



Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development Uppsala
Unit for Environmental Communication

Indirect Environmental Action

– Four stories of young adults, the hindrances they encountered and their driving-forces

Elias Henriksson

Master's thesis • 15 ECTS • Advanced (D) Level
Environmental Communication and Management; 60 ECTS •
Uppsala 2011

Indirect Environmental Action

Four stories of young adults, the hindrances they encountered and their driving-forces

Elias Henriksson

Supervisor: Lotten Westberg,
Unit for Environmental Communication

Examiner: Lars Hallgren,
Unit for Environmental Communication

Credits: 15 ECTS

Level: Advanced (D) Level

Course title: Practice and Thesis Work in Environmental Communication and Management

Course code: EX0409

Programme/education: Environmental Communication and Management; 60 ECTS

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2011

Online publication: <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

Key Words: Indirect Environmental Action, Phenomenology, Life-world, Environmental Activism, Hindrances, Facilitators, Driving-forces



Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development Uppsala
Unit for Environmental Communication

Abstract

Life-world phenomenology provides the theoretical foundation of this study with the aim to answer the overall research questions: *What hindrances to indirect environmental action are experienced by some young adults? What are the driving-forces behind their actions?* For the purpose of this study, indirect environmental action is defined as *voluntary and intentional action targeted at influencing other people or structures in society in order to decrease the impact on the environment*. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted with four young people who take indirect environmental action. Their stories show that, perceived competence, lack of environmental commitment from significant others and paralysis due to extensive reflection may constitute hindrances. Major driving-forces are feelings connected to other humans or nature but also career possibilities and a search for status and recognition.

Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	1
1.1	Guiding definitions	2
1.1.1	Indirect environmental action.....	2
1.1.2	Indirect environmental action in relation to environmental activism.....	3
1.2	Earlier studies.....	3
2	Approach and method.....	4
2.1	A phenomenological life-world approach	4
2.2	Method	5
2.2.1	Selection of subjects.....	6
2.2.2	The interview situations	6
2.2.3	Transcription	6
2.2.4	Analysis	6
2.2.5	Verification	7
2.2.6	Ethics	7
3	Results	8
3.1	Sofie.....	8
3.1.1	Driving-forces	9
3.1.2	Future	10
3.2	Kim	10
3.2.1	Driving-forces	12
3.2.2	Future	12
3.3	Linnea.....	13
3.3.1	Driving-forces	15
3.3.2	Future	15
3.4	Sam	15
3.4.1	Driving-forces	18
3.4.2	Future	19
3.4.3	General comments by Sam	19
4	Discussion.....	20
5	References.....	23
6	Appendix	24

1 Introduction

In this thesis I will retell some experiences made by Sofie, Kim, Linnea, and Sam, four young people that have one thing in common: they all take indirect environmental action. Which means they voluntarily take action to decrease the impact on the environment by influencing other people or structures in society. They are involved in environmental organisations, write debate articles, coach others or organise demonstrations.

When I meet people like them I cannot help but wonder how and why they do it. What does their way from thought to action look like? Was it short or long, easy or difficult? What hindrances and facilitators did they encounter along their way and why do they take action? They are not paid or forced to do it so which are then the driving-forces behind their environmental actions?

My questions are not raised out of pure curiosity but because the actions of these people are important. While most people take no environmental action or only direct environmental action, i.e. individual lifestyle changes, these people have taken it one step further. They take action not only to decrease their own impact on the environment but also take action with the intent to influence other people and structures in society, i.e. indirect environmental action. My point is not that individual lifestyle changes are unimportant; on the contrary these direct environmental actions are in the end what decreases our impact on the environment. Instead, my point is that indirect environmental action constitutes a leadership urgently needed in environmental issues. Some of us has to take action to influence others and structures in society. Only then may a large-scale change be possible. Let me take climate change and some statistic from Sweden as examples to illustrate the importance of indirect environmental action.

When it comes to climate change, few would argue that the current development of society is sustainable. Despite that, relatively little is done to combat climate change. Investigating this inaction of societies, Hale (2010, p.259) finds that politicians, businesses and the public all look to each other for urgently needed leadership to respond to climate change. Governments and businesses are very unlikely to take this leadership due to the constraints in the democratic and market frameworks in which they operate (Hale, 2010, p.263). Instead, Hale comes to the conclusion that this leadership can only come from the third sector, consisting of volunteers, community groups, trade unions, national and international non-profit organisations and social enterprises etc. “The third sector holds the key to mobilising public concern, behaviour and political mobilisation, and to success in the struggle against climate change” (Hale, 2010, p.264). Arguably, this is also the case in many other environmental and social issues.

In reality however, the third sector is, just as governments and businesses are, relatively passive when it comes to environmental issues. If the third sector is to take on this leadership it is largely dependent on additional voluntary commitment from individuals. If we take the third sector in Sweden as an example, the commitment of individuals is in general relatively high compared to most other countries. Today, 48 percent of the population report that they are active in voluntary organisations. These are however mainly organisations associated with sports, housing, arts or labour, which today do not have environmental issues topmost on their agenda. About half of the population is very worried about environmental deterioration and changes in the global climate (Holmberg and Weibull, 2009, p.22) nevertheless very few, only 1 percent, perform voluntary work within environmental organisations (Svedberg et al, 2010, p.13 and pp.19-20). The relatively high environmental awareness, on the one hand, and the low active commitment in environmental organisations, on the other, suggest that there is a gap between environmental awareness and indirect environmental action. When it comes to the gap between environmental awareness and direct environmental action, i.e. lifestyle

choices, studies have identified several hindrances as reasons for that gap (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, and McKenzie-Mohr, 2009). My assumption is that this is also true for the gap between environmental awareness and indirect environmental action. In other words, I believe there are many potential Sofies, Kims, Linneas and Sams out there, people who are willing to take indirect environmental action but for some reason find it difficult or impossible. The aim of this study is therefore to learn from the experiences of Sofie, Kim, Linnea, and Sam to better understand how come some decide to take indirect environmental action and what hindrances individuals may face.

To sum up, unlike governments and businesses the third sector has the potential to take the leadership needed in environmental issues. The third sector is however dependent on the voluntary commitment of individuals, but then again very few show such commitment when it comes to environmental issues. The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore how and why some young people come to take indirect environmental action and the overall research questions are:

*What hindrances to indirect environmental action are experienced by some young adults?
What are the driving-forces behind their actions?*

1.1 Guiding definitions

Hindrances should be understood as someone or something that prevents or makes it difficult to take indirect environmental action. An other word that is frequently used in this report is *facilitator*, which should be understood as someone or something that makes it easier to take indirect environmental action. *Driving-forces* should be understood as reasons or motives to take environmental action. How I define *indirect environmental actions* needs a bit further explanation, which is given below.

1.1.1 Indirect environmental action

For the purpose of this study indirect environmental action is defined as *voluntary and intentional action targeted at influencing other people or structures in society in order to decrease the impact on the environment*.

Indirect environmental action is *voluntary* in the sense that it is based on free will and done without any payment in return. It is *intentional* in the sense that it is conscious and that it is targeted at decreasing the impact on the environment. However, not all kinds of environmental action are of interest to this study. Jensen (2002, pp.326-327) categorises environmental action into four types depending on whether the action is direct or indirect and whether it is individual or collective. Direct or indirect refers to the relation between an action and its effect on the environment. Direct actions intend to directly decrease the impact on the environment, while indirect actions intend to influence other people to decrease the impact on the environment. In that sense, direct actions are characterised by the relation between people and the environment, while indirect actions are characterised by the relation between people. The distinctions between direct and indirect actions are however not always clear, as direct action, individual or collective, may be taken also with the intent to influence other people (Jensen and Schnack, 1997, p.170). In table 1 is shown how the different categories of actions relate to each other.

