Deliberation and sustainability

A frame analysis of policymakers' understanding of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability

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Abstract

As the effects of climate change intensifies, the tension between slow democratic processes and the need for urgent change towards sustainability is becoming more evident. This thesis aims to investigate how policymakers understand the relationship between deliberation and sustainability through a frame analysis and to identify tensions between the frames. The data consists of two policy documents, two interviews with politicians, and one interview with an official. The results are three frames; the *system change* frame, the *participation* frame, and the *conflict* frame. In the *system change* frame, deliberation is perceived to induce democratic engagement among citizens, which in turn will lead to structural change. This structural change is believed to have positive outcomes on ecological and social sustainability. The *participation* frame understands deliberation as a tool to increase social sustainability by emphasising the potential to increase diverse citizen democratic engagement, without necessarily resulting in system change. In the *conflict* frame, the controversy around issues related to sustainability is highlighted, and deliberation is seen as a tool to deal with conflicts constructively. A tension between the *system change* and *participation* frames arises in how radical a system change can be when deliberation, according to the *participation* frame, cannot guarantee sustainable outcomes. Another tension is highlighted between the *system change* and *conflict* frames, where the purpose of deliberation is understood differently. Further research could investigate how the tensions can be managed in practice and to study how practitioners and citizens understand the relationship between deliberation and sustainability to deepen the theoretical knowledge.

Keywords: Deliberation, sustainability, frame analysis, environmental and ecological democracy, system change, participation, conflict

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1. Introduction

In the light of the Anthropocene, societies worldwide face worsened effects of climate change due to human activity, which calls for governments to act urgently for a fundamental shift towards sustainability (Hammond 2020a, Pickering et al. 2020, Willis et al. 2022, Smith 2018). Fundamental change targets structures such as political systems, where the clash between slow democratic processes and the need for urgent change toward sustainability becomes evident. Hence, democratic responses to climate change are widely recognised as needed (Goetz et al. 2020). Deliberation and citizens' assemblies are two examples of democratic responses to meet the increased demand for sustainability (Willis et al. 2022).

The aim of deliberation is to discuss public matters by "*weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests*" (Dryzek 2000 in Mansbridge 2015). Reflection is key in deliberative democracy, which implies that participants are expected to challenge how they understand public matters and other perspectives (Dryzek 2000). Deliberation consists of several core aspects, for example, respect, authenticity, equal participation, transparency, and rationality (Mansbridge 2015).

However, the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is not clear. Contemporary liberal democracy itself inherently limits how sustainability can be realised (Eckersley 2019). Short electoral cycles impose unwillingness to make controversial decisions; hence politicians tend to avoid short-term costs (Hammond and Smith 2017). Deliberation is considered to have the potential to induce the change advocated for since citizens can question the political system that is regarded to limit opportunities to increase sustainability (Hammond 2020b). In terms of the political system and power structures, an essential aspect of sustainability is equal political participation, which is not perceived to be realised in the current system (Hausknost and Hammond 2019). By including underrepresented perspectives and actors in deliberative processes, different perspectives of sustainability can be raised (Arias-Maldonado 2007).

Further, along with deliberative democracy, sustainability is normative, which means that conflicts about how sustainability can be realised arise (Hammond 2020a). To increase sustainability on a societal level, an agreement on what is sustainable and unsustainable should be reached, and then, structures must be responsive enough to implement those suggestions (ibid). In other words, the perception of sustainable prosperity is dynamic, and there are currently insufficient

forums where desirable actions to realise sustainability on a societal level can be negotiated (Pickering et al. 2022).

Because of the different perceptions of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability, it is relevant to investigate how policymakers understand the relationship between the two concepts to increase knowledge on how deliberation could realise sustainability.

1.1 Aim and research questions

Considering the urgent need for increased sustainability, I argue that it is relevant to investigate how policymakers perceive the relationship between sustainability and deliberation. Looking at the problem of urgent action toward sustainability and slow democratic processes from a Swedish context, this thesis aims to provide insights on policymakers' embedded ideas of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. Such insights is gathered by analysing policy documents and interviews through a frame analysis. Environmental and ecological democracy will be applied in the discussion to understand the tensions between the identified frames regarding what kind of democratic development is advocated for.

The following questions will guide this thesis:

1. How do policymakers understand the relationship between deliberation and sustainability in a Swedish context?
2. What tensions can be identified between the understandings?
3. What characteristics of reformational and transformational change can be found in the identified tensions?

2. Background

I will introduce this chapter by explaining some of the basic features of deliberative democracy and how sustainability is understood in this thesis, which is followed by previous research about the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. Next, I will present the environmental and ecological democracy theories and their contribution to understanding tensions between the identified frames. These theories provide a framework of democratic change in relation to sustainability, and I use them to understand how 'change' is understood in the different frames.

2.1 Deliberative democracy

At its core, deliberation is about reflecting, weighing different options, and reasoning among different perspectives (Fishkin 2018). Deliberation is not a new practice, but to deliberate on environmental issues is a new way to approach sustainability. Simply put, deliberation is constituted of three key components:

- it is mutual and a two-way communication
- reflection and weighing are central
- matters are of a collective character (Mansbridge 2015).

Other core values in deliberation are respect, authenticity, equal participation, accountability, transparency, rationality, an orientation towards the common good, and the absence of power (Mansbridge 2015).

As weighing is central to deliberation, it is worth reflecting on the intention of weighing, which is to reach a decision (ibid). Even though deliberation is often used in decision-making processes, the potential of deliberative processes goes beyond reaching binding conclusions (Mansbridge 2015). In this view, deliberative democracy offers possibilities for inclusion and a better comprehension of different aspects of a given topic (ibid). However, it is important to distinguish between consultative and binding outcomes clearly to not risk initiating a process where the intention is perceived as dishonest (Mansbridge 2015).

2.2 Sustainability

In this thesis, the concept of sustainability is understood according to the UN's definition "*meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*" (UN n.a.). Because this view of sustainability is rather broad, it is a concept that requires flexibility and reflexivity in its definition (Dryzek and Pickering 2019). In this sense, I assume that sustainability is a process rather than an end state (Hammond 2020a). Further, sustainability is commonly discussed in terms of three pillars: ecological, social, and economic sustainability (Boström 2012). I decided to focus on ecological and social sustainability, leaving out economic sustainability as it would exceed the scope of this thesis.

2.3 Deliberative democracy and sustainability

Political institutions, structures, and systems have successfully dealt with issues related to, e.g., war and disease, but their ability to deal with problems related to the impact of human activity on the climate and nature is not ensured (Dryzek and Pickering 2019). A path dependency is created when previous structures or processes constrain later decisions or events (ibid). For example, in travel behaviour, path dependencies are reinforced by avoiding methods that include additional costs or restricting specific ways of transportation (Hrelja et al. 2013). In this way, the implementation of sustainable mobility is less radical (ibid). Path dependency is described as one of the biggest threats to dealing with sustainability issues since it closes opportunities to develop and implement more adequate ways of dealing with such problems (Feindt & Weiland 2018). However, reflexivity is one way of dealing with deficient path dependencies (Dryzek and Pickering 2019). By integrating reflexivity in institutionalised processes and systems, institutions would continuously be rethought regarding how sustainability could be increased (ibid). This means that systems and institutions are more adapted for transformative change towards sustainability on a fundamental level. Because reflexivity is central to deliberation, deliberation is believed to positively impact sustainability in terms of recognising, reflecting on, and responding to path dependencies that hinder increased sustainability (Dryzek and Pickering 2019). The assumed positive impact on sustainability is linked to that reflection through deliberation results in an "enlarged mentality effect" and increases the consideration of others, which in turn increases the possibility that sustainability is prioritised in decision-making processes (Wong 2016:151).

Further, path dependency is not only related to political systems and institutions. Glass ceilings connected to cultural ideas, beliefs, and behaviours constrain sustainability from being realised as they limit how transformation can happen on

a cultural level, i.e., how transformation is accepted or strived for on a collective level (Hammond 2020a). As an example, the lack of consideration of non-human entities is understood to be a core problem to increased sustainability (Dryzek and Pickering 2019). In this sense, the perception of who should be accounted for in decision-making processes is restricted to those who can express their voice. If structures would be more responsive to include non-human entities, appropriate conditions for sustainability are believed to be created (ibid).

