in transportation for a long time. This person probably identifies as a part of the Swedish motoring, and therefore believes the opposite of what is said of the out-group. This finding seems to be similar to what is concluded by Salmela and von Scheve (2017), who argue that threats towards peoples' identities could result in, for example, fear, that is repressed to anger towards other groups. Following, it is also coherent with the conclusion of Islam (2014); group identifications can intensify when various groups pose some sort of threat towards each other. According to my analysis, this person would then identify even more strongly with motoring, when feeling that motoring in Sweden is threatened by the out-group.

It was also argued that there are other, more efficient ways to reduce the emissions, but they are not used because they are not bringing in money for the treasury. This aspect seems to cause or be the cause of a mistrust towards a lot of politicians. Even though this reasoning argues that politicians have underlying intentions or the like, it can also be perceived to rationalize, to avoid being seen as the one who makes mistakes or who has made the wrong 'choice', as previously

discussed. Furthermore, a coping strategy on an interpersonal or intergroup level could be to favour the in-group and thereby creating a negative picture of the outgroup (Jaspal et al 2020, Martiny and Rubin 2016, de Hoog 2013). Together, those who strongly relate to being members of Bensinupproret 2.0 can negatively anchor politicians as a way to strengthen their identity and self-esteem as a member of the in-group (Bensinupproret 2.0).

There was further reasoning that *if* the money from the fuel taxes were directly used for the reconstruction of poorly managed roads or environmental improvements, there would be a greater acceptance, since it would be used for something valuable and beneficial both for rural residents and the environment.

Don't just let the money go to the treasury, aim it somewhere instead. Then I believe people would have a greater understanding and acceptance, because then it's like OK, I pay a lot in taxes. It is too much, but it's for a good cause. (IP7)

There was a desire for a transparent display of where one's money is put, to be sure that it is used for good and valuable purposes. Purposes that the taxpayers can either benefit from, or at least see that the money funds purposes it was intended for. The fuel tax, for instance, is instituted to reduce emissions to benefit the climate. If the tax money was aimed for climate positive functions it could, as the interviewees claim, be more accepted as it could be used for other environmental purposes as well. Knowing that one's money paid in taxes is being used for socially benefitting activities increase one's self-esteem, as it could contribute to one's sense of worthiness (Tyler and Smith 1995).

5.1.3. Unavoidable taxes

Some of the participants indicated that there would also be a difference in response to these taxes, if there were other ways to avoid them. Once again, the issue with centralised decision making comes back. Almost all the interviewees argued that there was no realistic way for them to avoid paying for fuel since no other services were available for them to be able to continue with a decent lifestyle without a car. Some also stated that they were in such an economical position that, due to the long distances to and from work, with a low income, they would not be able to save money to buy a car that emits less (or an electric car) because of how much money they must pay solely for fuel and car-related taxes. Therefore, they argued that they were in a trapped position where they could not save money to get a better car, and in turn, would have to pay even more in taxes. This aspect could further add to the perception of injustice - how one is punished and expected to change behaviour but can do nothing about it, because of one's economical position. It was also argued that the taxes sometimes made other requirements in life even more expensive, like buying groceries:

It's way more expensive to live here and to buy groceries in the local shops than to go to a supermarket in town. [...] It's the same thing there, the deliveries to the shops, if you increase the price of fuel, it will be even more expensive to shop in the local grocery stores. What do we do then? So, that's what makes you a little curious, will it work? Will we be able to stay here? (IP1)

The argument was based on that in order to save fuel, it is necessary to buy food in the local shops to reduce the amount of driving. However, in the local shops, it is more expensive than in city centres, so they probably would incur higher food costs than fuel costs. It was also mentioned that, due to the high fuel costs, they had to cut down on groceries and other commodities that are more environmentally friendly since they are often more expensive than other products:

I have had to stop or reduce the amount of sustainably labelled food I buy, and I have had to reduce the amount of good environmental choices I make in other respects, because there I can make a choice. (IP7)

Thereafter, the fuel taxes were not only viewed as unjust and a way for the state to receive more money, but also that they are putting some residents in a position where they must cut down on more sustainable alternatives due to an environmental tax. This understanding and anchoring of how the increasing fuel taxes may be affecting rural residents could make it seem like the taxes even lessens people's ability and willingness to act more sustainably. This understanding undermines the reason for even having an environmental tax in the first place, if it reduces the ability to make green choices in other aspects. This way of anchoring could further be a product of reducing what seems threatening by associating the taxes as ineffective, which could be a result of a coping mechanism. As explained by de Hoog (2013), a common coping strategy is the so-called biased processing, where people create perception and meaning about what feels threatening in a way that is best suitable for themselves. Making sense of the taxes as useless or counteractive could help the members feel less bad about themselves, as it puts pressure on the decision-makers instead of themselves.