Table 1. Four types of environmental action (Jensen, 2002, p.327)

	Direct	Indirect
Individual	1	2
Collective	3	4

A type 1 action might be to take the bike instead of the car, an action of type 2 might be to contact a politician and ask for measures which promote biking, type 3 might be to start a car-pool, and type 4 might be to participate in a demonstration for more bike lanes or higher taxes on car traffic. While direct actions concern individual or collective lifestyles, indirect actions concern structures in society, which influence living conditions. Living conditions may in turn influence possibilities for direct and indirect action (Almers, 2009, pp.38-39).

To a varying degree all four subjects¹ in my study show examples of direct individual actions and some of them also show examples of direct collective actions. Direct actions do however fall outside the scope of this study. Instead this thesis concerns individual and collective indirect environmental action.

1.1.2 Indirect environmental action in relation to environmental activism

Although there are no standard definitions of what environmental activism is, it is in some definitions comparable with indirect environmental action. I have searched for but not found any definition of environmental activism that manages to clearly grasp the diversity of environmental actions that my subjects take. Instead I find that often definitions of environmental activism are either too narrow or too implicit. Narrow, in the sense that they often include only “political action” or simply “membership in an environmental organisation”. Implicit, in the sense that they do not make any distinction between different types of action or between behaviour and action, e.g. “environmental protection behaviour”. I therefore do not find the term environmental activism satisfying. There are also other problems associated with using the term environmental activism in this study. None of the subjects would spontaneously call themselves an “environmental activist”. On the contrary, some of them perceive that environmental activism, as used in everyday Swedish, has bad connotations. They apprehend that the term is associated with illegal actions by “pushy” people or associated only with environmental values, while excluding social values which are among the main driving-forces for most of my subjects. Both Linnea and Sam deliberately avoid being identified as environmental activists, as they have experienced that such an identity limits their possibilities to influence other people. Environmental activism is however the most commonly used definition of indirect environmental actions and it has therefore been necessary to use the term when referring to some of the earlier research in this field.

1.2 Earlier studies

There are several studies trying to understand why people do or do not act or behave in a way that decreases the impact on the environment. These studies have, often according to the researchers themselves, difficulties to explain the complexity of environmental action and behaviour (Almers, 2009, p.40). Most of them are quantitative studies within the field of environmentally responsible behaviour (ERB)² and often ignore indirect and collective action and instead focus only on direct individual action in terms of behaviour. Relatively few,

¹ The word “subject” does here and elsewhere in this report relate to a person, e.g. the interviewed person.

² I use the term environmentally responsible behaviour synonymously with the terms pro-environmental behaviour and environmentally significant behaviour.

mainly quantitative studies have been done on environmental activism and it is therefore not well understood (Fielding et al, 2008, p.318; Dono et al, 2010, p.180; Gillham, 2008, p.70). By choosing a different approach than most of the earlier studies I hope to contribute to the understanding of some of the complexity of environmental action. One study that considers this complexity, and therefore has been of great inspiration to me, is: *Action Competence for Sustainable development – Three stories about the path leading there* by Almers (2009). The overall research questions explored by Almers are: “How do young people experience that they have developed aspects of action competence for sustainable development? Which motives and which driving-forces for committed actions are constituted in these stories?”. Action competence for sustainable development is an educational ideal defined by Almers (2009, p.27) as “willingness and capability to act for changes in individual lifestyle, as well as for structural changes of society, in a way that includes responsibility for present and future generations, globally.” Almers (2009) presents the following six themes as relevant in the process of developing action competence for sustainable development: emotional reactions; perceived competence; contrasts and normative foundation; action permeation; trust and faith from adults and in adults; and social belonging in contrast to outsidership. Major motives and driving-forces for sustainability actions in Almers’ (2009) study are: emotional reactions initiating a desire for change and a desire to act; longing for meaningfulness; a desire to feel comfortable with what you can contribute; and longing for belongingness. Although my research question is considerably narrower than hers our studies have basically the same approach and method. In my discussion I have therefore compared my results with some of Almers’ results.

2 Approach and method

This section consists of a brief description of the theory behind my approach, followed by a description of the method I have used.

2.1 A phenomenological life-world approach

This study has been inspired by the empirical research tradition known as the life-world approach, which has its origin in the philosophy of phenomenology. To understand the life-world approach it is therefore necessary to put it in to its phenomenological context. Phenomenology is however not a uniform concept, instead there are several varieties (Bengtsson, 2005, p.11). I will here describe how I understand phenomenology and why I think the life-world approach is suitable for my study. In the following description of the method the reader also gets a picture of how my own understanding of phenomenology and the life-world-approach has guided my study.

Common for all varieties of phenomenology is the ambition to return to the things themselves (Bengtsson, 2005, p.11). The “things” must in this context be understood as phenomena. The word phenomenon originates from Greek meaning “thing appearing to view”. “Appearing to view” does not only imply a thing that appears but also that there is someone present, a viewer (Bengtsson, 2005, p.12). In the context of phenomenology “things” must therefore be understood as objects as they appear to a subject. Furthermore, a phenomenon or “appearing to view” implies a somewhere. This somewhere is the life-world, the world as it appears to the subject. The life-world in turn consists of several worlds of which “science” is one but where the everyday world is supreme (Bengtsson, 2005, pp.28-29). It is from the life-world that we gain our knowledge, scientific or not. Merleau-Ponty (1962, p.viii) expressed it like this:

All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny and arrive at a precise assessment of its meaning and scope, we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression. Science has not and never will have, by its nature, the same significance qua form of being as the world which we perceive, for the simple reason that it is a rationale or explanation of that world.

The phenomenological ambition to return to the things themselves means to study the world without the limitations of theories and predetermined methods but with an open mind. In the life-world approach the researchers study the objects as they appear to a subject. Another way to put it is that the researchers study the world through the eyes of others.

The thing or object of my study is “indirect environmental action” and the subjects are the young adults: Sofie, Kim, Linnea, and Sam. In line with phenomenology, my ambition has been to return to “indirect environmental action” itself. Instead of relying on theories I have approached the object of my study with an open mind, trying to understand some of its complexity. I have searched for and found subjects with life-worlds in which the phenomenon of indirect environmental action is a central thing. I have then arranged meetings in the form of interviews between my life-world and theirs. By communicating with my subjects I have got an understanding of how they experience indirect environmental action. Through this understanding the horizon of my life-world has expanded and it is part of this expansion, my new understanding, which I wish to report in this thesis. Another way to put it is that my subjects have an implicit knowledge in terms of experiences of indirect environmental action that I wish to make more explicit and communicate to you (Bengtsson, 2005, pp.50-51).

There are branches within phenomenology with the ambition to put the existence of the subject, the researcher and their life-worlds within brackets in order to be able to study the object in a pure state. The branch that my approach departs from instead regards the existences of the researcher, the subject and our life-worlds as an inescapable prerequisite for understanding. This is because our life-worlds are the concrete realities, which we share with others through interaction and communication (Bengtsson, 2005). A consequence of this view is that, although I have taken several measures to avoid it, my perspectives on the world will inevitably influence my interpretations of my subjects’ stories and descriptions.