In a view where transformation towards sustainability is perceived as a cultural transformation, inclusion and representation of diverse perspectives are central to realise it (Hammond 2020a). In this sense, representative democracy is questioned for not being inclusive and diverse enough (Eckersley 2019). Correspondingly, participation is at the core of sustainability, and deliberation is recognised to offer opportunities for deepened participation (Fischer 2017). Additionally, because representativity is a cornerstone of deliberation, deliberation can help to make decision-making processes more inclusive where diverse perspectives are represented in decisions (Lidskog and Elander 2007). In this context, the emphasis is on deliberation as a legitimate process rather than its ability to result in sustainable outcomes. In Wong's (2016) definition of a pragmatic (green) democracy, a flexible process that includes diverse voices is seen as equally important as sustainable outcomes. From this view, environmental values need to be negotiated among diverse people because we cannot know what sustainable outcomes are unless they have been collectively reflected on among different actors (Wong 2016). In this sense, a process which can generate sustainable outcomes through inclusivity and flexibility, rather than sustainable outcomes themselves, is considered important (ibid).

In deliberation, diverse actors and perspectives meet where new relationships can contribute to a constructive dialogue (Innes and Boher 2003). In an ideal dialogue scenario, mutual understanding for each other develops, creating conditions where respect for other perspectives imbue interactions between actors (ibid). However, this is an ideal situation and, therefore, not common practice. The complexity of environmental problems due to *"high uncertainties and risks, long time and large spatial scales, diversity of conflicting views and interests, and international dependencies"* makes dialogues where a mutual understanding for different perspectives is challenging to pursue in this field (van de Kerkhof 2006:280). Further, deliberation, where participants are expected to reach a consensus or find satisfying compromises, requires time and effort, which does not align with the time-pressing need to act against climate change (Niemeyer 2013). Societies' transition toward sustainability is a widely recognised conflict area where polarised opinions characterise the debate. In this sense, there are different ways of approaching societal change.

2.4 Environmental and ecological democracy

Environmental and ecological democracy are two theories that can help to determine if a societal change is reformative or transformative. While theories of deliberative democracy offer perspectives on democracy itself, the theories of environmental and ecological democracy provide a theoretical framework for democracy in relation to climate change. These theories will be used to theorise the tensions between the identified frames to discover what kind of democratic development is advocated for: a reformative or transformative democratic advancement. Thus, it is also relevant to consider these theories to offer a broader theoretical framework to explain the findings and tensions between the frames.

As discussed before, democratic institutions established during the late phase of the Holocene are criticised for not being responsive enough to counteract ecological systems' degradation (Pickering et al. 2020). Environmental political theories have emerged to understand how these challenges can be mitigated. While advocators of ecological democracy are concerned about transforming the political system and institutions on a more fundamental level, environmental democracy is about reforming the current democratic practices and institutions (Eckersley 2019). Environmental democracy is perceived as anthropocentric, while ecological democracy is ecocentric (Pickering et al. 2020). From an environmental democracy perspective, the ecological crisis is closely connected to the lack of political engagement (Eckersley 2019:217). Advocators of environmental democracy suggest changes, and environmental movements have practised environmental democracy by utilising mechanisms and tools of liberal democracy to "*win legitimacy for their environmental claims*" (Eckersley 2019:217). Hence, environmental movements have demonstrated how structures of liberal democracy can increase sustainability (ibid). However, the outcomes from these movements are questioned because even if international agreements and policies are affected by these movements, for example, the 1992 Rio declaration, climate change and biodiversity loss are accelerating (Eckersley 2019). Other examples of environmental democracy are "civil society participation" and "partnerships in environmental governance" (Pickering et al. 2020:4).

Ecological democracy targets "transboundary ecological problems" and acknowledges the challenge of managing their complex character (Eckersley 2019:218). In theories of ecological democracy, environmental injustices and ecological degradation are acknowledged as systematically produced as a result of the limitations of liberal democracy (Eckersley 2019). Examples of such limitations are short-electoral cycles and limited citizens' participation due to dependency on experts to understand and decide about environmental issues, which has to do with their complex character (ibid). Further, a limitation to representatives in a representative democracy is their accountability in terms of what they can be held accountable for:

> (…) elected representatives are not institutionally obliged to answer to any community other than their electorates or their nation for the ecological consequences of their decisions, even when it can be clearly foreseen that other communities, now and in the future, will be seriously harmed. (Eckersley 2019:218)

Thus, the inability of current systems to account for the complexity of time and space of environmental problems becomes evident.

Ecological democracy is criticised for being too idealistic regarding the representation of non-human entities because they would be represented by citizens, which raises concerns about how the representation can be authorised and legitimised (Eckersley 2019). Examples of questions are if a citizen or a group of citizens can be held accountable for representing another entity wrongly or how it would be able to know if the entity was represented wrongly (ibid). Further, because ecological democracy is demanding to achieve and intensifying effects of climate change require urgent action, ecological democracy is believed to be more efficient to strive for on a local level rather than an overarching societal level (Pickering et al. 2020).

Deliberative democracy is cherished in both environmental and ecological democracy, although in different ways (Eckersley 2019). While environmental democracy sees the potential of deliberation as a complement to contemporary institutions, ecological democracy seeks to look beyond institutions and how civil society can induce change through deliberative bottom-up initiatives (Lepori 2019). In other words, liberal democracy and its institutions should be rethought in terms of how "ordinary citizens" can practice democracy according to ecological democracy (Lepori 2019:95).

Even if there are distinct descriptions of environmental and ecological democracy, they are not necessarily competitors. On certain levels, they can co-exist and work as complements of each other:

> For example, civil society may be best placed to enhance environmental governance if some parts engage in a radical critique of existing institutions while others engage in partnerships with those institutions, which was an original strategy of the German Greens. (Pickering et al. 2020:5)

In this sense, the potential of deliberation is not limited in terms of its usage. Institutionalised deliberation on a national level and deliberation in local entities in civil society have equal potential (Pickering et al. 2020). In this context, elements from both environmental and ecological democracy can co-exist to account for each other's limitations (Pickering et al. 2020). However, in this context, structures in line with environmental democracy might hinder a more wholesome transformation that aligns with ecological democracy (ibid).

Furthermore, the relationship between environmental and ecological democracy can be understood as sequential, where practices of environmental democracy are

"steppingstones" to ecological democracy (Pickering et al. 2020). In this view, implementing deliberation on an institutional level is perceived to induce more fundamental change in a longer perspective (ibid).

It should be considered that if democratic processes are slow, democratic change can be expected to be even slower. I do not intend to use environmental and ecological democracy to set a time frame on how fast change should happen or how radical a change should be. The theories are used to understand how change is perceived in relation to sustainability and the urgent need for action and to theorise the tensions between the identified frames.

3. Research design

Here, the material is first presented with motivations of how they contribute to the purpose of this thesis. Next, the framework of frame analysis is presented, followed by a description of how the data is analysed through a frame analysis.

This thesis draws on a social constructivist worldview where shared assumptions and meaning making through social contexts are central (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Personal experiences, interactions, and subjective meanings influence how individuals make sense of reality, which applies to me as a researcher when I interpret the data too (ibid). Language is an example of how the reality is constructed, which is prominent in the chosen method and analysis.

Regarding a social constructivist worldview, it should be considered that my educational background and subjective experiences influence my interpretation of the data. However, as this is unavoidable in a social constructivist view, I have dealt with this by writing a logbook where I reflect on my interpretations and how they could have been interpreted in other ways (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

3.1 Data

The data consists of two policy documents from different contexts and three interviews with two politicians and one official from a municipality in Sweden. Due to anonymisation, the municipality's name will not be revealed and will be referred to as *Municipality* in this thesis. In *Municipality*, a citizens' assembly has been established, consisting of both online surveys and, at times, physical meetings. The panel for online surveys is self-recruiting, and from this panel, participants are randomly selected and invited to participate in physical meetings with deepened dialogues about a more specific topic.

The data collection has focused on how the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is understood from policy makers' perspectives. I chose this focus because I am interested in how the relationship is understood on a system level and how different perceptions collide with each other on this level. I gathered such insights by analysing policy documents and interviews with policymakers.

Since the data from the interviews and the documents are in Swedish, I have had to translate quotes in the results section. First, I translated them through the website Deepl.com and then double-checked the translations. I made changes when a word

was misfitting to the context or when another word was used more frequently, e.g., citizens' assembly instead of citizens' council. Because all data are in Swedish, I have not experienced any language barriers in the analysis. Additionally, because I have used a translation program and double-checked the translations, I do not consider that there are any factual differences in the translated quotes compared to the original version. Nevertheless, grammatical differences such as sentence structure or word choice from the original version might occur so that the language is correct according to English grammar. However, I do not consider that meaning is lost in such grammatical differences.

