



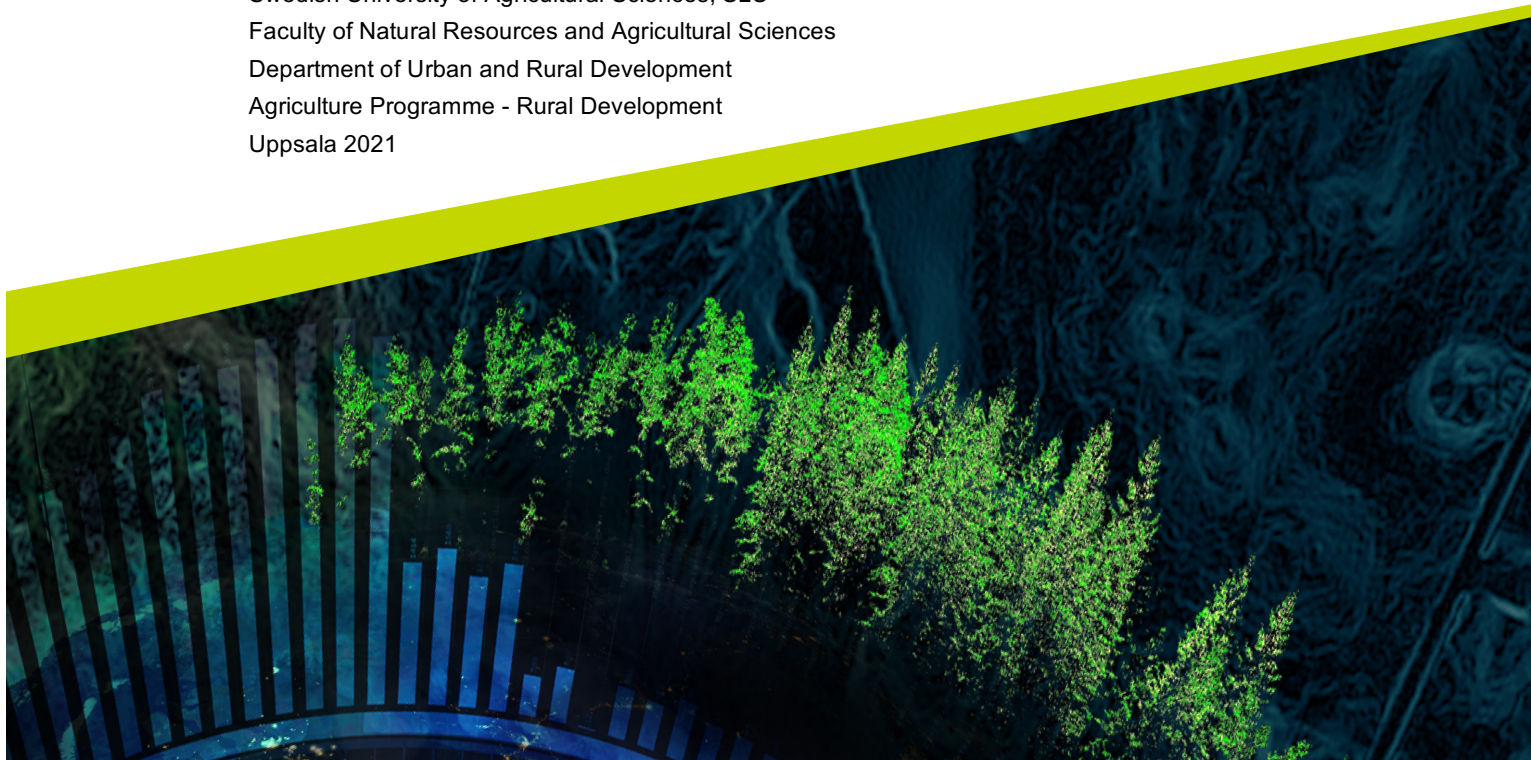
Between the lines

– a policy analysis of the European Green Deal
and its portrayal of rural areas

En policyanalys av EU:s gröna giv och dess porträttering av landsbygd

Viktor Botvidsson

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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development
Agriculture Programme - Rural Development
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Viktor Botvidsson

Supervisor:	Kjell Hansen, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development
Examiner:	Örjan Bartholdson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development
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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

Department of Urban and Rural Development

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Abstract

This thesis takes its starting point in the European Green Deal – the European Union’s new strategy towards a climate neutral union by 2050. It includes the overarching aim to combat climate change and environmental degradation, and will affect the major parts of EU’s political agenda for the upcoming decades. In terms of being a policy aiming for combatting climate change and support further economic growth, it constitutes a framework and a foundation that will define and direct the political work towards national, regional and local management levels throughout the entire EU for a long time to come. With this in mind, this thesis is aiming for an understanding of policy problems in the European Green Deal: how they are presented and what presuppositions that underlines statements and measures. In order to investigate how different geographical areas are mentioned in the policy initiative, an additional aim of the thesis is to investigate how rural areas are mentioned and described in relation to different aims and objectives. Based on a policy analysis combined with analysis of language, the press release of the European Green Deal reflects a discourse where climate and environmental measures are based and dependent on economic growth, while there also is a distinction made between rural and urban environments in terms of aims and functions. This becomes clear in the light of how urban contexts to a larger extent are associated and mentioned with explicit objectives and formulations, while rural areas thru implicit problem representations are described as a natural resource in need for adaption in order to contribute to a green transition. The analysis also shows how the European Green Deal correspond to older policy perspectives presented by the European Commission, which in turn creates a foundation for questioning formulations that emphasizes the European Green Deal as something *new*. Instead, the policy strategy can be linked to policy perspective based on ecological modernization theory, which is reflected by how measures and objectives are constructed in order to combine growth, social development and climate measures.

Key words: The European Green Deal, problem representations, language, rural areas, discourse

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1. Introduction

In December 2019, the European Commission presented a new policy initiative called *The European Green Deal*. It is presented as an action plan dedicated to combat climate change and environmental degradation, with the overarching objective to achieve a climate neutral EU by 2050. The initiative is considered to be one of the most ambitious projects presented by the EU so far and will have a great impact on the major part of EU's political agenda for the upcoming decades, including the ambition to stimulate private and public investments into a green transition equivalent to just over 1 trillion euros over the upcoming ten years. Some of the policy initiatives within the European Green Deal is a new climate law, that bounds European societies, businesses and the industry sector to contribute in the combat against climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gases. In addition, it contains ambitions to transform the EU economy to be based on circular flows and reuse, combined with new consumer rights that emphasizes recycling and repair of products and materials. Since the European Green Deal also is presented as a new growth strategy, an overarching aim is to achieve sustainable growth and job opportunities throughout the European Union. Considering the scale of the initiative combined with its expected impact on a national policy, it becomes relevant to analyse measures and objectives since they constitute, define and affect opportunities and limitations in policies at a national, regional and local levels the years to come.

No matter how policies are constructed in terms of measurements and objectives, an inevitable effect and risk is that *someone* or *something* is overlooked. This is a phenomenon that often occurs in relation to how policies cater for certain interests, groups and places, which in turn often are based in specific values, assumptions and worldviews. With this in mind, this thesis will focus on how rural areas, in form of geographical locations as well as homes for people, are portrayed in the European Green Deal, with the overarching aim to identify what kind of values and assumptions that underlies the portrayal of rural areas and their characteristics. There are almost as many definitions of rural areas as there are places that can be defined as "rural", which emphasizes the absence of a general definition. Some of these definitions are associated with the use of land, some are more or less monuments of a bygone era, and some are thriving idylls which have managed to

adapt towards postmodern ideals. But what they do have in common tends to be their role as periphery; something out of the normal, illustrated by an urban interpretive precedence in politics, culture, media and as a part of a number of other societal phenomena. With that said, the European Green Deal can work as an example of how this tendency potentially is reproduced by seeking and problematizing its problem representations, objectives and the language which construct the policy. Since the initiative is presented during a time of crisis, both in the light of a climate- and environmental crisis but also during a pandemic, analysis of the European Green Deal can reveal and identify political visions about the future and what kind of role the “periphery” is given within these objectives.

1.1. Aim and research questions

Since the European Green Deal can be regarded as a new policy with potentially large impacts on the European societies and their different decision levels in Europe, this thesis will focus on objectives and measures that are presented in the press release of the initiative. By conducting my research based on a policy analysis, the research will centre around implicit meanings, problem representations and presuppositions that occurs in relation to what is presented in the document, with the aim to draw conclusions about how rural areas are portrayed in the European Green Deal.

With that said, the aim of this research is to explore and create an understanding of the European Commission’s main objectives regarding the European Green Deal in order to reveal how rural areas are placed and presented within the initiative. To do this, I will use the following guiding questions:

- By analysing policy objectives and measures – what problem representations can be identified?
- What assumptions and presuppositions are reflected in the press release of the European Green Deal?
- Which functions are applied to rural areas?

1.2. Thesis outline

The thesis and its outline will be based on the three above-mentioned research questions. In order to explore and identify the aims of the European Green Deal, its problem representations and the role rural areas are given in the initiative, the research is based on my own interpretations of the document that makes up the press release of the European Green Deal. What follows in the next section is a presentation of the theoretical and methodological choices that constitutes my analytical tools which guides me throughout the research. Thereafter, a brief introduction to the European Green Deal and its main content in terms of aims and policy areas are presented within the frames of a background section. In the centre of the thesis there are three chapters that constitutes the analysis: (1) *The written language and its meanings*, (2) *What is meant to be solved?* and (3) *How rural areas are constructed*. The main idea of these chapters is to illustrate how language and choice of words reflects and reproduces discourses, what kind of policy problems that the European Green Deal is supposed to solve, and at last how rural areas are portrayed and given specific functions in relation to the implementation of the initiative – presented in that order. The thesis will end up with a chapter dedicated to conclusions, where overarching interpretations of my analyses are presented together with the main phenomena that have occurred during the analysis.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

The following section is dedicated to the theoretical and methodological choices which this thesis relies on. The empirical data is based upon interpretations of the press release of the European Green Deal, which was presented by the European Commission in December 2019. With consideration to my guiding questions, the analysis is centred around understandings and interpretations of problem representations, presuppositions, assumptions and hidden messages regarding the initiative's aims and descriptions of rural areas and their role within this political project. To conduct this research, I have chosen to use theoretical approaches and concepts presented by Carol Bacchi (2009) and Norman Fairclough (2013), which together constitute a combination of discourse analysis and linguistic studies. In this way, the essay aims to create a greater understanding of presupposed truths and implicit meanings embedded in the document, but also to provide an opportunity to conduct a policy analysis applied on policy initiatives such as action plans and political programmes in the European Green Deal (cf. Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000).

2.1. What's the problem represented to be?

Within the frames of conducting a discourse analysis, language and the written word becomes vital. By categorisations and formulations, words create meanings and thereby also constructs what can be interpreted as the reality (Bergström & Boréus, 2012). This also explains why discourse analysis is a suitable way of analysing policy documents with the aim to reveal implicit and explicit meanings relevant to those who are affected by the policy in question. Since this thesis is based on the initiative of the European Green Deal, combined with the idea of seeking an understanding of its content in relation to rural areas, it becomes suitable to use a method such as discourse analysis which is customized for analyses of text. As mentioned above, it enables both the analysis of the written language as well as the meanings it might implicate (*ibid*). Discourse analysis can be conducted in several different ways. With regard to my research aim I have chosen Carol Bacchi's (2009) way of analysing policies as a theoretical and methodological

framework called *What's the problem represented to be?* (WPR) – a form of policy analysis. In her own words, Bacchi explains her way of conducting analysis of policies from a perspective that can be described as thinking backwards: by analysing policies based on what is presented in a policy document, you can reveal problem representations made by its authors (ibid.). In other words, you can reveal how problems are being made and constructed by the policy makers behind the European Green Deal, by analysing the suggested measures, visions and goals within the initiative. Other starting points which characterise the use of Bacchi's policy analysis, is the presumption that policy includes a cultural dimension since it takes place in a certain context (Rönblom, 2014). In addition, policies always contain a demand for some kind of change and implied problems that are supposed to be solved; problems you as a researcher want to reveal - also explained as a will to make implicit problem representations explicit (Bletsas & Beasley, 2012). Furthermore, the idea of conducting a policy analysis based on Bacchi's WPR approach is not to determine whether a policy is good or suitable enough, but to reveal what kind of assumptions the policy in question is based on. To conduct the WPR analysis, the thesis will partly be based on six questions presented by Bacchi (2009), which are used to highlight implicit and explicit problem presentations and their meanings within a policy. These questions are:

1. What's the 'problem' represented to be?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How/where is this representation of the 'problem' produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

2.2. Critical discourse analysis

Since the European Green Deal is presented in form of a press release, words and language become vital theoretical tools in relation to phenomena that are hidden in the written language, and how it creates patterns in terms of power and power relations (Bergström & Boréus, 2012). Due to the fact that the European Green Deal is a new initiative, there is a lack of previous research around it. However, the use of critical discourse analysis is a common method when it comes to analyse policy documents such as the European Green Deal (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With this in mind, a critical discourse analysis enables me to conduct my study based on scientific

principles despite the absence of previous research. To be able to investigate the written language in the European Green Deal, the thesis will contain theoretical perspectives presented by Norman Fairclough (2013) and his tools for conducting a critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA). CDA reflects a social constructionist way of understanding and analysing discourses as linguistic phenomena which lack the ability to describe the reality in natural and objective terms. Though, language still plays an important part in the construction of social relations and identities. Thus, social phenomena can be explained in terms of a *discursive practice*, since nuances in dialectal statements implicate categorizations, ideology and expressions of power (Keman & Woldentorp, 2016). Fairclough (1997) is discussing five starting points for conducting an analysis based on CDA. As mentioned, the first step concerns a starting point where language and the production of texts are seen as a social practice where identities and social relations are constructed. Secondly, discourses are seen as something that both creates and reflects social structures. Moreover, the third starting point includes that CDA needs to be conducted empirically in a social context. The fourth starting point is emphasizing that discourses always includes an ideological aspect, where language reflects hierarchal divisions of the world or a certain context. The last and fifth starting point contains the assumption that CDA always contains a critical perspective, due to its aim to reveal, change and challenge the discursive practice in question (ibid).