2.2 Method

The life-world approach contains no predetermined methodology. The reason for this is the phenomenological ambition to return to the things themselves. This ambition entails adaptability towards the things under investigation and therefore contradicts with the use of a predetermined set of methods. Instead, the researcher has to be creative and choose methods according to the things under investigation (Bengtsson, 2005, p.39).

I have decided to use semi-structured interviews with mainly open-ended questions for several reasons. This method gives me a possibility to connect with the life-world of my subjects and it is open to unexpected themes (Kvale, 2009, pp.44-45). It also gives me the possibility to encourage stories and in depth descriptions and simultaneously gives the subjects and me a chance to understand how to interpret each other (Denscombe, 2009, p.117).

2.2.1 Selection of subjects

I have purposively selected subjects that I have perceived would be able to contribute to deeper understanding by answering my research questions. This strategy is acceptable as the purpose of my study is not to test a hypothesis or to generalise my results. I have strived for diversity in regards to sex and different types of environmental actions. The subjects were found through my personal contacts within the environmental movement.

2.2.2 The interview situations

The interviews were conducted individually with my four subjects in Sweden during April and May 2011. The language used during the interviews was Swedish. I used an interview guide with the following structure: the subjects were first asked to tell about their current environmental actions and then if they looked upon themselves as “environmental activists”. After that they were asked to tell about their first memories of environmental issues. From that first memory we then searched through their life story until today in order to identify when they started to take indirect environmental action. A lifeline with experiences identified by the subjects as important to their development of indirect environmental action was constructed. The subjects were then asked to tell about which hindrances and facilitators they had experienced on their way to indirect environmental action. Most of the hindrances had however already been brought up by the subjects earlier in the interview. At last the subjects were asked about the driving-forces behind their environmental actions. These parts of the interviews were more structured and closed-ended questions were partly used. The subjects were first asked to mention their main driving-forces and then whether a set of possible driving-forces was relevant to them. If I suggested a driving-force, this is explicitly mentioned in the results section. When the subjects touched upon themes I found interesting I encouraged them to tell stories or give me in depth descriptions. I asked for confirmation of my interpretations and allowed the subjects to correct me. When I felt that I did not understand I asked clarifying questions. At times I also posed critical questions to their interpretations.

The length of the interviews varied from 2 hours and 15 minutes to 9 hours and 18 minutes depending on the time available to the subject. All the interviews were recorded resulting in a total of 19 hours of recorded material.

2.2.3 Transcription

Due to time constraints I have not been able to transcribe the interviews. Instead I listened through the full recording one or two days after an interview was made. When listening to the recording I made key notes with time indications in order to make it easier to listen to specific parts of the interview at later stages in the process.

2.2.4 Analysis

According to the phenomenological research tradition that has inspired my study, the researcher should look at the world through the eyes of her or his subjects. This implies that the researcher should not analyse the meaning of the subjects’ experiences and actions. Instead, one should try to analyse the meaning the subjects give to their experiences and actions, and describe and present them in a way as true to the original as possible (Denscombe, 2009, p.112). As much as possible of the interpretations of the subjects’ stories were therefore made during the interviews together with them by me asking follow-up questions in order to clarify, confirm and sometimes test their interpretations. In that sense the

subjects have done the most important part of the analysis themselves prior to the interviews and in interaction with me during the interviews.

After having listened through the recordings, I first identified three to five central themes of an interview, the main barriers and facilitators and the driving-forces the subject had reported. In order to visualise this I draw mind maps (see appendix). A time line was also drawn in order to structure the stories chronologically. When all the interviews had been conducted the mind maps were used to pick central themes, facilitators, barriers and driving-forces to report.

Phenomenology implies a research process that is not reductionistic. A life-world approach should therefore have the ambition to study the world in its full concreteness as it appears to the subject. Such an approach must be guided by openness towards the complexity and diversity of the life-world. Nevertheless, all empirical work implies selection (Bengtsson, 2005, p.37). I have therefore let my research questions as well as the themes identified as central, guide me in deciding which parts of the interviews to include or exclude in the report. Relevant parts have been listened through again and some of them have been transcribed. Due to the space limitations of this report most of the material has been left out. The 19 hours of interviews have however not been in vain. In order to discover and understand how the subjects' experiences relate to my research question it has been necessary. It has also been necessary in order for me to understand the context of my subjects' experiences.

When writing the report I reconstructed the interviews to a chronological presentation using the time lines. The reason for this is to give the reader a sense of when in a subject's life a certain experience was made. When translating and writing the stories and descriptions, my ambition has been to retell them in a language authentic to the one used by the subject and at the same time maintain the readability. The quotes presented in the result section have been transcribed and translated into English. Repeated words, hesitations and the word "liksom" (similar to English "like" or "sort of"), which is excessively used in Swedish, have been removed in order to improve the readability.

2.2.5 Verification

I worked on the part of the analysis starting from the end of the interview until the finished report, including decisions such as what to present in the report and how to retell the subjects' experiences, in absence of the subjects. To avoid misinterpretations during this part of the analysis I have practiced participatory validation (Kvale, 2009, p.230). When the results section had been written, the individual parts were sent to the subjects. The subjects were asked to comment on my interpretations of them during the interview, on the language I used and how their identity was hidden. Kim answered that I had understood him "perfectly" and did not ask me to change anything. The other three subjects had comments and asked for or suggested changes of parts of the text. I changed the text according to their comments. The subjects have however not validated the final text since only some further minor changes have been made. Sam also gave three more general comments. Instead of changing the text, these comments have been translated and inserted at the end of his results section. Sam has approved this procedure and my motivation for it is given next to the comments.

2.2.6 Ethics

Before the start of each interview a contract was signed by me and given to the subjects. This contract explained the purpose of the study, how I intended to use the material, that the identity of the subjects will be hidden and that they have the right to withdraw their participation at any time until the report was finished. In order to protect the identity of my subjects, their names have been changed. Names of other people, places and of organisations

have also been changed. Such changes have been made both in the text written by me and in the quotations.

3 Results

The four interviews are presented individually here with the subject's name as the heading and the following basic structure: first the subject and the central themes of the interview are briefly introduced. After that the subject's life story related to environmental action is presented from the first memory of environmental issues until today. Hindrances and facilitators experienced by the subject are interwoven into this part. In the end of each individual section the driving-forces and a few thoughts about the future are presented.

Quotations from the interviews are indicated by indentation and a smaller text or for shorter quotations by quotation marks. In the quotations, "...“ indicates that the subject made a pause, "(...)" indicates that I have removed a short part of the speech in order to make the quotation easier to read and "(laughs)" indicates that the subject is laughing. The reader should be aware of that these presentations are far from complete pictures of the subjects themselves or of their lives. What are presented here are instead selected parts of the knowledge that was created in the interaction between the subjects and me during the interview. Another thing to keep in mind is that I have translated the quotations from Swedish. If the interviews had been conducted in English the subjects would have expressed themselves differently.

3.1 Sofie

Sofie is 29 years old. For two years she has been voluntarily active in Green Umbrella, a student NGO³ that works with environmental issues. Our four hour long interview takes place in the office of another environmental NGO where she is employed as a coordinator since half a year. The central theme of this interview is how lack of interest and commitment in environmental issues from friends and family, and unsuccessful attempts to influence them, can become a hindrance to further indirect environmental action.