5.1.4. Inattentive politicians and lack of trust for political decisions

A general belief seemed to be that most of the politicians are basing their decisions on what goals and targets they have agreed to follow, without listening to rural residents or thinking about how the process towards meeting the environmental goals will negatively affect a lot of people in Sweden. Especially for the majority of people living in the countryside, and for those who are very

dependent on their car. There was an impression that the ruling politicians have not had a systematic approach while making these decisions, instead, they have focused blindly on one aspect - reducing carbon dioxide emissions. It is because of this; they have lost the holistic perspective on how these taxes will affect those that will suffer the most consequences from them. There were impressions that the decision-making has been very centralised, and that it can only be applied to people living in larger cities or communities. The possibility to make an actual behavioural change in larger communities and cities, i.e., to drive less and use public transport more, is greater. One of the interviewees expressed a demand for politicians to broaden their minds by exploring the whole of Sweden, not just the city centres: *“Maybe the politicians should get out in the sticks to see what the reality is like”* (IP2). It is illustrated that these decisions are made by politicians who have not experienced life in the countryside at all, and therefore have based their decisions solely on their centralised view on transport and infrastructure. They argue that other rural aspects need to be considered when making decisions that will affect the whole country.

There was a further impression that the politicians who are responsible for the tax increase cannot take criticism or listen to how they could have a damaging effect on some people’s livelihoods. This aspect referred to how the deciding politicians *“put their heads in the sand”* (IP2) and either ignore or do not understand the negative aspects of the carbon dioxide taxes, which undermines the faith and reliance residents have in them. *“Most people just seem to want the power, but without the responsibility”* (IP6). There seemed to be a perception that politicians do not take rural habitants into consideration when making decisions and that they do not care about how they are affected. Not being acknowledged or appreciated can negatively affect one's sense of worthiness, which can further contribute to feelings of their identity being threatened (Stets and Burke 2014, Breakwell 2010).

Following on from this, there was also annoyance with how climate politics has changed and developed through the past years. One interviewee brought up the fact that a few years ago it was considered better to drive a diesel car instead of a car that runs on petrol, and therefore many people invested in a diesel car:

Look at those who bought environmentally friendly diesel cars a few years ago, that suddenly disappeared. Now you are not allowed to own diesel cars in principle, because it is the enemy of the world. (IP7)

Due to changes in the tax regulations in recent years, the carbon dioxide taxes are now (at the time of writing) higher if you drive a diesel car than a petrol fuelled car. This change has seemingly caused a lot of displeasure for many diesel car owners that initially bought the car because of the low taxes. Perceiving diesel

fuelled cars as something negative or even as an ‘enemy of the world’ could further enhance the emotion of being viewed as a bad person if you own such a vehicle. The drastic shift in what is considered sustainable is argued to have caused distrust towards politicians and environmental politics, which could be a contributing factor for why many car drivers are hesitant towards environmental policies. Because of the understanding that politicians have changed their agenda so many times regarding climate policies, it seems like they are not to be trusted. Once again anchoring occurs; by relating to climate decisions from the past and the results of these, people will together try to determine and make sense of how they will be affected by the newer decisions. This has resulted in the lack of trust for political decisions regarding environmental issues and transportation.

Some of the interviewees also believed that the way some politicians talk about the future of Sweden is by using empty words instead of talking about actual plans; *“They talk about how we shall be fossil-free, but they don’t know what that means” (IP3)*. There were concerns that some politicians do not have enough knowledge nor interest to dig deeper in the matter of how the fossil transition should be implemented, which seems to contribute to the distraught. Therefore, there was a demand for factual and constructive debates between all parties in this matter, to improve the situation for all involved, perhaps mostly for those who are worst affected. Some of the interviewees believed that if the ones subjected to these questions would take on responsibility for the outcomes and listen to the critiques, the result would be different. There was a belief that openness and transparency would allow for the constructive debates that are demanded, which could introduce new and improved solutions.