All these starting points can be summarized in a “three dimensional model” according to Fairclough (2013), which in turn can be used in order to conduct studies based on CDA. The first step includes analysis of the text itself: the linguistic features, grammatical choices, formulations and choice of words - the structure of the text and its characteristics. Thus, it is possible to substantiate findings related to discursive features and expressions. Speaking of discursive features, the second step in the three-dimensional model implicates the analysis of what can be described as ‘production and consumption’ of the text in question. It is used to understand to what extent and in what way a text is producing new discourses, as well as the reproduction of already existing discourses – for example by putting it in relation to other similar texts. The last and third step is called ‘social practice’, which refers to analysis of texts at a norm level: analysis of social structures, norms and standards of the society (ibid). By conducting my thesis based on a critical discourse analysis with inspiration from Fairclough together with a policy analysis based on Bacchi’s WPR approach, enables an analysis where language is analysed from two different perspectives: both as a social practice that constitutes the reality by words and formulations, but also as a reflection of underlying assumptions and presuppositions in relation to what is presented as policy.

2.3. Theoretical concepts

Since this thesis is based on a policy analysis combined with a critical discourse analysis (CDA), *discourse* as a concept becomes vital. It refers to a specific way of speaking, made up by ideas, concepts, arguments and questions in a certain context (Lyons & Cole, 2021). It can also be described as a definite way of talking about and understanding the world. Discourse analysis in turn, can be described as the method you use to reveal this specific ways of speaking, which in turn can reveal patterns of how the reality is constructed in terms of what we are able or not able to do, as well as what we know or not know (Fairclough, 1995). Since language and words play a crucial part in the analysis of a policy document such as the European Green Deal, Fairclough's discussions about *affinity* and *modality* are used to explain linguistic phenomena such as a speaker's way of hiding doubts and uncertainties in words, but also to what extent a speaker commits in relation to what is said (Sulkunen & Törrönen, 1997:43-69). Another concept proclaimed by Fairclough is *intertextuality*, a concept referring to how texts tend to be built on other texts (ibid). Moreover, one of the main concepts that can be linked to the use of CDA is *social practice*, which illustrates how language can be seen as a social phenomenon that constructs what can be interpreted as reality. An overarching aim with this thesis is also to analyse and dissect how problems are being made in the European Green Deal. This will be expressed by using Bacchi's (2009) *problem representations*, where questions are raised in order to explain what kind of background knowledge that characterizes claims, statements and measures in a policy document. Finally, *power* and *power relations* will occur as theoretical concepts, referring to how formulations and measures in the European Green Deal reflect an expression of power as well as institutional relationships (Fairclough, 2013). Each of these concepts will be further explained in the forthcoming chapters: *discourse*, *modality*, *affinity*, *intertextuality*, *problem representations*, *social practice* and *power*.

2.4. Method

As mentioned briefly earlier, this thesis is based on analyses of the press release of the European Green Deal, with the aim to create an understanding of its problem representations, the mentioning of rural areas and their role in the implementation of the initiative. The method can be described as a text analysis based on principles associated with qualitative research such as: the use of natural settings, where the key instrument for data collection is yourself, inductive and deductive data analysis and the use of multiple sources of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This put together, has made it possible for me to gain in-depth understanding and knowledge of specific phenomena encountered during my research, as well as opportunities to work inductively by looking for patterns, categorizations and themes which

together can illustrate and explain certain phenomena I have been able to identify. Also, the combination of qualitative research perspectives and text analysis coincides with the opportunity to conduct a case study (ibid).

By doing a case study applied on the European Green Deal, I have been able to form my study with the aim of finding a deeper understanding of its problem representations and how rural areas are portrayed in relation to main objectives in the initiative. Also, case studies include the opportunity to adapt your research in a flexible way depending on your findings, but also to conduct your research during a predetermined and limited amount of time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Another aspect of conducting my research based on a case study, entails the possibility to identify and collect data which in turn, depending on its content, can guide me in what theories and theoretical tools that are suitable to express and explain phenomena identified by my research (Yin, 2006). In that way, in the meantime, I have been able to adapt my findings in the European Green Deal towards appropriate theoretical perspectives. Thus, this has been vital in order to identify phenomena and data that have emerged during my research and which have been crucial in relation to my research questions. This put together, has created a study based on empirical data where my own impressions, perceptions and conclusions combined with my theoretical concepts works as the main tool for data collection.

With regard to my theoretical choices represented by Carol Bacchi and Norman Fairclough, they implicate that boundaries between what can be seen as theory on the one hand respectively method on the other, becomes hard to separate. Both are presenting ways of conducting research that can be described as a combination of theory and method, which can and should be used in both ways (Fairclough 2013: Bacchi, 2009). Thus, the thesis will be conducted in a way where Bacchi's WPR approach and Fairclough's CDA approach are applied both as method and a theoretical starting point. Fairclough's (2013) way of conducting a critical discourse analysis is characterized by discursive reasoning and uses of language, as well as methodological guidelines for how the research can be conducted. This can be illustrated by the five starting points for conducting a critical discourse analysis presented in the theory section above, together with Fairclough's three-dimensional model which in this case includes:

1. Analysis of a text itself – the press release of the European Green Deal.
2. Discursive practice – focus on the authors and how the text is used.
3. Social practice – consequences linked to how the document is formulated.

What this three-dimension model can be seen as, is a combination between theoretical concepts such as social and discursive practice, together with methodological considerations. Also, the link between Fairclough (2013) and my method can be expressed through the nature of CDA, which is reliant on analysis of communication and texts: criteria met by my analysis of the policy document which the press release of the European Green Deal relies on (Keman & Woldentorp, 2016). The same reasoning can be applied to Carol Bacchi (2009) and her WPR approach, since it brings methodological choices of how policy analysis can be conducted, while it also brings theoretical perspectives focusing on discourses and problem representations. In methodological terms, it implicates studies of one or several policies. In this case, the policy is represented by the European Green Deal and its policy initiatives, aims and objectives. It also entails studies of the written language, which applied on the European Green Deal means that I as a researcher must rely on my own interpretations of the written word (ibid). Even if the policy document in full has been in focus for my analysis, some policy areas in the European Green Deal have been more relevant than others with regard to my research aim. That is why policy areas concerning circular economy, energy, a just transition and policy initiatives related to the protection of biodiversity have become important in relation to the thesis emphasis on rural areas. In addition, this has been combined with analysis of the overarching ambitions and formulations in the European Green Deal, in order to determine what kind of role rural areas are associated with according to the European Commission – the initiator of the European Green Deal.

2.4.1. Me as a part of the study

Since this is a thesis where I as a researcher is central in order to collect empirical data, it includes the inevitable presence of my own subjective claims and conclusions (Bergström & Boréus, 2012). These can in turn be seen as a reflection of myself, since it is my frames of references that play an active part in relation to my research topic, not least in terms of how I choose to describe what I see is the “reality” and how I interpret the world. This is something that I as a researcher, as well as the reader of this thesis, must be aware of and take into account (ibid.). Also, it is relevant to address the fact that I have a relation to European Green Deal, in terms of knowledge and earlier experiences linked to a traineeship where EU policy was in the centre of the daily work. Even if it is hard to judge in what way this has affected my conclusions and the thesis in a general perspective, it is worth to address in order to overcome doubts and questionings regarding my role in the process of conducting the research that underlies the thesis – both in terms of being a researcher, but also a reader (Dean, 2017).

Due to my choice of conducting my research based on qualitative methods, it becomes hard and undesirable to deliver ‘truths’ in its proper sense as in quantitative research. The lack of numbers, statistics and measurable variables makes such claims impossible, at the same time as my subjective interpretations of the empirical data never can be defined as truths or absolute facts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Instead of seeking truths, the overarching aim is centred around the aim to shape an understanding of what is mentioned in the press release of the European Green Deal: what the text itself can tell us and how it speaks to me as a reader. Since subjective interpretations are an inevitable and integrated part of my research, it also implicates that the outcome of my findings can differ in relation to other similar studies of the European Green Deal. If so, my conclusions and claims still can be used in order to create a greater understanding of similar issues and phenomena as this thesis focus on (Bergström & Boréus, 2012).

3. Background

What follows is a brief introduction to the European Green Deal and its aims and priorities: the purposes of the initiative, what is to be achieved, the contextual background and policy areas that are included. Also, an overview of the initiative's structure is presented in order to give an overall perception about the initiative and its main objectives and measures.

3.1. A political initiative towards 2050

In June 2019 the European Council adopted a new strategic agenda over the coming five years. One of four identified priorities in the strategic agenda was a need for measures dedicated to climate change and a future Europe that is climate neutral by 2050 (European Council, 2019). When the new European Commission got in place in December 2019, the new president Ursula von der Leyen addressed the policy package called 'the European Green Deal' in order to respond to climate and environmental priorities identified by the European Council. Since the European Green Deal is a policy initiative which spans several decades, there are still room for minor changes in relation to objectives, measures and visions that are presented until now, spring 202. Thus, it is not a static policy. Instead it will, to varying degrees, change throughout the time. To date, the only policy document that describe the European Green Deal in full, is the press release of the initiative presented by the European Commission in December 2019, which in turn implicate that my thesis relies on this document. This also means that references in the thesis such as 'the initiative', 'the European Green Deal' or 'the policy initiative' – hereafter refer to this very press release from 2019.

Partly, the initiative should be seen as a way to replace the 'Europe 2020 Strategy' that was presented in 2010, which aims has been to get EU out of and recover from the financial crisis in 2008, including measures and goals striving for sustainable growth (European Commission, 2010.). However, there are several differences between the European Green Deal and the Europe 2020 Strategy. First of all, the European Green Deal is much more comprehensive and covers more policy areas than the Europe 2020 Strategy; in total nine policy areas. Moreover, the European

Green Deal aims for 2050 and beyond, which emphasizes the initiative as long-term strategy compared to the Europe 2020 objectives (European Commission, 2019b). Something that has not been intended as a similarity between the two initiatives, but which nevertheless has become a reality, is the fact that they both interact with one or several societal crises in some form. Due to the pandemic, the European Green Deal has been adapted to fit a new reality where Europe is facing both a health crisis and an economic crisis. Simply described, the changes that have been made consist of larger financial support from the EU in terms of loans and contributions, which can and should be combined with measures and goals within the European Green Deal, in purpose of combating the ongoing crises and pave the way for a sustainable recovery.

3.1.1. Priorities and aims

The European Green Deal can be described as a policy package, or an action plan, filled with measures and political initiatives with the overarching aim of making Europe climate neutral by 2050 (European Commission, 2019). To meet this goal, the European Commission has focused on the importance of cutting emissions, for example by the implementation of a new climate law that bounds European actors from the public and private sector and the European society generally, to undertake action towards climate change and the vision of a climate neutral EU by 2050. In addition, there is a new climate target under way for 2030, with an expected CO₂ emission reduction goal of 55 % until 2030 based on 1990's emission levels (Taylor, 2021). Added to this, there is a large number of measures presented within a wide variety of policy areas such as the transport and energy sector, which together are aiming for the reduction of greenhouse gases and emissions throughout the whole EU. Furthermore, there is a big focus on environmental aspects in terms of biodiversity, overexploitation of natural resources and the assurance of sustainable food systems (European Commission, 2019).