Growing up, Sofie was idealistic and wanted to prevent social injustices in the world. At the age of 14 she heard about the destruction of rainforests. She remembers how she perceived this to be very unfair towards the native people living in the forests. The picture of her as idealistic and wanting to prevent social injustices in the world was also recognised by her friends. When they graduated from the upper secondary school the students wrote in each others friendship books.

Then they wrote about me that ..."I wanted to save the world"... and that (...) "I could not see any problem why you could not bring ice from the North Pole to ensure that they get water in Africa".

At the age of 22, she decided to skip her veterinary studies and study human ecology instead. Her knowledge of how humanitarian and environmental issues are connected with human activity then increased. She dreamed of going to a third world country to work with some sort of development project but was never brave enough to realise her dreams. At this time she also tried to become active in a humanitarian NGO, attended a couple of meetings and activities but it did not lead to a longer involvement. She started to take more direct environmental action and also tried to influence her friends and family to do the same. These attempts were often unsuccessful and instead they ended in heavy arguments. Sofie tells me

³ Non governmental organisation here used synonymously with non-profit organisation.

about when she celebrated Christmas with her family and she and her grandfather ended up in an argument.

... then, we came to the environment and then the climate and he said that there was no scientific proof ... and ... I cannot remember numbers straight off like that ... so it was difficult to take the discussion with him ... and everyone else just sat and was silent, because ... this was something ... something that he and I had to sort out ... It ended up with me crying and he mocked me and said that I was weak and then I went home.

After that episode Sofie and her grandfather did not speak to each other for a year. Although, this is the worst such situation that Sofie tells me about, but talks regarding these issues often turned into conflicts, especially with her father and grandfather. She was left with a feeling of not being able to influence people to take environmental action. This feeling in combination with that she had not been brave enough to realise many of her dreams made her lose some of her self-confidence and feel a dislike towards herself in the role as an idealist. These feelings also turned into periods of depression in her life.

Looking back, she points out this feeling of incompetence as a major hindrance to indirect environmental action. Another hindrance she identifies is the lack of interest and commitment to environmental issues from her former boyfriend and their friends at that time.

At the age of 26 she started to study environmental science. Her new classmates were not as engaged in environmental issues as they were when she studied human ecology and she was therefore recognised as a person committed to environmental issues. She believes this identity has been an important facilitator for her commitment.

At this time she is again trying to find an organisation to engage in. She contacts Greenpeace but due to bad coordination from the organisation it ran into the sand. Those unsuccessful attempts to find an organisation have been a hindrance to her.

Some of her new classmates were active in Green Umbrella, a student organisation working with environmental issues and at the age of 27 she decided to join them. The atmosphere of this organisation contrasted very much to what she had experienced before.

Often I feel less motivated when I say something ... "Ohh we could do this" and there is no one who says "Yes, let's do it!" ... but here it was quite the opposite ... it was (laughs) you wow (laughs) ... I remember a German guy. We talked about that we would stand on the square. Then we started talking about that we would do an atmospheric kind of ... tent. You know, we just brainstormed on ideas and we just pepped each other more and more ... it was a fantastic feeling.

Green Umbrella became a facilitator for indirect environmental action. Here she has others to take action with, the projects are fun and her competence is recognised by her colleagues. She tells me that this organisation has been very successful lately. She points at the importance of this feeling of success for her commitment. I ask her if it is the feeling of "I" or of "us" succeeding that is important to her, telling her that to me, my feeling of personal success has been an important driving-force for my commitment. To her it is however different: "I can become completely high ... after having done something together". She has also realised that it is better for her commitment to be involved in local projects having concrete and achievable goals as opposed to international climate politics.

3.1.1 Driving-forces

The main driving-force for Sofie is the injustice between rich and poor countries. Another driving-force for her is problem solving. In a bit of a joking manner she expresses it like this.

In (laughs) one way, I do not hope that the environmental problems are solved because then I have nothing to commit myself to.

She also mentions that environmental issues are something that really matters as opposed to many other things in life.

That, this is so big ... it is so crucial. Environmental ... environmental commitment and environmental change ... or our behaviour, our transition is so ... so crucial for how the world will look like in ten, fifteen, fifty years (...) It's not about consulting someone in their pensions planning.

And that:

It's super exciting I think, really, and it is so ... is so broad. It is also why I like it. Because, I'm still the person who does not really know where I belong.

The ability of future generations to satisfy their needs is not driving-force for her.

When you hear on TV, "I think of my children's children in the future". That feeling. I do not have it. Maybe it's because I do not have children. I do not have that ... the "next generation-feeling". I cannot at all identify myself with it.

3.1.2 Future

Sofie is not really sure what her commitment will look like in the future. Perhaps she will start up a consulting business, offering coaching in environmental issues. One thing she is sure of is that she needs to feel that she has succeeded in a project where she has been the driver.

3.2 Kim

Kim is 21 years old. He is employed as a political secretary in a student organisation. On partly voluntary and partly paid basis he gives lectures about international climate negotiations and is active in a political youth party and a political student party. On voluntary basis he also runs one of the biggest environmental blogs in Sweden. Our 2 hours and 17 minutes long interview takes place in the garden of his parents' house. The central theme of this interview is how the search for recognition, status and career can be a major driving-force for indirect environmental action.

I ask about it but Kim does not seem to feel that he has any memories from his childhood that are relevant for my study. The only thing he remembers is that his parents taught him to respect the nature and that environmental awareness was taken for granted both by his parents and the teachers in the school he went to. Instead his story starts when he was 18 years old and joined his older brother in a political youth party. He soon became active in the youth party and at the age of 19 he travelled with them to COP 14⁴ in Poznan. Although he did already have a general interest in environmental issues, the main reason for joining the trip was to meet new people and have fun.

It was not environmental issues that awakened my interest for this particular trip ... but because, like ... go out and meet people from all over Europe. It's a fun thing anyhow, really.

⁴ COP is an abbreviation for Conference of the Parties, the main meeting in the international climate negotiations. These meetings are held annually in different places in the world and are organised by United Nations. The number 14 indicates that COP 14 was the 14th meeting held since the first COP meeting in 1995.

During this trip he developed a greater knowledge of climate issues and the many dimensions of it, such as climate justice between rich and poor countries. This knowledge led to a greater interest in the international climate negotiations, which has been the focus of his commitment since then. He tells me that although he has a holistic view of environmental issues he has pragmatic reasons to focus on the climate issue.

There, I'm a pragmatist also, so I ... I look at ... the climate as the main environmental issue (...) simply for the survival of humanity ... I choose to ... or ... I think the issue is the most important, simply.

Another reason for him to focus on international climate negotiations has been to gain status, success and power within his party.

As I said, I am pretty cynical ... but ... it is always the aspect of ... status and success and power within the party actually (laughs). Whew, I sound very cynical (laughs) ... But it ... it is clear that if you know a lot about environmental issues and climate issues in the party then you can go far and ... and ... Without diminishing my commitment, it is definitely (...) it contributes of course definitely to that I have ... been working actively with it ... and I actually do not see that as a problem ... I do not see a problem in ... That there is an ... interest of status and success ... I do not see it as a problem at all, instead I think it is perfectly ... perfectly natural that one should be seen.

Since COP 14 Kim follows the international climate negotiations and has attended both COP 15 and COP 16. During these meetings he writes debate articles and takes part in demonstrations. He is now an expert on international climate negotiations and gives lectures on the issue in schools and for different organisations. He has also climbed the hierarchic ladder within his party.

