

Green capitalist or critical environmentalist?

A comparative study of the environmental policies of the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet) and the Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokraterna)

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Abstract

This paper analyses the environmental policy documents of Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) and Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party) based on the theories of ecological modernization (EMT) and critical environmental sociology (CES), constructed as ideal types. The aim is to explain ideational differences and similarities based on the ideal types of each theory and how well the parties can be linked to the ideal types of EMT and CES, their similarities and differences. The results show that there is a clear ideational distinction between the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party and that their views on solutions to climate change and subsequent environmental issues, based on ecological modernization theory and critical environmental sociology, differ despite other ideational similarities. The Left Party adheres more to the ideal type of CES and the Social Democratic Party adheres more to the ideal type of EMT.

Keywords: Ecological Modernization Theory, Critical Environmental Sociology, Vänsterpartiet, Socialdemokraterna, Ideal types, Green capitalist, Critical environmentalist, Environmental politics, Environmental political discourse, Capitalism, Post-capitalism

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1. Introduction

Mountains of scientific research have made it clear: our planet's ecosystems are failing. We, as individuals, linger on uncomfortably within the presence of climate change and its subsequent, imminent, destruction. Many people have already experienced its destruction first-hand. Will it continue to creep up on us until we can no longer recover? Or will we take (collective) action to solve this crisis? As it stands today, climate change and its environmental crises may very well be the greatest threat facing humanity in the 21st century. Clearly, something must be done. But what? What changes are we, as individuals and as a society, ready to make in order to neutralize this threat? And who has the most historical responsibility for climate change? The questions seem to outnumber the answers.

During the 2019 UN climate action summit in New York, Greta Thunberg held a speech saying

People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you! [...] How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just "business as usual" and some technical solutions? With today's emissions levels, that remaining CO2 budget will be entirely gone within less than eight and a half years. (Thunberg 2019).

Thunberg is clearly alluding to a tension between desires of economic growth on the one hand and solutions for the climate crisis on the other hand. But what lies at the core of this tension and how can such a tension be explained theoretically? Furthermore, are there any major alternatives to the processes of 'technical solutions' and 'business as usual'?

I begin this dissertation by introducing theories on ecological modernization and Critical environmental sociology. I do so in order to define the most prominent features within each theoretical discourse. The literature review offers theoretical definitions of both ecological modernization theory and critical environmental sociology as well as examples of studies where these theories have been applied to explain various environmental outcomes.

The prominent features within each theoretical discourse are used to construct two ideal types. The first ideal type, and its contents, is based on the most prominent features of ecological modernization theory. The second ideal type, and its contents, is based on the most prominent features of critical environmental sociology. In later sections, I analyze the ideas and arguments put forth by the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party using the ideal types of EMT and CES. What follows is a discussion on the ideational differences, and similarities, between the two and a reflection on how well the ideal types of EMT and CES can explain ideational differences in environmental policy. Lastly, I offer some concluding remarks and some ideas for further studies in this area.

1.1. Research problem

There are several ways in which theories of ecological modernization have been applied. For example, ecological modernization theory has been used to assess the prospects of ecological modernization in various countries (Mol, 2006, p. 35; O'Brien, 2013, p. 250). Ecological modernization theory has also been adopted in an analysis of the UN's sustainable development goals (Weber & Weber, 2020, p. 8). By contrast, critical environmental sociology has been adopted to scrutinize ecological modernization theory and offer alternatives to the concept of ecological modernization (Ewing, 2017, p. 129; Parrique et al., 2019, pp. 58–59; Schmid, 2019, p. 9). However, none of them have reviewed whether the ideational differences of EMT and CES can be observed in a comparative analysis of the ideas and arguments put forth in an environmental political discourse.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze and identify the ideas and arguments put forth by the latest environmental policy documents of the Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) and Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party). Using the ideal types of ecological modernization theory and critical environmental sociology, I will attempt to explain, compare and conceptualize the ideas and arguments between these two parties. In other words, are the theories of ecological modernization (EMT) and critical environmental sociology (CES), constructed as ideal types, able to explain the ideational differences and similarities put forth by the environmental policy documents of the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party?

1.2. Research question

The research question which is to be answered in this paper is “*Are the theories of ecological modernization (EMT) and critical environmental sociology (CES), constructed as ideal types, able to explain ideational differences and similarities put forth by the environmental policy documents of the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party?*”

2. Literature review – Ditching economic growth or decouple environmental issues from economic growth?

In this section I will present the Ecological Modernization Theory and corresponding criticism constituting of the Critical Environmental Sociology which builds the foundation for this dissertation.

2.1. Ecological modernization in theory and practice

In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate that the descriptions of ecological modernization theory and its practice are many and that they sometimes overlap with each other. Furthermore, I shall review and present examples from the research area of ecological modernization in both theory and practice.

In general terms, the theory of ecological modernization suggests that, through the use of ‘green’ technological advancements, local municipalities, nation-states, corporations and international organizations can establish a ‘positive-sum relationship’ between desires of environmental protection and stable economic growth (Ewing, 2017, p. 131; Fiorino, 2011, p. 374; Hermelin & Andersson, 2018, p. 188; Lundqvist, 2015, p. 199; Machin, 2019, p. 208; O’Brien, 2013, p. 249; Tynkkynen, 2014, p. 579; Yee et al., 2013, p. 104). A marriage between economy and ecology if you will. In this sense, the theory of ecological modernization claims that the environmental issues, such as the local, national and global CO₂ emissions, can be solved without the need for profound change of the market structures and their ‘capitalist rationale’ (Hermelin & Andersson, 2018, pp. 186–187). In the case of CO₂

emissions, the objective of ecological modernization would be to reduce the emissions while maintaining a stable economic growth on a local, national or global level.

Moreover, ecological modernization theory is also described as a ‘movement’ of ecological interests, ideas and considerations within the social practices and institutional developments of modern societies (Mol, 2006, p. 33). An ‘ideational movement’ with the goal of a successful integration of an ecological rationality into the core structures of modern capitalist society (Ewing, 2017, p. 131). As such, EMT has been described as a ‘theoretical and practical guide’ to an appropriate and pragmatic response to environmental issues (Gibbs, 2000, p. 9). Therefore, ecological modernization theory is often used to study and explain local, national and global environmental politics, political strategies and processes of industrialization that aim to decouple economic growth from destructive environmental impact (Lundqvist, 2017, pp. 107–108). In other words, EMT is a social scientific interpretation of environmental reform processes and a reflection on *how* various institutions and social actors attempt to integrate environmental concerns into their everyday functioning, development and relations with each other and the environment (Mol et al., 2013, p. 15). For example, Mol (2006, p. 35) has studied China’s environmental reforms from the perspective of ecological modernization theory in order to assess whether ecological modernization is taking place in China. Conversely, a study by Gibbs (2000, p. 17) showed that regional economic policy in the UK implicitly draws upon ideas derived from ecological modernization theory.

Mol (2006, pp. 34–35) notes that scholars of ecological modernization have elaborated on various social mechanisms, dynamics and actors in which social practices as well as institutions are ‘ecologically transformed’ by the incorporation of environmental demands and interests. There are, however, three key elements, or conditions, that are used to assess whether ecological modernization is manifesting in a given case. European ecological modernization studies have highlighted that these three key elements are: political modernization, economic dynamics and civil society.

- The first condition, ‘political modernization’, refers to the modern environmental state which plays a key role in processes of environmental institutionalization. Mol (2006, p. 34) reasons that modern governments that are environmentally conscious forgo environmental governance which can be described as top-down, centralized,

hierarchical and command-and-control regulation. Instead, such governments adopt decentralized, flexible and consensual styles of environmental governance.

Furthermore, non-state actors (such as businesses and NGOs) are increasingly involved and partake in the environmental matters of the nation-state. Lastly, Mol (2006, p. 35) notes that international and transnational institutions play a significant role in the environmental reform and the ecological transformation of a nation-state.

- The second condition, ‘economic dynamics’, refers to the presence of market producers, customers, consumers, credit institutions, insurance companies, the utility sector and business associations (within and across national borders) that seek to realize ecological innovations and reforms by utilizing market and economic logics in the pursuit for environmental goals (Mol, 2006, p. 35). As O’Brien (2013, p. 250) notes, however, the second condition implies the existence of a functioning and relatively free market economy.
- Mol (2006, p. 35) explains that the third condition, ‘civil society’, refers to the presence of environmental movements and their institutionalization processes, new positions, roles, ideologies and cultural frameworks that they cultivate. These environmental movements are, to a greater or lesser degree, incorporated into decision-making processes within the state and the market. Accordingly, this incorporation serves to strengthen the influence of environmental norms, values and discourses beyond that of technocrats and core supporters of environmental NGOs.

However, there are other ways to conceptualize ecological modernization theory. O’Brien (2013, p. 250) notes that the presence of these conditions cultivate the capacity in which states are able to choose between different environmental protection strategies and engage effectively with internal and external actors. Furthermore, in cases where such capacity is weak, in democratizing states for example, the likelihood of achieving a strong development of ecological modernization is reduced to a weak development of ecological modernization. But how do we justify the emergence of an ecological modernization as either ‘weak’ or ‘strong’? As Christoff (1996, p. 485) notes, in different situations (such as different policy forums and different states), different styles of ecological modernization may develop in ways that can be judged normatively to adhere to either ‘weak’ or ‘strong’ outcomes on a range of issues: the level of democratic participation or the level of ecological protection, for example.

Therefore, Christoff (1996, pp. 490–491) emphasizes the normative dimensions of EMT: different interpretations of what constitutes ecological modernization lie along a spectrum from the notion of a weak EMT to the notion of a strong EMT based on their efficacy in promoting ecologically sustainable developments and outcomes. Furthermore, this distinction could also be interpreted as a ‘duality’ between various environmental movements (demanding a strong ecological modernization) on the one hand and industries and governments (supplementing a weak ecological modernization) on the other hand. In a similar vein, Hajer (1995, pp. 280–287) also reflects on this spectrum by suggesting the concept of a reflexive (i.e. strong) ecological modernization: where political and economic development act on the basis of critical environmental self-awareness involving public scrutiny and democratic control. While non-reflexive (i.e. weak) ecological modernization involves a lifeline for capitalist economies threatened by environmental crises. A typology for ecological modernization can be visualized in the following table:

Table 1 Weak and Strong EMT. Source: (Gibbs, 2000, p. 13)

Weak EMT	Strong EMT
- Technological solutions to environmental issues (economistic)	- Broad changes to institutional and economic structures of society incorporating ecological concerns (ecological)
- Technocratic styles of ‘green’ policy making	- Open, democratic decision making with high participation and voice
- Restricted to developed nations who use ecological modernization to consolidate their global economic advantages (competitiveness)	- Concerned with the international dimensions of the environment and development
- Imposes a single, close-ended framework on political and economic development	- a more open-ended approach with no single view, but multiple possibilities with ecological modernization providing orientation

These normative dimensions of EMT serve as ideals for ecological modernization that could be described as either weak or strong. In other words, within EMT, there lies a spectrum that can be used to explain and justify a weak or strong emergence of ecological modernization.