3.1.1 Documents

The two documents that are analysed in this thesis are one investigation conducted by a governmental committee and one motion from the Swedish green party (see table 1). Because the documents are issued by the Swedish government and a political party in the Swedish parliament, they have influence on how deliberation in relation to sustainability is managed practically. Further, the documents contain elements of both ecological and social sustainability, however, they complement each other because one is focusing more on climate change and ecological sustainability, while the other focuses on social sustainability. In the documents, I used search words to analyse how the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is communicated. Because the documents are in Swedish, I used the search words "hållbar*", "miljö", and "climate", which translates to "sustain*", "environment", and "climate" in English. Because I found several interesting aspects in these two documents concerning deliberation and sustainability, they were chosen.

Table 1. Documents

Title	Type of document	Description	Level
Konstitutionsutskottet (2020). Citizens' assembly for a fair transition. (Motion 2020/21:3641) Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag	Motion from the green party in Sweden.	Argues why a citizens' assembly should complement the political parliament.	National level.
Demokratiutredningen (2016). Let more people shape the future! (SOU 2016:5) Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer.	Swedish Government Official Report (SOU) about democracy in Sweden.	Investigates opportunities to enhance democracy. The document suggests approaches.	Suggestions are targeting local, regional, and national levels.

In the process of selecting documents, I paid attention to the sender of the document and how influential the document is. The motion has significance because it presents reasons for why deliberation on a national level is understood as needed to mitigate climate change. The credibility of the document resides in that it is a motion from a political party in the Swedish parliament. The second document is a Swedish Governmental Official Report (SOU) about democracy in Sweden, which is the most recent review of the situation of Sweden's democracy. The credibility of the SOU lies in that it is the most recent investigation by experts which is a preparation for a government bill, therefore, it is part of a policy process. Hence, the document has significance in terms of how the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is understood by the Swedish government. It discusses how democracy can be developed to enhance democratic engagement in Swedish politics. The report is divided into two parts, A and B, where the investigation is presented in part A, and an impact assessment on the suggestions is presented in part B. Part B is omitted from the analysis because the aforementioned search words did not generate any results. Part A is selected because it investigates how democracy can be renewed to be more inclusive, where the focus on sustainability is on the social aspect. Deliberation is not mentioned explicitly in the report, however, citizens' dialogues that build on the same principles as deliberation, e.g., reflection, representativity, and transparency, are central to and at the core of the investigation. Further, the investigation describes:

> In recent years, the term 'citizen dialogue' has become the most common term for the different ways in which municipalities and county councils invite individuals, interest groups, or other actors to express their views on a particular issue. The use of the term in both research and public documents is not consistent, but citizen dialogue is usually used as a collective term for different methods of obtaining the views of the general public. (Demokratiutredningen 2016).

In this context, even though deliberative processes might not be explicitly mentioned, dialogues like deliberation are still discussed. Hence, I consider this investigation relevant to the purpose of this thesis.

3.1.2 Interviews

Because the aim is to investigate perceptions about the relationship between deliberation and sustainability, semi-structured interviews are a suitable approach since an interview can give insights into what people know, do, think, or feel (Robson & McCartan 2016). Hence, the participants' answers are often concerned *"(...) with facts, with behaviour, and with beliefs or attitudes"*, which aligns well with this thesis' purpose (Robson & McCartan 2016:286). Early in the research process, I contemplated conducting focus groups instead of interviews. I initially

asked the *Municipality* in the invitation if they would agree to do an interview or focus group. The preference of the respondent was considered when I decided to do interviews. The interviewees are selected through snowball sampling, where one respondent recommended me another respondent (Robson & McCartan 2016). Although this sampling method can bias the results (ibid), I consider that the respondents' roles in the *Municipality* justifies their contribution to the purpose of thesis. The first respondent is a politician who is currently involved in the citizens' assembly in the *Municipality* and the third respondent is a former politician who was leading the work of establishing the citizens' assembly. Hence, they contribute with valuable information and thought through opinions about deliberation in relation to sustainability. The second interviewee is an official who works in the *Municipality*'s administration and has had a prominent role in setting up the citizens' assembly by providing information to politicians. Because s/he has a different role in *Municipality*, s/he brings different perspectives on the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. Table 2 describes the interviewees' roles in *Municipality* and how they will be referred to in the analysis when quotes are used.

Table 2. Interviewees

Title	Description
Code: Interviewee 1	Current politician involved in the work with the citizens' assembly
Code: Interviewee 2	Official working in the administration
Code: Interviewee 3	Former politician who led the work of setting up the citizens' assembly

The interview guide (see appendix 1) is partly based on the first findings from the documents. When formulating the interview guide, I organised the questions according to a sequence presented by Robson and McCartan (2016). I found the way of organising questions helpful in creating a clear structure of the interview, which helps me as an interviewer and the interviewee to systematically talk through the topic. Because it was the first round of analysis, I consider the interview guide to be slightly misfitting to the context of this thesis. Because it was created early in the research process, the interview guide is created when this thesis's purpose was not fully developed. Hence, some of the questions do not entirely align with what this thesis is investigating. For example, the interview guide contains questions that align with the policymakers' identity. As will be discussed in section 3.2 below, this thesis focuses on the frame topics policy issue and the process itself. Therefore, the answers to the questions about the policymakers' identity have not been useful to fulfil the purpose of this thesis.

3.2 Frame theory

This thesis aims to get insights into how policymakers perceive the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. One way of analysing their perception of this relationship is to study their language. The object of analysis in this thesis is written language in documents and spoken language in transcripts from interviews. Language is a form of human interaction and is therefore interesting to study in terms of a meaning-making process (Entman 1993). By studying how policymakers make sense of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability, different perceptions of the relationship become visible. Due to the actors' diverse backgrounds, roles, and experiences, they have different perceptions of how deliberation relates to sustainability. Hence, I study the policymakers' embedded ideas about deliberation and sustainability and their relationship. I find van Hulst and Yanow's (2016) approach to frame analysis especially applicable to the purpose of this thesis because it describes frame analysis in a policy context. I will use their approach to understand *what* policymakers frame and *how* it is framed. In this context, the possibility to identify dilemmas arising from different perspectives about the given policy issue makes frame analysis relevant as a method for the purpose of this thesis.

Even if frame analysis is understood from a cultural perspective in this thesis, it does not mean that there are universal frames within each culture. Due to the complexity of human interaction and the role of previous experiences, individuals can hold diverse frames on the same topic (Entman 1993). Meaning derives from the interactional process in which people engage (van Hulst and Yanow 2016).

Frame theory emphasises how people make sense of their surroundings and how the sense-making process results in different perspectives on issues (van Hulst and Yanow 2016). In a frame, some parts or characteristics are emphasised as more evident than others, which are hidden or invisible (ibid). Hence, a frame includes and omits certain aspects of a situation. However, there is a difference between fram*es* and fram*ing* (van Hulst and Yanow 2016). While frames are perceptions of reality that make some characteristics more evident than others, framing is the process of developing frames collectively through interactions (ibid). Concerning that frames are developed collectively, the framing process is not necessarily intentional, and individuals may not be aware of the frames they possess (van Hulst and Yanow 2016). Thus, frame analysis is about going beyond what is being said to discover tacit knowledge (Westin 2019).

Frames influence the collective perception of reality, and "*the culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames; in fact, culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping*" (Entman 1993:53). The reason for why understanding framing from a cultural perspective is relevant for this thesis is because the perception of deliberative democracy and sustainability is rooted in culture, which

is collectively constructed (Hammond 2020a). Hence, the policymakers' understanding of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is seen as building upon mutually constructed frames.

From a frame analysis, a diagnosis and an action bias are developed. A diagnosis constitutes a problem formulation of the given topic, which helps to identify areas in the topic where development is needed (van Hulst and Yanow 2016). The action bias provides perceptions of solutions to the identified problem:

> What gets produced in the framing process is both a model of the world—reflecting prior sense-making—and a model for subsequent action in that world. Framing, then, does two kinds of work: It organises prior knowledge (including that derived from experience) and values held, and it guides emergent action (van Hulst and Yanow 2016: 98)

Selection and salience are central concepts in frame theory. Selection is what parts or characteristics are present by choosing them over others, while salience is about emphasising something as more important and hence more noticeable to the audience (Entman 1993). Both selection and salience are about making something prominent due to the cost of letting something else be hidden. That some characteristics are hidden implies that they can be both difficult to detect and completely absent (ibid). In language, selection and salience appear through the usage of words and what kind of perspectives are presented or omitted (Entman 1993).