After the Swedish election in 2010, during which the youth party employed him, he became disappointed that environmental issues had not been raised at all. Therefore he and some friends decided to start an environmental blog with the aim of placing environmental issues on the political agenda. Today the non profit blog is one of the biggest environmental blogs in Sweden.

When it comes to hindrances he mentions lack of time and the exclusion from the party's inner circles.

Something that I've felt ... when I was about to start to get involved there, it was that social structures can be very ... inhibiting ... that ... it felt like ... in the youth party, or elsewhere, where I have been, (...) It's been just a few people who have been very significant or had much status ... within the organisation or elsewhere ... and ... that ... hmm ... you felt a bit excluded perhaps.

He believes that this exclusion is part of the game but that it may be discouraging to new members. He did however choose to continue and he is now included in the inner circles. I ask him if reaching there has been a driving-force for him.

Yes indeed ... that has of course to do with this about status and to get recognition ... that you ... want to be a bit like them (laughs).

He also says that the knowledge of environmental issues that he has obtained has made it easier for him to engage himself.

It has been a matter of knowledge, too, I think ... I have not always been ... very ... competent in environmental issues. But it has been a process where I have learned more and more. I have, for example, never studied anything with environment ... I do not have it genuinely in me but have had to learn it myself ... and then, the last, maybe, (...) last year, it is since then that I have been ... generally competent in environmental issues ... then it has become ... It is much easier to engage in a question if you truly know it.

Other than that he cannot point out any hindrances or facilitators to his commitment that has been of any greater importance to him. He does however mention that he believes it is important to find friends that you can associate with in the organisation you choose to get involved in. He also mentions the importance of finding a forum that fits your level. At first he felt the youth party was a bit unserious. That it was more about social games than about discussing politics. This has however changed for him as he has worked his way up the ladder.

3.2.1 Driving-forces

What becomes a central theme to our interview are the driving-forces behind his commitment. He identifies status and recognition as driving-forces and gives the following example.

As I mentioned it is also this with ... the aspect of status. I remember the first time I got a debate article in ... in print ... it was a thrill, it was a thrill to know that now I'm visible in the media.

He believes this sort of recognition and status has been an important condition for his commitment. At the same time he points out that other active people may not have this need of recognition and status.

I think it is very individual how people function but if I did not, if I knew that, I did not have the opportunity to ... so to speak ... move up the stairs, maybe ... career-wise, or status wise ... or ... and not been able to receive an external recognition ... then I don't think I would have been nearly as committed.

He also mentions community, personal development, climate justice, his ideology which has to do with making this world a better place, as driving-forces. Another driving-force for Kim is the anger he can feel when people make false statements. He takes the environmental minister Carlgren as an example.

It is often that ... that Carlgren, often is lying. He says something is an investment but it is a reduction ... as it is when they are investing in the railroad, they say it is a historically big investment, but it is really a big reduction from last year ... And to get away with lying. It can be ... This injustice, ... the feeling that you are unfairly treated ... it can make me really engage myself.

I asked about it but he does not regard future generations as a driving-force.

3.2.2 Future

He thinks that in 5 years from now he might work as a political secretary in the parliament but that he will still be partly voluntarily engaged in environmental issues such as attending the COP meetings.

3.3 Linnea

Linnea is 23 years old and studies environmental science. On a voluntary basis she coaches students wanting to realise different sustainability projects. Our 3 hours and 20 minutes long interview takes place at her home. A central theme of this interview is how the feeling of not having enough knowledge in environmental issues and one's self-confidence can become a major hindrance to indirect environmental action.

When Linnea was little she often watched documentaries about nature. She remembers how they made her feel fascinated by the creation of nature. These documentaries did however always come with the message, that human activities are a threat to the environment. At the age of 5, after having watched a documentary about the sea, she made a book with drawings of the different animals living in the sea. She also wrote in the book that these animals were threatened by human activity and that it was necessary to take action. When she showed the book to her parents they said "Oh exiting, well done" but they did not take the action she wanted. This made her frustrated and "there somewhere ... I realised, that if I want change, if I think this is bad, I will have to do something about it myself".

I walked around and felt that "Hey, this is urgent" and everyone said "God, that is sad, somebody else will have to do it"... and ... the frustration and the stress associated with these issues, I have felt it basically my whole life ... And it is only now, that I've started working practically ... got an ... release for my commitment to the environment that I feel ... do not feel stressed anymore.

Linnea's feeling of frustration and willingness to act for change has been a guiding star in her life. The journey towards further indirect environmental action is however long and characterised by the search for knowledge and the lack of self-confidence.

Growing up she always wanted to become a veterinary so that she could help the animals, but at the age of 14 she realised that she needed to have a more holistic view of the problems.

It is not enough ... to ... I care very much about animals ... but ... if I want to change ... (laughs) ... the global health condition of animals everywhere then it is not enough, as I said, to patch them up. Then, I need to influence other things ... and there somewhere I realised that ... I need a bigger picture of ... the problems.

They often discussed different issues in her family and she was taught that it is important to know what you are talking about.

I've always been a person who has wanted to have ... 100 percent check on what I stand for.

At upper primary school some of Linnea's friends participated in political activities such as demonstrations. She however always felt she did not know enough to participate.

I've always wanted to be like that ... yes ... but really ... I want know all the arguments ... pros and cons ... and then take a stand ... I do not want to take a stand first and then ... yes but, that someone may get a wrong idea of what I think.

Another aspect of this is Linnea's self-confidence.

It has perhaps been much of a self-confidence question for me (...) There are many who think it is enough with only ethical arguments or, do you understand what I mean? ... In one way, I admire people that do that cause I never could ... I would never dare to (...) just come out and say "I'm right and you're wrong" ... I have never had the self-confidence to do that ... That has definitely been a barrier also to me ... that my confidence has not been the best ... never, really.

She has also been lonely in her commitment. Her friends and family showed little interest and when she, at the age of 19, met her boyfriend Josef, he was the first person that really listened to what she had to say. This improved her self-confidence.

... but he was very positive (...) "Aah how interesting. I've never thought of this before" (...) It's not at all that he bought everything I said, but he took it in and thought over it ... and said "Aah, you're damn right".

At the age of 20 she started to study environmental science at the university. It felt "totally right" like "finally finding a home" she says. In this education she found what she had been missing all those years; the knowledge, the holistic view of environmental issues and arguments other than ethical.

One year later, Josef, who she describes as a man of action, started a non profit organisation together with some friends. The aim of the organisation is to exchange knowledge in sustainability issues between the academic and the business world. As Linnea knew what the organisation stood for and liked the way they worked she decided to become active in the organisation last fall. Within it, on a voluntary basis, she coaches students in sustainability projects.

Linnea tells me about how she coached a girl who wanted to do a project in Bolivia and I ask her how she felt when the girl succeeded: "It was great fun". This was soon after she had become active in the organisation. Linnea was a bit insecure in her new role as a coach, not knowing if she did a good job or not, but then the girl wrote in her blog that she had got a lot of help from a girl (Linnea) in the organisation.

... but the way she described it, it was as ... She would certainly have been able to carry out the project without us, but that it meant very much ... That it helped her a lot. And that was very valuable to me ... and I guess, that was ... to me that was the reward.

Linnea has now been involved in the organisation for a little bit more than half a year. When I ask her why she thinks she did not become involved earlier she identifies a lack of knowledge in environmental issues and her self-confidence as major hindrance.