According to the European Commission, the initiative will also work as the EU's new growth strategy with the aim to accelerate a transition into what is described as a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy that cooperates with the long-term goal for climate neutrality (Regeringskansliet, 2020). An outspoken goal and vision of the European Green Deal is also the long-term goal of 'decoupling economic growth from resource use' (European Commission, 2019). To mention some of the suggested measures within this area that are expected to fulfil these purposes, the strategy of turning EU's economy into a circular economy is a great example. The strategy builds on the ambition to, in larger extent, to create recycling systems that can pave the way for a drastic reduced use of resources, combined with measures promoting non-fossil products and materials. To mobilise resources into the transition, the European Green Deal is customized to support and stimulate

public and private investments in line with the initiative, which in turn can create jobs and a ‘competitive European economy’ (ibid). In the press release of the European Green Deal, there are also objectives that coincides with social aspects as a part of the policy package. For example, it is an outspoken goal to achieve a green transition where ‘no one is left behind’. This formulation can be related to measures such as the ‘Just Transition Fund’, which financially will support regions and places around Europe where the transition might have greater and more difficult impacts on the local economy (European Commission, 2019). Also, one of the priorities is to protect and secure the health and wellbeing of the EU citizens, including the access of healthy food, clean and non-toxic environments, labour rights and improved consumer rights. Last but not least, the European Commission strongly emphasizes the importance of a just and inclusive transition where citizens and stakeholders are given space to influence and be a part of the implementation (ibid).

3.1.2. Overview and policy areas

In terms of actions, there are several policy areas that are emphasized by the Commission. In total, there are nine different policy areas that the European Commission (2019) has identified as crucial in the implementation of the European Green Deal – which still is at an early stage. However, each policy area is followed by a strategy or an action plan which defines and concretizes measures and goals within each policy area, which in turn also will work as a foundation for upcoming legislations and strategies. Each policy area, including associated strategies, contains actions such as legalisations proposals, investment initiatives and calls towards the 27 member states.

European Green Deal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A zero pollution Europe • Preserving Europe’s natural capital • Sustainable transport • Achieve climate neutrality • Transition to a circular economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm to fork • Towards a green CAP • Take everyone along • Funding the transition

Figure 1. ”European Green Deal”

As shown in *Figure 1*, the policy areas that makes up the foundation of the European Green Deal are a decarbonised energy sector, the long-term goal of a climate neutral EU by 2050, green mobility, biodiversity, elimination of pollutants, a clean and circular economy, sustainable food systems combined with a sustainable agriculture policy in the EU (CAP) and finally the overall goal to ‘take everyone along’. Depending on which fact sheet or policy document you take part of, sustainable construction and renovation sometimes is defined as a policy area in

its own right as well, while it sometimes is included within the already mentioned areas. As the figure also illustrates, there is an overarching goal of mobilizing resources by public and private sectors that can fund the transition and the particular aims and measures within each policy area (ibid.). Since this thesis will focus on rural areas and their position in relation to the European Green Deal there are some policy areas that have more relevance than others. Even if all policy areas concern all parts of the society, there are mainly three areas that can be identified to have clear and traditional connections to rural areas and typical definitions of rurality. These three areas can be considered to be the transition into a circular economy, the emphasis on sustainable food and agricultural systems, and finally the overarching goal of a just and socially inclusive transition. To some extent, the transition into a decarbonised energy system can be considered as well, due to the connection to natural resources which tends to be suited in rural contexts.

3.1.3. Policy processes in the EU

Since this thesis centres on a policy document which is a product of policy processes in the EU, there are some EU institutions that need to be mentioned here. Simply put, there are mainly three EU institutions that are vital within decision-making processes in the EU: The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union (also known as the Council of Ministers), constitute the legislative bodies of the EU (Best, 2016). The Commission is the executive branch of the European Union and is responsible for legalisation proposals, implementation of made decisions and works, simply put, as a form of “government” in the EU. In addition, the Commission is also responsible for taking recommendations from member states, civil society and the EU parliament into account within policymaking processes. The European parliament, which is the only directly elected institution among the EU institutions, share the responsibility to review, make suggestions, approve and reject law-proposals together with the Council of the European Union. In order to adopt measures and law proposals, both the parliament and the council have to agree (European Commission, 2021). If we use the European Green Deal as an example, this thesis will focus on the press release of the initiative, which is presented by the Commission. In other words, the policy document which this thesis relies on is a product from the Commission. Thereby, some policy areas in the European Green Deal can still be changed depending on recommendations from the parliament, the council and the public, while some parts and details already is adopted and under way for implementation – aspects worth noticing as a reader of the thesis.

4. The written language and its meanings

The way we speak or write, our language, is vital in the examination of discourses. Language can be seen as a constituent and constituted form of power that defines and determines how we perceive the reality (Wodak, 1989). In that way, language can be described as a social practice that constitutes the reality at the same time as it is offering worldviews constructed by specific categorizations, institutional and personal relationships, politics and ideology (Fairclough, 1992). With this in mind, the following section will focus on the written language in the press release of the European Green Deal, in order to reveal hidden worldviews and meanings of contextual expressions in the policy document.

4.1. A reflection of the past

Fairclough discusses what is called intertextuality – a concept that can be used to highlight and explain how discourses are reproduced within communication and written texts. It refers to how texts tend to be based on other and similar texts, but also how old texts and written works are updated and reused in order to be relevant. It also implicates the assumption that a text never stands alone, instead it is a part of a network of other texts (Fairclough, 2013). With this in mind, intertextuality can be used in order to explain and shape an understanding of how discourses are reproduced in texts, for example in a policy document such as the European Green Deal. Since the European Green Deal partly can be described as a policy that replaces an older policy, the Europe 2020 Strategy, the ideas of intertextuality can be applied to discover similarities and the reproduction of discourses (ibid.). By looking at the introduction section of both the European Green Deal and the Europe 2020 Strategy, there are great similarities regarding aims and objectives in each policy document. Both texts are introducing its policy in relation to one or several crises: The European Green Deal is based in a context of a climate and environmental crisis, while the Europe 2020 objectives mainly have its starting point in the financial crisis from 2008 and the need for a ‘sustainable recovery’ (European Commission, 2010). In the same way as the European Green Deal, the 2020 strategy contains formulations that indicates a will to describe the initiative as something new in terms of aims and objectives, which in turn are expected to

achieve change in relation to a number of problems. Similarities that can be identified are for example how the Commission portray each document as political initiatives which are striving for something new, and where formulations such as *we must* and *is a response to these challenges* are supposed to indicate action and determination (European Commission, 2019: European Commission 2010). There are also similar problem representations with references to a need for social and economic progress, challenges following globalization and the pressure on natural resources. These similarities can be illustrated by two quotes from the introductory parts of each document:

To achieve a sustainable future, we must already look beyond the short term. Europe needs to get back on track. Then it must stay on track. That is the purpose of Europe 2020. It's about more jobs and better lives. It shows how Europe has the capability to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, to find the path to create new jobs and to offer a sense of direction to our societies (European Commission, 2010:2).

The European Green Deal is a response to these challenges. It is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use (European Commission, 2019:2).

Apart from the difference in years in the respective quote, both quotes contain almost identical meanings. Both also contain visions about economic growth that combines sustainability with 'social inclusion and fairness'. By reconnecting to intertextuality, the obvious similarities in terms of formulations and problem representations can illustrate how a discourse is reproduced in the European Green Deal, where the belief in economic growth is strong and where climate and environmental measures go hand in hand with an increased standard of living (cf. Fairclough, 1992). These claims can in turn be linked to what is called 'ecological modernization', which is an environmentally oriented discourse that emphasizes the belief to combine economic growth with a sustainable and environmentally friendly development. It can both be considered as policy strategy, as well as a theoretical view in environmental science that has been adopted by a large number of decision makers around the globe, especially in the western world (Berger et al., 2001). This policy perspective is also reflected through similarities regarding how the European Green Deal and the Europe 2020 Strategy contains a similar use of concepts. For example, concepts such as *sustainable and inclusive growth*, *competitiveness*, *smart solutions*, *climate change* and *common action* are all, with some variations, examples of how climate change and its challenges are supposed to be solved in conjunction with the aim of supporting economic growth (Dale, 2016).

In line with Fairclough's (1992) claims regarding networks of texts and how they build on each other, the above-mentioned concepts can be regarded as concrete illustrations of a reproduction of ideas and worldviews in the Europe 2020 Strategy, into what now is presented as the European Green Deal. Even if the initiative of the European Green Deal is more comprehensive, has other aims and covers more policy areas in relation to the 2020 Strategy, aims and commonly used concepts are to a large extent much alike. Conclusions that can be drawn based on these similarities, is that the European Green Deal can be regarded as a reproduction of earlier goals and visions presented by the Commission, as well as an example of phenomena that comes alive through Fairclough's intertextuality, where relations to what is written in the past very much still is alive and reused (ibid). This in turn, raises questions whether the European Green Deal can be regarded as a *new* policy direction dedicated to climate change, since it relies on ideas and objectives presented from the past.

4.2. The curse of broad formulations

As a part of doing a critical discourse analysis, especially regarding analysis of a text itself, Fairclough proclaims the use of modality. The concept is used to reveal to what extent an author, or the one who utters something, commits in relation to what is said; to what extent you choose to stand behind what is said. In relation to a critical discourse analysis, modality implicates an analysis of the certainty an expression or a claim is surrounded by (Jørgensen & Philips, 2002). To describe this phenomenon, where claims can be made by more or less certainty, Fairclough (1992) is using affinity in order to determine whether a statement is characterized by low or high affinity. Thereby, the affinity concept can be used to highlight doubts and presupposed truths within a statement or a text. In addition, modality can be divided into subjective or objective sayings. Subjective modality refers to the speaker's own claims such as 'I see' or 'I think that', in contrast to objective modality which refers to claims presented in an unquestioned way and where subjective claims appears as objective facts (Sulkunen & Törrönen, 1997:43-69).

The meanings of modality are relevant in relation to the European Green Deal and its claims and ways of presenting policy. To start with, the press release of the European Green Deal is introduced with a statement that clarifies that the content of the policy document aims to work as a communication plan from the European Commission towards decision making bodies such as the European Parliament, member states and regions around Europe (European Commission, 2019). Thereby, within this aim, there is an intention to communicate new policy initiatives that can be received and accepted by such a complex and comprehensive target group as the

most vital institutions within the EU. Even if the press release works as a way of communicating towards EU's most vital organs, the presentation of the European Green Deal is also dedicated to the European citizens, which include almost 448 million people from 27 different countries (Eurostat, 2021). This in turn, creates consequences such as a frequent use of broad and undefined formulations in the policy document in terms of claims, statements and presentations of facts. A great example of this tendency, where Fairclough's (1992) modality becomes vital, concerns formulations regarding the member states' ability to handle and respond to the transition towards a climate neutral union. As the thesis will show further on, there are formulations where the European Commission recognizes that regions, and thereby also member states, due to 'different social and geographical conditions', differs in terms of the ability to transform and contribute to a green transition – without mentioning what this actually means or what regions the policy makers refer to. This in turn, affects the impression of to what extent the Commission chooses to support and stand behind the claim about social and geographical differences between regions.

Even if the Commission omits what the definition of social and geographical changes might imply in this particular context, it is followed by explanations of how some regions and countries have limited opportunities to deliver a green transition, and where the dependence on fossil fuels and fossil resources still is an integrated part of the national and regional economy (European Commission, 2019). If we use the term modality to analyse this statement by the Commission, it appears as if the European Commission consciously is seeking for formulations that can be accepted broadly by the public and the member states. What this implicate, is the presence of vague but carefully selected formulations, embedded in a noticeable fear to express facts that might put the legitimacy towards the European Green Deal's aims and measures in jeopardy. Instead of mentioning countries such as Poland where the coal industry is big and comprehensive (Hernandez & Hernández-Morales, 2021), or rural areas where possibilities to take action are limited due to demographic, social and economic disadvantages - the policy makers create sentences with implicit meanings and associations in order to point out what they refer to, without actually mentioning it (Fairclough, 2013).

Vague formulations such as those mentioned above, embodies a tendency where it becomes almost impossible to describe and present phenomena in a way that corresponds to what can be described as the reality. According to Fairclough (2001), this can be seen in the light of power structures that exist within social institutions, which implicate that words and formulations are customized in order to avoid confrontation and risks that might put institutional relationships in jeopardy. Thus, the use of vague formulations emerges as a strategy to keep and

maintain the right to execute power. In this case, this can be applied on institutional relationships within the EU, where the Commission is the executive power in relation to other EU-institutions, countries, regions and the European citizens. It illustrates a balancing act where problem representations must be addressed, while avoiding the risk of conflicts with those geographical areas that indirectly are designated and described as weak. Furthermore, it shows how discourses in terms of worldviews and perceptions of the reality, are reproduced and manifested by formulations and words, at the same time as it reflects power relations within the European Union. The built-in power relations within the EU can also explain how discourses are structured and put in relation to other discourses; how worldviews, values and perceptions about the reality are categorized and structured (cf. Fairclough, 2001). In the European Green Deal, this becomes clear in relation to how policy areas are emphasized, where the example represented by the emphasis on ‘social and geographical differences’, embodies certain objectives and values that must be emphasized in order avoid critics and legitimacy against the European Green Deal and the Commission.