The mistrust in the politicians could be resulting from various anchoring and objectification processes between the members. As previously stated, the two processes occur by referencing one phenomenon with a similar experienced phenomenon or a person that symbolises a phenomenon (Höijer 2010, 2011, Jaspal et al 2014). Together, members in the Facebook group can make an understanding what is common for politicians, by linking their political work with previous mistakes or failures. The objectifications regarding specifically the environmental party in the Swedish government (Miljöpartiet) is extensive, which also is seen on many posts in the Facebook group. Some interviewees have also expressed thoughts about Miljöpartiet, in this case of how they want to completely remove motoring in Sweden:

That illustrates extremely clearly Miljöpartiet’s way of resonating, it’s wrong with motoring in general [...] They can’t see the whole picture of how things are connected, but they are just genuinely against cars in general, that’s how it feels. (IP6)

Another interviewee reflected on how much blame is put on the left-winged parties, but mostly the environmental party in the Facebook group: *“These are insults, personal insults, what they're talking about. Above all, the poor environmental party, which has not done much for either one or the other, but they really get to take a lot of stick.”* (IP5) There is a general understanding, mostly visible in the Facebook group, that Miljöpartiet is to blame for a lot, not only the fuel taxes. The (as often stated in Bensinupproret 2.0) unnecessary tax on plastic bags, increasing electricity bills and the uncertain supply of electricity due to wind power, are also things that Miljöpartiet stands responsible for. By anchoring a specific party, in this case, Miljöpartiet, for most things concerning environmental policies could simplify the understanding of the environmental tax. The tax is often represented simply as a product of the environmental party, whose members are only represented by those living in city-centres, cycle to work and have no clue about how society really works. This representation of the Miljöpartiet, as well as other political leaders and parties, could be a result of the coping strategies that both individual and in-group members have created. As Oren and Bar-Tal (2014) exemplifies, a perception of threat coming from an outgroup could result in both inter-personal and inter-group strategies. In this example, negative stereotyping and accusing of the out-group could be one of those coping strategies that have resulted in shared representations within the Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0.

5.2. Individual concerns

Six of the interviewees lived in the countryside and stated that they had either a small or no opportunity of using public transport efficiently. All of those also expressed an emotional connection to where they lived. They argued that it was a privilege and that it gave them, what some called, quality of life. Some of the interviewees also had hobbies relating to either being in rural areas or their use of fuel, which could be connected to what they identified with. The one person (IP4) that did not live in the countryside or was even being affected by the fuel taxes since the person did not have a car, had instead a very strong interest in tax politics specifically, and how they should be operated in the best way for society and a prosperous economy. One person (IP5) expressed a positive view about fuel taxes, that they were useful and indeed had nudged them to drive in a certain way to reduce fuel use, to buy cars that emit less, or similar. This person also had a strong connection to politics (over 20 years of experience) and stated that they were mainly a member of the Facebook group to try to convince and explain to the other members how fuel taxes are useful for society.

5.2.1. Interests and identification

Hobbies or interests could be regarded as identity-related practices. In terms of hobbies, some of the participants' hobbies or interests seemed to be threatened if the fuel taxes were to continue to increase. This was expressed as a great concern for some of the participants. Even though some did explain their hobbies were just hobbies, they were still considered highly important for their quality of life or life-long dream:

It is a dream I have had for many years, since I bought a house, to be able to implement the plans I have for the garden and to be able to dig drainage myself instead of paying huge sums of money for companies to do it. I am a bit like that, I like to do things myself because partly it's expensive to hire people and partly I think it's quite fun to do most things myself, where there are opportunities. (IP7)

This participant stated that due to the increasing fuel taxes, they would probably not be able to afford to move their excavator that they had invested in to pursue their life-long dream. Nor would the participant be able to help friends and family with digging, (something that was considered as troublesome since that person expressed it to be a joyful thing, to be able to help their loved ones). There was a concern about what would happen when the price had increased to a level where this person would not be able to continue with their dream. This issue could be applied to the concern of losing control over one's life, as previously described by Stets and Burke (2014). The notion of knowing that this person soon might not be able to fulfil what is described as a life-long dream could be inflicting on this person's sense of self-efficacy, and therefore be experienced as a threat towards their identity.