In frame analysis, there are generally three frame topics to look at in policy processes: the substantive content of a policy issue, actors' identities and relationships, and the process itself (van Hulst and Yanow 2016). What gets framed in the policy issue is *the world of ideas relevant to the policy issue at hand"* (van Hulst and Yanow 2016: 102). Concerning sustainability, examples of this could be the perception of whether climate change is the most significant issue in human history or not. However, conflicts around sustainability do not only evolve around meaning differences. Actors' identities and relationships are framed in ways that actors become attached to the policy issue in *"emotional, psychological, social, and/or cultural ways"* (van Hulst and Yanow 2016: 102). Therefore, conflicts can arise in *"policy-relevant actors' senses of their own and other actors' identities and the relationships between or among them, including identities that those actors cherish"* (ibid). Meta-communication is central to the process itself and concerns *"the way in which people communicate about what is being communicated"* (van Hulst and Yanow 2016). It is about saying something implicitly or without being clear about what you mean. Hence, it will tell you about its "*social, cultural, political, and/or other context*" (van Hulst and Yanow 2016:103). In this sense, the process itself as a frame topic gives information about the broader context of a topic or situation. The story behind how a topic related to sustainability got on the table in a deliberative process is an example of such meta-communication.

Because the aim is to investigate perceptions of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability on a policy level, I have chosen to target the frame topics of policy issue and process in this thesis. Investigating actors' identities and relationships would have added information about how policymakers relate to deliberation and sustainability on a more personal level, which does not add any relevant information to how the relationship is understood on a policy level. Hence, this topic is not addressed in this thesis.

3.3 Analysis

Once the documents were selected and analysed in the first round, I created the interview guide to fill gaps that arose during the first round of analysis. When the interviews were completed, the analysis of them and the documents started and was inspired by the five steps presented by Creswell and Creswell (2018). I returned to all the steps several times during the research process. In the coding process, I first did all coding by hand in a Google document. Because I found this approach too time-consuming and inefficient, I decided to use an analytic software for qualitative data called maxQDA to facilitate the coding process.

The first step is about getting familiar with the data by, for example, transcribing interviews and reading documents (Creswell and Creswell 2018). This first step was conducted in the process of selecting documents, which is described above in section 3.1.1. Further in the process, other keywords, e.g., representation and legitimacy, were also used. I copied the whole paragraph where the search words appeared into word-document. Quotes are considered relevant when the keywords refer to the area being researched. For example, when climate referred to the political climate, it was not considered relevant unless the political climate referred to sustainability or environmental issues.

Once the interviews were conducted, I started transcribing them, which helped me become more familiar with the data. The transcribing was made through a software which made the process less time-consuming.

The second step is to get deeper into the data (Creswell and Creswell 2018). I started to read through the documents and transcriptions in more depth and write notes of my understanding of what was being stated. I focused on the document with the collected quotes, and whenever I needed to get the context of the quote, I searched in the original document for the search word that was in the quote. Hence, quotes without search words can also be used in the results.

In the interviews, this was done in the transcribing process, where I wrote notes to myself when I found something interesting in relation to what I had found in the document analysis.

In the third step, the coding begins, and I coded chunks of text that referred to the same category with the same code (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Here, I also

focused on my document with the collected quotes. I used colour coding and started by coding according to the frame topics: the policy issue and the process. More specifically, I focused on parts where the relationship between deliberation and sustainability was discussed. In the following coding round, I looked at the diagnosis and action bias. In other words, what belongs to the problem formulation, and what is described as solutions. In the next two rounds of coding, I identified themes, which turned into frames in the next step.

The fourth step is about describing the themes or categories generated in the coding process. Using quotes to support the findings and descriptions, the researcher proves the relevance of the results (Creswell and Creswell 2018). In this analysis phase, the frames started to become more distinct from each other.

Lastly, by interpreting the findings, the analysis moves beyond a descriptive analysis, and the results are made sense of. Examples of this practice could be to provide a "*detailed discussion of several themes (complete with subthemes, specific illustrations, multiple perspectives from individuals, and quotations) or a discussion with interconnecting themes*" (Creswell and Creswell 2018:270). Hence, what distinguishes this step from the previous is to ascribe a meaning to the frames in terms of putting the findings into a broader context. At the same time, it is about analysing them in more depth to discover underlying meanings of what is being said and not.

4. Results

In this chapter, the result from the analysis is presented. Even though each frame has a distinct diagnosis and action bias, all identified frames are interconnected and relate to each other. Each frame is described and supported with quotes to show the relevance to perceptions of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. The table below provides an overview of the analysis, and it illustrates the frame topics sustainability as the policy issue and deliberation as the process. Additionally, it presents the suggested diagnosis and action bias of each frame.

The table's structure is inspired by Westin and Joosse (2022).

Table 3. Results and description of the frames

	System change	**Participation**	**Conflict**
Sustainability	The current political system fails to provide opportunities for democratic engagement and increased sustainability.	People are excluded from discussions in the political arena, leading to insufficient social sustainability.	Different perceptions of sustainability lead to conflicts.
Deliberation	Increased democratic engagement through deliberation results in structural change and more radical decisions can be made.	Deliberation offers an inclusive process which enhances social sustainability.	Conflicts can be dealt with constructively through deliberation.

4.1 System change

In the *system change* frame, the relationship between sustainability and deliberation is understood from a political system perspective. The diagnosis of this frame relates to the political system's structures which are perceived not to be responsive enough to deal with sustainability:

It is a fact reinforced by research that the relatively short mandate periods contribute to short-sightedness on climate and environmental issues. Policies today are not sufficiently progressive, radical, and transformative on the scale or at the pace needed to meet the targets set, partly because they may be judged to be against the interests of business or risk generating poor opinion polls in the next election. (Konstitutionsutskottet 2020)

The prioritisation of business interests is perceived as a hinder to implementing a radical transformation of the political system. In this sense, business interests are perceived as incommensurable in relation to sustainability, and the diagnosis relates to that other values triumph over sustainability. It is acknowledged that efforts are needed to increase sustainability, which implies that values like interests of business should be rethought in relation to sustainability.

Further, the limitation of representative democracy in terms of short mandate periods is understood as a hinder to realise sustainability in policy making. In this sense, the complexity of issues related to sustainability is recognised, and long-term thinking is understood as necessary to deal with such complexity. Short mandate periods are perceived to result in policies that are not radical and progressive enough to have an impact on climate change.

In addition, policies and societal structures are in focus. Transformation of policies and the system overall is seen as necessary in order to increase sustainability because current structures are designed to meet business demands and public opinion. In one of the interviews, the power of public opinion is reflected on as well:

We have gone from 25 to 80 percent refusal in the municipalities to build wind turbines in one or two years because the municipalities have a veto when it comes to building wind power. That is completely absurd. But then I think. Is there any legitimacy in a municipal veto? (…) Why does it change so much? I think it is because it is election year. People do not dare say no, and then you start thinking about it. Is there legitimacy in a representative electoral process? When it comes to extremely important issues like climate change... (Interviewee 3)

The example of wind power plants as a 'not in my backyard' problem illustrates the interviewee's perception of the political system's limitations. Again, the short mandate periods are highlighted as problematic. When municipalities decide about wind power plants, the political system's structures contribute to decisions based on how public opinion steers politicians. In this sense, decisions are not steered by prioritisation from a sustainability aspect but directed by politicians' concerns about being unsuccessful in the next election. Thus, the diagnosis of this frame refers to structures that make it difficult for politicians to make long-term decisions for sustainability because the effects of short-term costs are too uncertain.