The first row highlights two ideals with which ecological modernization can manifest: as economistic or ecological. For example, Christoff (1996, pp. 485–486) reasons that a weak ecological modernization focuses on “technological solutions to environmental issues”. Accordingly, this ideal reduces the environment to a series of concerns about resource inputs, waste and pollutant emissions. As cultural needs, non-anthropocentric values (such as granting moral standing to such natural objects as animals, plants and landscapes) and conservation of biodiversity that cannot be reduced to monetary terms tend to be marginalized or excluded from consideration. Accordingly, to suggest that industrial activity and resource use should be allowed as long as environmental side-effects are reduced indicates that such ecological modernization is greatly economistic and weakly ecological as well as limited and peripheral. In this sense, the weak form of EMT is relatively Eurocentric: deeply influenced by the experience of local debates on environmental issues (such as acid rain and other local outputs), rather than debates on broader conflicts over biodiversity preservation for example. Accordingly, the ideal of technological solutions to environmental issues would be ill-suited to combat environmental issues on a global scale. Such dangers of a weak form of EMT are visualized in the following quote.

Although current uses of EM [ecological modernization] may be well adapted to describing positive environmental outcomes in certain industrialised First World countries where a version of ecological sustainability may be created in the wasteland of a vastly depleted biological world, it may be positively dangerous if taken prescriptively by those nations where the conservation of biodiversity is a more fundamental concern or opportunity and/or which depend on primary resource exploitation to fund their traditional forms of economic growth, for example as in the case in Australia, Brazil and South Africa. (Christoff, 1996, p. 486).

In other words, there is no environmental ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. In contrast, a strong form of EMT would be the ideal of “broad changes to institutional and economic structures of society incorporating ecological concerns”. For Christoff (1996, p. 486), this entails stronger considerations of both the integrity of ecosystems and the continued environmental impact of industrialization upon these ecosystems. In sum, political debates on environmental problems need to refocus from localized environmental concerns to an inclusion of environmental

problems that are broader in scope: with less focus on economics, and a stronger focus on global ecology.

The second row highlights whether ecological modernization manifests in technocratic or democratic processes. Christoff (1996, pp. 488–489) and Gibbs (2000, pp. 12–14) reason that the strong form of EMT focuses on the ideal of an “open, democratic decision making with high participation and voice”. This means an emphasis on the influence of the environmental awareness on civil society and the public sphere as well as on the institutions and practices of government and industry. It is a focus on the ways in which citizenship and democratic participation in environmental planning may serve to socialize and voice ecological demands in the market and limit industrial production. Realizing such an ideal would require an interventionist state to support a well-developed culture of environmental policy innovation by means of public investment and subsidies in order to achieve economic advantage and benign environmental outcomes. Additionally, this ideal requires increased public participation in political decision-making processes and green political pressure by both the environmental movements and parliamentary politics (i.e. green political parties). Furthermore, this would also require an increased public influence over industry behaviour through green consumer action and the activities of environmental pressure groups and organizations. In contrast, a weak form of EMT focuses on the ideal of “technocratic styles of ‘green’ policy making”. For Christoff (1996, p. 489) and Gibbs (2000, pp. 12–14), this technocratic, or neo-corporatist, relationship between states, business associations, and civil society is dependent on four variables. The first variable is economic performance, which is viewed as a country’s capacity to pay for, and afford, environmental protection. The second variable is a country’s consensus ability, which is viewed as neo-corporatist structures cultivating consensus-seeking decision-making styles of environmental governance. The third variable is a country’s innovative ability, which is viewed as the capacity of both the state and the market institutions to remain open to new interests and innovations in the judicial and political system, the media and the economic system. The fourth variable is strategic proficiency, which is viewed as a country’s capacity to institutionalize environmental policy across sectors. The underlying argument is that there is a close relationship between consensus-seeking policy styles and high output levels of environmental protection in industrialized countries.

The third row highlights whether ecological modernization should be national or international. Christoff (1996, pp. 486–487) and Gibbs (2000, pp. 12–14) note that the weak form of EMT adheres to the ideal that is “restricted to developed nations who use ecological modernization to consolidate their global economic advantages”. As such, a weak form of EMT seems narrowly focused on environmental changes within industrialized nation-states. Such an ideal is therefore ignorant of the impact of economic globalization on the environment. Case in point, Christoff (1996, p. 487) explains that although pollution levels, primary consumption of energy and other primary resources may have fallen in relation to GNP in certain European economies as they have become increasingly post-industrial, their per capita material consumption continues to increase. The main argument here is that the environmental impacts of such post-industrialized economies have been displaced ‘overseas’ (in developing nations for example) where dirtier forms of industrial activities are taking place.¹ In contrast, Gibbs (2000, p. 12) explains that a strong form of EMT would adhere to the ideal that is “concerned with the international dimensions of the environment and development”. This entails a break with the overvaluing of local environmental achievements and impacts while undervaluing geographically distant factors, as well as the adoption of a broader scope: from concerns of localized end-of-cycle environmental issues to concerns for the globally integrated nature of resource extraction and manufacturing in relation to domestic consumption. In other words, the strong form of EMT would embrace a greater concern, and need, for international institutions for environmental regulation and protection as well as the integration of global environmental trends into the environmental politics of nation states (i.e. stronger ‘convergence’ of environmental policy throughout the world).

The fourth row highlights whether ecological modernization exhibits a hegemonic development or a development with multiple possibilities for ecological modernity. Christoff (1996, p. 487) reasons that a weak form of EMT focuses on the ideal which “imposes a single, close-ended framework on political and economic development”. This would point an ecological modernization which is dependent on the hegemonic power of western science, technology and consumer culture propagated by leading western(ized) countries. This single, close-ended framework on political and economic development seems to claim that all countries may transition from the phase of ‘dirty industrialization’ into the fully ecologically modern state. Furthermore, this ideal seems to claim that ecologically modernizing countries

¹ For a deeper explanation on this line of reasoning, see section 2.2.

will be able to act as net exporters of green technologies, political strategies or other standards of environmental governance to bypass the ‘dirty industrialization phase’ now occurring in developing countries (Lundqvist, 2017, p. 120). For Christoff (1996, p. 488), this weak form of EMT would continue to solidify the core-periphery relationships between industrialized and industrializing countries, with world markets and the forces of (environmental) progress dominated by leading industrial states. In contrast, a strong form of EMT would instead focus on the ideal of “a more open-ended approach with no single view, but multiple possibilities with ecological modernization providing orientation”. This would entail that such leading industrial states embrace the notion that there are multiple paths to ecological modernization. And these pathways may rest in the diversity of environmental ideas within non-western cultures.²

Based on the table above, one could draw the conclusion that the weak form of EMT exhibits a focus on technocratic tendencies, an appeal to green technology, economic theory, and market-based instruments on a national scope. Moreover, the weak form of EMT and its ideals can also be interpreted as an ecological modernization that originates from, and is propagated by, western(ized) countries. On the flip side, the strong form of EMT adheres to democratic notions of participation, ecological demands that are global in scope and greater voice for various social actors within an unbiased international arena of environmental theories. However, Christoff (1996, p. 491) highlights that it is important to note that these ideals sometimes overlap or work in tandem with each other. In this sense, the ideals are not mutually exclusive. Accordingly, some ideals are necessary but insufficient in themselves for enduring ecologically sustainable transformations. For example, one cannot substitute technological development and economic instruments in favor of broad changes to institutional and economic structures of society incorporating ecological concerns. In many cases, however not all (for example in democratic or technocratic styles of governance), aspects of weak EMT need to be incorporated into and guided by the normative dimensions of strong EMT.

Using the aforementioned models of EMT, scholars have studied various social mechanisms, dynamics and actors in which social practices as well as institutions are ‘ecologically

² For a deeper review on what such environmental ideas may be, see section 2.2 on “Critical environmental sociology: alternatives to green capitalist approaches”

transformed' by the incorporation of environmental demands and interests (Mol, 2006, pp. 34–35). And as the typology suggests, it is possible to determine whether the outcome of an ecological modernization adheres to a weak or strong form of EMT (Christoff, 1996, pp. 490–491). In the following paragraphs, I shall exemplify how the interplay between these models of EMT can be used to explain ecological modernization in several countries.

The typology for ecological modernization (as well as the three conditions) is further developed by O'Brien (2013, p. 249) who conducted a study on the challenges associated with the emergence of ecological modernization in the context of democratization in Bulgaria. For O'Brien (2013, p. 256), the findings indicate that the introduction ecological modernization into democratizing states has the potential to lead to environmental improvements. However, the complicated nature of a democratization process introduces several potential constrictions for the emergence of ecological modernization. More specifically, democratizing states lack the capacity necessary for a cultivation of an ecological modernization that adheres to the strong form of EMT. Especially during the early stages of the democratization process. Therefore, it is more likely that democratizing states incorporate an ecological modernization that adheres to a weak, technocratic, form of EMT that will become embedded and difficult to reform in the future.

The models for EMT can be observed in the study by Tynkkynen (2014, p. 575) who conducted an analysis on the prospects for ecological modernization in Russia. The results showed that ecological modernization in Russia is initiated by an economic rationale and by institutionalizing environmental issues into state institutions, legislation and politics (Tynkkynen, 2014, p. 603). Furthermore, Tynkkynen (2014, p. 603) explains that ecological modernization takes place from a top-down governance rather than a bottom-up governance. In terms of 'civil society', green thinking is not widely spread and possibilities for ecological demands from citizens remain undermined. Moreover, the external influence from international and transnational environmental institutions remain undermined as well. In such areas, an ecological modernization including 'civil society' or 'democratic decision making with high participation and voice' is less evident. Thus, Tynkkynen (2014, p. 603) concludes that Russia demonstrates an ecological modernization that can be explained by a weak form of EMT: emphasis on green technological solutions and technocratic tendencies.

This conclusion is further confirmed by Kovalev et al. (2021, pp. 8–9) who found that Russia's ecological modernization lags behind when compared to the ecological modernization process of Kazakhstan. Accordingly, Kazakhstan has sought to institutionally change and strengthen the processes of environmental transformation of its economy. For example, the country adopted the concept of the transition to a 'green economy', formed a market for quotas for greenhouse gas emissions and announced the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060. In contrast, the concept of a 'green economy' is nearly absent in the official Russian political discourse and the market for greenhouse gas emissions quotas is only in the initial stage. Furthermore, the introduction of new types of energy and resources such as saving technologies, renewable energy sources and the development of alternative transports are all slowly taking place in Russia through ministerial resolutions and not within the context of a national strategy. Russia lacks a broad and clear 'eco-friendly' vision of a country's development based on a unified low-carbon economy, which in turn slows down the process of ecological modernization (Kovalev et al., 2021, p. 9). At best, it seems that the emergence of ecological modernization in Russia can be described through the lens of a weak form of EMT.

In a study on the prospects of ecological modernization in China, Yee et al. (2013, pp. 122–126) found that the Chinese government has adopted a decentralized approach in environmental issues, by which regulatory enforcement responsibilities lies within local environmental protection bureaus. However, such decentralization has resulted in disparities across regions in China, with some regions (Guangdong for example) progressing faster than other regions towards higher environmental standards. Furthermore, negotiated, flexible and consensual styles of regulatory enforcement remain heavily undermined or non-existent. Instead, interactions between the government and firms in China have become stricter and more formalized. These interactions serve to transfer industry-specific expertise to governments (Yee et al., 2013, p. 125).