Another interviewee was highly concerned with how other climate policies could negatively impose on postal and delivery services. This person had worked in the business for many years and appeared to have a lot of knowledge in that area. They expressed concerns over how rapidly taken decisions over delivery services could result in damages for the whole business. They indicated that the decisions taken to reduce emissions were not thought through enough and that the focus had only been on lowering the carbon dioxide emissions. According to this person, other important logistical aspects had apparently been left out. This person also deemed this question to have a personal aspect, as they had worked with delivery services for many years and maybe incorporated their work as a part of their identity:

They are very good at seeing, just like the end of it. When there is a train coming there will be a reduced amount of carbon dioxide emissions. Yes, but partly it (the load) must be driven to the train, and it has to be driven from the train. Everything like this takes time, the train has a certain departure time. [...] It's like, I've been driving stuff like this for a while so that's why

I'm acquainted with it. I mean, the truck was standing there and waiting while I was packing and organizing the last pieces. (IP6)

If this person is identifying strongly with their work role, this person then would understand the changes within this working role as a threat towards their identity. If the working role is looked upon as something that is not good enough or needed to be improved, this person could relate it to their personality too. The person would then cope with this negativity as an attempt to minimize the threat by blaming someone or something else. The understanding of how others are wrongly making decisions of one's business could be based on biased processing, as an attempt to protect oneself by doing what de Hoog (2013) called defence motivation. Further elaborations on this aspect will be discussed under the headline 'coping mechanisms'.

5.2.2. Emotionally tied to the countryside

As stated, almost all the interviewees had a strong connection to living in the countryside. Almost all of them were born and raised in the countryside, lived there, and felt that the calmness and closeness to nature was something that they would not like to trade for anything else. One interviewee described their feeling moving back to their place of birth as the following:

It feels really good, because sometimes when I lived in the city and watched this movie about the place I grew up in, I got this feeling almost like a heartache, because I remembered that is what it's like up there. (IP2)

Others expressed an appreciation that they could live where they were living; close to the pristine and quiet wilderness. "*Of course, it's a privilege to live in the countryside*" (IP5). Some also expressed that the geographical point of their upbringing, as well as the relation to both nature and animals, had influenced their interest in both rural issues and environmental questions, among other things. Most of the interviewees had a strong emotional relation to the countryside.

This emotional connection with the countryside could relate to what the participants identify themselves as. If a person considers oneself to be a countryside person, or someone that has relations to the countryside, they will feel good about themselves when they can express or uphold their connection to nature in different ways. Seemingly, the feeling of being a worthy person would be even greater if others expressed appreciation for aspects that one considers as a large part of one's identity (Stets and Burke 2014). On the contrary, there is a risk that these people could feel less worthy as a person if their interest or lifestyle is considered as something less important or inconvenient to others. This aspect could be related to what was previously stated in 'societal concerns'; how some

considered the taxes as a punishment for their way of living. The notion that the tax is a punishment for one's lifestyle can further affect one's self-esteem and sense of worthiness, which could launch the creation of coping mechanisms (Tyler and Smith 1995, Breakwell 1988, Jaspal et al 2020). What could be argued to be a coping mechanism is how the interviewees (that live rurally) portray where they are living. While some expressed that it is a privilege to live where they are living, others stated they were being punished with this tax due to where and how they were living. Focusing the guilt on where one resides could be an intrapsychic strategy to avoid or diminish the feeling that it is oneself that is wrong or should somehow change.

5.2.3. Family role and a stressful society

Almost all the participants brought up the aspect of how stressful society is today, that our society has changed the last couple of decades and therefore a car is now a necessity to manage the work-life balance. The focus was especially put on family concerns; how else would you be able to take your children to their exercises or leisure activities and also be able to get to the gym and meet your family, if you do not have a car? Even though a few of those who mentioned this aspect with the stressful family life did not have young families themselves, it was still stated as a given fact that parents *do* drive their children everywhere. That is the perceived way a family works currently; *“Children are transported here and there and everywhere. [...] I mean, a lot of people have so many activities, it’s a stress in the whole society.” (IP1)* There was a general understanding that the role as a parent involves driving children around to different activities, for example. Another shared understanding was that people have so many activities these days, which require a car as a means for transportation. Some argued that the family aspects are so important, that restricting a person's ability to keep in contact with loved ones is almost inflicting on what should be treated as a civil right:

And it should not matter if you are retired and may have 10,000 after tax a month. You must be able to have your car and drive and visit your children. I think it's almost a human right, isn't it? Because I believe that fuel, is a necessity, and then you should not have a lot of tax, but it should be as cheap as possible. (IP3)