Further, the urgency of action towards climate change is central to this frame. The structures of the political system are perceived to hinder successful action to manage climate change within a reasonable timeframe. Before the effects of climate

change become too severe, a radical change of policies are advocated for to mitigate climate change:

> Sweden urgently needs to create a just transformation of our society into a welfare nation that lives and operates within planetary boundaries. In our time, we need examples of countries that are leading the way and showing how good lives with low ecological footprints can be organised. Accelerating climate change combined with accelerating depletion of ecosystems and biodiversity puts us in a situation where time to act to reverse negative trends is running out. The transition thus requires transformative and radical changes that at the same time have the support, legitimacy, and anchorage of the population to be realised. One method to address the above ambitions in an inclusive and democratic spirit is the establishment of a citizens' assembly. (Konstitutionsutskottet 2020)

Here, climate change is targeted as especially time-sensitive to act on. By noting the need for examples of successful fundamental societal change, it draws attention to the radicality of introducing a deliberative forum at a national level. In other words, deliberation at a higher level is something that is not commonly used to discuss issues related to sustainability. A citizens' assembly is believed to bring the radical change and transformation of the political system needed to manage climate change in a foreseeable time frame. Deliberation is perceived to open a democratic space where more radical decisions supported by citizens can be made.

At the same time, as more radical decisions towards sustainability are advocated, support and legitimacy are considered necessary. Because representation is a crucial component in deliberation, it is perceived as a solution to achieve radical change, which is accepted because diverse representatives have been part of making the decisions, and citizens themselves would initiate the transition:

> A citizens' assembly engages the public and its decisions gain legitimacy because people with whom they can identify have been involved in making them. A citizens' assembly set up by the government can be a releasing force that helps to solve one of Sweden's greatest challenges of our time: the fair transformation of society into a welfare nation that lives and operates within planetary boundaries. (Konstitutionsutskottet 2020)

In this sense, the controversy around sustainability is acknowledged, and a citizens' assembly is perceived to bring radical change while the legitimacy of decisions is ensured due to citizens' engagement in the decision-making process. The possibility to increase democratic engagement through deliberation is emphasised as important to induce the change perceived as needed. Within this engagement and diverse representation, legitimacy for radical change is believed to reside.

Furthermore, one interviewee talks about the need for new spaces and tools to make braver decisions:

> And I think we would benefit if we had, if we had a... could have a platform where we could be a little bit more courageous… we had to take long-term, a little bit more long-term sustainable decisions. That is one of the sources of resistance today is that the mandate periods

for these revolutionary changes are too short. In practice, our democratic cycle is such that if you work as a local or national politician, or work in politics full time, every fourth year is lost in the first year of the mandate. Then it has at least six months, but probably a year, to get going. (…) Then you work actively for two years, two and a half at best, then it is an election year and then everything dies. The power of initiative does not disappear, but it is very much controlled by what happens to be in public opinion, and there we need a bolder platform that makes us dare to be a little bolder and a bit more long-term. I think that would be a clear advantage. (Interviewee 3)

Again, the limitation of short mandate periods are given as an example of policymakers' challenge to think about issues related to sustainability in a long-term perspective. The quote demonstrates how current democratic structures restrict long-term decision-making and how upgrading the current political system is seen as a solution to the inadequate structures. As a long-term perspective is important to deal with complex issues like sustainability, a forum where politicians can make bolder decisions would be "a clear advantage" to increase sustainability.

To summarise, this frame diagnoses that a system change is needed to manage climate change within a reasonable time frame. Structures of the political system result in inadequate decisions for sustainability, and long-term decisions are difficult to make. Democratic engagement through deliberation offers possibilities for radical change and for policymakers to make bolder decisions about controversial topics. This is because the inclusion of citizens in deliberative processes is seen to legitimise decisions.

4.2 Participation

The *participation* frame entails a perception that in a democratic system, different perspectives must be represented through diverse representatives, which is seen as especially important in the face of climate change. The diagnosis implies that the lack of diverse citizens' participation in decision-making processes makes the transformation toward sustainability challenging. As an example, in one document, it is argued: *"it will be extremely difficult to make the transition that society needs if parts of the population do not feel represented by the people who dictate it and if a wide range of perspectives are not heard"* (Konstitutionsutskottet 2020). In this frame, trust in decisions depends on those who make the decisions. If policymakers do not represent diverse perspectives accurately, neither can the decisions be made for a wide range of people. In a time when transition towards sustainability is perceived as becoming inevitable, the challenge of diverse inclusion in a representative democracy is seen as problematic since transitions need to be supported by citizens. Further, in this frame, participation is perceived as a core value to sustainability, and without participation, increased sustainability cannot be achieved:

The goal is "a sustainable democracy characterised by participation and equal influence". We believe that democracy is strengthened when many people participate and feel part of society. Broad participation creates better conditions for more voices to be heard, which in turn can lead to more equal influence. Equality of influence also requires that everyone has the same opportunities to participate and influence the exercise of political power, regardless of gender, colour, linguistic, ethnic, or religious affiliation, disability, sexual orientation, age, or socio-economic status. Democracy policies must therefore aim to increase participation and promote a more equal exercise of influence. (Demokratiutredningen 2016)

The quote demonstrates how democratic values are perceived to go hand in hand with sustainability. Participation is understood to be at the core of what is described as a sustainable democracy. Further, what is highlighted in relation to participation is that it must be diverse, and discrimination is unacceptable. Thus, "a sustainable democracy" is understood in terms of social sustainability, where social aspects like equal influence and inclusion are emphasised as crucial.

Another aspect that is understood in terms of social sustainability is how future generations are considered. For example, *"it is our duty to ensure that democracy is passed on in good condition to future generations. A sustainable democracy requires a high level of democratic engagement and a sense of empowerment"* (Demokratiutredningen 2016). Hence, in this sense, not only values related to nature and ecology should be preserved for future generations but also democratic values to ensure social sustainability.

In the corresponding action bias, deliberation is perceived as a tool to enlarge the political arena in the transformation towards sustainability for those who are omitted. For example, one interviewee describe that in *Municipality*, deliberation is an opportunity to involve citizens in the *Municipality's* way toward sustainability:

We have focused on how we can change the regulatory framework of the municipality and so on for the purpose. And on citizen dialogue as these two topics go very well together. Agenda 2030, the sustainability goals are never possible for a municipality with 1000 - 1200 employees to make a big impact. We can make an impact in this building, but in the municipality within the municipality boundaries, the other 19,000 people must be involved. So, dialogue and Agenda 2030 go very well together. (Interviewee 1)

In this sense, the inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes is understood as crucial, and topics related to sustainability are perceived as especially appropriate to deliberate on regarding the inclusion of perspectives. However, in a representative democracy, citizens' participation in elections is limited, independently of whether one is eligible to vote or not:

Communication with citizens is very important between elections. Not everyone goes to vote even though they may. Not everyone gets to go to vote because they are too young. So many people are excluded from the democratic process.... If you just look at the elections. (Interviewee 1)

Deliberation is in focus as a solution to deal with insufficient participation. The inclusive space deliberation offers to different actors is especially highlighted as positive. In an inclusive space like a citizens' assembly offers, representation of diverse perspectives is a key component:

> Democratic innovation is needed, and a citizens' assembly creates an invaluable meeting place between ordinary people, interest groups and experts to guide policy and society into the future. A citizens' assembly engages the public and its decisions gain legitimacy because people with whom they can identify have been involved in making them. A citizens' assembly set up by the government can be a redemptive force that helps solve one of Sweden's greatest contemporary challenges: the equitable transformation of society into a welfare nation that lives and works within planetary boundaries. (Konstitutionsutskottet 2020)

In this sense, deliberation is believed to provide an opportunity for inclusion in political decision-making and space for diverse voices to be heard. It is seen as especially important to include diverse perspectives on controversial topics such as sustainability, also because it is perceived as a collective matter. Because sustainability is a shared concern, it is understood as necessary that citizens understand and are on board with the consequences of why things are decided to be in a certain way:

> If we are going to refurnish a family's living room, they have to be on board, and they have to understand the advantage and have to see the disadvantage of the furniture that they had. The traffic environment is such an example. It is people's living room. As soon as they go outside their house and come out into public spaces, it is part of their environment. It is their living room. Respect for people's living rooms is just as important as stimulating change. (Interviewee 1)

Here, the interviewee touches upon a need to respect citizens in the sense of how far they are willing to go for a transition towards sustainability. By including citizens in decision-making, resistance to change or unwillingness to make more significant changes to increase ecological sustainability on a societal level would need to be accounted for. Hence, deliberation is not perceived as a guarantee for increased ecological sustainability. Another aspect related to deliberation and resistance is the time perspective:

> Not everyone walks away converted and loving getting rid of their parking space, no matter how much we talk... because I need mine. It is... and I do not think it is something wrong with the dialogue form really, I think it is us humans... We do not work like that. We are not rational. And a dialogue between people that is not based on rational thought, it will be like a negotiation between Ukraine and Russia. So, it becomes very, very difficult. You simply have to grind the stone with drops. If you are in a hurry, it is not good. (Interviewee 3).