Probably I could have involved myself a lot earlier if I had ... the tools that I felt I needed. If I would have obtained more knowledge and if I would have had the chance to talk more about the environment and stuff like that ... already in elementary school. Then I would not have waited as long as I did.

In the end of our interview she also adds:

Yes. To me it has been really important ... really because it has given me a completely different self-confidence.

3.3.1 Driving-forces

The most fundamental driving-force behind Linnea's environmental actions is what she refers to as her ethic.

That I ... do not think it is okay that we destroy ... things that we do not have the right to destroy. I think it is disrespectful against ... If I should have respect for humans, I should also have respect for animals and nature. For me this has always been obvious.

Although she feels that social justice issues are important, and that these are often closely connected with environmental issues, the situation of humans is not the main driving-force for her.

I don't know. Somehow I feel that humans are anyway smart enough to take care of themselves but nature does not have a chance ... It cannot think, it cannot scream, it can not express ... sounds. But I do not mean that it has a pain or so but that ... Because it does not have a human behaviour, it has no human value for us and that is not the way I look at it. I think it has an intrinsic value.

In later years she has also discovered how dynamic and broad the field of environmental issues is and that this is important to her.

I do not need to make up my mind on what ... what I will be when I grow up. I can ... I may be young forever (laughs).

She has also discovered that the "entrepreneurs" that now are entering the environmental field are inspiring. Although she does not identify herself as one of these ground-breaking actors, she feels that she has a reflecting and organising role to fill.

When I ask if the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs is a driving-force for her, she answers:

Yes, it is definitely important ... but then I automatically think of future generations as in future nature ... again, we humans will always be able to take care of ourselves in one way or another.

3.3.2 Future

In the future Linnea believes her voluntary commitment will look approximately like it does today.

3.4 Sam

Sam is 28 years old and is currently working on his master thesis in biology. On voluntary basis he is running a project in his neighbourhood with the aim of influencing public opinion and the resource consumption among his neighbours. Our 9 hours and 18 minutes long interview stretches over two days and takes place in his home. The central theme of this interview is how reflecting too much on how to maximise the outcome of ones indirect environmental actions can become a hindrance.

Sam is a veteran when it comes to commitment in social and environmental issues. It is therefore impossible to cover all the different projects and organisations that he has been involved in. Instead, I will try to give a short overview of the history of his commitment in environmental issues.

Already in primary school Sam was engaged in political issues. One of Sam's teachers told Sam's parents about how Sam often held small lectures in the classroom. In the upper secondary school Sam joined an environmental NGO for young people. His main reason for joining the NGO was the social- and outdoor activities. He soon found a leading role within the organisation and his political interests in environmental issues and willingness to influence the society gradually became a more important part of his involvement. The two years after finishing school he worked partly voluntary and on paid basis within the NGO. He also got involved within a political party that has the environment as one of its main issues.

Looking back, he tells me that since the upper secondary school he became more and more conscious in his environmental actions. Earlier he just “did” but since then he has gradually been reflecting more on how to influence society and create real change. At the age of 21 he also became more aware of the severity and urgency of climate change and for the first time he started to think of environmental issues as heavy and troubling.

When the feeling comes that it is crucial what happens in the near future and that it may be too late. That it does not matter at all that you have done something (...) Then I feel ... that I must act so that what is done ... contribute to us actually managing to solve the situation. So that the climate ... That the positive feedback mechanisms in the climate system do not begin to hit with such force that the climate run out of control ... That there is a limit ... an absolute limit ... That we must keep ourselves below it.

His growing awareness of the severity and urgency of climate change made him start to reflect more upon how he can maximise the outcome of his actions.

It is perhaps not so much that I feel I have a ...responsibility and that it is a burden. It's more that I ... want it to bring about a change and that I want it to ... I want to contribute as much as possible ... really ... well to maximise ... my output.

At about the same time, at the age of 22, he starts feeling less at home in the youth NGO and gradually leaves the organisation. He enters a period of searching, trying different projects and organisations, all with the aim of maximising the outcome of his actions. It was in last autumn he initiated a project in his neighbourhood with the aim to influence public opinion and the resource consumption among his neighbours. He is now running it. He is quite happy about the project so far but insecure if it has led to as much change as he had hoped for.

When we meet he tells me that his commitment has been quite inactive the last two years. One reason for his inaction is that he has started to reflect more and more on how to maximise the outcome of his actions, how he most effectively can contribute to change the world to a better place. Another reason is that he does not want to involve himself in organisations and projects that he feels are not good enough. He has a lot of ideas but when trying to navigate between them and all the possible organisations he feels that he loses a lot of his energy to act.

Lost the energy to act because I ... reflect too much on what is ... the best way to influence or how to influence most and I don't know "should I do like this or like that".

He is often insecure to whether the projects will be worth his effort or if it would be better worth in other projects.

That it will work? Sure ... it will turn into something of course ... If I start a project it will of course turn into something ... but will it be ... good enough for me to feel that it was the right thing to do? ... It is a ... it's a bad fear, as it is unproductive ... only, I think.

He sometimes feels that what he could achieve, if he just found the right way and the courage to do it, could make such a difference. He says that the importance that he puts behind his actions has both positive and negative aspects.

Well ... it can be positive ... to feel that you have ... That it matters what you do ... That it may be important ... Cause otherwise you might just as well give up ... Then if it is ... it feels too big ... crucial ... it can become paralysing also, maybe ... I have at least experienced it like that sometimes.

“Because the burden is too heavy ?“ I ask.

Yes, too heavy burden and that you want to find the absolute best, that which saves the entire world ... It is just ... well, you do not save the world on your own ... in this world ... It is not ... not a reasonable ambition ... So ... there I can feel sometimes that I have ... too ... give too much importance to my choices ... that ... or that ... I am trying to find something that ... will ... well make everything right. And that, does not exist. It is completely impossible. So it would be better if I could stop that ... and try ... to do something little instead.

When he was little his father read Lord of the rings for him. He now thinks that the importance he gives to his actions might have to do with this and all the other stories of heroes he has read. He also makes a parallel with the chaos theory and the butterfly effect.

... (laughs) ... I don't know ... perhaps, if I should find a rational argument for that feeling then it is maybe in ... That it is crucial what I as a person do so, it is perhaps in the chaos theory ... That ... sometimes ... very small ... events can have major effects ... It is said that a butterfly that flutters can initiate a hurricane on the other side of the earth ... But on the other hand I do not know if it would be like a rational argument ... for that it is crucial what I do because it is quite impossible to predict what it is ... I would do that ... would get this great effect. So ... it is still an irrational argument for this feeling, maybe.

To better understand how to interpret his feeling I relate to his earlier reference to Lord of the Rings and propose the following comparison.

Me: You, you are Frodo, you could ...

Sam: Yes ...

Me: You feel, you feel. You may not know but you feel that you could take the ring to Mount Doom... and therefore ... you must also do it ... and that it is over- ...

Sam: Yes

Me: ... -whelming at times or that you become ... paralysed?

Sam: Yes

Me: hmm

Sam: Exactly ... and that feels silly (Sam laughs)

Me: Yes, but I know ... I know...

Sam: ... the feeling ...

Me: But I would agree with that ... (Sam laughs) ... that it may be silly ... (me and Sam laugh) ... But I know it, I have it myself (me and Sam laugh)

He tells me that he has felt it as if his reflections have not been constructive. That he is just stuck in a mind process but that during the interview he feels that some parts have fallen in place. That his inactive period maybe will turn out to be valuable to him in the future. That all his reflections may show useful to him when forming future goals for his action.