On the Chinese market front, Yee et al. (2013, p. 126) found that firms decided to 'go green' based on their own convictions and commitments to environmental protection, rather than an institutionalization (i.e. pressures from various market actors) of ecological values into China's economic structures. Hence, it seems that the Chinese market's capability to produce 'green' goods and services is primarily motivated by basic economic theory, rather than a truly transformational ecological rationality.

Furthermore, in terms of civil society, Yee et al. (2013, p. 126) explains that the Chinese civil society has remained an undermined social actor in environmental policy processes. Although there are observations of increasing media reports and citizen complaints about pollution, enterprise executives rarely view such societal pressures as the main reason for adopting greater environmental standards. Instead, such executives view their own environmental protection measures as a ‘sign of their benevolence’ to society. In their concluding remarks, Yee et al. (2013, p. 126) highlights three suggestions for stronger environmental practices: (1) empowered resolve for government actors and their ability to enforce environmental regulations across all regions, (2) through the use of its buying power and encouragement of responsible environmental practices, the international community can exert pressure on Chinese firms and cultivate an adherence to ecological modernization and (3) in the long run, political reform is needed to gradually open up more space for civil society to play a significant role in processes of Chinese environmental governance.

The three conditions of EMT (Mol, 2006, pp. 34–35) reveal that China’s ecological modernization can be said to be of a different style than what the European version of EMT stipulates (Mol, 2006, p. 53). One could also note that the typology for EMT makes it possible to interpret a weak form ecological modernization as well as environmental actions towards a strong form of ecological modernization. Indeed, the study suggests that China could move towards the ideals within a strong form of EMT through stronger democratic processes which would increase participation and strengthened voice for China’s civil society. Based on the results of the study, however, China seems to display an ecological modernization in which its governance is vaguely technocratic with an undermined voice and participation of its civil society and a strong appeal to an economic rationale focusing on green technological development and production in the Chinese market structure.

In an analysis of the United Nation’s sustainable development goals (SDGs), Weber and Weber (2020, p. 8) found that the approach of ‘sustainable development’ within the SDGs aligns strongly with the ideals of EMT. In fact, it is ecological modernization theory which offers the basis for the proposed integration of ‘environmental’ and ‘developmental’ goals. Here, Weber and Weber (2020, p. 5) define EMT as the idea of economic growth as central to achieving ecological objectives. Moreover, EMT is also viewed as an ideological commitment to ‘liberal capitalist principles’. As such, EMT offers a distinct tendency to embrace

neoclassical and neoliberal variants. For example, the authors note how the SDG agenda exhibits a strong bias in favour of “further commodification of public services and the commons, of the pursuit of economic growth, of the empowerment of private interests and against commons-type understandings, institutions or practices of linking environmental and development objectives” (Weber & Weber, 2020, p. 8). In this sense Weber and Weber (2020, p. 8) conclude that the main objectives of the SDGs necessitate a realization of a set of economic growth objectives in order to adequately address issues of the environment and societal development.

Adherence to the core ideals of EMT is also confirmed by Lidskog and Elander (2012, p. 411) in a study of sustainable development in Sweden. The analysis found that Sweden has adopted an understanding of society where economic growth, social welfare and environmental values and interests support each other. Where economic growth is highlighted as the crucial driving force. Furthermore, Lidskog and Elander (2012, p. 423) note that Swedish economic growth continues to result in increased environmental emissions, however, not so much within Swedish borders. Instead, environmental emissions occur in countries which sell products to Sweden. As a result, the Swedish reduction of environmental impact and sustained economic growth could be viewed as a success. However, the authors also point out that the success could be interpreted as a decoupling of domestic responsibility from emissions caused in other countries. In this sense, market dynamics seem to “not promote environmental sustainability on a global level while allowing for a shallow greening of particular countries at the expense of others” (Lidskog & Elander, 2012, p. 423). Furthermore, Lidskog and Elander (2012, p. 421) also noted that a striking feature of environmental politics in Sweden is the absence of radical green perspectives in public discourse. Thus, the public sphere appeared to be ‘semi-constrained’, dominated by highly organized groups and networks, with many working in close affiliation with the state. These results correspond to some of the ideals of a weak form of EMT displayed by Christoff (1996, pp. 490–491).

One could contemplate on the results of each study presented in this literature review of EMT. In each presented case, there seems to be an emergence of an ecological modernization that is best explained by the weak form of EMT. That is to say, the countries undergoing an ecological modernization usually exhibit a focus on technological advancements, technocratic tendencies and an omission, or marginalization, of different radical environmental perspectives in favor of those environmental perspectives that adhere to economic growth. In

a reflection on the typology for EMT, O'Brien (2013, p. 249) posits that the strong form of EMT might be 'intuitively favoured', but that it is much harder to achieve in practice. Supposedly, this is because a strong form of EMT challenges the embedded interests and questions the environmental costs associated with the economic growth that constitute modern society.

Conversely, although ideals of a strong form of EMT may be portrayed as 'desirable', they cannot simply abandon the ideals of a weak form of EMT. It seems, then, that the ideals of a weak form of EMT constitutes necessary preconditions for a strong form of EMT. In this sense, a strong form of EMT complements its weaker form in that it

points to the potential for developing a range of alternative ecological modernities, distinguished by their diversity of local cultural and environmental conditions although still linked through their common recognition of human and environmental rights and a critical or reflexive relationship to certain common technologies, institutional forms and communicative practices which support the realisation of ecological rationality and values ahead of narrower instrumental forms. (Christoff, 1996, p. 496).

In holistic terms, it seems that a fundamental objective for EMT is to seek out ways to decouple environmental issues from economic growth. It is therefore important to note that all scholars of EMT include this fundamental objective in their depictions of EMT.

2.1.1. Criticism against EMT

Ecological modernization theory is not without criticism, however. As Ewing (2017, p. 128) notes, the two most influential schools of thought in the subject of environmental concerns are 'green capitalist approaches' (i.e. EMT) and 'critical environmental sociology' (CES). Essentially, the former relies on 'green adjustments' of the central features of the capitalist world-system (features such as economic growth, technological advancements, mass production and consumption and market-based instruments). The latter, however, seeks to hold the capitalist world-system responsible for the many ecological crises that torment the world. Hence, critical environmental sociology pursues both critical analyses and radical, non-capitalist, solutions for environmental issues.

Perhaps the most relevant critique against EMT is its reliance on green economic growth and green technological advancements. The idea, proposed by organizations such as the OECD and UN, of decoupling ‘environmental bads’ from ‘economic goods’ as a global, absolute, fast-enough and long-enough path towards ecological sustainability (Vadén et al., 2020, p. 236). In a survey reviewing the research and results on ‘decoupling’, Vadén et al. (2020, p. 236) found that the strategy of ‘decoupling’ could not provide evidence of a path towards ecological sustainability in its absolute global fast-enough form. Similarly, Parrique et al. (2019, p. 4) found that there is no empirical evidence of an absolute decoupling currently happening. For materials such as energy, water, greenhouse gases, land, water pollutants and biodiversity loss, signs of a decoupling were relative, and/or observed only temporarily, and/or only locally. When an absolute decoupling occurred, it was observed only during short periods of time regarding certain resources and specific locations with low rates of mitigation.

Ewing (2017, pp. 129–130) argues that advocates of EMT and other ‘green capitalist’ approaches reject the thesis that economic growth, characterized by unequal economic and ecological relations, entails ecological destruction. Accordingly, it is EMT’s presumption of the central features of the capitalist world-system that undermines its own claims of an ‘economic-ecological rationale’. Ewing (2017, p. 134) highlights the many ways in which the capitalist world-system focuses on profit maximization and growth which in turn generate negative externalities that are pushed onto the public rather than internalized within the firm. Moreover, EMT’s belief in ecologically efficient technologies and their feasibility is opposed in terms of the Jevons paradox: cost advantages, gained from the cheapening of resources due to increased efficiency in production, often contribute to increased resource usage. This could be exemplified by the increased energy demand in sectors with the largest efficiency gains. EMT also neglects the paperless office paradox: the presence of a substitute of a resource does not necessarily entail a diminished consumption of that resource (Ewing, 2017, pp. 134–135). For example, the ‘paperless office paradox’ implies that the presence of renewable energy sources does not lead to a diminished consumption of fossil fuels. Conversely, Ewing (2017, p. 135) notes that the incorporation of green technology in the core may come at the cost of ecological devastation in the periphery. This argument is exemplified by the production of green technologies in the automotive industry, which necessitates an extraction of natural resources from the global south, which in turn causes ecological destruction. Case in point, newspapers have reported that lithium-ion batteries found within electric cars require

large amounts of raw materials such as lithium, nickel and cobalt (Lim 2021). Mining and obtaining the aforementioned materials come at a great environmental and social cost in the form of land occupation and the alienation of indigenous communities (Riofrancos 2021).

In the concluding sections, Ewing (2017, p. 145) argues for a stronger adherence to the environmental voices and values of many non-western and unconventional critical perspectives. Rather than a blatant focus on ‘green capitalist’ approaches, the international political and academic communities should engage with the environmental theories of other schools of thought outside the global north. In a similar vein, the blatant focus on ‘green capitalist’ approaches is confirmed by Machin (2019, p. 208) who studied the discourse of ecological modernization in the European Union. Machin (2019, p. 208) found that the environmental-political decisions were discursively constructed based on a market rationale rather than a democratic process that engages with different environmental-political positions. Further analysis of the environmental discourse in the European Union showed that ideas that could be linked to EMT are constructed as the only feasible solution, while other alternative and contesting perspectives are marginalized.

2.2.Critical environmental sociology: alternatives to green capitalism

There are two prominent features of critical environmental sociology (CES): (1) the acknowledgement of the negative ecological effects of the profit-and-growth structure of a capitalist economic rationale, and (2) a focus on different proportions of economic-ecological power held between core and non-core states within the capitalist economic rationale (Ewing, 2017, p. 129). Thus, the most significant difference between CES and EMT is that CES argues that “the central elements of capitalism amplify ecological destruction by necessity” (Ewing, 2017, p. 143) while EMT adheres to the improvement and usage of capitalist structures to solve ecological issues (Lundqvist, 2017, pp. 110–111). Advocates of CES believe that the ecological crises cannot be solved within the logic of the present economic, political and social system (Magdoff & Foster, 2011, p. 123). In this sense, CES holds capitalism responsible for ecological ills and pursues both critical analyses and radical, non-capitalist, solutions for environmental issues (Ewing, 2017, p. 128; Sivaraksa, 2014, p. 148).

If 'green capitalism' is insufficient, what else can local, national and international environmental politics turn to? Magdoff and Foster (2011, p. 138) explains that the 'triangle of socialism': (1) social ownership, (2) social production organized by workers and (3) the satisfaction of communal needs can be transformed into the 'elementary triangle of ecology': (A) social use, not ownership, of nature, (B) rational regulation by the relevant producers of the supply-chain between human beings and nature and (C) the satisfaction of communal needs – of present and future generations. In order to realize the elementary triangle of ecology, Magdoff and Foster (2011, pp. 138–139) argue that the distribution of land as well as food, health care, housing and other necessities should be based on maximizing human needs, rather than being reliant on market forces and the control exercised by an economic rationale. In a similar vein, Sivaraksa (2014, pp. 151–152) encourages the use of Buddhist economics: an attempt to reorganize the dominating economic rationale (such as neoclassical economics) to prioritize the maximization of well-being and minimization of consumption.