Here, deliberation is understood as a time-consuming process because people are not thinking rationally. From this perspective, increased dialogue through deliberation will not necessarily result in everyone understanding others'

perspectives. However, the potential of deliberation is understood to be that increased understanding will happen with time.

To summarise, the diagnosis implies that the lack of democratic participation among various citizens makes it challenging to realise sustainability. Further, participation is considered a core value in the concept of sustainability. Deliberation is seen as a mechanism that could increase representative participation and realise citizens' participation in political decision-making processes. Through deliberation, decisions supported by citizens can be made. However, the outcomes cannot be guaranteed to be more ecologically sustainable because respect for people's opinions are equally important.

4.3 Conflict

In the *conflict* frame, deliberation is seen as a tool to legitimise decisions about controversial issues among citizens. There are ambivalent perceptions of sustainability, and deliberation is perceived to contribute to legitimate decisions that citizens accept. This frame diagnoses that sustainability is a controversial topic on different levels. First, how sustainability should be prioritised in relation to other values is contested, i.e., *if* or to what degree sustainability should be considered. Second, increasing sustainability is difficult to pursue because there is no universal answer to what sustainability is. Thus, *how* to achieve it is contested too. As an example, conflicts around transportation in the *Municipality* are especially highlighted by one of the interviewees:

> What immediately strikes me is the motorism. The conflict between parking spaces everywhere and bicycle lanes. How should the space be used? How much should we allow car traffic in these two areas, for example? Or how much should we stimulate motorism rather? And how much should we stimulate other things? (Interviewee 1)

As stimulation and restriction are two different approaches to change, the spectrum from "allowing traffic" to "stimulating motorism" illustrates the diverse directions the development of transportation in the *Municipality* could take. In the absence of consensus, trade-offs need to be made. For example, restricting motorism by reducing the number of parking spaces in the city centre of the *Municipality* negatively impacts car owners. However, it is understood to increase sustainability if people decide to leave their cars at home. In this sense, trade-offs regarding increased sustainability are disputed due to the impact they can have on personal life and individual choices:

> Individuals will be affected quite negatively... it is unpopular things to do and... Representative democracy is also in some ways a popularity contest or to set up... trying to convince people that you can do better, and I think it is very difficult for [political] parties today... to be able to do that deliberation or that discussion process. (Interviewee 2)

Here, as well as in the *system change* frame, representative democracy is targeted as an inadequate system. As described in the *system change* frame, due to short mandate periods, decisions that would be beneficial in the long run might have short-term costs. When politicians make such decisions, they risk not being voted for in the next election because people do not support the decisions. Due to the competitive character of representative democracy, its ability to handle conflicts about controversial topics like sustainability is questioned. However, even in deliberative processes with citizens, competitive conflicts between political parties appears:

> I think it has been very difficult to have a… try to have an objective discussion about just parking spaces, even if you get the factual argument that a parking space costs about 1500 SEK a month when they are built. Do you think it is okay for those who do not have cars to subsidise car owners through taxes so that it is free and in the middle of town where we can have a city park? Then the other half of the policy responds that they think so, and they have arguments for it. It becomes more like a political debate at times, in my experience, than an actual dialogue with citizens, and I think that is a great pity. (Interviewee 3)

In this context, even though deliberation is perceived as a tool to unravel controversial issues like sustainability, deliberation does not guarantee consensual outcomes. However, deliberation is believed to enlarge the political debate and offer a more constructive dialogue. Before *Municipality* implemented the citizens' assembly, those who disagreed with decisions made in the *Municipality* were the ones who were heard the most. All interviewees talked about how citizens were invited to citizens' dialogues with politicians in *Municipality* to discuss different matters. The dialogues did not result in a constructive dialogue because it was mainly those who opposed decisions that attended the meetings. In this sense, many other perspectives were lost. By implementing a citizens' assembly, policymakers in the *Municipality* were able to receive broader feedback on their decisions, which in turn makes it easier to identify possibilities and limitations in how sustainability can be pursued. Hence, the action bias in this frame concerns that deliberation will help to discuss sustainability more constructively:

> One thought one got quite a lot of criticism against things one does. *Municipality* is growing very fast, not least in urban development and new districts that are being planned now, a general rate of expansion, there are a lot of opinions. And it was felt that a lot of this was mainly negative, just that it was perhaps a certain type of group that is very resourceful and who are against this that is heard most in the discussions. So, they wanted to broaden the dialogue. (Interviewee 2)

By broadening the dialogue through the citizens' assembly, they could gather more diverse perspectives about their decisions and how citizens perceive different matters. In this way, politicians were more confident in the decisions they made.

Additionally, including citizens in decision-making processes through dialogues is one way to make sure that decisions will be supported and be more legitimate:

> Citizens' dialogues can help to ensure that decisions are more deeply rooted and have greater legitimacy. They can also help to avoid conflicts of interest or expressions of discontent in the implementation of political decisions. On the other hand, citizens' dialogues that raise expectations of influence that are not fulfilled can lead to an erosion of confidence in democracy as such. (Demokratiutredningen 2016)

Thus, in this frame, deliberation is seen as a tool to legitimise decisions and to complement representative democracy to manage conflicts about controversial topics like sustainability.

Another salient aspect in the quote above is that a citizens' assembly would need a strong mandate to be legitimised. In this sense, there is a risk that deliberation would have the opposite effect on legitimising decisions and instead would lead to dissatisfaction and lack of trust in decisions. This perspective is visible in *Municipality* and brought up by one interviewee as well: *"We present results and that we also follow them. (...) If we did not follow the majority of the citizens' assembly, it would be exactly the opposite"* (Interviewee 1). Hence, it is perceived as necessary that the *Municipality* is clear about what the citizens' assembly can contribute to. For the citizens' assembly to be successful, citizens' expectations of what the deliberation can contribute to should align with what politicians are willing to decide about:

> What we are trying to develop is a way to be clear in our feedback and in our expectations for the dialogue. That is very important. And we have a dialogue where we are only at a stage where we actually... We take comments, where the idea is not that it might be a dialogue where we answer the statement, but really want to collect things, then also citizens who participate should be aware that this is just a... This is a forum where they can raise things. (Interviewee 2)

In this context, deliberation is not about being a decision-making process where deliberation contributes to legitimate decisions but a possibility to provide an arena where policymakers gather profound information about public opinion. It is understood that outcomes from deliberative processes can guide policymakers' further decision-making, not generating binding decisions. Furthermore, deliberation is seen as a way to discuss and reflect on shared concerns, and the aim of the process should be to get a broader understanding of citizens' perspectives:

> We know that there is a high response rate, we know that the answers, if I put it that way, are in line with our image, i.e., what sustainability is, public transport versus individual travel, dense [built areas] instead of villa water and so on. Urban development versus green spaces. We get confirmation from these citizens' assemblies. That does not mean that we are beating our breasts. We cannot use citizens' assemblies as hostages to get decisions through. They are our decisions. (Interview 1).

Legitimacy is understood to be generated by increased awareness of citizens' opinions, which indicates that the inclusion of citizens through deliberation contributes to supported decisions. In this view, deliberation does not replace politicians who make decisions but helps them to make decisions supported by citizens. However, a citizens' assembly's ability to influence is central for successful deliberation: "*furthermore, the citizens' assembly needs to have a strong mandate in order not to undermine people's trust in political institutions*" (Konstitutionsutskottet 2020). This perspective was presented during the interviews as well, for example: "*we present results and that we also follow them. And work... and become a role model. If we did not follow the majority of the citizens' assembly, it would be exactly the opposite*" (Interviewee 1). In this sense, there is a fine line between a citizens' assembly with too much or too little say in final decisions.

To summarise, different views on sustainability result in conflicts about *if* and *how* to realise it. Deliberation can help to deal with conflicts constructively and help policymakers to understand citizens' different perspectives about sustainability. Thus, deliberation is understood to legitimise decisions.

5. Discussion

This thesis aims to study how policymakers understand the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. In this chapter, I will discuss the frames and answer the second research question about the tensions that arise between them in terms of how deliberation is perceived in relation to sustainability. I will then discuss the identified tensions using the concepts of environmental and ecological democracy to discover what kind of democratic development is advocated for in this study's context: a reformative or a transformative democratic advancement. Lastly, I will discuss how a transformation, as outlined in the concept of ecological democracy in section 2.4, could be realised by looking specifically at how deliberation can challenge cultural entrenched ideas.