The question then arises, how does it affect people that deem the possibility as a parent to drive your children to activities as part of the parenting role? How does it affect people to not be able to meet with family members or other loved ones as much as you would, emotionally? Whether or not it is an understanding of how increased taxes could affect your life in the future or if this is a real consequence that is affecting individuals right now, it can still affect you mentally. This aspect could be highly related to self-esteem and self-worth. The notion of not being able to meet your loved ones as you would want will most likely affect your self-

esteem negatively if maintaining the relationship is something that makes you feel valuable. If a person will not be able to meet the social and personal expectations for the role they identify with, both self-esteem and self-efficacy will be negatively affected (Stets and Burke 2014). Hence, the understanding of how increasing fuel taxes will limit one's ability to maintain important aspects of one's identity and could be defined as a threat, as it puts the control over one's live and worthiness in uncertainty. Thus, resonating about how the fuel taxes are inflicting on what is argued as human rights could be indicated as a coping mechanism. By making sense of reuniting with one's family as a human right, the faulty behaviour is then understood to lie with the decision-makers (as they have decided to inflict on human rights), instead of oneself. This understanding of who is to blame will then reduce the threat towards one's identity.

5.2.4. Future concerns – societal, environmental, individual

Some participants expressed concerns over what the future will be like. As previously stated, some were worried that they would not be able to either continue to live where they are living or work where they are currently working, for example. Attention was also aimed towards the state of the environment. All the participants said that it was clear that the climate is changing. However, there were different opinions regarding how much they (in northern Europe) will be affected by it, and how much Swedes are contributing to climate change comparing to other countries. Nevertheless, it appeared that all those interviewed expressed that it was an important matter which could affect our future. Other concerns were also expressed regarding how today's society is so fragile, and that movements like Bensusinproret 2.0 or the Yellow Vests show an example of the dissatisfaction in different parts of our society. This concern was elaborated to be about how society has become more and more polarized, and therefore (as previously stated in 'societal concerns'), it is more important than ever that politicians start investing in constructive discussions. *"You cannot have any confidence in, you cannot trust a democracy when you have representatives who sit and talk over each other's heads, who sit and shout at each other"* (IP6). There were arguments that politicians, as well as the media, should take responsibility in partaking in fruitful and respectful debates instead of having arguments or discussions where *"they end up in the sandbox"* (IP2), like kids fighting for their toys.

Examples were further brought up about how the US, among other countries, has become polarized the past couple of years, and the fact that similar events could happen in Sweden if we are not careful or attentive enough. One interviewee expressed that *"there is something smouldering everywhere in society, and that's not good, because things can happen"* (IP1). This general concern over the future

of our society was not restricted to solely fuel taxes or the Facebook group, but other political processes that contribute to insecurity. The uncertainty of what the future might hold could have an impact on the sense of self-efficacy, which could cause or at least contribute to internal distraught and worry regarding the stability of one's identity. The internal worry about the state of society could further contribute to the search for a group where one can feel belonging, to diminish some of the threatening aspects. This aspect will further be discussed under the headline 'coping mechanisms'.

5.3. Coping mechanisms

5.3.1. Reproducing representations

According to the interviewees, one of the main reasons why some joined the Facebook group was to see how other people are dealing with the issue: *"It was simply pure curiosity, about what is being discussed. You want to keep up with what people think and believe."* (IP1) There was a need to see how others are dealing with the situation and what they think of it - to gain insights and understandings in how the increasing taxes could affect oneself. Joining the Facebook group could also be a way of coping with what one believes is threatening. According to IPT, a common coping strategy is to seek affiliation with others that share your belief and look for compassion and security (Breakwell 1988). This could for instance be the membership of a group where one's concerns and thoughts of what is worrying could reduce the feeling of a threat (de Hoog 2013, Jaspal et al 2020). This is done to make it visible that you are not alone in what you are feeling and experiencing. It could also be reduced by the fact that the activity within the social movement Bensinupproret 2.0 created, as some interviewees expressed, has had a clear effect on the political situation: *"I would say that the group has influenced national politics, you could say, in a direction that I think is good, and has brought up a debate on the table that I think has been lacking before"* (IP4)" This person stated that the topic of discussion that the Bensinupproret is pushing has not been in question in politics before. The visualisation that this group is advocating a debate of the subject that concerns many could be part of the great attraction to the group, as the notion of being part of a collective could be calming and reduce the feeling of a threat. Another member continued:

I mean, for me, it is very clear that they have raised fuel taxes every year since 1980, year after year after year. And then when Bensinupproret 2.0 came in it suddenly stopped. There are no more increases. For me, it is super clear, we have gone in and influenced, we have contributed to this change. (IP3)

This person expressed that there was a clear understanding that the Bensinupporet, along with its many members, have influenced the Swedish transport politics and that they can continue with this influence. The understanding of having joined a collective movement that not only shares your opinions but also works towards implementing your opinions could be a very effective way of reducing the threat of (in this case) increasing fuel taxes (Jaspal et al 2020).