More specifically, Magdoff and Foster (2011, p. 138) argue that economic-environmental decision-making should be based on democratic processes at the local, regional and multiregional levels. Furthermore, this entails the mobilization, on their own behalf, of millions of people promoting positive interactions with nature. Therefore, a new form of democracy will be needed which emphasizes mankind's responsibilities to each other, to their own communities and to communities around the world. The fundamental idea for Magdoff and Foster (2011, p. 139) is that an economic-environmental system which is democratic, reasonably egalitarian and able to reasonably limit consumption will without a doubt lead to a significantly lower material well-being than its present 'middle-class lifestyle' levels. However, a simpler way of life which is 'poorer' in gadgets and luxury housing can be socially and culturally 'richer' and enable deeper connections between people as well as between people and the environment.

Another idea that seems to be a driving force within CES is the idea of 'degrowth'. A concept which focuses on achieving ecological sustainability vis-à-vis a just distribution of resources (Hanaček, Roy, Avila & Kallis, 2020, p. 1). D'Alisa, Demaria and Kallis (2014, p. 20) argue that the desire for growth causes economic, social and environmental crises. And as such, growth cannot remain the only viable solution. Instead, D'Alisa et al. (2014, p. 39) argues for future civilizations 'beyond the dominant institutions of capitalism'. In a holistic perspective, D'Alisa et al. (2014, pp. 38–39) retain the idea of a transition to societies being convivial,

living a simple life and with less. For example, eco-communities that have shifted from (1) production for exchange to production for use, (2) the substitution of wage labour with voluntary activity, (3) adopting an economic logic where the circulation of goods and services adhere to the ideal of reciprocal ‘gifts’ instead of the ideal of profit maximization, (4) a rejection of the pursuit to accumulate and expand an enterprise in favor of (5) an internalization of ‘commoning’: the ideal that interactions and relationships between individuals carry an intrinsic value which is greater than private enterprise, competition and wage labour. The intended effect of these ‘non-capitalist practices’ is the decommodification and de-professionalization of labour and they stand in stark contrast to the ideals of the pursuit for profit, accumulation and expansion of capital (D’Alisa et al., 2014, p. 39).

Furthermore, these non-capitalist practices serve to redirect our societies away from ideals such as ‘productivity’ to societies that are ‘unproductive’. However, unproductive does not necessarily mean ‘undesirable’. As D’Alisa et al. (2014, p. 39) argues: current market systems offer higher output in terms of goods and services, but they also heavily contribute to ecological destruction through pollution-intensive mass production. In contrast, these non-capitalist practices would reduce the total carbon footprint and encourage new forms of commons without the presence, and reliance, of extensive consumption.

In a similar vein, Parrique et al. (2019, p. 58-59) argues that environmental policy strategies aiming to cultivate ‘green efficiency’ (i.e. green economic growth) need to be downplayed, but not eradicated, in favour of the pursuit of ‘sufficiency’. Sufficiency, then, should be understood as the direct downscaling of economic production in sectors that have a high environmental impact and a parallel reduction of consumption in the wealthiest countries. According to Parrique et al. (2019, p. 59), sufficiency would enable our civilizations to live the good life within the planet’s ecological limits. Moreover, the idea behind the concept of sufficiency is that more is not always better and, within a climate-constrained world, enough can be plenty (as demonstrated by the transition towns, degrowth-movements, eco-villages, slow cities, social and solidarity economies). Prioritizing sufficiency over efficiency does not necessarily entail unemployment, rising inequality, poverty and shrinking welfare states. Instead, sufficiency should be interpreted as a new form of economic system bound by the planet’s ecological limits. In this sense, the overarching goal should not be to decouple economic growth from environmental issues, but rather to ‘decouple’ ideas of the good life and prosperity away from economic growth.

Conversely, Schmid (2019, p. 9) highlights that a focus on degrowth and post-capitalism entails an abandonment of accumulation, commodification and individualization as guiding principles of human coexistence. Instead, economic, political and social institutions should focus on a temporally and spatially equitable, sustainable and dignified survival of mankind and nonhuman species. As a result, degrowth and post-capitalist movements often promote community-based organizing or eco-social enterprises. Such institutions usually exhibit three features: (1) democratic governance structures and stakeholder governance involvement, (2) an explicit public benefit aim and (3) some restrictions on profit or surplus distribution (Johanisova & Fraňková, 2017, p. 509).

Yet another prominent feature of CES is its focus on power relations between ‘core’ and ‘non-core’ states. In general, efforts to solve one environmental issue, such as the aforementioned case of lithium-ion batteries, can create new environmental issues or exacerbate others (Parrique et al., 2019, p. 40). Therefore, to argue that an absolute decoupling is possible, one must show that a decoupling of one type of environmental issue will not increase, or strengthen, another type of environmental issue (Parrique et al., 2019, p. 41). In particular, this is evident in comparative analyses on society-nature relationships between developed countries and less-developed countries. Jorgenson and Givens (2014, p. 40) explain that international trade enables developed nations to externalize some of their environmental ‘impacts’ onto less-developed nations: impacts such as deforestation, loss of biodiversity, industrial water pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, foreign investments towards less-developed countries are often linked to ‘dirtier’ forms of resource extraction and production, various forms of environmental harms and subsequent decline of human well-being.

The fundamental idea for Jorgenson and Givens (2014, p. 31) is that a country’s economic development, levels of domestic income inequality, resource use, environmental harms and overall human well-being are a function of its own internal processes as well as external processes from abroad: a global economic-environmental hierarchy where an international division of labour is comprised of a core (developed nations), semi-periphery and periphery (less-developed nations). The core could be characterized as the generator of capital-intensive production and high-wage labour, while the periphery exhibits labour-intensive production and low-wage labour. Such structures foreshadow the challenges facing the development

prospects of poorer countries, as well as an indication of the links between power, unequal economic development and global environmental change. “a country’s domestic social and environmental conditions must be understood within the context of the entire capitalist world economy” (Jorgenson & Givens, 2014, p. 31). One could concretize this perspective with a news report from The New York Times by Popovich and Plumer (2021) which revealed that 12 percent of the planet’s population (i.e. the rich countries) are responsible for 50 percent of all the planet-warming greenhouse gases released from fossil fuels and industry over the past 170 years. This perspective sheds light on why advocates of CES highlight a fair distribution of resources (i.e. solidarity, egalitarian and communing economies) in terms of global justice. Furthermore, a global perspective of this kind is lacking within EMT. For example, Lundqvist (2017, p. 111) reasons that EMT’s primary objective is to focus on a ‘national hyper-industrialization’: developed countries will take advantage of their industrial competitiveness and develop resource-efficient green technology to uphold economic growth and sustain the environment within their national borders.

In sum, Critical environmental sociology stands in stark contrast to ecological modernization theory. CES displays anti-capitalist sentiments: holding capitalist structures responsible for various ecological ills, treating such structures as inherently detrimental for the environment and nature. CES also seems to display a different economic rationale which seeks to develop environmental policies that challenges the ‘growth logic’ of EMT. These policies could be based on minimized consumption, stronger forms of commons, an appeal to democratic decision-making, degrowth and a belief in the maximization of human needs and well-being. It is also quite clear that CES incorporates various environmental perspective from non-western(ized) countries and cultures. This is shown through the adoption of different types of non-mainstream economic theory as well as a global focus on the (environmental) power of core and non-core states.

2.3.Critical environmentalist or green capitalist?

The purpose of this dissertation is not to take any normative stance on whether green capitalist approaches, such as EMT, are sufficient or insufficient in comparison with critical environmental sociology. An evaluation of such nature is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I will offer some reflections and proposals below that, to some extent, oppose the

arguments against EMT presented above as well as an argument in favour of both CES and EMT.

Indeed, the claim that ecological concerns can be incorporated into the concept of economic growth might sound contradictory and vague. Since it is a well-known fact that economic growth certainly involves pollution-intensive activities such as its manufacturing processes, use of fossil fuels, transportation, urbanization and its consumption of water, land and natural resources (Fiorino, 2011, p. 372). However, studies have shown that increasing wealth (i.e., economic growth) allows a country to accumulate 'environmental protection capital' (Fiorino, 2011, p. 372). In other words, the economic 'capability' necessary for acting to resolve various environmental issues. This is not to say that increasing wealth alone puts mankind on the path to 'ecological preservation'. Fiorino (2011, p. 374) highlights that effective (environmental) governance, democratic process and institutional capacity play significant roles in addressing environmental issues as well as influencing and establishing green solutions between such issues vis-à-vis wealth.

But what does it take to make the move? More specifically, what kind of 'social components' compels contemporary societies to go green and how do they do it? Based on the literature review on EMT, the general answer is twofold: first, and perhaps obviously so, is that a core legitimizing component for a society's 'ecological modernization' lies within arguments from economic theory or a market rationale. Second, it seems that the nature and level of (environmental) democratic participation and voice distributed between political actors, market actors and social actors within civic society determines whether 'the move' takes the form of a technocratic and closed development of ecological modernization or a deliberative and open development of ecological modernization. I have already showed how a technocratic and closed development of ecological modernization appears to be the most common manifestation in practice. However, allow me to exemplify and further elaborate on these social components in the following paragraphs below.

Mohseni (2012, p. 37) noted that the main reason for the success of fossil fuels is derived from the fact that they are dense in energy and cheap to obtain. At the time of writing, the cost for 1 kWh of energy (about 0.1 liters of gasoline) was around 10-15 €cent. In a visual sense, the corresponding work that could be conducted with 1 kWh of energy is akin to lift a small car from ground level to the top of the Eiffel Tower. Accordingly, the maximization of the

fossil fuels potential (energy density and cheap cost) has improved the lives of many individuals and societies. Moreover, since modern societies have heavily relied on fossil fuels for many decades, a switch from a fossil-based society to a renewable-based society will take time.

However, both Lindvall (2021, p. 751) and Mohseni (2012, p. 37) highlight that the cost for renewable energy (wind power, solar power, wave energy and so on and so forth) has decreased and is currently expanding rapidly on the international energy market. Lindvall (2021, p. 751) notes that in the U.S.A. alone, forecasts have shown that renewable energy sources may constitute around 37 to 50 percent of the country's energy production by the year 2030. Additionally, since modern renewable energy sources display a high level of economic efficiency, the Democratic Party in the U.S.A. have adopted strong political standpoints that align themselves with the interests of the renewable energy industry. The Democratic party's ideational shift has also been influenced by heavy pressure from various climate movements and campaign donations by the renewable energy industry. In contrast to the Democratic Party's alignment with the renewable energy industry, the Republican Party are aligned (in a similar fashion) with the fossil fuel industry. As such, Lindvall (2021, pp. 751–752) notes that, for the first time since the 1970s, there is a strong ideational gap within American environmental politics. This ideational gap may affect the future development of environmental politics in the United States.