It would certainly have been much more effective if I had ... if I have had this interview for (laughs) a year ago (laughs). For example, maybe a lot had fallen into place ... much faster ... or if I had ... the discussions ... with other people to a greater extent. I have had ... very much inside of me (...) I have talked about it with other people but it has been a lot of different people. I have had to start from the beginning each ... time, so I have never got so far.

3.4.1 Driving-forces

I want people to have a good life ... and I want ... the world to be a beautiful place to live in where people can have a good life ... A love for life.

Sam's most fundamental driving-force is love, his love for everything that he finds beautiful.

When I have thought about that, then ... I have come to the conclusion that ... even though I do not feel you have an inborn responsibility ... to act in any particular way, purely objectively, or how to say ... then, I anyway want to do it ... Because I think there is ... much beauty in this world that I want to remain ... People are beautiful ... rainforest is beautiful ... biodiversity is beautiful ... I want it to remain ... and I ... That humans are beautiful it is very much ... the love that exists between people that is beautiful ... what man creates with art and music, dance ... the joy that exists.

As these beautiful things are threatened Sam wants to save them and decides to take action for a better world. Another way he describes his driving-forces is the solidarity he feels with humans which live now and in the future and with other organisms. He acts with the intention to prevent the suffering that the rich world, due to overconsumption, inflicts on these lives. He believes that if we do not decrease our consumption of limited resources very soon we will face a severe population crash. A future he describes like this

... that is a time ... a process I would find it very difficult to live under. Extremely depressing ... anxiety-provoking ... See all that suffering it would inflict. All the people that would die and ... the ... parents that would see their children die ... and people who would see their friends die.

He does not believe this will happen during his lifetime but whether it will or not, does not make any relevant difference to him in the context of his driving-forces. It does however influence how he thinks about having children.

In periods I have felt very strongly that I want children ... and ... but it feels ... it feels ... when I do not have a more positive view of ... the earth and man's destiny ... or what to call it ... then it does not feel as it would be right ... against any person to bring that person to the world ... because ... or I feel ... have for some period of my life felt that it is more painful than joyful to live ... and that is very much due to ... the injustices I see and ... the suffering that exists which we ... ourselves carry the responsibility for with our ... unnecessarily high resource exploitation in the rich world ... I feel powerless in this course of events.

He fears that the world will become overpopulated, a future where the human dignity and global solidarity no longer exist.

In that situation the ... the human dignity will nearly cease ... someone will have to die ... if the food is distributed evenly over the world population then everyone will die (...) how do you choose who should live or not?

He does not think that such decisions will ever have to be made in practice, but says that the global solidarity would almost lose its meaning and that he would not like to live in a world where global solidarity is not an ideal.

I would probably not ... it's not that I ... would take my life ... but if I could ... choose ... not to have been born into that situation then I would maybe have done that ... and when I reason or think like that, then it feels completely wrong to ... have children.

But Sam also sees that the world does not need to become overpopulated and this hope is an important driving-force for him.

I need to feel that it is theoretically possible (...) With a development where the global solidarity is still meaningful.

Solidarity not only with people living now but also with future generations is a driving-force for him. He explains the solidarity he feels with future generations like this.

To me ... a person I never met ... is not ... it is not closer to me because it ... it is living today ... It is equal ... I imagine ... If I see a human starving in the news ... or simply read a newspaper, it can be without pictures, without names, just statistics ... over starvation or something similar, war victims, then ... If I, depending on the mood and context I am differently susceptible to connect with it emotionally. But ... I can take it in quite strongly emotionally ... I can. It has happened that I started to cry over the newspaper sometimes ... and it ... these are things ... happening now, most of the time. But sometimes these are ... projections ... streams of refugees, resulting from climate change. And when it comes to that earth ... could become overpopulated, which I see as the most frightening scenario ... the most ... the most crucial ... which exists for my involvement, or how to say. It's something which I do not think will happen in my lifetime, really.

3.4.2 Future

In the future he will continue his commitment on a voluntary basis in his profession or in an organisation.

3.4.3 General comments by Sam

When validating, Sam left three general comments that I have translated and inserted below. My motive for this procedure is that these comments are not so much consequences of my interpretation of him during the interview, but rather on the content of the interview or the selection of the parts of the content I chose to present in this report. At the same time we both think that his comments contribute to a better understanding and we have therefore chosen to include them here. According to Sam, the first and second comment has to do with that he has reflected more after the interview and therefore sees things from a different perspective or have found ways to express his feelings more clearly. Regarding the third comment, he is not sure whether it came to him as a consequence of my interpretation of him or of the selection or content of the interview.

1) "I thought of this with responsibility and duty as a driving-force. I'm probably not free from it on an emotional level even though I, on an intellectual level, think I should be."

2) "In the text, it revolves a lot around that I want to maximise my output (and probably in the interview as well) and there is a major focus on me as an individual, that I would do it all by

myself, but I would rather be part of an organisation, but an organisation that deals with the issues that I feel are important, and that makes it in a target focused manner.”

3) “To further develop the parable with the Ring - the feeling is that I could take it to Mount Doom, if only I had it in my hand and knew that it was the right ring, but how do you know that? - That the mission you are considering actually is the Ring - the little push that is needed for the development of society to be redirected onto another path, away from the cliff on which I feel we are on the edge of.”

4 Discussion

This section consists of a summary and a discussion of some of the things that I have learned from this study. Here I have given myself the freedom to suggest some possible interpretations that go beyond the self-understanding expressed by the subjects. I have pointed out some common themes from the different interviews and when applicable I relate to Almers’ study (2009). I also discuss any practical consequences my results may have. This I do both from the perspective of the individual that wishes to take indirect environmental action and the perspective of individuals and groups that wish to facilitate indirect environmental action among other people. Finally I discuss the weaknesses and strengths of my results followed by some suggested topics for future research.

My results show that the paths to indirect environmental action may vary much among different young people. Sofie and Linnea have faced hindrances that have prevented them from taking action for a long time. Sam, on the other hand, has faced hindrances after taking action for many years, while Kim does not seem to have faced any major hindrances at all.

Hindrances and facilitators

As defined in the introduction, *hindrances* should here be understood as someone or something that prevents or makes it difficult to take indirect environmental action and *facilitators* should be understood as someone or something that makes it easier to take indirect environmental action. Hindrances and facilitators are often two sides of the same coin. The lack of competence or of companions to take action together with, might be a hindrance, as well as the presence of these aspects might be a facilitator.

Perceived competence and the important feeling of success

The main hindrance that Sofie experienced was the memory of unsuccessful attempts to influence people close to her, which made her feel incompetent in communicating environmental issues. The main hindrance that Linnea faced was a lack of knowledge in environmental issues and self-confidence. Although Kim does not feel that he has experienced any major hindrances, knowledge in environmental issues has been a facilitator for him. These experiences of Sofie, Linnea and Kim all show that perceived competence might be an important hindrance or facilitator for indirect environmental action. Perceived competence was also a common theme in the study of Almers’.

Related to perceived competence is also the feeling of success. Both Linnea and Sofie point out success as an important facilitator for their commitment. For Sofie, it is her feeling of collective success in her organisation and for Linnea it is when she could successfully influence her boyfriend.