4.2.1. Commonly used terms – what do they mean?

Further examples of recurring concepts that are used frequently in the policy document are *transition*, *sustainable* and *climate*. All of them tends to be used without any further explanations or definitions. As an example, transition is mentioned 54 times in the press release of the European Green Deal. It occurs in conjunction with formulations such as: *this transition must be just and inclusive*. Another example is: *the transition is an opportunity to expand sustainable and job-intensive economic activity* (European Commission, 2019:7) Again, this illustrates how a concept is used as if there were a general definition related to transition. It is possible to argue, that measures and aims that are presented in the European Green Deal, constitutes and defines the content of the word *transition* in this very case. At the same time, the policymakers are presenting it in a way where the reader is supposed to understand ‘transition’ as something that everyone can relate to, as if it existed a general definition. Moreover, by questioning what is said in the document, transition can to a large extent be described as an adaptable concept that can fulfil different purposes and aims, and where its meanings can be customized to fit a certain context (Fairclough, 2013).

Moreover, ‘transition’ is used by the policymakers to describe politically motivated changes within several policy areas such as climate policy or growth strategies, which reflect how the concept is customized and placed in specific contexts depending on the different policy areas. Since ‘transition’ occurs throughout the policy document, but in different contexts and with different meanings, it highlights a paradox: it becomes a concept without content, but that still is used as something

self-explanatory. This can also be applied when it comes to the use of ‘sustainability’ in the policy document as well, hence it is presented as something obvious and where its meanings are left to be defined by the reader. If we go back to Fairclough (1992) and his theoretical perspectives presented in terms of modality – ‘transition’ and ‘sustainable’ illustrate how something is described as an objective fact, but as in reality are dependent on a subjective explanation; a subjective claim (ibid.). Another aspect which is presented by Bacchi (2009) concerns what she calls as strategic framing, which refer to how policies often contain formulations and concepts with open meanings, due to the ability to customize and change them in relation to political objectives and measures (Lombardo et al., 2009). Thus, this is an example of how concepts and sentences are eroded within the construction of policies.

Besides transition, the same type of arguments can be applied on the mentioning of ‘climate’ and ‘sustainable’, which are mentioned 120 and 87 times respectively. Since the Europe Green Deal is dedicated to combat climate change, it is no surprise that ‘climate’ is used in such a large extent as it is. But what is worth noting, is how climate change and climate in its own meanings, seems to be universal concepts; a concept with a defined meaning. In a way, it is possible to argue that climate and climate change refers to the changes in the atmosphere, caused by emissions, which thereby can be used as a definition. But in the press release, the effects caused by climate change are not always defined. Instead, it becomes *a* phenomenon, rather than a force of *several* effects and implications. How the concept is presented as something obvious and seamlessly can be illustrated by the following quote dedicated to the motivation of the European Green Deal’s aim:

It resets the Commission’s commitment to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges that is this generation’s defining task. The atmosphere is warming and the climate is changing with each passing year (European Commission, 2019:2).

In that way, climate change is constructed as something that all European citizens can relate to, at the same time as it is defined as *this generation’s defining task*. Since the Commission combines these statements with calls for everyone’s attention and dedication into the transition, the statement on how it constitutes our generation’s defining task can be analysed. It is possible to argue that in a more likely scenario, the calls for dedication and participation would not be needed if it concerned what the public perceived as the most defining task of our time. If we go back to the word ‘sustainable’, it follows the same pattern as ‘climate’ and ‘transition’ in terms of being undefined concepts that are used in the same way regardless of the policy area that is being discussed. There are more examples of how the Commission and the policy makers behind the European Green Deal choose to relate to the written word (cf. Jørgensen & Philips, 2002). Apart from

tendencies such as the balancing act mentioned above, which can be described as a way of creating a sense of consensus among the implementing actors of the European Green Deal, there are also other examples of modalities. One phenomenon that recurs in the written language of the initiative, is the presence of unquestioned truths and claims (ibid). Often, these claims appear in conjunction with expressions aimed for the creation of legitimacy. In line with the presentation of the European Green Deal, the Commission presents the initiative as something that will reinforce actions and policies from the past:

The EU will continue to promote and implement ambitious environment, climate and energy policies across the world. It will develop a stronger ‘green deal diplomacy’ focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share of promoting more sustainable development (European Commission, 2019:20).

With regard to Fairclough (2013) and the concept of modality, this quote can be regarded as a subjective claim made by the Commission itself, but which turns into an objective and unquestioned truth where the EU is portrayed as a successful and energetic actor within the field of combatting climate change and environmental degradation. By adding the expression *green deal diplomacy* also strengthens the overall picture of a union that takes responsibility for climate change in contrast to other parts of the world, and where the EU has a responsibility to convince and support measures which otherwise not would have been implemented.

4.2.2. When challenges are rewritten into possibilities

The very first sentence, a subheading in the introduction section of the European Green Deal, is formulated as followed: *Introduction - Turning an urgent challenge into a unique opportunity* (European Commission, 2019:1). What is meant as a unique opportunity is the transition to a climate neutral EU by 2050 – the overarching goal of the European Green Deal. It illustrates a tendency, where climate change and threats towards the environment are described as a phenomenon that brings opportunities to the EU and its citizens. Climate change and environmental challenges are described as the most defining challenge of our time, illustrated by examples such as a warming atmosphere, species in risk of being lost and oceans and forests in desperate need of help from pollution (European Commission, 2019). By using these challenges as a starting point, the introduction of the policy document turns into another story: a story where the initiative of the European Green Deal shall pave the way for something else, referring to a climate neutral union within the upcoming 30 years.

The European Commission describes the initiative as the European Union’s way to respond and answer to these challenges, at the same time as it is supposed to affect other policy areas in a positive direction as well (European Commission, 2019). By

combatting climate change, possibilities are born for solving other issues related to EU's political agenda. This becomes clear when the European Green Deal is portrayed not only as a policy package dedicated to climate change, but also as EU's new growth strategy. Within the aim of using the European Green Deal as a growth strategy, the European Commission emphasize the importance of transforming EU's economy into what is called a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy. Moreover, this is supposed to go hand in hand with social values, where European citizens and industries are encouraged and supposed to play an important part in the implementation. The vision towards 2050 also implicate values such as people's health and well-being, but also economic growth that will benefit *all* EU citizens. All in all, this can be interpreted as a phenomenon where challenges are turned into possibilities. It illustrates what Bacchi (2009) discusses in term of problem representations, how problems are being made. In his case, the European Green Deal exemplifies how problems also are a part of an agenda-setting, as well as the will to attribute policies with a narrative that emphasizes opportunities that can create the foundation to absorb legitimacy.

4.3. Power and power relations as a part of language

Since language can be seen as a social practice which defines and categorizes the reality, it also implies the construction of power and power relations. If this is applied on the European Green Deal, the policy can be regarded as the foundation for categorizations: what problems are to be solved, which actors are involved in the transition, how are roles defined and what kind of possibilities and challenges are followed by the policy in question? (Fairclough, 2001). The structure of the European Green Deal indicates a vertical view regarding how the initiative is supposed to be implemented. To start with, the initiative is presented by the European Commission, which is the executive branch of the European Union. The European Green Deal is an example of the Commission's right to propose actions and measures, which in turn must be accepted by the European parliament and the Council of Ministers in order to be realized (European Commission, 2021). The policy which makes up the European Green Deal is in turn dedicated to stakeholders and different actors on national, regional and local levels, which are emphasized continuously throughout the policy document. Within this structure, there is a built-in power relation where EU-policy is expected to be implemented from top to bottom (Buonanno & Nugent, 2013). This is also reflected in the policy document, where some parts can be considered as reflections of an interpretive precedence; an indication of how the Commission owns and creates a narrative which determines what is possible and not. For example, there are claims and statements that points out a direction for the European Green Deal and its implementation: *The*

Commission has already set out a clear vision of how to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 (European Commission, 2019:4). Another example is:

This will feed into the process of increasing climate ambition for 2030, for which the Commission will review and propose to revise, where necessary, the relevant energy legislation by June 2021. When Member States begin updating their national energy and climate plans in 2023, they should reflect the new climate ambition (European Commission, 2019:6).

In terms of power and power relations, the interesting part here concerns how the Commission presents objectives linked to the realization for the Europa Green Deal. Both quotes can illustrate how the Commission underlines its role as a dominating actor within decisions processes in the EU, while it also reflects categorizations in terms of hierarchical and vertical implementing process such as: who does what on which premises – a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2013). This coincides with Fairclough's definition of discourse as a phenomenon of power, since it implicates preconceived notions regarding how something is expected to be structured and thereby constitutes the reality. This is why a discourse, such as the vertical policy process reflected in the European Green Deal, can be seen as a phenomenon connected to power due to how it creates and governs subjects.

In addition, it is between subjects and discourses power relations becomes visible (Fairclough, 2001). If we apply this on the European Green Deal, this can be illustrated by the different stakeholders that are pointed out by the Commission to deliver a green transition in line with the policy initiative. It can be authorities on different levels, but also the European citizens in the role of being consumers, which to a large extent is central in the implementation of the European Green Deal since it relays on the intersection between economic growth and climate and environmental objectives. In that way, the European Green Deal creates the framework for what is possible and what is not – reflecting power relations and institutional relationships (ibid). Since the European Green Deal is a part of a political work and a political agenda, the presence of ideology becomes clear in different ways (Fairclough, 1992). As it will be described further on in the thesis, the European Green Deal can be seen as an expression and a discourse to defend market-based solutions and growth. One of the very first sentences in the policy document is great example of this ideological perspective:

As the world's largest single market, the EU can set standards that apply across global value chains. The Commission will continue to work on new standards for sustainable growth and use its economic weight to shape international standards that are in line with EU environmental and climate ambitions (European Commission, 2019:22).

This ideological starting point is in many ways reflected through expressions and formulations in the policy document, which in turn also creates categorizations (Fairclough, 2013). As mentioned earlier, and as a consequence linked to the defence of a growth discourse, European citizens tend to be described as consumers in the document. This can be illustrated by looking at policy areas such as the ambition to turn the EU into a circular economy, or the ambition to improve consumers' rights in relation to recycling and repairs of products and materials (European Commission, 2019). Thus, European citizens emerges to be characterised as consumers in first hand, which in turn can be regraded and an example of a categorization and what Fairclough (2013) calls social practice. In addition, the role of being a consumer, implicates that other definitions of being a citizen (in the EU) are overlooked. Instead, people are marginalized to contribute to the transition by consuming in a 'sustainable way'. There are more examples of formulations in the policy document that creates categorizations and expression of power (ibid). In line with the section above, it is possible to identify tendencies where the Commission defines and ascribes roles and problem representations linked to different phenomena. This in itself implicates power; the right to define problems and to explain how they are supposed to be solved (Elsharkawy, 2012). One example that shows how the Commission both defines and describes a problem, can be illustrated by this quote:

In particular, the Africa-Europe Alliance for sustainable investment and jobs will seek to unlock Africa's potential to make rapid progress towards a green and circular economy including sustainable energy and food systems and smart cities (European Commission, 2019:20-21).

Here, the Commission defines a need for sustainable investments by attributing the entire African continent with certain aims and 'potentials', which in turn are expected to be achieved by investments in sectors close to nature and climate issues. Above all, it can be seen as an exercise of power. These tendencies can also be applied with a European geographical perspective in mind, since the Commission ascribes different areas and places around Europe with different purposes. For example, problems linked to urban areas are to a larger extent addressed by emphases on emissions from traffic, urban congestion, improved public transport, the need for biodiversity in urban spaces and measures that support and stimulate different urban policy strategies. This can also be seen as an example of categorization, which defines problems and purposes in the particular context of urban societies (Fairclough, 2013). It also reveals how the society becomes divided into centre and periphery (De Souza, 2019), which is reflected by formulations and problem representations that separates urban and rural functions in the European Green Deal.

5. What is meant to be solved?

According to Carol Bacchi (2009), policies can be regarded as problematizing activities which can reveal implicit problem representations. She advocates a way of analysing policies that can be seen as a way of thinking backwards, where analyses of problem interventions can reveal how policy makers think and feel about a certain phenomenon. In other words, we can analyse policy measures in order to understand how a problem is being made, defined and presented (ibid). The following section will use this approach applied on the European Green Deal, with the aim to identify and shape an understanding of what kind of problems that are in the centre of the initiative – and how they are constructed.