To summarize, these two social components (an economic rationale and the nature and level of democratic participation and voice) matter in the development of a country's ecological modernization. So far, these social components are present, in varying degrees, in every case discussed in the literature review of EMT. Indeed, without a focus on these core social components, it would perhaps be difficult to explain the various ways in which a country moves towards ecological modernization.

However, as mentioned in previous sections, the school of thought known as CES focuses on ecological modernization from a different perspective. In green political-philosophical terms, Lundqvist (2017, p. 110) notes that a core difference between CES and EMT lies within their ideas of governance, or 'control', of nature itself. On the one hand, advocates for green capitalist approaches hold the idea that nature can and should be dominated by humanity in order to satisfy humanity's needs. Needs that are fundamental to our civilizations as well as

needs that have come about through technological, economic and social developments. Such developments should not be limited or constrained in any way. In this sense, individuals should be free from governance within their domination of nature and the environment (apart from common property laws and other contract laws). The freedom from governance, in this regard, is a prerequisite for growth and development. On the other hand, critical environmentalists hold the idea that nature should be spared from humanity's grand ambitions of dominance and exploitation. They believe that an environment, exploited by mankind's capitalist behaviours³, will eventually 'fight back' in some way, shape or form. Instead, our civilizations, the individuals who inhabit them, and their capitalist behaviors can and should be subjected to governance. Accordingly, free rein to do what one wishes over nature often leads to negative externalities. Therefore, the ecological sustainability can be maintained through the governance, or control, of human behavior.

These ideas could be interpreted as an ideational dichotomy pulling environmental politics towards different outcomes in practice. But they can also be interpreted as two sides of the same coin, trying to solve two fundamental issues. Lundqvist (2017, p. 111) reflects on this by demonstrating that the critical environmentalists usually focus on the fact that capitalist human behaviour intensifies climate change and biodiversity loss, for example. On the flip side, green capitalists are concerned with the moral-ethical dilemma of satisfying humanity's needs today while at the same time ensuring the needs and opportunities of future generations. However, both issues are central to the concept of sustainable development.

These issues show that on the one hand, mankind would have to impose constraints on capitalist behaviours (such as constraints in consumption or production) that are destructive towards the environment. On the other hand, mankind would have to find creative ways, be it technological, organizational, cooperative or theoretical, that ensures present and future needs as well as opportunities (such as private transportation via airplane or cars). My own interpretation is that societies cannot achieve sustainable development without addressing, and solving, both issues fully. If we presume that sustainable development entails a satisfaction of both issues, then one can ponder on the following thought experiment.

³ i.e. behaviours of consumption and production that can be linked to capitalist structures, institutions, associations and so on and so forth

For example, imagine if a state were to focus on securing the needs for present and future generations, while ignoring the negative externalities that contribute to climate change and its subsequent ecological issues. Now imagine if a state were to focus on a governance that sanctioned human behaviour to the benefit of the environment, while ignoring individual needs today and the needs of future generations. In both cases, a sustainable development would not have been achieved. If sustainable development is the main objective for nation-states and international institutions, then they would have to maximize both demands. Now imagine if a state were to ensure humanity's needs in the present as well as the needs of future generations, while at the same time combatting various human behaviour which intensifies climate change and its subsequent ecological issues. In my opinion, it is therefore crucial to note that solutions to these central issues, and other environmental issues, will require the use of both CES and EMT approaches within environmental politics.

3. Methodology

There are many ways to conduct contextual idea analysis, but the most common way is in the form of a textual analysis (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 21). Bergström and Boréus (2012, p. 146) explain that a contextual idea analysis may be used if the objective of the study is to analyze the logic in a political-ideological argumentation. It is a descriptive method that seeks to clarify ideas or arguments and relate them to ideologies or political theories. In a general sense, the overarching goals of contextual idea analysis are twofold. On the one hand, contextual idea analysis seeks to establish a clarity of the many ideas and arguments that occur in various (political) discourses. On the other hand, contextual idea analysis seeks to reconstruct prominent ideas or arguments in order to connect, or identify, them with established (environmental) theories. For example, research questions that are closely linked to this type of methodology could be formulated as the following: Which ideas are prominent in the political debate about X? How does party X argue in issues of welfare politics? What are the main concepts, or ideals, within the argumentation? What is the meaning behind the argument(s)? Are there any contradictions? As mentioned above, the research question could also combine policy area, actor and idea: What ideas are prominent for the contemporary Swedish Social Democratic Party in the climate policy debate?

With these overarching goals in mind, this dissertation seeks to analyze the prominence and the relatability of ideas from two political parties in a specific policy area. And it is in this sense that I am able to formulate the specific purpose of this dissertation: to analyze and identify the ideas and arguments put forth by the latest environmental policy documents of Vänsterpartiet (the Left Party) and Socialdemokraterna (the Social Democratic Party). By constructing ideal types of ecological modernization theory and critical environmental sociology, I will attempt to explain, compare and conceptualize the ideas and arguments between these two parties. In other words, are the theories of ecological modernization (EMT) and critical environmental sociology (CES), constructed as ideal types, able to explain the ideational differences and similarities put forth by the environmental policy documents of the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party?

Furthermore, within a contextual idea analysis, an ideal type could be used as an analytical tool to interpret and sort different formulations of a text into a defined political-theoretical framework (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, pp. 150–151). Indeed, the development of such an ideal type necessitates that there is a defined political-theoretical framework established beforehand. Naturally, an ideal type also allows the researcher to interpret and sort formulations of a text that does not fit the defined political-theoretical framework (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, p. 150). Based on the literature on ecological modernization theory and critical environmental sociology, I have constructed two ideal types which I intend to use as analytical tools on the ideas put forth in the environmental policy documents of mainstream political parties in Sweden.

The table below represents an analytical scheme of 2 distinct ideal types. One ideal type of EMT and one ideal type of CES. Each holding 7 features. The ideal types, and their features, act as ‘guiding beacons’ during the analysis of the ideas put forth in the environmental policy documents. In other words, the ideal types allow me to interpret and sort those ideas that adhere to, for example, EMT or those ideas that adhere to CES. Conversely, there are 3 primary ‘areas of interest’ within EMT and CES. In a comparative sense, the areas of interest, and their subsequent features, of an ‘economic rationale’, ‘relationship between states’ and ‘views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters’ indicates very different outcomes in terms of environmental policy. If these theoretical blocs are indeed popular environmental theories, they should be able to explain two fundamental inquiries. The first inquiry is whether the ideas in the given party’s environmental policy document can be

linked to the theoretical bloc of EMT or CES. The second inquiry is whether one can draw valid conclusions on the real outcomes of Swedish environmental politics.

Table 2 Ideal types of EMT and CES

Ideal type	Economic rationale	Relationship between states	Views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters
Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reliance on capitalist structures (economic growth, mass production and consumption and market-based instruments) - Development of green technological solutions to environmental impacts - Belief in the decoupling of economic growth from environmental impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Western countries are hegemonic beacons of guidance in notions of ecological modernization - Developed nations are supplementers of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies - A distinct focus on environmental changes within the nation-state (close-ended framework) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Technocratic (neo-corporatist) environmental decision-making in matters of ecological modernization
Critical Environmental Sociology (CES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-capitalist sentiments (rejection of capitalist structures) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on the economic-environmental power relationships between 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An appeal to democratic decision-making at local, regional and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimization of consumption - Belief in the maximization of human needs and well-being - The idea of degrowth (decreased growth vis-à-vis increased fair distribution of resources) 	core and non-core states	<p>multiregional levels in matters of ecological modernization</p> <p>- Eco-social enterprise (stronger forms of commons)</p>
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If the ideas within the environmental policy documents can be linked to these features, one could draw the conclusion that the environmental policy adheres to either EMT or CES. Of course, the establishment of such links is grounded in interpretations of different sets of text. In general terms, interpretation originates from the practice of interpretivism. Bryman (2011, p. 35) highlights that the adoption of interpretivist research enables the researcher to show how a social actor ‘interprets’ the social reality around them. Furthermore, interpretivist research also enables the researcher to sort his or her interpretations into a social scientific framework. In this sense, one could speak of interpretation occurring on three ideational levels: (1) the social actors (i.e. individuals, political parties, international organizations and other social actors) interpret social reality, (2) the researcher attempts to interpret the interpretations of the social actors and (3) the interpretations of the researcher must be interpreted in terms of concepts and theories that manifest within the literature of an established academic field. However, these ideational levels are not without theoretical presumptions. And these presumptions can be linked to the constructivist school of thought. Eriksson (2014, p. 99) and Leftwich (2004, pp. 16–17) explains that constructivism views intangible phenomena such as identity, culture, interests, language and ideas as social constructs. Social constructs, then, are formed and defined by the interplay between social

actors. For example, research that is based on a constructivist approach usually tend to analyze the meaning and prominence of different ideas within the context of security politics, the spread of democracy and human rights as well as international institutionalization, to name a few. Instead of presuming *what* identities, interests or ideas are, the fundamental idea for constructivists is that they seek to inquire *how* such identities, interests or ideas are formed.

This dissertation, and its view on the political parties' environmental policies, draws upon the three ideational levels. It is in this sense that one should treat, or 'interpret', the environmental policy documents: as social constructs. In other words, the ideas and arguments put forth within the environmental policy documents are viewed as social constructs that have been formed and defined by the interplay between social actors in the Swedish environmental political discourse. These social constructs are then further interpreted in terms of concepts and theories that have been reviewed within the literature of EMT and CES. And through the use of ideal types the interpretations are sorted and placed into theoretical blocs that represent a focus on, or adherence to, ecological modernization theory or critical environmental sociology.

It is important to note, that the two ideal types are not mutually exclusive. In some cases, parties may exhibit ideas that could be linked to features of both EMT and CES. The contrasting features of the ideal types do make it clear, however, that it is unlikely that the ideas and arguments of a party's environmental policies fully adhere to both ideal types. For example, it is rather contradicting to hold anti-capitalist sentiments while also arguing for the continued use and perpetuity of capitalist structures. In terms of real outcomes (i.e. policy formulations), what would such contradicting ideas manifest as? Indeed, a deviation of this kind is difficult to ponder on. The main point, however, is that the two ideal types are formed with the intent of minimizing deviations. Bergström and Boréus (2012, pp. 154–155) do make it clear, however, that the researcher could either accept such deviations or engage in closer scrutiny and interpretation of the empirical material. Sometimes, the authors note, further elaboration is needed in order to fully capture *how* such deviations should be interpreted within the ideal type(s).

The acceptance or further scrutiny of such deviations (or 'ideational contradictions') seem to be contingent on interpretations that are based on relevancy. More specifically, an ideational

contradiction may not be relevant for further elaboration if it does not affect the holistic outcome of the results. Therefore, in order to bypass such ideational contradictions, one answer to this dilemma could be to further scrutinize whether the object of analysis exhibits other ideas that could be linked to the features of the ideal types of EMT and CES. Doing so would allow the researcher to measure the adherence to EMT or CES in an arithmetic sense. For example, If the ideas and arguments align with more features of the ideal type of EMT, then the subsequent conclusion would be that the ideas can be explained and represented by the ideal type of EMT. Moreover, if the scrutinized ideas fail to confirm any of the features above, then there would simply be no case of EMT or CES. With this reasoning in mind, it is possible to resolve the ‘ideational contradictions’ and instead offer ‘ideational clarity’, making it easier to identify and sort the object of analysis into the ideal type of EMT or CES.