5.1 What tensions can be identified between the frames?

As presented in the results, there are three identified frames: the *system change* frame, the *participation* frame, and the *conflict* frame. The diagnosis and action bias in these frames present reality from different perspectives, where some aspects are left out while others are made more salient (van Hulst and Yanow 2016).

The *system change* frame highlights the limitations of our current political system and its inadequate way of dealing with sustainability as a policy topic. Short mandate periods are given as an example of how long-term thinking is difficult for politicians, a perspective which is supported by Dryzek and Pickering (2019). Deliberation is understood as a tool to bring people together to act for a system change, and the frame emphasises the urgency of action to mitigate climate change.

In the *participation* frame, deliberation is seen as a tool for citizens to become more democratically engaged and to broaden the arena. Hence, the benefits of social sustainability in terms of increased democratic engagement among various citizens are highlighted in this frame (Fishkin 2018). However, through inclusion comes perspectives which do not support a change toward sustainability. In this sense, the *participation* frame highlights that respect for people's resistance to change should be accounted for. Therefore, ecologically sustainable outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

The contestation of sustainability is especially highlighted in the *conflict* frame, where deliberation is believed to deal constructively with conflicts around

sustainability. Further, deliberation is seen as a tool to legitimise political decisions by including citizens in deliberative processes. The *conflict* frame, as well as the *participation* frame, omits the urgency of action toward sustainability within a reasonable timeframe.

Because of the omission of urgency, the perceived purpose of deliberation differs between the identified frames. According to the *system change* frame, people's increased democratic engagement through deliberation is believed to result in a radical change in the political system. From this view, in deliberative processes, more radical decisions can be made to meet the demand for urgent action to mitigate climate change.

In the *participation* frame, on the other hand, deliberation is believed to increase inclusion and diverse representation. In this sense, the benefit of deliberating on issues related to sustainability resides in social sustainability. There is no emphasis on the urgency of radical change. The tension arises between a declared need for radical change in the *system change* frame and no guarantee for increased ecological sustainability in the *participation* frame. I will elaborate on this tension in section 5.2.

In the *conflict* frame, deliberation is understood as a tool to deal with conflicts constructively. Through deliberation, participants are expected to broaden their perception of the discussed matter (Dryzek 2000). However, deliberation to deal with conflicts constructively does not guarantee sustainable outcomes. In the *system change* frame, democratic engagement through deliberation is believed to result in a system change that will increase sustainability. The different understandings of what deliberation contributes to sustainability illuminate a tension between the *conflict* and *system change* frames, which will be further discussed in section 5.3.

5.2 The tension between system change and participation

In the *system change* frame, a fundamental change of the democratic system is advocated for in order to deal with climate change adequately. Path dependency related to political institutions and systems is recognised as a threat to sustainability because of the challenges of managing the complexity of sustainability (Dryzek and Pickering 2019). Because current policies are not perceived as progressive enough, and structures are not designed to deal with complex issues, deliberation in citizens' assemblies is seen as a suitable complement to representative democracy. The idea of radical change towards sustainability is believed to be realised through increased democratic engagement in deliberative processes. However, the *participation* frame suggests that deliberation cannot ensure ecological sustainability because respect for resistance to change is equally essential as stimulating change. In this

context, deliberation is understood to enhance social sustainability through inclusion, but it does not necessarily result in increased ecological sustainability. As mitigating climate change is a matter of time (Niemeyer 2013), the tension between deliberation that results in radical decisions and deliberation with no guarantee for increased ecological sustainability becomes evident. Further, the question arises of how radical a system change toward sustainability can be.

Regarding the question of how radical a system change can be in light of the tension between the urgent need for action and no guarantee for ecological sustainability, I will use the two concepts of environmental and ecological democracy to discuss what kind of democratic advancement is advocated for. Because of the anthropocentric character of environmental democracy and its focus on increasing democratic engagement among citizens (Pickering et al. 2020), the perception of change in the *system change* frame aligns with environmental democracy. Non-human values are more central in ecological democracy, which is not targeted in the *system change* frame where radical change is advocated for. Further, the *system change* frame depicts radical change by introducing deliberation in a national citizens' assembly. Looking at radical change from an ecological democracy perspective, 'radical change' would instead be described as transforming the democratic system on a fundamental level (Eckersley 2019). Hence, adding deliberation as a complement to a parliamentary system, not transforming the parliamentary system itself, aligns with a reformation in line with environmental democracy.

However, it is not necessary to distinguish sharply between environmental and ecological democracy as elements from both can be present in a political system (Pickering et al. 2020). Although, it needs to be considered that in a representative democracy, outcomes from deliberative processes can only bring so much change as the structures of a representative system allow (Pickering et al. 2020). Suppose deliberation is added as a complement in line with environmental democracy. In that case, structures like short mandate periods could still prevail, which might hinder a radical change in line with ecological democracy. In this way, as indicated in the *conflict* frame, the mandate of a citizen's assembly is essential to determine how much impact deliberation can have on entrenched structures.

Further, the relationship between environmental and ecological democracy could be seen as sequential. In this sense, reforming the current political system does not exclude the possibility of transformation within a reasonable timeframe (Pickering et al. 2020). In this thesis's context, deliberation, which increases social sustainability, could also be a steppingstone to increasing ecological sustainability. For example, according to the *system change* frame, it can be assumed that preconditions for ecological sustainability are created through increased participation in deliberative processes. Concerning pragmatic (green) democracy, the procedure of deliberation is legitimised as a 'green' process due to its flexibility

and inclusion of diverse voices (Wong 2016). In this view, a flexible and inclusive process is crucial to collectively identify and agree on environmental values (ibid), which aligns with the understanding of deliberation in the *participation* frame. However, a 'green' process does not guarantee sustainable outcomes (Wong 2016). In this sense, the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is not linear, and deliberation cannot be guaranteed to increase sustainability. The question of how radical a change can be regarding the urgent need for action and no guarantee for sustainability remains open.

5.3   The tension between system change and conflicts

Even though there is a similarity between the *system change* frame and the *conflict* frame in questioning a representative democracy's ability to deal with complex issues, the two frames approach sustainability differently. Different perceptions of deliberation's contribution to sustainability underlie the difference between these frames, and tension appears in what the purpose of deliberation is understood to be. In the *system change* frame, the purpose of deliberation is to increase democratic engagement among citizens, which will lead to a radical system change. In the *conflict* frame, the purpose of deliberation resides within its ability to deal with conflicts around issues related to sustainability.

Understanding others' perspectives is essential for solving conflicts where diverse views are represented (Innes and Boher 2003). Due to the controversial character of issues related to sustainability, such issues are highlighted as especially important to deliberate on in the *conflict* frame. In this frame, deliberation is understood to have the potential to create a broader understanding of sustainability as a policy issue. However, that individuals consider others' perspectives in decision-making processes is a demanding practice, and the controversy around sustainability does not add to a positive outlook on creating agreements about already complex issues (van der Kerkhof 2006). In the *conflict* frame, deliberation is seen as a process which enables constructive dialogues to take place where different perspectives about sustainability can be unravelled. Thus, the process is in focus and outcomes perceived as sustainable are not the goal. In the *system change* frame, there is a greater focus on sustainable outcomes as the goal of deliberation. In this context, tension arises between deliberation as a tool to deal with conflicts and to generate sustainable outcomes. Constructively dealing with conflicts does not guarantee sustainable outcomes, which contrasts the emphasis on the urgency of action toward sustainability in the *system change* frame.

However, even if deliberation cannot guarantee sustainable outcomes, the reflective practice in deliberation is still recognised to positively impact sustainability in decision-making processes (Wong 2016, Dryzek and Pickering 2019). Thus, even though sustainable outcomes are not the purpose of deliberation

in the *conflict* frame, deliberation to constructively deal with conflicts does not exclude sustainable outcomes. Hence, in terms of environmental and ecological democracy, the view of deliberation as a way to constructively deal with conflicts around issues related to sustainability can be seen to be in line with environmental democracy. This is because deliberation is understood to reform contemporary institutions by adding deliberation as a complement to unravel conflicts around contested topics rather than transforming institutions on a fundamental level (Eckersley 2019). In the following section, I will discuss how deliberation could contribute to a transformation in line with ecological democracy by challenging culturally entrenched ideas about sustainability.