For individuals who like to take action but feel that they are not competent enough, it may be encouraging to learn that both Sofie and Linnea did overcome this hindrance. Kim’s experiences also show that competence is something that is developed through action. A practical consequence for both individuals and organisations might be to choose projects that

are achievable and concrete. In that way the results and the possible feeling of success will be more visible.

Other people to take action together with, and important aspects of such community

Both Linnea and Sofie also express the lack of interest and commitment in environmental issues from friends and family as a major hindrance. Sofie repeatedly tried to find an organisation to involve in and it is not until she joins Green Umbrella that she starts to take indirect environmental action to any larger extent. Although not directly expressed by Linnea, her story shows a similar pattern. To have other people to take action together with, therefore seems to be important.

It is however not only important to find other people to take action with. All four subjects have also experienced important aspects of such community. Sofie points out the importance of having fun when being involved with others. For Linnea it is important to know what the organisation stands for and how it works. Kim points at the importance of finding friends within the organisation and how social structures might be both inhibiting and motivating. To Sam it is important that the organisation works with issues which he believes are important and to do it in a goal-oriented way.

A practical consequence to keep in mind for individuals and organisations may therefore be that there are at least some young people, and probably also older people, out there, that would like to take action. These people have a lot to contribute but may have difficulties to find others to take action with. Another thing for organisations to keep in mind are the aspects, mentioned above, that these subjects point out as important for a community.

Paralysis and the therapeutic effects from talking

Sam's story is different in the sense that he starts to take action much earlier in life. His story also tells us that one may face hindrances after taking action for many years. One can sometimes become paralysed when facing the enormous challenges associated with environmental and social issues, and one therefore tries to maximise one's output. My interview with Sam also shows that talking about it instead of keeping it all inside may have a therapeutic effect. It is of course not every day one finds someone who is willing to listen for a longer time. A practical consequence of my results for organisations may therefore be to facilitate such talks in groups or in pairs.

Driving-forces

As defined in the introduction driving-forces should here be understood as reasons or motives to take environmental action. My results show both common themes and differences between the interviews. Other humans are central to the driving-forces of Sofie and Sam, and partly also for Kim. For Linnea, on the other hand, it is nature and not humans that are central. The feelings associated with these humans or with her affection for nature as driving-forces are suffering, respect, love and solidarity, and compassion due to injustices. Such emotional reactions are similar to the ones described as driving-forces in Almers' study.

Only Sam defines future generations as important to his driving-forces. Sofie and Kim only relate to now-living generations and Linnea relates to now-living and future-living nature.

The subjects also point out several driving-forces that are not based on moral considerations. One such driving-force, expressed both by Sofie and Linnea, is that environmental issues are broad and therefore give them many different possibilities in life. Another one is a possible career and the search for status and recognition expressed by Kim.

Weaknesses and strengths of this study

A survey with questionnaires would have allowed me to have more subjects and the possibilities to generalise my results. With the chosen approach and methodology it has not been possible to have more than four subjects and I therefore cannot generalise my results. On the other hand the chosen approach and method have enabled the rich, in-depth descriptions that the subjects have contributed with, out of which selected parts have been presented in the report. This would certainly not have been possible in a survey with questionnaires.

Another consequence of my approach is that the results are limited to the self-understanding of the subjects. I have also been restrictive with criticising the subjects' interpretations of their experiences. If the interviews had been analysed with theoretical glasses or in combination with observations or simply in a more critical manner it would have resulted in an additional perspective on things.

As I mentioned in my approach and method section, I do not put my own life-world within brackets when I meet the life-world of my subjects. There are several links in the chain from my first idea to the finished report where my perspectives on things inevitably have coloured the results. If someone else had conducted the study, the results would have looked different from mine.

On the other hand, I have given the subjects opportunities to object to my interpretations, both during the interviews and by asking them to validate my results. The fact that three out of four commented on my results and that I have made changes in accordance to these comments might be seen as a quality stamp on this report.

Although I will soon stop writing, my study does not end here. Instead my intention is to take the experiences that Sofie, Kim, Linnea, and Sam have shared with me and I will test the results in practise.

Some suggested topics for future research

The subjects of this study are all active, in the sense that, they all take indirect environmental action today. What they have experienced as hindrances and facilitators may not necessarily be the same hindrances that are perceived by people who are "passive". I would therefore find it interesting to read a study about what passive people perceive as hindrances to indirect environmental action.

Although not the overall research question of this study, the subjects mentioned several important aspects of a community, of which most of them have not been presented in this report. It would therefore be interesting to further investigate this.

I have focused on young people in my study. It is however important not to forget that older people play a just as important role. I would therefore find it interesting to read a study about what "older" people perceive as hindrances and driving-forces to indirect environmental action.

Social enterprises have become as an important part of the environmental movement. It would therefore be interesting to study the similarities and differences between a voluntary commitment and a social entrepreneurship in the context of environmental action.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank: Sofie, Kim, Linnea, and Sam for sharing their experiences and correcting my misinterpretations. Lotten Westberg, for great supervision. Doris Norrgård, for inspiration and proofreading. Beke Regelin, for help with the language. Hans Brehnfors, Lars Vaste, Salomon Abresparr, and Oleg Izyumenko for help with developing the aim of my study.

5 References

- Almers, E., 2009, *Handlingskompetens för hållbar utveckling: tre berättelser om vägen dit*. Jönköping: Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation.
- Bengtsson, J., ed, 2005, *Med livsvärlden som grund: bidrag till utvecklandet av en livsvärldsfenomenologisk ansats i pedagogisk forskning*. 2nd ed., Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Denscombe, M., 2009, *Forskningshandboken: för småskaliga forskningsprojekt inom samhällsvetenskaperna*. 2nd ed., Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Dono, J., Webb, J. and Richardson, B., 2010. The relationship between environmental activism, pro-environmental behaviour and social identity. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30(2), 178-186.
- Fielding, K.S., McDonald, R. and Louis, W.R., 2008, Theory of planned behaviour, identity and intentions to engage in environmental activism, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 28(4), 318-326.
- Gillham, P.F., 2008, Participation in the Environmental Movement: Analysis of the European Union, *International Sociology*, 23(1), 67-93.
- Hale, S., 2010, The new politics of climate change: why we are failing and how we will succeed, *Environmental Politics*, 19(2), 255-275.
- Holmberg, S. and Weibull, L. eds, 2009. *Swedish Trends: 1986-2008*. Göteborg: SOM Institute, Göteborgs universitet.
- Jensen B.B., 2002 Knowledge, Action and Pro-environmental Behaviour, *Environmental Education Research*, 8(3), 325-334.
- Jensen, B.B. and Schnack, K., 1997, The Action Competence Approach in Environmental Education, *Environmental Education Research*, 3(2), 163-178.
- Kollmuss, A. and Agyeman, J., 2002. Mind the Gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior?. *Environmental Education Research*, 8(3), 239-260.
- Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S., 2009, *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*, 2nd ed., Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Mckenzie-Mohr, D., 2009. *Fostering Sustainable Behaviour – Community-Based Social Marketing*. Online version, available at: www.cbsm.com
- Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962, *Phenomenology of Perception*, London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Svedberg, L., von Essen, J. and Jegermalm, M., 2010. *Svenskarnas engagemang större än någonsin: Insatser i och utanför föreningslivet*. Stockholm: Ersta Sköndal högskola.

Examples of mind-maps used in the analysis of the interviews.

Examples of mind-maps used in the analysis of the interviews.