5.1. Shortcomings of the past

As mentioned in the introduction section, policy can be seen as something that can reveal what we think regarding a specific problem. According to Bacchi (2009), ‘problems’ do not exist outside the policy process. On the contrary, the policy itself illustrates how a problem is being created by those who are conducting the policy in question. Traditionally, policy is seen as a phenomenon that responds to a problem after a need or problem has been discovered and identified. The WPR approach presented by Bacchi reverses this view of policies. Instead, policies are seen as processes which constitute a problem via problem-settings and settings of agendas, and not just an answer towards worries, threats and problems. Thus, policies can also be seen as important tools and reflections in relation to agenda settings. Problems that are presented in the European Green Deal, both in terms of implicit and explicit problems, can thereby be seen in the light of agenda settings, as well as a reflection of the assumptions and presuppositions that surround the problem in question. Regarding the European Green Deal, an overarching but implicit problem representation emerges, which concerns shortcomings of the past when it comes to combat climate change and environmental degradation. This is not expressed explicit, but still it is expressed by words and formulations that emphasizes the policy as something new (cf. European Commission, 2019). Thereby, the narrative of the European Green Deal is characterized by an attempt to establish the initiative as a new, comprehensive and ground-breaking policy

initiative, that implicitly will make up for previous shortcomings on behalf of the European Union's ways of taking action towards climate change. There are several sentences, especially in the introduction of the document, that illustrates how this becomes an implicit problem representation:

One million of the eight million species on the planet are at risk of being lost. Forests and oceans are being polluted and destroyed. The European Green Deal is a response to these challenges (European Commission, 2019:2)

The last sentence, which highlights the European Green Deal as an answer towards negative climate and environmental effects, can be interpreted as an attempt to convince the reader that this is a new initiative which is unparalleled in relation to earlier policies presented by the EU. Implicit, it also can be seen as an indication where earlier policies not have been enough in order to combat climate change and environmental degradation in a satisfying way, which in turn implicates a need for new policies that can start a new path, or a 'new beginning', regarding climate and environmental measures on the behalf of the EU (cf. Bacchi 2009). Speaking of older policies, when the European Green Deal was introduced by the new Commission and its president Ursula von der Leyen in December 2019, it replaced the Europe 2020 Strategy. At a first glance, the priorities between the two policy initiatives are quite similar regarding policy objectives. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a great emphasis on the importance of climate measures that can be combined with economic growth in both documents. This can be illustrated by a subheading at the front page of the 2020 goals saying: *A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (European Commission, 2010). In relation to Fairclough's (2013) intertextuality, inclusive growth is exactly the same type of formulation that characterizes the European Green Deal's functions as a growth strategy, which in turn highlights a fundamental similarity between the two documents.

Overall, there are several similarities between the two policy documents in terms of aims and objectives – even if they differ in terms of scope and presentations of measures. When it comes to climate change and measures against environmental degradation, there are several resembling objectives that are reflected in both documents. For example, there is even within the priorities of the 2020 goals an outspoken goal that Europe must be more energy efficient, that Europe and the Europeans must start to adapt and be prepared for a new and modern labour market characterized by lifelong learning, retraining opportunities and new green businesses (European Commission, 2019: European Commission, 2010). What this can tell, is that the European Green Deal is a further development of the 2020 goals. It also illustrates a phenomenon which can be identified as an attempt to reconstruct former policy initiatives into something that can be perceived as new.

All this put together shapes what Bacchi (2009) calls an implicit problem representation, which in this case concerns shortcomings of the past. By presenting the European Green Deal as an answer towards societal issues which still are presented as urgent, paradoxically confirms that policy initiatives from the past not has been enough, but where the European Green Deal in form of new policy is ready to tackle these issues. This can also be seen in the light of the policy areas and the measures that are suggested within each policy, since they implicitly confirm that political initiatives from the past has failed to combat challenges within each policy area. For example, by setting goals for the future such as the overarching goal for a climate neutral union by 2050 or a vision of a circular economy, it implicitly says what has not been a successful or possible a conduct until now. In that way, the European Green Deal and its content can be regarded as a reflection of the past - despite the fact that it is presented as a new policy initiative.

5.1.1. Policy perspectives in terms of a discourse

Among the overarching aims of the European Green Deal there are two objectives that are particularly emphasized: the goal to create a climate neutral union by 2050, combined with favourable conditions for continued growth. In explicit words, the European Green Deal is described as EU's new growth strategy. As mentioned earlier, an overarching objective is: *A modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use* (European Commission, 2019:2). Since these objectives are vital in terms of being problem representations in the European Green Deal, it also implicates that they are surrounded by presuppositions or assumptions (Bacchi, 2009).

In line of doing a policy analysis with inspiration from Bacchi (2009), a founding assumption is that problem representations can reveal how the understanding of a problem is expressed. In regard to this, the European Green Deal follows and embodies a discourse and a narrative where economic growth and measures towards climate action are dependent and based on each other. One of the best examples that can illustrate this is how objectives towards a circular economy is emphasized in the Europeans Green Deal, which is one of the most vital policy areas since it refers to the overarching goal to decouple resource use and economic growth. By the emphasis on a circular economy, the above-mentioned goal to create a competitive European economy that is decoupled from resource use is expected to be achieved: a policy initiative that embodies the combination of growth, climate and environmental measures. In addition, the document follows traditional perspectives on sustainability linked to the Brundtland's definition of sustainability, with three classic divisions of economic, ecological and social sustainability (World

Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). In relation to Bacchi (2009) and her way of using problem representations in order to reveal hidden assumptions, presuppositions and what she calls ‘background knowledge’, the European Green Deal relies on perspectives that are attached to typical features of ecological modernization theory (Spaargaren, 2000).

Ecological modernization can be described as a school of thoughts, an analytical approach and a policy strategy, which emphasizes that the economy can benefit from measures dedicated to climate and environmental action (Jänicke, 2007). More specifically, it contains convictions where natural resources such as wind, water, land and ecosystems create the foundation for economic growth and development in the same way as capital and labour. In addition, the belief in new ‘green’ technologies are strong, both as a source for growth as well as an important aspect in relation to climate and environmental challenges. New technologies are also assumed to fill an important function to make resource use more effective (Berger et al., 2001). These aspects and perspectives are to a high degree reflected in the European Green Deal. Besides the goal for a climate neutral union by 2050 and its functions as a growth strategy, the policy areas of the initiative also reflect this perspective:

To deliver the European Green Deal, there is a need to rethink policies for clean energy supply across the economy, industry, production and consumption, large-scale infrastructure, transport, food and agriculture, construction, taxation and social benefits. To achieve these aims, it is essential to increase the value given to protecting and restoring natural ecosystems, to the sustainable use of resources and to improving human health. This is where transformational change is most needed and potentially most beneficial for the EU economy, society and natural environment (European Commission, 2019:4).

This quote sums up how the European Green Deal can be seen as a policy document that reflects a growth-oriented discourse in relation to climate action, but also as a way to combat social challenges. Thus, it indicates that the document relies on traditional sustainability perspectives in terms of economic, ecologic and social pillars. Together, it creates the foundation for what can be seen as assumptions and background knowledge, which defines and influences how problems are presented, as well as how they are supposed to be solved (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). In addition, the European Green Deal can also be seen as an example of a phenomenon that illustrates how worldviews, ideas and assumptions about the reality are reproduced and confirmed through institutional practice. In this case, these worldviews reflect a growth discourse in line with objectives related to ecological modernisation. Thereby, the European Green Deal can be explained in terms of institutional practice, which in turn implies the construction of a discourse that becomes influential in relation to what is possible and not for the upcoming decades. Thus, the policy document reflects the adherence of old ideals, values,

ideologies and policy perspectives which are integrated parts of the EU agenda since decades back in time, and which are maintained for the future through initiatives such as the European Green Deal (cf. Fairclough, 2001). In the next section, these tendencies will be illustrated by some of the main objectives that are presented in the European Green Deal, and how they reflect and connects with ecological modernization as a discourse.

5.2. Social inclusion and increased legitimacy

One of the major priorities that emerges by reading the European Green Deal the promotion of ‘social inclusion’, ‘legitimacy’ and ‘fairness’. This is also expressed by the policy area called *Take Everyone Along*, which includes measures that shall combat social and economic differences between regions in Europe. The emphasis on legitimacy occurs in relation to implementing processes, where the policy makers underline the importance of participation from stakeholders such as businesses, national and regional authorities and citizens in order to realize the objectives of the initiative. In the introduction section of the European Commission’s presentation of the European Green Deal, this quote can be found: *It is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society* – which indicates how social inclusion is defined as an important policy area (European Commission, 2019:2).

According to Bacchi, the development of policy is not a passive action. On the contrary, policy creates specific meanings in relation to what is being addressed. If this is applied to the objectives of increased legitimacy and social inclusion, it is possible to assume that these objectives cannot be described as problems; rather a vision for the future. By formulations such as *take everyone along* and *fair and prosperous society*, the desire to create a fairer and more socially inclusive Europe emerges as an objective, but what this might implicate in more concrete terms are left to the reader of the policy document. Since these objectives rather can be described as visions, the problem representation here can be interpreted as the opposite meaning of social inclusion and legitimacy – the lack of legitimacy towards the EU and its shortcomings in counteracting social exclusion (cf. Bacchi, 2009). Moreover, the emphasis on a fair and inclusive green transition can be seen as a way of paying attention to problems related to the EU-citizens’ faith and trust towards EU’s ability to solve societal challenges in general (Carlsson, 2016).

With this in mind, Bacchi (2009) also emphasizes that formulations that suggest and define measures and objectives in a policy document, are built on an assumption which claims that something needs to be fixed. That is why the

objectives to transform the EU into what is called a fair and prosperous society, can be regarded as claims that do not concede with assumptions about today's EU. Namely, between the lines it is possible to identify a problem representation where the EU is not as prosperous and fair as it could be. The same type of arguments can be applied on other objectives linked to other policy areas such as the European economy or EU as a climate leader: EU's economy is not modern enough and not as resource efficient as it could be, combined with too much emissions and a tangible problem where economic growth is based on the cost of natural resources. In the name of the European Commission, it can be interpreted as an attempt to indicate self-examination on behalf of the policy makers behind the policy document which makes up the European Green Deal, by referring to the need of social inclusion and legitimacy. In addition, this tendency appears in the document in form of sayings such as:

It (the European Green Deal) also aims to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts. At the same time, this transition must be just and inclusive. It must put people first, and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges (European Commission, 2019:2).

Also, the European Commission argues that the European Green Deal starts a transition that will include big changes, which in turn requires that Europeans and stakeholders from different sectors must be able to take part and feel involved in the implementation. These statements and goals put together, constitutes a pattern where the EU is portrayed as a union that must get from point A to point B; a transition into a socially inclusive union with a high degree of democratic legitimacy. These patterns can in turn be regarded as a way of defining a problem representation, where the European Green Deal becomes a tool that formulate and suggest suitable measures based on challenges and problems constructed by the Commission and its policy makers (cf. Bacchi, 2009).

5.2.1. Just Transition Mechanism

As mentioned-above, the European Green Deal contains a policy area called *Take Everyone Along*, including formulations that emphasizes the importance of paying attention to regions, industries and workers where the transition is predicted to be more difficult. From a rural perspective, it becomes vital to understand what kind of problem representations that are linked with the formulations about, especially, 'venerable' regions and places. As an example, in line with the aim of a socially inclusive transition, a mechanism called *Just Transition Mechanism* is presented. It is a financial tool dedicated to regions which according to the European Commission are heavily dependent on fossil fuels and carbon-intensive processes. More specifically, the mechanism is expected to add economic support in order to

mitigate bad socio-economic effects in regions where the carbon-intensity is higher in comparison with the EU average, as well as to overcome social and geographical challenges within the European Union. These funds will also work as incitements for climate and environmental measures within these specific regions (Commission, 2019:16). Why this mechanism is needed, interacts with the outspoken idea of leaving no one behind, combined with an emphasis on the need of structural changes as the European Green Deal will bring into the European society. Some of these changes that are mentioned are new types of business models, a higher demand for education and retraining opportunities as a result of the phasing out of fossil fuels and the addition of new green markets. In terms of a problem representation, the Just Transition Mechanism reflects development perspectives and a dominating narrative attached to the aim of implementing what is described as a green transition (cf. Bacchi, 2009). By economic means, the initiative is expected to support regions that cannot manage the transition on their own (European Commission, 2019). They need help. Implicitly, these claims create a problem representation, where some geographical areas cannot contribute to the transition if they do not get financial means that can assimilate them into a state in line with geographical areas that not are covered by the Just Transition Mechanism. It also implicates that Europe, with all its different contexts and places, are supposed to handle the transition in a quite similar way, regardless of social and economic conditions, illustrating tendencies of generalization and homogenization through the power of language and measures (Bacchi, 2009; Fairclough, 2013).