5.3.2. Denial of unnecessary travels

When asked about how unnecessary driving could be avoided, almost all the interviewees responded that they did not make any avoidable journey. *“People do not drive for fun anymore, as far as I know. No one I know drives for fun because it's simply too expensive.” (IP7)* They also mentioned that they did not know anyone who drove their car in unnecessary ways. There were arguments that people who have a lot of money are making unnecessary journeys since they are not as troubled by the fuel taxes as others with lower income. The definition of ‘necessary travels’ was not discussed in this matter, which could have created room for misunderstanding of the definition between interviewer and interviewee. The unclear definition can also invite for discussion about what is described as necessary in one's life.

One interview participant brought up the example of meeting one's sister, how that was a necessity in your life to be able to socialize with your family. They continued:

It's nothing you can be without. Like ‘deregister the car and stop seeing your sister’. I feel like no, I don't think it should be like that. I think it is necessary. And I don't think that people's mobility should be restricted at all. It is part of society that you move around (IP3)

This person argued that mobility is a necessity, and that society is built up by citizens being able to travel. No matter the purpose, travelling is something that should not be restricted at all. As described by Murtagh et al (2011), a common coping mechanism within IPT is to reconstruct the meaning of the issue or phenomenon that seems to be threatening, to reduce the worrying aspects. By arguing that one does not make unnecessary trips, one has also confirmed that it is not possible to change one's behaviour. That is, that one should not have to be accused of making wrong decisions. By also saying that it is a human right to transport oneself and that society is based on individuals' ability to move, the problem ends up with the decision-makers instead. This way of reasoning will contribute to less pressure on oneself to change and avoid taking the blame for doing something that seems to be considered wrong by society.

5.3.3. Inaccurately targeted actions

Some of the participants expressed, in different ways, that it seemed strange to put so much effort into reducing emissions from private transportation, in relation to other issues. For example, one person believed the amount of effort put on reducing the emissions from Sweden's motoring would not make any difference in the bigger picture:

They probably see it, so to speak, only in the short term. Like 'if we increase the price, it will reduce how much you drive, and then the carbon dioxide emissions decrease with so and so much, it will be great!' If you only see it in a small perspective, it can look great. But if you look the total, it is just permille in the context, which the total constitutes. Because if you then reduce the small permille by 20%, it has not affected a bit in total. (IP6)

This person argued that even though emissions from Swedish transport will be reduced, it will not make a difference in total since other bigger countries emit more. They believed that it would be more efficient to aim resources on larger emitters, such as coal plants or other less sustainable countries etc, than to put effort into things that do not have an impact, in the end. It is described as almost an unnecessary burden to put on Swedish car drivers when other countries and individuals are emitting much more.

Another person stated that if you look at the territorial emissions, Sweden is climate-neutral due to the large forests that pick up the carbon dioxide released within the Swedish borders.

If we do not count on all these products that we import, but only look at our emissions within the country, then we are already carbon neutral today. Because our forest absorbs more carbon dioxide than we emit. It is these imports of these Chinese telephones and the Chinese television sets that make it end up at an emission level today which means that we are no longer neutral. (IP3)

And the fault, according to the interviewee, does not lie within the amount of fuel that is consumed in Sweden, the issue rather lies on the import of different goods that Swedes are buying to keep up with a certain standard. In this case, effort should be put on the way we consume, instead of our way of transporting ourselves.

A third person also felt that other peoples' travel behaviours have changed radically in the past decades, specifically looking at the travels conducted via aviation. This person argued that it is way too easy and cheap to fly nowadays, and indicated that those kinds of travels should be restricted even more than private car journeys:

But this thing with flying, it was something exclusive formerly, and now it's like taking the bus to the supermarket. Of course, people want to go out and travel more, I have nothing to say about that, but it has become more like "I want to, it is a human right". To manage the transport policy now, they have to look at the whole of Sweden and not just the metropolitan regions (IP2)

This person specified especially air travel because air traffic emits a lot of greenhouse gases. They also noted that continuous travelling seems to be viewed as a human right by many people, as incitement to fly often. At the same time, others, like rural people affected by increasing fuel taxes, must struggle to be able to afford to drive to their place of work. This person argued that right now the transport politics affects citizens unevenly and that a way of making it more just is to look at how to reduce the aviation traffic instead of focusing on car transports.