The main ambition of this dissertation is to perform a textual analysis on the latest environmental policy documents using the ideal types of EMT and CES, however, I will thereafter visualize the textual analysis, and its results, in an arithmetic sense. Each feature within the corresponding ideal type is to be seen as having a value of 1 that is either positive or negative. Furthermore, I have devised an x-axis, from left to right, assigning values of -7 to 7. By doing this, I can visualize the textual analysis on an X-axis with two extremes: positive values cultivating an adherence to the ideal type of EMT as well as negative values cultivating an adherence to the ideal type of CES. Indeed, the results of the textual analysis are independent of the devised x-axis. However, the x-axis will visualize and summarize the results of the textual analysis in an arithmetic sense. Making it easier to contemplate on the results for the researcher as well as the reader. In other words, the x-axis is a heuristic technique or instrument, serving as an aid for scientific inference.

3.1.Discussion on validity and reliability

One could reasonably presume that the choice of a qualitative method will undermine its reliability in the sense that it lacks a clear and precise design when compared to standard quantitative methods. It is therefore of the utmost importance that ‘clarity of thought’ is upheld throughout the dissertation. In other words, the way that claims and interpretations are arranged to lead to the conclusion should be as clear as possible for the reader. Thus, I have sought to strengthen this ‘clarity of thought’ by consolidating the many theories and

descriptions of EMT and CES into two ideal types. These two ideal types, and their features, are a representation of the most prominent ideals within the theoretical discourse of both EMT and CES. For example, Bergström and Boréus (2012, p. 166) note that the advantage of using ideal types is that they enable the researcher to create ‘order’ within unprocessed and overwhelming amounts of text from the empirical material. It is in this way that the ideal types serve as analytical tools for the reconstruction and processing of patterns in extensive empirical material.

It is also important to avoid arbitrary assumptions (Bryman, 2011, p. 507). Therefore, larger quotations will be extracted from the empirical material. In contrast to keywords or smaller quotations, the choice of larger quotations should be viewed as a way to enrich and deepen the understanding and interpretation of the actor’s (i.e. the political party’s) ideas and arguments. Although the main extraction of text is grounded in larger quotations, smaller quotations may occur as well in order to complement, or further elaborate on, specific lines of reasoning in the analysis. Furthermore, Bryman (2011, p. 352) highlights that qualitative methods may face troubles with the ‘external’ validity and reliability. However, as Bergström and Boréus (2012, p. 166) notes: if an ideal type is derived in a systematic fashion, it would increase the opportunities for comparative analysis. Therefore, my aim is to draw valid conclusions based on the application and guidance of prominent environmental theories, previous studies as well as a complete and transparent presentation of each section in this dissertation. Moreover, my hope is that the choice of constructing ideal types and applying them to an environmental political discourse could be used for further comparative research.

Moreover, the validity may be grounded in the ‘dependability’ of the empirical material (Grönmo, 2006, p. 230). With this reasoning in mind, I have chosen to analyze the latest environmental policy documents from Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) and Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party). These parties hold and manage a proportional share of the 349 members of the Riksdag. And as such, they could be viewed as having ‘real influence’ and political power in Swedish environmental politics and its discourse. It is therefore crucial to note that the analysis of the environmental policy documents is a strategic selection of central texts within the environmental context. They are, after all, environmental policy documents that represent each party’s position in the Swedish environmental political discourse. As such, they are deemed to be the most suitable empirical material for the purpose of this dissertation.

4. Analysis

In this section I will present the textual analysis of the Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) and Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party) and their corresponding environmental policy documents, and how well they fit in to the ideal types for CES and EMT.

4.1. Vänsterpartiet (Left Party)

In this chapter I will present the textual analysis of the Swedish Left Party's environmental policy document based on the constructed ideal types of CES and EMT. The analysis is separated into three segments: Economic rationale, Relationship between states and lastly, Views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters.

4.1.1. Economic rationale

The following quote is taken from the Swedish Left Party's (hereafter characterized as V) 'Ekologiskt-ekonomiskt punktprogram':

Kapitalismens drivkraft är inte att producera för att tillfredsställa mänskliga behov, utan för att ge största möjliga vinst för ägarna. Samhällssystem som försökt konkurrera med kapitalismen har ofta kopierat dess fokus på snabb materiell tillväxt. De ohållbara globala produktions- och konsumtionsmönster som drivits fram av dessa systemlogiker har skapat större ekologiska fotavtryck än planeten kan bära. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 2).

One feature of the ideal type of CES is 'anti-capitalist sentiments'. In this context, it is an acknowledgement that capitalist structures intensify environmental destruction. As such, capitalism is to be held responsible for the many environmental ills that have emerged in contemporary times. Clearly, one interpretation could be that the Swedish Left party displays such sentiments by deeming the current production and consumption patterns as unsustainable for the planet. Furthermore, V also highlights that the purpose of capitalism is not to satisfy the needs of humanity, but rather the satisfaction of the pursuit for the highest possible profits for shareholders. This line of reasoning is further elaborated on in the following:

Varje effektivt omställningsprogram måste se till att *kapitalets vinstmaximering underordnas* hänsynen till planetens ekologiska gränser och till grundläggande mänskliga behov. Den ekonomiska politiken måste verka aktivt för detta och styra den ekonomiska utvecklingen i en riktning som är *anpassad till de ramar som klimat och ekologi sätter upp*. Endast en tillväxt som går att förena med omställning till ett hållbart samhälle – det vill säga en *socialt och ekologiskt hållbar* utveckling – kan accepteras. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 2).

Initially, V demands that within every effective (environmental) transition program, the profit maximization of capital must be subordinated to the planet's ecological limits and to basic human needs. As such, economic policies should prioritize this notion and redirect economic development towards a context which is based on the environmental limits of the planet's climate and ecology. Furthermore, V also exhibits the need to limit economic growth: the only acceptable form of economic growth is a growth that can be reconciled with sustainable social and ecological developments.

Kapitalismen fördelar jordens resurser extremt ojämnt, mellan klasser, mellan rika och fattiga länder [...] Länder, regioner och individer måste hålla sig inom ett rättvist miljöutrymme, det vill säga den mängd resurser som vi kan använda utan att tvinga andra människor att använda sig av en mindre mängd resurser, nu eller i framtiden. Miljöutrymmet är inte statiskt. Det kan minskas ytterligare genom rovdrift och miljöförstöring, men också ökas genom mer miljövänliga produktionsmetoder. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 2).

V also argues that capitalism redistributes earth's resources unequally between classes as well as between rich and poor countries. As such, the consumption of resources by countries, regions and individuals must remain within a fair 'environmental space'. More specifically, the limits of this environmental space should be based on the notion that our present and future consumption of resources should not force others to consume less resources. Moreover, V argues that the expansion, or depletion, of this environmental space depends on the types of production processes: environmentally friendly production methods or exploitation and pollution, respectively.

In the quotes above, one can interpret that V adheres to the feature of 'a maximization of human needs and well-being' within the ideal type of CES. This is largely due to V's focus on

the social aspects of the consumption and distribution of the planet's resources as a pathway to a more sustainable society. This adherence is further confirmed by V's restructuring of the concept of economic growth. V downplays the ideal of the pursuit for profits and replaces it with a growth that is contingent on social and ecological developments. Thus, V challenges the contemporary 'growth logic' that is exhibited by contemporary societies.

En jämlikare fördelning av resurser är en förutsättning för att en kraftigt minskad total resursanvändning ska kunna kombineras med en hög materiell standard för alla, såväl i Sverige som globalt. Omställning till ett hållbart samhälle kommer därför få störst konsekvenser för dem som idag har störst ekologiska fotavtryck och som tar mest resurser i anspråk. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 2).

The feature of degrowth, a decreased growth vis-à-vis an increased fair distribution of resources, can also be interpreted from V's environmental policy document: the idea of an equal distribution of resources is combined with a national as well as a global scope. Furthermore, V seems to display a belief that the pathway of degrowth, in the sense of an advocacy for a great minimization of total resource consumption, may cultivate a higher material standard for all. Corresponding to the CES perspective that more is not always better and, within a climate-constrained world, enough can be plenty.

"Om vi ska klara klimatförändringarna behöver våra konsumtionsmönster förändras. I detta arbete är samhällets gemensamma konsumtion central. Offentlig upphandling, pensionsfonder och investeringar är avgörande verktyg" (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p.2). One could contemplate on whether V displays an explicit will to minimize consumption or not. Focusing on the latter quotation, it only seems to argue for a 'change' in consumer behaviour. Whether this means a minimization or maximization of consumption in practice is ambiguous. However, previous quotations have made it clear that V argues for a great reduction of the total consumption of resources and a resource consumption that is contingent on the proportional resource consumption of others nationally and globally (i.e. the idea of a 'fair environmental space'). Furthermore, V also supports the idea that capitalist structures have created unsustainable production and consumption patterns. It is in this sense that one could make the interpretation that V indeed favours a 'minimization of consumption' laid out as a feature within the ideal type of CES.

It seems, then, that the ideas and arguments put forth by V's environmental policy document adheres closely to the column 'economic rationale' in the ideal type of CES. In other words, the ideas and arguments put forth can be linked to the four features of the economic rationale: 'anti-capitalist sentiments', 'minimization of consumption', 'belief in the maximization of human needs and well-being' and 'the idea of degrowth (decreased growth vis-à-vis increased fair distribution of resources)'.

However, one must also consider the following quotation that explicitly mentions ideas on green technology

Vänsterpartiet vill prioritera en *stark och långsiktig expansion* av välfärdsverksamheter, vård av ekosystemtjänster, utbildning, kultur och annan informationsproduktion, *samt investeringar i grön teknologi och grön infrastruktur*. Det handlar om sektorer som vårdar de ekologiska systemen eller präglas av jämförelsevis låg miljöbelastning och hög samhällsekonomisk produktivitet. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 4).

Here, V explicitly supports the notion of a strong and long-term expansion of investments in green technology and green solutions to infrastructure. In other words, V views these investments as significant solutions regarding the preservation of the ecological systems and maintaining a high socio-economic productivity. Thus, one could interpret this expression as an adherence to the feature 'development of green technological solutions to environmental impacts' that is described in the economic rationale of the ideal type of EMT.

4.1.2. Relationship between states

In terms of the relationship between states, V reasons that

Vänsterpartiet vill se ett *globalt klimatavtal som baserar sig på principerna om rättvist miljöutrymme och klimaträttvisa*. Det bör vara juridiskt bindande med ett sanktionssystem för skarpa begränsningar för utsläpp och fossil utvinning, *rättvist så att de länder som har ett historiskt ansvar för utsläppen tar ett särskilt ansvar* för att hantera konsekvenserna av dem och ambitiöst nog att undvika katastrofala klimatförändringar, *samtidigt som det ger förutsättningar att ta världen ur fattigdom*. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 6).