There is also an implicit assumption around the structural changes mentioned before, including new labour markets and the emphasis on retraining and education opportunities for those who will lose their jobs as a consequence of the transition (ibid). The assumption is founded on an idea that some parts of the society, such as rural region as an example, are willing and able to adapt to these changes. It sorts of creates an idea about assimilation, where some geographical areas with higher carbon-intensity and economies relying on the need of fossil fuels, must be transformed into another state – a more *normal* condition. A condition that not is distinctive. Instead, the narrative is promoting a society that is restructured both socially and economically, characterised by green lifestyles and educated citizens who adapt to a new reality. This can be linked to what Fairclough (2003) mentions in terms of ‘language in new capitalism’. It refers to how language constitutes a form of social change within the contemporary society based on capitalistic values, as well as how capitalistic ideals and approaches are reproduced by social changes. The Just Transition Mechanism can in that way be regarded as an example of how traditional capitalistic principles and values are reproduced and manifested in policy, as well as a phenomenon of social change embodied by policy measures dedicated to overcome social and economic differences among European regions.

5.2.2. The public interest

If we go back to the identified need for democratic legitimacy for the upcoming changes the European Green Deal will entail, there is a big focus related to the roles of authorities and different management levels. In line with the aim of supporting a widespread legitimacy and confidence for the transition, a theme within the priorities of the European Green Deal is the support of what is called *a pact to bring European citizens in all their diversity*, including ambitions where national, regional and local authorities together with the civil society, the industry and the EU institutions are encouraged to work more closely. Why this pact is needed, as well as the European Green Deal in general, is explained by statements which indicate that they are requested by the public, as if it were in line with ‘the public interest’. This is a phenomenon that is recurrent in the policy document and occurs in relation to measures and objectives presented by the Commission. There are several examples of how the policy makers are claiming what the public wants and demands in order to emphasize the importance of what is presented in the document. One example is:

People are concerned about jobs, heating their homes and making ends meet, and EU institutions should engage with them if the Green Deal is to succeed and deliver lasting change. Citizens are and should remain a driving force of the transition (European Commission, 2019:22).

What this indicates, is how the Commission is trying to legitimize the initiatives within the European Green Deal – by referring to the public. The above-mentioned pact to ‘bring European citizens in all their diversity’ becomes a great example of this tendency, where the objectives of supporting collaboration between different stakeholder in the implementation of the European Green Deal, appears as a general desire among the European citizens – which tends to appear like a homogenous group that asks for change in line with the priorities of the European Green Deal. Even if it might be hard to argue that the European citizens do not want more collaboration between different management levels, as wells as different stakeholders in general, it illustrates a common phenomenon in how the European Commission systematically substantiates and legitimates the content of the European Green Deal. In addition, by referring to the public the Commission constitute a problem representation that are customized to fit the ideas in the European Green Deal (Bacchi, 2009). Thereby, the idea of what is supposed to be solved, also becomes a construction made by the policy makers – but in the name of the European citizens. With this in mind, it becomes relevant reflect upon how the public is used and addressed in the European Green Deal, which partly seems to assume to know what the public interest wants and demands.

The references to the public interest, can also be regarded as what Fairclough (2001) discusses as a way of defending a certain practice. Since the use of language and words are examples of a social practise, i.e. how the reality is constructed, language also implicates the opportunity to defend and present social structures and discourses as something universal and commonsensical. This applied on the European Green Deal, can be illustrated by the references to the public interest. By presenting measures and objectives characterized by a grow-oriented discourse in the name of the European interests, the initiative appears as the “right thing” to do and as a result of consensus. This can be explained as a result of ideological power, which Fairclough presents as a common tendency within political and economic exercise of power, also mentioned as “rule by consent” (ibid.). This also highlights a power relation where the Commission and the EU has the power to define and defend values which the European Union is based on, such as trade, free markets and growth-based solutions combatting climate change and environmental degradation – a political discourse that appears as universal by references to the public interest. To be able to maintain this power, Fairclough means that one way to deal with this is to seek for peoples’ consent, or at least their acceptance, in relation to the exercise of power. This is why the overall objectives of legitimacy, social inclusion together with references to the interests of the public, can be seen in the light of seeking people’s consent.

5.3. Economic growth to everyone

As mentioned earlier, the European Green Deal is not just an action plan for combatting climate change and environmental degradation. This becomes clear if you read the content of the press release of the initiative, where almost all climate and environmental measures are combined with the embracement of the overarching goal towards economic growth. What this means, is that a large number of measures, initiatives and goals within the European Green Deal, are supposed to deliver green solutions together with economic growth that can benefit the entire EU. In a way, economic growth is described as a vital tool in the realization of the long-term goal of climate neutrality. Again, the action plan for a circular economy is a great example which can illustrate this perspective; where growth is expected be combined with climate and environmental measures (cf. Redclift & Woodgate, 2010). As mentioned earlier, the action plan for a circular economy is vital due to the overall goal of decoupling economic growth from resource use, set by the European Commission (2019). By creating a new wage system throughout the entire EU, increased use of recycled materials and products, new consumption rights to promote repair opportunities and lasting products and use of renewable materials, the European economy is supposed to be transformed into a circular

economy characterised by resource-efficiency (ibid.). This opportunity-based way of seeing the economy as a source to climate measures, also coincides with measures dedicated to promote private and public financing of innovations and certain renewable and sustainable products and materials.

The action plan for a circular economy illustrates a political perspective where climate and environmental policy is based on economic terms, as well as a perspective where solutions *only* combat climate change combined with economical motives – reflecting objectives in ecological modernization strategies (York et al., 2010). Bacchi (2009) defines discourse as socially constructed knowledge that determines what is possible to think, say and write regarding a specific phenomenon. A consequence of this, is that discourses also can be seen as systems of meanings, which relies on assumptions, values, language and what she describes as conceptual logics. What is meant by conceptual logics, concerns how policies are put forward in a way that is interpreted as logical and reasonable. In this case, the logic is centred around the relationship between climate measures and economic growth, embodied by the objective to create a circular economy within the EU. More specifically, new patterns of consumption based on bio-based materials and products, recycling and reparation possibilities, are presented as solutions that will combine growth and actions against climate change and environmental degradation – examples of how conceptual logics are presented in the initiative, but which also illustrates how ecological modernization turns into a policy strategy, as well as a discourse. At the same time, there is a paradox in the statement of turning EU's economy into a circular economy. If we go back to the vision of decoupling resource use from economic growth, which is an overarching objective of the European Green Deal, the action plan for a circular economy still has a connection to resource use. This is expressed when it comes to objectives that emphasizes the use of bio-based products and material as an important element in a future circular economy. This, put together, makes up what can be seen as a paradox where the goal of separating resource use and economic growth is expected to, at least to some extent, be replaced by other ways of consuming resources. It can exemplify how conflicting problem representations emerges, but also how there are gaps in relation to what can be seen as conceptual logics, which in turn creates a foundation for questioning the reasonableness and the logic of the initiatives presented in the European Green Deal (cf. Bacchi, 2009).

Moreover, the policy makers' way of emphasizing economic growth is characterized by the claim that all Europeans will benefit from a strong economic development within the EU. This can be illustrated by formulations such as: *The European Green Deal will support and accelerate the EU's industry transition to a sustainable model of inclusive growth.* Another example is: (...) *an opportunity*

to put Europe firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth. These formulations indicate how the European Commission (2019) is framing the motives of the European Green Deal and its purposes. By using the concept of economic growth as a phenomenon that will benefit EU as a whole, economic growth emerges as something obvious and self-exoplanetary in line with ‘the rule of consent’ (Fairclough, 2001.). This in turn, also implicates a certain view of economic growth, where everyone is able to take advantage and gain from the positive aspects it has to offer. Based on interpretations of the document, it is easy to get an image of economic growth as something that is distributed equal, due to the lack of discussions nor measures dedicated to the overcome of differences within nations, regions, cities or rural areas; geographical and social aspects that can be seen as missing (Barrier, 2007). Though, the Just Transition Mechanism might be seen as a tool for combatting uneven conditions between European regions, then it is constructed in way where adaption is central. This reflects in part a problem representation, where adaption is fundamental to be able to take part of the advantages of economic growth.

5.3.1. The premises of growth

Since an inclusive economic growth is a significant part of the European Green Deal, it becomes relevant to sort out which premises it will be based on. As the figure presented earlier in the background section of the thesis shows, the majority of the policy areas that are covered by the European Green Deal are somehow related to nature, or more specifically: natural resources. This can be exemplified by the emphasis on a transition within the energy sector towards renewable energy, a safe and secured food production or the securing of EU’s natural capital in terms of biodiversity and venerable environments. At the same time, nature is also described as a foundation for solutions; via resources from nature it is possible to produce and consume new products and materials that are non-fossil. In that way, nature is paradoxically portrayed as something that must be protected while it also constitutes a source for ‘green solutions’. This highlights how nature is absolutely vital in the understanding of the European Green Deal and its purposes, since it constitutes the source of economic growth and environmental protection - simultaneously. As mentioned earlier, the narrative within the presentation of the European Green Deal, declares that EU and its regions and citizens must adapt. Adaption is thereby a central concept in relation to what premises the economic growth will be based on (Ferrão & Lopes, 2004). One of the sections in the European Green Deal, which is emphasizing a just and fair transition, highlights the importance of adaption with regard to different social and geographical conditions among places and regions:

Citizens, depending on their social and geographic circumstances, will be affected in different ways. Not all Member States, regions and cities start the transition from the same point or have the same capacity to respond. These challenges require a strong policy response at all level (European Commission, 2019:16).

This quote and its ambition for a fair and just transition, can be seen as part of a problem representation where the European Commission admits that social and geographical differences matter when it comes to the ability to adapt and undertake needed measures in line with the European Green Deal. On the other hand, it is not defined what these social and geographical differences implicate. However, *adaptation* is a central concept in order to overcome these differences, which in turn also highlights assumptions that are taken for granted (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). In order to implement adaptation processes to overcome 'social and geographical differences', there is an implicit assumption that those who are affected by these changes, are willing and able to implement these policies. In other words, the presentation of the European Green Deal is founded on an idea assuming that stakeholders, regions and citizens across the continent are having the willingness, the opportunities and the right conditions to adapt and contribute to the objectives and visions presented in the initiative, where economic growth is one overarching goal. Implicit, it also implicates an idea where growth benefits the society and populations as a whole, without questioning places' opportunities to enjoy and take advantage of the benefits that are associated with growth.

6. How rural areas are constructed

This section will focus on the creation of rural areas in the European Green Deal. What I mean by creating rural areas, refers to how rural areas are mentioned in the European Green Deal. Both in explicit words, but also in terms of implicit meanings. Since the initiative has a strong emphasis on social inclusion and the importance of public trust and participation in the implementation of the European Green Deal, it also becomes relevant to examine what role rural areas are given in relation to the suggested measures presented by the European Commission. With this in mind, the function of rural areas will be discussed and highlighted, as well as how rural areas are mentioned and what kind of implicit meanings that can be found and defined regarding the portraiture of rural places and their characteristics.

6.1. Something particular

In explicit words, *rural* is only mentioned three times in the policy document, while there is no policy area specifically dedicated to rural areas and their role in the realization of the European Green Deal. Rural appears under the same section in the document called *Time to Act - Together: A European Climate Pact*. This is a policy area where the Commission presents measures dedicated support of public engagement into a green transition, which is expected to take place as a result of the European Green Deal. This is also a policy area that coincides with the overarching goal for *taking everyone along*. When ‘rural’ appears as a word for the first time it is in conjunction with mentions of a circular economy. It is explained that European funds, including the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development, will support rural areas to make use of the opportunities followed by the transition into a circular and bio-based economy. How this will be conducted is not mentioned in the policy document, nor does it become clear what kind of opportunities this will implicate or in what way it will benefit rural areas. In terms of a policy, this shows what Bacchi (2009) explains as a phenomenon where problems are not being made, but where solutions and indicators still are presented. This can be applied to the statement above regarding opportunities followed by the promotion of a circular economy, since it is unclear what kind of problems this will solve in relation to rural areas, as well as the lack of information on what kind of

opportunities it will bring. According to Bacchi, this also creates a weakness when it comes to implementing a policy, as it lacks clarifications on what is to be solved. Another aspect worth to consider, is how rural areas appears in relation to a policy area which partly is dependent on bio-based solutions in terms of products and materials, at the same time as a circular economy is one of the most defining objectives in the European Green Deal. In that way, rural areas are given a specific but implicit role in terms of being a catalyst in the realization of a circular economy (ibid.).