These three interviewees exemplify how there are other ways the reduction of emission could be done, perhaps even more efficiently than to increase the fuel taxes. Although the aspects they bring up I believe are reasonable in many ways, their reasoning could also be a way of minimizing their responsibility in the matter of transport-related emissions. By viewing and understanding others and their behaviour as more problematic than yourself, you can put less pressure on yourself to change. This reasoning could be another way to protect yourself, as it creates an understanding of how others are acting incorrectly and therefore, it is they who need to change rather than oneself.

5.4. Concluding analysis

The connection between meaning-making amongst members and individual coping mechanisms to undermine identity threats seems to be connected. Through social interactions within Bensinuppreret 2.0, the members can make sense of what seems to be threatening, by reconstructing and reproducing their coping mechanisms with others. By sharing and observing these understandings and perceptions, it is possible to help others to make meaning of, for example, how they will be affected in the future, if/how the taxes are unavoidable, and how the politicians are making the wrong decisions. By joining Bensinuppreret 2.0, people are able to accompany a community where similar experiences and opinions are shared regarding the negative aspects of fuel taxes. Being in a community with similar opinions about resisting or working against the fuel taxes, the members can feel safe to express how they are perceiving the taxes as well as able to discover how others are dealing with them.

6. Discussion – bridging to a wider context

The need for a global transition is urgent, and consequently, the need to reduce emissions from all sectors, including the private transport sector, is urgent. Thus, research on how behavioural changes can be implemented effectively is of importance (Murtagh 2011). As important is the understanding of how tools for regulating behaviour, such as taxes, are reacted upon. This study has therefore engaged in the discovery of how social representations, identity threats and coping mechanisms could be contributing to resistance towards increasing fuel taxes, through investigation of the Swedish Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0. The focus has been put on aspects beyond monetary concerns, merely focusing on questions regarding societal worries and aspects that could threaten individuals' identities. This focus has helped me to discover how shared understandings of fuel taxes can contribute to individuals' establishing of coping mechanisms, to undermine or remove the aspects of what seems to be threatening. It is concluded that coping mechanisms stemming from individual concerns could be influencing how meaning-making about the fuel taxes is conducted in the Facebook group among its many members. As this has been a qualitative study with only a few interviewees, the results cannot apply to all members within the group. Furthermore, the results of the analysis do not necessarily correspond with the reality of the interviewees, as the theory and my subjective worldview have most certainly influenced the conclusions. Therefore, one cannot assume that the results are general and true for all members of Bensinupproret 2.0. However, the results can give insights into how increasing fuel taxes can be perceived and reacted upon, by a large group of people (such as the members of the Facebook group).

Looking at the results from the interviews in this study, fuel taxes do not come across as 'encouraging', rather the opposite. As some of the interviewees expressed, the taxes are experienced as either a punishment for the way they live their life, or unjust since those most affected are the ones that cannot avoid the taxes. These reasons, among others, seem to set the stage for why the members of Bensinupproret 2.0 want to resist the taxes. These insights into how fuel taxes are perceived can be put in a larger context, more specifically resistance against environmental management in the transition towards a fossil-free society.

The role of identity protection in transition movements could be an important factor to acknowledge. As Murtagh et al (2014) clarify, the resistance to change one's behaviour could be amplified by coping mechanisms, more specifically by neglecting or avoiding phenomena that appear threatening. Consequently, other coping mechanisms that lead to group formations can amplify this resistance, such as the Yellow Vests and Bennisupproret, among others. It seems therefore important to research how smooth transitions can be optimized by including aspects of identity processes. Salmela and von Scheve (2017) conclude that there are other aspects behind the increase of right-winged groups than socio-economic factors, namely negative emotions like fear and insecurity. They argue that these negative emotions are causing resentment and anger towards various out-groups that are perceived as threatening towards one's identity. This observation could be compared to the visualisations of 'them and us' that seem to be a common understanding within the members of Bennisupproret 2.0. In addition, it was found that these feelings cause people to seek meaning and belongingness with others whom they could identify with, as a way to cope with the threatening aspects (ibid). This finding has similarities with the emotional processes that seem to occur within members of Bennisupproret 2.0, which imply that threatened identities could spark engagement to join social groups that helps reinforce one's identification.