The call for a fair environmental space and climate justice is based on the demand for greater accountability from countries that have the most historical responsibility for the global emissions. It is a demand for a management of the consequences of the historical emissions and an assurance to avoid catastrophic events caused by climate change. Furthermore, V states that the concerned countries provide conditions to lift the world out of poverty. This line of reasoning has been observed in the discourse of CES and is in close correspondence with the feature of a 'focus on the economic-environmental power relationships between core and non-core states' that is listed within the ideal type of CES. Not only is there an acknowledgement for such power relationships, but there are also resolutions to combat the economic-environmental power relationships. The alignment with the ideal type of CES is further illuminated by the following quotation

Länder och regioner ska utifrån en sådan *rättvis fördelning av miljöutrymme* ha både rätt och möjlighet att jämlikt utveckla och kontrollera sin produktion, sina finansiella flöden och sina naturresurser. Den fria rörligheten för kapital ska underordnas alla länders rätt att värna en *hållbar ekonomisk, ekologisk och social utveckling* [...] Grunden för handelspolitiken borde vara välavvägda multilaterala avtal där *utvecklingsländer ges möjlighet att utvecklas på ett hållbart sätt*.
(Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 6)

Here, one can yet again interpret that V shifts the focus from 'economic' to 'environmental' in the economic-environmental power relationships between core and non-core states by prioritizing the developing nations' sustainable economic, ecological and social developments. Furthermore, the concept of a 'fair environmental space' and the downgrading of capitalist structures seems to be a central line of reasoning forming many ideas and arguments within V's environmental policy documents. Moreover, a line of reasoning among the scholars of CES states that efforts to solve one environmental issue can create new environmental issues or exacerbate others. This issue is usually perceived in a global economic-environmental scope and demands an accountability from core states. "Vänsterpartiet vill att Sverige även tar ansvar för de konsumtionsrelaterade utsläppen, de växthusgasutsläpp som kommer från import och internationella flygresor" (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 8). Thus, the presented ideas and arguments from V's environmental policy document

makes it clear that there is an adherence to the feature of a ‘focus on the economic-environmental power relationships between core and non-core states’.

Furthermore, V seems to correspond to features within the ideal type of EMT as well. Consider the following quotation:

Sverige fyller idag en viktig roll i världen genom att exportera en lång rad industriprodukter som är samhällsekonomiskt viktiga och producerade med relativt begränsad miljöpåverkan. Den omställning Vänsterpartiet vill se kommer att behöva genomföras på ett sätt som inte leder till utflyttning av den produktionen [...] Vänsterpartiet förespråkar en aktiv statlig industripolitik som bland annat ska verka för att svensk industri ska producera samhällsnyttiga varor med riktigt låga utsläpp och exportera dem till världen. (Vänsterparti 2016, p. 5).

Here, V displays ideas of Swedish industries as crucial supplementers of goods that are produced through means of green production. V supports the continued maintenance of Swedish industries as exporters of green goods and holds that an ecological transition, or modernization, must not result in an outsourcing of such production. In a following quote, V’s position on this matter is further illuminated as ”Vänsterpartiet vill att Sverige ska vara världsledande i flera av de viktigaste omställningsprocesserna. Vi verkar för att den tekniska kunskap världen behöver för sin utveckling så långt som möjligt ska kunna användas fritt (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 5)”. The ambition displayed by V here is not merely that Sweden should embrace an important role in the pursuit of green technological solutions, goods, services, ideas or policies, but to embrace the role of ‘world leader’ in such matters. It seems that in V’s view, a developed nation such as Sweden has a lot to offer to the rest of the world in matters of ecological modernization. Thus, one could make the interpretation that these ideas adhere to the feature of the ideal type of EMT that views developed nations as supplementers of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies.

4.1.3. Views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters

Vi vill skapa ett *socialistiskt, jämlikt och demokratiskt samhälle* med utvecklad välfärd och livskvalitet, där ekonomin är ett medel för att uppfylla de ekologiska och sociala behoven [...] Marknaden kommer inte att lösa miljö- och

klimatproblemen. *Det krävs att folkrörelser mobiliserar, erövrar politisk makt och använder staten för att reglera marknaden.* (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 2-3).

V displays a will to create a socialistic, egalitarian and democratic society where the economy acts as a measure to realize ecological and social needs. This in turn is contingent on the civil society's mobilization, conquering of political power and utilization of state regulations on the market. One of the prominent features of the ideal type of CES is based on 'an appeal to democratic decision-making at local, regional and multiregional levels in matters of ecological modernization'. Indeed, it seems that V is keen on moving political power to the masses (i.e. civil society) rather than advocating for a belief in market forces to solve environmental issues. Further scrutiny reveals that

En rödgrön omställning innebär att vi lyfter fram jämlikhet, jämställdhet, solidaritet, organisering och demokrati som röda trådar i en framgångsrik omställning till ett hållbart samhälle [...] Vänsterpartiet ser att klimatkrisen inte uppstått genom att enskilda människor gjort felaktiga val. Den kommer därför inte heller lösas genom att vi lägger ansvaret för omställningen på enskilda människor. Miljö- och klimatproblemen är grundläggande samhällskriser som vi bara kan lösa tillsammans och där människors engagemang för att skapa hållbara lösningar ska tas tillvara. (Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 3).

Again, the commitment, organization and moral purity of 'regular people' seems to be central to a sustainable society in the future. Furthermore, solutions to the many environmental issues are portrayed as being solved as a collective, rather than by a society of individuals. Conversely, V argues that a sustainable society in the future should be based on ideas related to egalitarian values such equality and solidarity.

Utgångspunkten för Vänsterpartiets miljö- och klimatarbete är att vi lägger pragmatiska, genomförbara och handfasta reformförslag som ska kunna vinna brett politiskt stöd med de politiska förutsättningar som finns idag. Vi åtar oss att vara den pådrivande kraften för detta på alla nivåer; statligt, regionalt och kommunalt [...] Omställningen måste genomföras på ett sätt som är lyhört inför hur människors vardag ser ut [...] Omställningsrörelsen behöver vara bred, folklig och inkluderande. Människor från många olika grupper i samhället ska kunna känna

sig hemma i den och vara trygga med att deras intressen finns företrädda i den.
(Vänsterpartiet 2016, p. 3-4).

There are several ideas and arguments to note here. V's environmental political strategy expresses a will to act within several political levels: state level, regional level and the municipal level. In a general sense, a political party that conveys such objectives seem to be trivial at best and irrelevant at worst for the purpose of this dissertation. However, if one combines it with how the environmental political strategy will be realized, one can draw the interpretation that V is willing to incorporate interests and ideas outside of its 'party borders'. In this sense, V explicitly posits that their environmental political strategy is broad, responsive and inclusive to the many interests and everyday lives of various regular people. This 'bottom-up' perspective in V's environmental political strategy could be interpreted as an argument for the maximization of democratic participation and voice in environmental issues. Therefore, V's environmental strategy adheres to the feature of 'an appeal to democratic decision-making at local, regional and multiregional levels in matters of ecological modernization' in the ideal type of CES.

Another prominent feature in the same column is 'eco-social enterprise (stronger forms of commons)'. In the following, we shall see whether V's ideas and arguments correspond to this feature.

Den gemensamma ekonomin och de offentliga investeringarna behöver växa. Skattehöjningar på de högsta inkomsterna och förmögenheterna, samt på sådant som förstör miljön behövs för att möjliggöra sådana ökade offentliga investeringar och en utvecklad välfärd [...] Det gemensamma ägandet i ekonomin ska öka och bidra till [klimat]omställningen. Eftersom våra naturresurser är starkt begränsade ska initiativ stimuleras som låter dessa resurser återvinnas, återskapas och återanvändas. Här kan en mångfald aktörer alltifrån näringsliv, ickevinstdrivande företag, statliga bolag, kommuner och landsting till kooperativ, sociala företag och ideella föreningar bidra till att låta våra resurser cirkulera i samhället med målet att göra största möjliga nytta. (Vänsterpartiet 2016 p. 4-5).

As shown in the literature review for CES, institutions such as eco-social enterprises or community-based organizing entails an abandonment of accumulation, commodification and individualization as guiding principles of human coexistence. Instead, temporally and

spatially equitable and sustainable values should be prioritized. These values are typically (1) democratic governance structures and stakeholder governance involvement, (2) an explicit public benefit aim and (3) some restrictions on profit or surplus distribution. Here, V calls for an expansion of the common ownership of the economy by taxation of the highest wages and assets as well as a taxation on ‘things’ that are detrimental to the environment. This expansion is seen as necessary within the process of ecological modernization. There is also an acknowledgement of the scarcity of natural resources, and solutions are proposed through initiatives aimed at recycling, refurbishing and reusing scarce natural resources. Actors that are included in these initiatives are business associations, state enterprises, municipalities and county councils. However, V also includes cooperative’s, social enterprises and non-profit organizations. This should be interpreted as a significant inclusion of actors that are eco-social enterprises, since many of them exhibit the aforementioned values of (1), (2) and (3). Thus, V’s ideas of common ownership, an environmental public benefit aim and restrictions on profit or surplus distribution adheres to the feature of ‘eco-social enterprise’ within the ideal type of CES.

In sum, the ideas and arguments of Left Party’s environmental policy document closely aligns with the 7 features found within the ideal type of CES. However, some ideas and arguments also display an adherence to 2 features within the ideal type of EMT. The first set of ideas refers to the support for the development of green technological solutions to environmental impacts. This is a feature found within the column named ‘economic rationale’ within the ideal type of EMT. The second set of ideas refers to the support for developed nations that are seen as supplementers of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies. In an arithmetic sense, then, one could draw the conclusion that the satisfaction of the seven features in the ideal type of CES correspond to a value of -7 and that the satisfaction of two features in the ideal type of EMT correspond to a value of 2. Thus, the sum of -7 and 2 is equal to -5.

4.2.Socialdemokraterna (Social Democratic Party)

In this chapter I will present the textual analysis of the Social Democratic Party’s environmental policy document based on the constructed ideal types of CES and EMT. The

analysis is separated into three segments: Economic rationale, Relationship between states and lastly, Views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters.

4.2.1. Economic rationale

The economic rationale of the Social Democratic Party (hereafter characterized as SDP) can be ascertained through an analysis of the following quotations

Marknaden kommer inte att lösa klimatkrisen. Alla har ett ansvar, men ansvaret kan inte vältras över på enskilda [...] *Det krävs tydliga prioriteringar, investeringar och fortsatt utveckling* [...] EU:s utsläppshandelssystem är ett *kraftfullt instrument för att ställa om till en hållbar ekonomi* [...] *Tillväxt, välfärd och klimatomställning är inte bara förenliga med varandra, utan även varandras förutsättningar. Vi stärker vår konkurrenskraft, svenska jobb och resurserna till välfärden både genom att leda omställningen, och genom krav på att varje land måste göra investeringar för att efterleva Parisavtalet.* (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 6).