5.4 Ecological democracy, transformation, and culture

The transformational aspect of change is crucial in ecological democracy. The focus is anthropocentric in both the tension between the *system change* and *participation* frames, and between the *system change* and *conflict* frames. From this view, deliberation from an ecological democracy perspective can be expected to focus more on ecological aspects of sustainability (Eckersley 2019). Examples of how ecological aspects could be considered is to rethink agency and representation of non-human entities (ibid). Hence, a transformation begins with changing how sustainability is communicated about.

Looking into how culture influences people's worldviews is one way to approach transformational change (Hammond 2020a). Hammond's (2020a) take on ecological democracy is that culture is essential to enable transformation towards sustainability because entrenched ideas are rooted in culture. Hammond (2020a), as well as Wong (2016), recognise deliberation's ability to question culturally entrenched ideas and structures that hinder sustainability from being realised. For example, as presented in the *conflict* frame, whether sustainability should be prioritised in relation to other values is a conflict embedded in cultural systems and norms. In this sense, people's culturally embedded perspectives about sustainability can be questioned in deliberative processes, and new cultural approaches to sustainability can be created. However, deliberation can only challenge entrenched ideas about sustainability, not guarantee to transform them, and transformation through culture can expected to take time (Wong 2016).

5.5 Further research

This thesis contributes with insights into the relationship between deliberation and sustainability and the findings are useful for practitioners working with citizens' dialogues and similar democratic innovations to identify different approaches to

deliberation in relation to sustainability. The identified tensions between the different understandings of the relationship raise questions about how radical a system change can be and what the purpose of deliberation is. By investigating how the tensions can be handled in practice, e.g., planning practice, future research could contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship and its practical implications. Further, to get a deeper theoretical perspective of this relationship, investigating how practitioners and citizens see the relationship would increase the knowledge about deliberation's possibilities and limitations in relation to sustainability.

6. Conclusion

Through a frame analysis, three frames of policymakers' perceptions of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability have been identified; the *system change* frame, the *participation* frame, and the *conflict* frame. In the *system change* frame, deliberation is perceived to induce democratic engagement among citizens, leading to structural change. This structural change is believed to result in ecologically sustainable outcomes. The *participation* frame understands deliberation to increase social sustainability by emphasising the potential to increase diverse democratic engagement. In the *conflict* frame, the controversy around issues related to sustainability is highlighted, and deliberation is seen as a tool to deal with conflicts constructively.

A tension between the *system change* and *participation* frame is illuminated because the *system change* frame emphasises a need for radical change towards sustainability, while deliberation according to the *participation* frame cannot guarantee sustainable outcomes. In this context, the question arises of how radical a system change can be. Further, a similar tension between the *system change* and *conflict* frame is highlighted where policymakers understand deliberation's purpose in relation to sustainability differently. In the *conflict* frame, deliberation is understood to deal with conflicts constructively, while in the *system change* frame, increased democratic engagement through deliberation is believed to result in more radical decisions to mitigate climate change.

The results and the identified tensions indicate that a democratic change is understood to be in line with environmental democracy due to the understanding of change as a reformation rather than transformation. Change in line with environmental democracy is perceived to enhance social sustainability, but the question is how effectively such a change would impact ecological sustainability.

This thesis contributes with insights into the relationship between deliberation and sustainability, and the identified tensions illuminate areas where further research is needed to investigate how sustainability can be handled through deliberation. The results are helpful for practitioners working with citizen dialogues and similar democratic innovations. Future research can contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship by investigating how the identified tensions can be handled in practice. Further, deeper theoretical insights could be gathered by researching how practitioners and citizens understand the relationship.

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Popular science summary

Do policymakers think that deliberation can take us closer to sustainability?

As the effects of climate change intensify, it is important to look beyond technical solutions and into how our societal structures could facilitate sustainable development. Faith is put on deliberation to result in increased sustainability, but the relationship between deliberation and sustainability is not clear. Whether deliberation will result in increased sustainability is contested, and tensions arise between the different understandings of deliberation. The question of how radical decisions can be made in deliberative processes becomes evident. Addressing these tensions in further research would deepen our understanding of how deliberation could work as a tool to increase sustainability.

The relationship between deliberation and sustainability illustrates the many dimensions of the tension between the need for urgent action to deal with climate change and slow democratic processes. The results are three frames which illustrates different understandings of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. In the *system change* frame, a radical change of the political system change is believed to happen when people become more democratically engaged through deliberation. The *participation* frame emphasises the inclusiveness deliberation brings as a process, which is understood to enhance social sustainability. Because sustainability is a contested topic, conflicts related to sustainability are inevitable. Thus, in the *conflict* frame, deliberation is understood as a way to deal with conflicts constructively.

By analysing two policy documents, two interviews with politicians in a municipality which has implemented a citizens' assembly, and one interview with one official working in the municipality administration, I have gathered insights into policymakers' understanding of the relationship between deliberation and sustainability. These perceptions are summarised in three frames, which present reality in different ways. A frame analysis focuses on language and how people collectively make sense of reality through interaction. Therefore, this thesis contributes to discovering embedded ideas about deliberation and sustainability.

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Appendix 1

Intervjuguide

Informera om:

- Allt som sägs i intervjun är konfidentiellt och personlig information kommer inte att länkas till dig.
- Du kan när som hoppa över en fråga.
- Är det okej om jag spelar in? Transkribering av intervjun kan visas för min handledare.

Introduktion

- Jag skriver min masteruppsats inom miljökommunikation. Den här studien syftar till att undersöka hur vi kan förena hållbarhet och demokrati, med fokus på hur demokratiska processer kan utvecklas.

- Har du något du vill fråga mig om?

Korta öppningsfrågor

- Berätta lite om dig själv och hur du varit/är involverad i deliberativa processer.
- Vart ligger ditt intresse för de här frågorna?

Huvuddelen av intervjun

Del 1

1. Hur länge har du varit involverad i medborgarrådet?

2. Berätta hur processen ser ut när medborgare träffas i ett fokusråd för att diskutera ämnen som rör hållbarhet.

3. När fokusrådet diskuterar ämnen som rör hållbarhet och klimatet, vilka konflikter har ni stött på?
   - hur ser du på spänningen mellan konsensus och konflikt i relation till deliberativa forum?

- är deliberativa forum rätt verktyg för att ta oss till hållbarhet?

4. **När en sådan konflikt uppstår, hur hanterar ni den?**
- facilitering
- konflikt vs. consensus

5. **Vilka nackdelar har ni stött med medborgarrådet/fokusrådet som process i sig, i förhållande till ämnen som rör hållbarhet och klimatkrisen?**
- hur har ni hanterat dessa problem?

6. **Beskriv vad som gör fokusrådet legitimt och hur dessa processer ser ut.**
- (diskursiv) representation
- facilitering
- information

Del 2 - preliminära resultat från dokumenten

7. Mänsklig aktivitet erkänns som en av de största bidragande faktorerna till klimatförändringarna. Vilken roll har deliberation i att tackla klimatförändringarna sett utifrån att mänsklig aktivitet är den största bidragande faktorn?

8. Hur viktigt är det att fokusera på minskning av utsläpp i deliberativa forum på lokal respektive nationell nivå?

9. Hur viktigt är representation, facilitering och information för legitimitet i deliberativa processer?

10. Hur viktigt är det att medborgare känner sig delaktiga i beslutsprocesser som syftar till radikala förändringar och stor omställning?

Del 3

11. **Vad är din erfarenhet av demokratiska beslutsprocesser som syftar till att tackla klimatförändringar?**
- praktiska exempel på tillvägagångssätt
- resultat
- hur hanterades konflikt och konsensus?

12. **Hur skulle du beskriva behovet av utveckling av demokratin?**
- spänning mellan demokrati, hållbarhet och ekonomisk tillväxt

13. Vad gör ett deliberativt forum anpassat eller inte anpassat för att handskas med komplexa problem som hållbarhet?
- legitimitet (representativitet, facilitation, information)?
- konsensus vs. Konflikt

14. Vad innebär demokrati för dig?
- frihet, ansvar
- är det viktigt att leva i ett demokratiskt samhälle?
- finns det komplement/alternativ till demokrati som skulle kunna fungera bättre?

15. Vad är din uppfattning om hållbarhet?
- är det viktigt att leva i ett hållbart samhälle?
- vem avgör om något är hållbart och inte?
- ekologisk, social, ekonomisk
- är utsläpp viktigare att fokusera på än andra typer av mänsklig aktivitet?

Det var allt, har du något du vill lägga till eller fråga mig om?

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