In addition, the European Commission presents an initiative where a vision for rural areas will be produced in cooperation with stakeholders from business life, civil society and public sectors. Even here, rural areas are given a role where the transition into bio-based and circular economy will be a vital element according to the document (European Commission, 2019: 23). Though, the long-term vision for rural areas is still under way and not finished when this thesis is conducted, which means that objectives attached to rural areas are not presented in the press release of the European Green Deal. If we ignore the fact that we do not know the content of the upcoming long-term vision of rural areas yet, it nevertheless becomes relevant to reflect upon the initiative. Again, it is possible to identify a lack of explanations when it comes to identifying one or several problems waiting to be solved by this long-term vision for rural areas. In contrast and worth noticing, there is neither a long-term vision for urban areas in the European Green Deal. Thus, this exemplifies how rural areas are emphasized as something particular or deviant; places in need of separate solutions. The combination of suggested measures and language creates an image where distinctions are made between geographical locations, which in turn reflects a power relation created by the policy itself (Fairclough, 2013; Bacchi, 2009). Also, it can be interpreted as what Bacchi (2009) describes as background knowledge and presuppositions, which reflects worldviews and policy perspectives underlying problem representations. In this case, the distinction of rural areas as something deviant can be regarded as an example of the relation between centre and periphery, which constructs and defines the relationship between what can be seen as normal on the one hand in terms of urban interpretations, and what can be seen as deviant in terms of rurality on the other (De Souza, 2019).

As mentioned earlier, the policy document of the European Green Deal is often referring to the public interest, which emerges as a way to convince how the European Green Deal responds to challenges identified by the public in order to create legitimacy towards the presented measures. This also coincides with objectives regarding social inclusion and the overarching aim for a just transition. With this in mind, it becomes interesting to shape an understanding of how the

public interest is used in relation to mentions of rural areas. In section 5.2.2, questions are raised regarding the meaning of the public interest; how it is defined and what kind of interests that are presented by this way of shaping legitimacy. By referring to this concept together with references to the European Citizens, an image emerges where the European Commission wants to satisfy the European citizen's interests. This is illustrated by formulations such as *the public interest* or *the EU and its citizens*, which also strengthens the perception that the European Commission (2019) and its policy makers dedicates the European Green Deal to the European citizen, who sort of becomes a role model for the suggestions of measures presented in the initiative. In line with Bacchi's (2009) sixth point regarding the questioning of problem representations, questions can be raised whether how these interests are defined as well as to what extent they reflect the interests of the European citizens. In the light of a public interest, which implicitly refers to a fictional idea of Europeans' interests, the presentation of a separate policy such as the long-term vision for rural areas can reflect a policy perspective where rural areas are presented as something out of the normal (ibid).

Furthermore, in the presentation of the European Green Deal, there is a big emphasis on the importance of implementing a transition with the overarching aim to create a more sustainable society that will benefit the EU as a whole. Within these formulations, a political objective concerns how measures and objectives are expected to benefit the public in general - no matter where in the EU you live (European Commission, 2019). This is why the creation of a long-term vision of rural areas can be regarded as a further example of how rural areas are pointed out as something particular. The point here is not to judge whether this a suitable or adequate policy initiative (Bacchi, 2009), but rather to emphasize how the European Green Deal is dedicated to the European citizens as a whole. With this in mind, it can be worth questioning why rural areas are lifted as something that need a long-term vision or a framework for its development. Put in relation to what was mentioned before regarding the fact that there is no similar long-term vision for urban areas, adds to the perception of how rural areas and their characteristics are portrayed as something deviant in need of a distinguished and defined vision for the future in order to suit problem representations in the European Green Deal. In that way, rural areas around Europe emerge as something with specific features that needs specific solutions (cf. Rönnblom, 2014). In addition, there are formulations in the press release of the European Green Deal which highlights that *member states, regions and cities* start the transition from different starting points, but also how the capacity to react in line with the aim of the European Green Deal can differ between geographical regions (European Commission, 2019:16). What type of regions the Commission refers to is described in quite undefined terms, but as mentioned earlier it specifically concerns regions with industries and labour

markets that are carbon-intensive, for example areas where heavy business such as the coal industry characterizes the local labour market. It is also here, in conjunction with these regions, where the Just Transition Mechanism is presented as a key future. Even if formulations about different starting points to a large extent concerns geographical areas where the extraction of fossil fuels or the use of fossil fuels is dominant, they also implicitly point out cultural, economic and social differences in Europe, both between and within regions. What this might be regarded as, is a symptomatic pattern where rural areas implicitly are mentioned in the policy initiative (cf. Bacchi, 2009). In addition, it also shows how the Commission manifests the existence of different conditions within member states and regions, as well as how it affects the opportunities to combat climate change, environmental degradation and contribute to a sustainable economic growth – aims in line with the overarching goal of a climate neutral union. This can be seen as a further illustration of how rural areas are described as something deviant – even if it finds expression in implicit terms in the document.

6.1.1. The normal cities

According to Bacchi (2009), the perfect policy cannot exist. There will always be possible to present objections in relation to a policy. What is possible, however, is the comparison between different problem representations in a policy. In this way, it also becomes possible to draw conclusion whether some groups are excluded or included in relation to different representations. With this in mind, it becomes suitable to apply an analysis on how urban areas are mentioned and how they are surrounded by problem representations, which in turn can be compared with mentions of rural areas. What is significant when you read the press release of the European Green Deal, is how cities are continuously mentioned and noticed. If we go back to the quote mentioned in the previous paragraph, where the Commission talks about member states, regions *and* cities, it constitutes a pattern where urban contexts are highlighted as something special, but in a considerably different way than rural areas. If rural areas mostly are mentioned implicit, it is the opposite when it comes to cities which are an outspoken part of aims and measures presented by the policy makers. One of the policy areas in the European Green Deal concerns transports and so called ‘smart mobility’. Within this area, the Commission wants to promote and shape incitements for rail-based transports in the EU, smart mobility such as public traffic, multimodal mobility, digitalisation and the availability of non-fossil fuels. This can be reflected via formulations and quotes such as:

Transport should become drastically less polluting, especially in cities. A combination of measures should address emissions, urban congestion, and improved public transport (European Commission, 2019:11).

The biodiversity strategy will also include proposals to green European cities and increase biodiversity in urban spaces. The Commission will consider drafting a nature restoration plan and will look at how provide funding to help Member States to reach this aim (European Commission, 2019:13).

The quotes can be seen as rather uncontroversial, but they illustrate a tendency where the city as a geographical area is given a purpose as well as defined tasks in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. There are several examples of this, not only within the policy area of infrastructure and mobility, but also when it comes to discussions about urban planning and urban adaption, where urban areas are urged to contribute to the fight against environmental degradation and losses of biodiversity, as well as the decrease of carbon dioxide emissions and pollutions (European Commission, 2019:11). Speaking of climate adaption, a EU strategy for climate adaption is presented in the European Green Deal, with the aim of promoting investments in nature-based solutions, climate protection and resilient systems that can meet effect related to climate change. A part of this initiative is to stimulate public and private investments, with special regard to cities and their opportunities to produce action plans dedicated to climate adaption (European Commission, 2019:5). This is a further example of how urban contexts in contrast to rural areas, are mentioned and linked with specific tasks and purposes in line with the overall objectives of a climate neutral union by 2050, as well as an expression of categorizations and power (Fairclough, 2001) Since there is an active and continually use of references towards cities and urban areas in the policy document, an overall picture emerges where cities are implicitly described as something self-explanatory. In other words, it is possible to identify how the European Green Deal is based on a frame of reference that coincides with urban perspectives and values.

What might be a further example of how urbanity is portrayed as a form of normality, can be seen in the way of how measures are presented in the policy document. Since a significant part of the European Green Deal is aiming for economic growth, there are several factors that are addressed in order to achieve this. As mentioned earlier, investments and measures which can facilitate economic growth becomes crucial in policy such as the European Green Deal. If we return to the discussion about premises connected to economic growth, it is possible to recognize a pattern where the policy makers address the suggested measures to capital-intensive actors. There is a clear will to mobilize both private and public actors with the aim to stimulate capital and investments within those policy areas that are presented in the European Green Deal. By mentioning capital-intensive actors, Fairclough's discussion regarding power and relations as a consequence of capitalistic structures is relevant, since they define and control the content of discourses. In that way, the division that occurs between rural and urban areas in

the European Green Deal, can exemplify how worldviews, values and presuppositions become visible in form of an expression of power and how it can be traced to the degree of capital intensity. Even if it is not intentional, the emphasis on capital-intensive actors also implicates that capital-intensive contexts and places are given a vital role in the implementation of policy initiatives – traits not traditionally associated with rural areas (De Souza, 2019). Since this is put forward as something quite unproblematic, it can be identified as a pattern or a tendency where the reliance on capital strong environments is described as something obvious and natural. With this in mind, it reflects a view related to other non-intensive actors and contexts, whose roles in the realisation of the European Green Deal becomes less significant due to absence of capital and density (ibid).

6.2. Rural areas - a natural resource

Another tendency in the press release of the European Green Deal is the great emphasis on natural resources. The majority of the policy areas in the initiative have clear connections to the use of natural resources, both in terms of objectives dealing with problematic overexploitation of natural resources, but also as a vital tool in the transition into a climate neutral union. These aspects can also be reflected by the policy areas presented by the Commission, which includes policies for biodiversity, food production, renewable energy such as wind power, sea-based energy and sun energy (European Commission, 2019). Moreover, the strong emphasis on biodiversity and in some extent also conservation of nature, is reflected within the policy area for European forests, since the Commission promotes a development where European forests are attributed to an objective proclaiming that forests should make up a larger part of EU's total land area, combined with measures dedicated for restoration. In addition, food production and agriculture, which makes up approximately one third of EU's total budget, are given a specific 'Farm to Fork Strategy', with the aim of securing food supply, biodiversity in the agriculture sector and healthy food for the European citizens (cf. Cabuzel, 2017). These objectives and measures which are related to natural resources and rural characteristics, in a way creates an assumption that rural areas do play an active role in the realisation of the European Green Deal (cf. Bacchi, 2009).

When rural areas, implicitly, are described as a big natural resource, it highlights a phenomenon that can be linked to Fairclough's social practice (2001). To say that rural areas are associated with food production, nature and energy sources, is not necessarily a wrong way of seeing it. On the contrary, natural resources traditionally are suited in rural contexts in forms such as forests, watercourses and food-producing landscapes (Bischoff & Jongman, 1993). But since the written word can

be seen as social practice, as well as something that embodies a discourse, it constructs what can be seen as reality. In this very case, where rural areas only are mentioned in terms of natural resources, implicates that other perspectives of what can be considered as rural are missing. Thus, other definitions and values that might be useful to acknowledge in relation to rural areas and their role in the realization of the European Green Deal, are overlooked. Instead, the reality, as Fairclough describe as a result of social practice, consolidates the image of rural areas as a resource in first hand; something whose purpose is to deliver materials, products and solutions based on nature. In that way, alternative descriptions are omitted, while descriptions of rural areas as a home for those who are living within these places, or how rural areas contributes to the economy in terms of taxes and business, do not become visible. Instead, a discourse claiming rural areas as a natural resource is confirmed and reproduced (cf. Fairclough, 2001).

Since nature and natural resources are vital in relation to the purposes of rural areas in the European Green Deal, it becomes interesting to analyse how these policies reflects and portrays the environment that surrounds natural resources, as well as what kind of roles the surrounding environments have in the transition. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the explicit formulations about rural areas in the European Green Deal are limited. This can also be applied on the formulations about natural resources, which tend to be portrayed as a separate phenomenon where the resources are decoupled from its context. In other words, there are few formulations, or almost none, where parallels are drawn between natural resources and their social and geographical placement in the landscape – with food production as an exception. In the section *Preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity*, the Commission presents the new initiative of an ‘European Forest Strategy’, which can illustrate how forests primarily are described as a natural resource and nothing else:

The new EU forest strategy will have as its key objectives effective afforestation, and forest preservation and restoration in Europe, to help to increase the absorption of CO₂, reduce the incidence and extent of forest fires, and promote the bio-economy, in full respect for ecological principles favourable to biodiversity (European Commission, 2019:13).

The quote can illustrate how the European Commission and its policy makers are describing what can be seen a phenomenon typically associated with rurality, highlighted as a tool for combatting climate change and environmental degradation. The point here is not to judge whether this is the right way of formulating a policy or if its content is suitable or not, yet it illustrates a pattern where natural resources, which often are suited in a rural environment (cf. Bischoff & Jongman, 1993), becomes a universal asset; a tool for combatting climate change claimed by the European Commission. In the same way, nature and its resources in terms of food

production, energy sources and ecosystems, tend to be described in the same way in the European Green Deal. Nature is thereby “claimed” and lacks connections to the environment they are placed in and what functions and purposes it fulfils for those who are in direct coexistence with it. What this combined might indicate is how rural areas, and traditionally rurally coded phenomena, are minimized to be implicit described as a natural resource that can be used, or protected, with the aim to achieve a climate neutral union (Barbier, 2005). This can also be applied on the presentation of the initiatives regarding the Farm to Fork Strategy, where food production and food supply, at least in part, seems to be separate phenomena that exists in itself – non-dependent on land, farmers nor food processors. Even if this not may be the intention, the presentation of policy initiatives linked to nature, natural resources and rural characteristics such as forestry and agriculture, are portrayed in a way where rural areas and rurality only are mentioned implicit. In other words, the European Green Deal contains formulations and policies that largely can be associated with rural areas and their characteristics, but which at the same time are not mentioned explicit.