On the other hand, it is argued by Brieger (2019) that identity and strong identification with groups and communities could increase the willingness to act within and support environmental protection. This finding goes well with IPT, as self-esteem and self-efficacy are increased when finding support from others, both group members and individuals (Stets and Burke 2014). The findings of Brieger (2019) invite reasoning on how regulations in the transport sector could encourage both rural and urban residents to behave more sustainably, in a way that could strengthen their identity instead of weakening them. As many of the members of Bennisupproret 2.0 seemingly identify strongly with the countryside, it could be investigated in which ways these identifications can be reinforced and at the same time invite for change in transport-related behaviour. Future research could thus qualitatively as well as quantitatively investigate approaches to motivate citizens to lower their traffic-related emissions without negatively affecting their identities, and instead enhance or reinforce them.

Another aspect to be considered in future research is how social media can facilitate discourses and identity processes. Adam-Troijan et al (2021) argue that social media played a great role in the success of mobilizing the Yellow Vest movement; that the use of social media platforms opened the possibility to form a group identity that could gather and involve people all over the political spectra. Additionally, another reason behind the success of the Yellow Vests is that

messages spread quickly across large populations with social media, therefore the use of social media is an important component to consider within social movements (Adam-Troijan et al 2021). Similarities between Binsicupproret and the Yellow Vests implies that the use of social media can simplify the spread of discourse and engagement within social movements. Therefore, I believe that research on the use of social media in various social movements is important. It can provide insight and understanding of how people perceive and experience the phenomena they demonstrate against, on a deeper level than what is explicitly shown. This kind of knowledge could help researchers and decision makers understand what social aspects are necessary to involve in the transition towards a fossil-free society.

7. Conclusion

In this qualitative research, I have attempted to discover how social representations and identity threats could contribute to the resistance towards increasing fuel taxes within the Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0. I have been able to communicate with several persons who have shared their different experiences and understandings of fuel taxes and their consequences. The themes that were brought up and discussed were shared by many (sometimes all) of the interviewees. Therefore, it is assumed that at least some of the opinions and understandings have also been shared either in the Facebook group Bensinupproret 2.0 or between other social groups and constellations that the interview participants have taken part in. The results from the interviews gave insights into how fuel taxes could be understood as threatening, both socially and personally. Examples of how the taxes are perceived as punishing for a faulty lifestyle, and how they are unjust for many people that appear to not have a choice regarding driving has been brought up. On a personal level, there were concerns regarding the possibilities for people to continue with their hobbies, keeping up with what is expected from certain roles, and a general worry about the future. All these worries were anticipated as threatening towards the members, and therefore discussions of what could be assumed to be examples of coping mechanisms towards the threatening aspects have been made. It is assumed that members of the group have created understandings of fuel taxes that fits best with their identity structures as a way to undermine elements that are worrying. It is further assumed that joining the group as well as putting the out-group in a bad light could enhance their self-esteem and identity. It appears that Bensinupproret 2.0 has created an opportunity for its members to share and gain information on fuel taxes. This has allowed the members to further create, change or strengthen their perceptions of the taxes, as well as to feel membership and belonging with a group, as a way to increase their self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Through social representations, individual coping strategies and thought systems can be reproduced within and between individuals, for example, between members of Bensinupproret 2.0. As previously stated, these mechanisms to protect identities can be applied to group-level (Oren and Bar-Tal 2014). Members of Bensinupproret 2.0 that experience similar pressure and share similar beliefs could feel an association with other members in the group, which implies

that threats coming from out-groups (such as the Swedish government or political parties) could enhance coping mechanisms on a group level as well. Based on the theories of social representations and identity processes, assumptions on how the interviewees are trying to make sense and manage the threat of increasing fuel taxes have been made. It is possible that these representations have originated from both individual and shared coping mechanisms; by creating an understanding of how the threats from increased fuel taxes should be reduced, new representations of fuel taxes can be created, some of which have been described in this essay. Hopefully, these observations can contribute to the understanding of why these types of resistance movements occur and how they can gain such a large following. Last but not least, I hope it can give insights into how the roles of self-efficacy and self-esteem can play in a changing society.

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