The lack of explicit formulations about rural areas and their role in the transition also highlights how power relations are made in the policy document. The shifting emphasis on cities on one hand, and the absence of rural recognition on the other, creates a hierarchic approach towards rural contexts and their abilities as well as functions in relation to the implementation of the European Green Deal (Fairclough, 2013). By defining natural resources as vital in the transition and thereafter formulate measures, shapes a situation where policy makers are defining aims, definitions and motives for why these measures are needed. The same type of argument can be put forward with regard to what is not mentioned, for example in terms of a conscious choice, as well as a sign of ignorance or a lack of knowledge (Bacchi, 2009).

6.3. To deliver solutions

Another phenomenon that can be identified in the European Green Deal which to a large extent can be associated with the above mentioned discussion whether the European Commission implicitly is mentioning and defining rural areas, concerns functions and purposes that are attached to natural resources and thereby also rural areas. As mentioned earlier, there is great emphasis on the importance of natural resources and nature in the European Green Deal. Both as something that must be protected, but also as a part of the solution towards a climate neutral EU. What is meant by natural resource in terms of solutions, can again be exemplified by the high priority to create measures towards circular economy in the EU. Except from

new initiatives and legalisation proposals connected to consumer rights and better opportunities for repairing and recycling of materials and products, there is also an outspoken goal to phase out fossil dependent production processes in favour for renewable products and materials, where nature is expected to deliver new solutions for the future in terms of raw material (European Commission, 2019). If we go back to the initiative of a new Farm to Fork Strategy, the same type of argument can be applied, but in this case it concerns the agricultural sector and its aim to not just produce food, but also safe food and non-toxic production methods in line with protecting biodiversity. These two tendencies where nature, and implicitly rural areas, are supposed to deliver, can be illustrated by the following quote:

European food is famous for being safe, nutritious and of high quality. It should now also become the global standard for sustainability. (...) the Farm to Fork Strategy will strive to stimulate sustainable food consumption and promote affordable healthy food for all (European Commission, 2019:11).

These formulations can be seen as an indication of how purposes and tasks rural areas and their assets are given and defined by the Commission and its policymakers; places with purposes to deliver solutions for the EU as a whole. Within the WPR approach presented by Bacchi (1999), an important focus for the analysis relies on the relation between problem representations, reforms and its potential effects. In terms of problem representations, the focus on natural resources embodies an implicit recognition of rural areas in the initiative. At the same time, the absence of explicit mentions of rural areas can indicate the opposite: how rural areas are overlooked and marginalized in relation to the objectives of the European Green Deal. The reforms, also known as measures, are in turn embodied by initiatives such as the action plan for a circular economy, the expansion of renewable energy or the Farm to Fork Strategy mentioned above. What this can be interpreted as, according to Bacchi, is how discursive aspects such as values, worldviews and assumptions are materialized in form of different policy areas (ibid.). This in turn, emphasizes how words and actions are intertwined with each other and creates categorizations and definitions that are followed by some kind of effects (Rochefort & Cobb 1994: 27). In this case, these effects implicate that rural areas are portrayed as something which are supposed to deliver solutions, while they also become distanced from its contrary in form of urban contexts where natural resources are not in the centre of the landscape. With that said, rural areas and nature play an important role to deliver, while manifestations through language also highlight power relations between geographical areas as well as between policy makers and local perspectives.

6.3.1. A tool for economic growth

In regard to the discussion above, it becomes clear that solutions not only imply measures that have a clear connection to measures that will combat climate change and environmental degradation. Since the European Green Deal not only is a strategy for reaching the overarching goal of a climate neutral union, but also a growth strategy, the aim of economic development is prominent in the policy document (European Commission, 2019). In the section about ecological modernization earlier in the thesis, there is a pattern identified which concerns a political will to combine climate measures and economic growth. This pattern is also reflected from a perspective where rural areas are analysed on the basis of formulations and measures in the European Green Deal. Indirectly, rural characteristics in terms of its contribution to what can be called as ‘green solutions’, implicates an approach where rural areas are given a role to produce growth (cf. Thompson & Ward, 2005).

Even if there are formulations in the European Green Deal that emphasizes advantages that will follow a green transition into a climate neutral EU, such as jobs in industry sectors rooted in typical agrarian contexts such as the agriculture and forest industry, there is also a belief that it will benefit Europe and EU as a whole (European Commission, 2019). This claim, or this statement, is unproblematic in the document. As mentioned, there is neither a discussion or proven awareness whether the possibilities to benefit from economic growth differ between nations, regions and local communities. From a rural perspective, rural areas can to a large extent be defined as an important and vital source for economic growth. But with this in mind, the possibilities to extract these benefits might be limited due to demographic and economic structures that differ from urban environments. The lack of density in rural areas can be used as an exploratory model for why economic growth can be seen as a concept that is hard to apply in rural contexts, due to the limited possibilities to embrace it (cf. Bryden & Munro, 2000).

More specifically, economic growth tends to drag on to densely populated areas where the labour market is large, combined with greater consumption, education and lifestyle possibilities – and where economic growth already is high (De Souza, 2019). This is an issue that can be discussed and defined in different ways, but the point here is the fact that the European Green Deal, based on the press release of the initiative, do not mention or indicate this as a problem. This can be traced to the tendency where rurality becomes a natural resource, with the aim of bringing economic growth (Milbourne, 2003). What this can be seen as, is a reflection of a societal structure where the society is divided in a centre respectively periphery that creates power relations between urban and rural environments (ibid.), but also as a reflection of an uncontested truth (cf. Bacchi, 2009) which comes to life by

formulations and measures in the European Green Deal. Formulations which sort of defines the rules of the game in relation to the realization of the idea of climate neutral union and the emphasis on high economic growth.

6.4. A need for adaption

As already mentioned, an important policy area in the European Green Deal concerns the importance of a just and fair transition. The Commission's press release contains a specific section named *Pursuing green finance and investment and ensuring a just transition*. Within this section, the Commission draws attention to how member states and regions in the EU starts the transition into at climate neutral union from different starting points (European Commission, 2019:15). What is meant here, is social and geographical conditions in the EU, and how it affect certain region's opportunities to contribute and adapt to new standards that will follow the implementation of the European Green Deal. It is also in conjunction with these claims that the Just Transition Mechanism is proposed in order to *leave no one behind* (ibid). What social and geographical conditions actually means in this context, is not presented more specifically in the policy document. One explanation that does exists is references to regions around Europe where the local economy is highly dependent on the extraction of fossil fuels, such as coal mining for example. However, the extraction of fossil fuels cannot only explain what the Commission describe as social and geographical conditions. Instead, it should be interpreted from a broader perspective, where typical rural conditions and characteristics such as sparser populations and limited possibilities to economic growth, also are included (De Souza, 2019). In order to overcome these challenges, the Just Transition Mechanism, which briefly has been mentioned earlier in the thesis as a fund dedicated to the most vulnerable areas in the EU, reflects a perspective where adaption is a central concept. What it can be interpreted as, is how some geographical areas, for example those that can be defined as rural, only has a role to play if they adapt in line with the requirements that the European Green Deal implicates by its goals and suggested measures.

Even if *adaption* occurs as a recurring concept that refers to measures and objectives related to *climate adoption*, it also highlights how the European Green Deal appears as a political project where regions and societies are expected to follow the implicated changes related to the initiative. Again, it is possible to refer to the growth discourse that characterizes the narrative in the policy document, since it embodies a political idea where growth is synonymous with development and actions dedicated counteraction of climate change and negative environmental changes (York et al., 2101). Between the lines, the emphasis on adaption among

places around Europe embodied by expressions such as ‘social and geographical differences’, illustrates how some places and people around Europe are expected to undergo profound changes in order to be a part of a journey towards a climate neutral union by 2050 – and not just exist in their current form nor striving for its own interests. As expressed by Peter De Souza (2009), characteristics such as low income and education levels, geographical locations, urbanization and resistant social and cultural compositions – creates limited opportunities to achieve and absorb advantages of economic growth, but also to what extent it is possible to adapt. Even if social and economic difference between different geographical areas are addressed and met with measures in the European Green Deal, there still is an absence of formulations that can explain and give an answer to what happens if the criteria to adapt not is fulfilled – when places loose the opportunity to be a part of the political project embodied by the European Green Deal. Since the discourse illustrated by perspectives suited in ecological modernization theory is so strong, consequences related to what happens when economic growth is difficult or almost impossible to achieve are absent in the document. In that way, it is possible to argue that the European Green Deal to some extent is a political project for already growth-strong habitats and environments, where possibilities to absorb and produce growth and value already exist.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has critically reviewed the press release of the European Green Deal in order to reveal patterns and phenomena linked to the description of rural areas and their role in the implementation of the long-term goal to achieve a climate neutral EU by 2050. To start with, the review of the European Green Deal has resulted in findings which reveals how problem representations in the European Green Deal concern objectives of dealing with shortcomings from earlier policies dedicated for climate action. By presenting the European Green Deal as a new initiative, the Commission strives for legitimacy among stakeholders and citizens in relation to what is presented in terms of policies. Whether it can be considered as a new attempt to introduce policy, the analysis has shown that many of the objectives in the European Green Deal are derived from older policies related to climate change and economic growth, while it also represents a defence of a growth discourse with connection to ecological modernization.

The emphasis on environmental and climate measures and the connections to economic growth, becomes clear in relation to policies such as a bio-based and circular economy or within the energy and agricultural sector, where nature and its resources play a vital role in the realization of sustainable growth objectives. In relation to these objectives, it is also possible to identify a paradox where the outspoken goal of decoupling resource use becomes contradictory with regard to how policies, for example the action plan for a circular economy, actually are based on the use of (natural) resources. Other findings concern how the European Green Deal can be interpreted as a reflection of power and power relations. Firstly, the policy initiatives in the European Green Deal represent a top-down perspective, where strategies produced by the Commission and other EU institutions are expected to be implemented by the member states, regions and local stakeholders, which illustrates an institutional relationship based on hierarchical structures. Moreover, vague formulations that occurs in relation to different policy areas in the European Green Deal, indicate how power relations within the European Union are reflected, since it almost becomes impossible to use words without risking legitimacy of the policies that are presented, as well as the relation towards different stakeholders. In that way, some policies emerges as watered-down and vague, which in turn makes them difficult to implement.

Nature is in the centre of the European Green Deal, both in terms of something that needs protection from environmental degradation and climate change, but also a source for measures that combine growth and objectives of a climate neutral union by 2050. Nature and rural areas are described in synonymous terms, as a phenomenon that contributes with resources in terms of energy, food supply and as a source of bio-based solutions, which in turn create an image of rural areas as tools rather than something else. In that way, rural areas can be described as vital in the implementation of the European Green Deal, but without being mentioned explicit. The fact is, that the document is almost empty when it comes to mentioning rural areas in explicit words. Instead, rural areas and their characteristics are illustrated as places contributing with food production, an energy supplier or contributors of bio-based materials and products. Thus, alternative definitions of rural areas are overlooked, with the consequence that rural areas are portrayed and attributed with one-sided functions in the implementing process of the European Green Deal.

Since *implicit* is the key word for describing how the European Commission portrays and mentions rural areas in the initiative, it reveals stereotypical and urban influenced narratives throughout the presentation of the European Green Deal, where rural areas tend to be marginalized as something which aim is to deliver sustainable solutions towards the EU as a whole. Without mentioning explicit what kind of geographical areas one refers to, the thesis has shown that the European Green Deal reflects a discourse where traditional urban characteristics are taken for granted and described as something normal, at the same time as its opposites (read rural areas) are in need of help or some kind of support in order to contribute to what is described as a green transition. In contrast to descriptions which explains the European Green Deal as a policy initiative with the overarching aim to create conditions and possibilities towards a climate neutral union, there is a surprisingly large emphasis on regions and European citizens' obligation to contribute to the goal of a climate neutral union by 2050. Although this might be considered as a fair and relevant issue to address, there is undoubtedly something worth to consider in relation to rural areas, since it means that the importance of contributing with nature-based solutions tends to be more emphasized rather than creating conditions and opportunities for those regions and places which contributes with the above-mentioned solutions – something that may be worth investigating in future studies.

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