For SDP, solutions to the environmental issues requires investments and further development. As an example, SDP mentions that the EU's emissions trading system are viewed as powerful instruments in the transition to a sustainable economy. Moreover, SDP also displays a presumption that processes of economic growth, welfare standards and environmental transitions are compatible with each other. Not only are these processes compatible with each other, but they constitute and act as prerequisites to one another. Nurturing these processes, then, would lead to a stronger competitiveness, Swedish jobs and resources to the Swedish welfare system vis-à-vis ecological modernization. Moreover, SDP also states that

Det ska vara attraktivt att investera i och utveckla produktion och tjänster i Sverige. Industrin är Sveriges tillväxtmotor, och industrins omställning ska främjas ytterligare genom att industrikivet förstärks. Med en modern lagstiftning och en aktiv näringspolitik på både nationell och regional nivå ska tillståndsprocesser effektiviseras för både befintliga och nya verksamheter. (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 7)

From this quotation, one could make the observation that SDP appeals to several economic solutions such as the realization of an attractive investment plan for Swedish production and services. The Swedish industry is defined as a significant force for Swedish growth and that it is to be strengthened even further. SDP also formulates the use of active enterprise and innovative green policies in order to help current and future enterprises in an efficient manner. Moreover, SDP states

Vi ska ha fortsatt höga miljökrav och *ny hållbar gruvverksamhet* ska kunna öppnas för att säkra tillgång på för omställningen nödvändiga respektive *innovationskritiska metaller och mineraler*. *En hållbar besöksnäring* ska fortsätta att utvecklas. De allra flesta nya jobb skapas i små- och medelstora företag. *Vi vill skapa goda förutsättningar för Sveriges företagande, med fler företag som utvecklas och växer*, är med i omställningen och anställer fler. (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 7).

Here, SDP argues for new sustainable enterprises in areas such as mining operations as well as the tourism and hospitality industry. Furthermore, natural resources such as metals and minerals are portrayed as crucial for innovations within the process of ecological modernization. SDP also reasons that they want to cultivate a prosperous environment for Swedish enterprise with the aim to further their development and growth. Another significant quotation holds that “Skogen, vårt gröna guld, spelar en central roll i klimatomställningen genom att ersätta fossila produkter och som kolsänka. Ett aktivt skogsbruk som *är klimatsmart och miljömässigt hållbart samtidigt som det skapar jobb och hållbar tillväxt i hela Sverige, bygger vår nya växande bioekonomi*.” (Socialdemokraterna 2016, p. 7). Again, the elements of economic growth and benign environmental transitions are portrayed as mutually beneficial for each other. Furthermore, “Socialdemokratin är en teknikoptimistisk rörelse, som med spänning följer *utvecklingen av olika teknologier som kan bidra till klimatomställningen*” (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 8). Green technology, then, is viewed as an important component in the Swedish ecological modernization. This is further confirmed by the following quotation: “Genom en *investeringsdriven omställning* som finansieras gemensamt kan vi både ställa om till ett *fossilfritt välfärdsland, stärka vår tillväxt genom klimatsmart innovation*, och minska klyftorna. Så ska vi bygga världens första fossilfria välfärdsland.” (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 8). The SDP reasons that investments can direct

the environmental transition and achieve the goals of a fossil-free welfare state and strengthened growth through green innovations.

These quotations allow for the interpretation that SDP is indeed reliant on capitalist structures such as economic growth, processes of green production and consumption as well as market-based instruments to cultivate an ecological modernization in Sweden. This can be observed in the ideas of sustainable economic growth as a prerequisite to processes of environmental transition (i.e., ecological modernization). The ‘greening’ of Swedish industries, Swedish enterprise and other business sectors are also seen as significant contributors to processes of environmental transition. Furthermore, market-based instruments are promoted as viable political strategies in the encouragement and development of green innovations.

SDP also displays a support for the development of green technological solutions to environmental impacts, holding the belief that natural resources such as various metals and minerals are crucial to innovations in terms of green technology. Moreover, SDP displays a belief in the decoupling of economic growth from environmental impacts. This can be observed in SDP’s ideas of economic growth as a driving force in the vision of an ecologically modern state. It is in this sense that one can interpret that the Social Democratic Party adheres to the three features within the column ‘economic rationale’ of the ideal type of EMT.

4.2.2. Relationship between states

Vi socialdemokrater driver på för att Sverige ska vara *världsledande i den gröna industriomställningen* [...] Men klimatarbetet måste genomsyra alla relevanta områden, och *klimatet känner inga landsgränser*. Vi ska fortsätta att driva på den gröna omställningen, *sätta press på de stora utsläppsländerna att leva upp till Parisavtalet, och bistå länder som behöver hjälp med att minska sina utsläpp*. (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 3).

In terms of the relationships between states, SDP conveys that Sweden should be a ‘world leader’ in green industrial transitions. Moreover, SDP also highlights that the climate ‘knows no boundaries’ and that SDP will continue to demand accountability from countries that have

high emissions. One can also note that SDP displays a will to support those countries that are in need of help with the reduction of their emissions.

I dag lever vi över planetens tillgångar och förutsättningar. Klimatförändringarna är på riktigt. Var och en av oss påverkas, *men det är de mest utsatta i världen som drabbas hårdast*. Världen blir allt varmare, glaciärer smälter och översvämningar plågar många länder [...] *Möjligheten att ställa om är ojämlikt fördelad. De som står för de största utsläppen, och har bäst förutsättningar bör också åläggas det största ansvaret. Sverige har goda förutsättningar att vara pådrivande och leverera de innovationer som världen efterfrågar. En rättvis klimatomställning ger nya jobb och exportinkomster, [...]*. (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 6).

There are two fundamental ideas within the quotation. The first idea refers to SDP's statement that those countries who are worse off are the most vulnerable in terms of climate change and environmental ills. SDP also reasons that the opportunities for an environmental transition are unequal. Therefore, SDP argues for a greater accountability from countries that have the greatest emissions as well as the greatest capabilities to contribute to an environmental transition. The second idea refers to the statement that Sweden has enough capability to act as a driving force in the export of green innovations into the world. Benefits from such a role include the creation of new jobs and new revenues from export sectors. The second idea is further elaborated on in that "*En klimatexportoffensiv ska inledas så att svenskt kunnande och jobb kan minska de globala utsläppen från våra handelspartners.*" (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 7). Swedish ingenuity and Swedish jobs are both seen as valuable components in an offensive 'green export sector' and SDP reasons that these components could reduce the global emissions from trading partners. Furthermore, "*Utvecklingsländer ska få ekonomiskt och tekniskt stöd för att genomföra klimatåtgärder och att anpassa sina samhällen till klimatförändringarna*" (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 36). This points to the notion that developing countries are in need of economic and technical assistance in matters of ecological modernization. And given the contents within the previous quotations, one could reasonably interpret that Sweden, and other countries who have the capacity, should be supplementers of such economic and technical measures.

In terms of the relationship between states, the ideas of SDP's environmental policy document exhibit a clear correspondence with the feature of 'developed nations viewed as

supplementers of green technological solution, goods, services and ideas or policies' in the ideal type of EMT. This is shown in SDP's arguments in favour of supplementing and supporting developing nations with their pursuit of ecological modernization. Swedish ingenuity and the green production processes of Swedish industry is portrayed as a significant asset for the rest of the world, and as such, Sweden must continue to play the role of 'world leader' in environmental matters. One can also note that the ideas and arguments from SDP correspond to the feature of 'economic-environmental power relationships between core and non-core states' in the ideal type of CES. This correspondence can be seen in SDP's view of ecological modernization emerging in an unequal and unjust fashion. Accordingly, countries who are worse off tend to be affected by environmental ills at a higher rate. It is in this moral sense that SDP demands accountability from countries who are 'richer' in their capability to solve the problems resulting from climate change and other phenomena of ecological destruction.

4.2.3. Views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters

In terms of views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters, SDP conveys that "I Sverige ska vi arbeta tillsammans för [klimat]omställningen – näringsliv, akademi, civilsamhälle och det offentliga" (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 7). In other words, there is a will to cooperate between several sectors in society: between business, academia, civil society and the state. SDP continues to elaborate on this line of reasoning:

Klimatomställningen är ett samhällsbygge. Ingen enskild och inget enstaka företag kan ensamt åstadkomma det som krävs. Omställningen ska ske så att den fungerar i varje del av vårt land, genom att alla kan vara med, ha inflytande och komma med initiativ. Att arbetet sker tillsammans i kommuner och stadsdelar, folkrörelser och föreningsliv, och med en stark ställning för arbetstagarna och samverkan mellan arbetsmarknadens parter, bidrar till att Sverige kan lyckas. (Socialdemokraterna 2021, p. 8)

SDP holds that no single corporation can satisfy the requirements of ecological modernity. Therefore, the environmental transition necessitates the involvement, and influence, of 'all' social actors such as municipalities and districts, social movements and other associations.

One feature of the ideal type of EMT regards the ‘Technocratic (neo-corporatist) environmental decision-making in matters of ecological modernization’. We can contemplate on this feature by recalling two relevant aspects that were discussed in the literature review of EMT: (1) This feature refers to a country’s consensus ability: neo-corporatist structures cultivating consensus-seeking decision-making styles of environmental governance. (2) Furthermore, this feature also refers to a country’s innovative ability: the capacity of both the state and the market institutions to remain open to new interests and innovations in the judicial and political system, the media and the economic system. It is in this sense that one can interpret the ideas and arguments of SDP. The quotations illuminate that the SDP seeks to cooperate with several social actors in environmental matters. It is a cooperation that is based on collective interests, influence and consensus rather than an authoritarian mandate in environmental issues for example. It is crucial to note that SDP defines ‘social actor’ in terms of various organizations or institutions. Not as individual citizens in matters of environmental decision-making processes. These social actors, however, are to partake in the environmental decision-making processes together with market actors and state actors. It is in this sense that one can interpret an adherence to (1) and (2) and thus an adherence to the feature of ‘Technocratic (neo-corporatist) environmental decision-making in matters of ecological modernization’ in the ideal type of EMT.

In total, the ideas and arguments of the Social Democratic Party environmental policy document closely aligns with 5 features found within the ideal type of EMT. Most notably, the SDP closely aligns with the 3 features that are embedded in the ‘economic rationale’ of the ideal type of EMT. Furthermore, the ideas and arguments from the SDP also aligns with 1 feature embedded within the ‘relationship between states’ column of the ideal type of CES. Namely, a ‘Focus on the economic-environmental power relationships between core and non-core states’ However, the ideas and arguments from the SDP also adheres to 1 feature within the ‘relationship between states’ column of the ideal type of EMT. Namely, that ‘Developed nations are supplementers of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies’. Lastly, the ideas and arguments of the SDP displays a ‘technocratic (neo-corporatist) environmental decision-making in matters of ecological modernization’. In an arithmetic sense, then, one could draw the conclusion that the satisfaction of the 5 features found within the ideal type of EMT correspond to a value of 5 and that the satisfaction of 1 feature in the ideal type of CES correspond to a value of -1. Thus, the sum of 5 and -1 is equal to 4.

5. Discussion

Based on the textual analysis of the two chosen parties, the results of the matched criteria of the ideal types are displayed in the following figure. The figure displays the minimum and maximum available points of the ideal types and the corresponding results for the Left Party, which was -5, and the Social Democratic Party, which was 4. The scale ranges constituting of negative integers are cohering to sympathies to CES and the positive integers are cohering to sympathies to EMT.

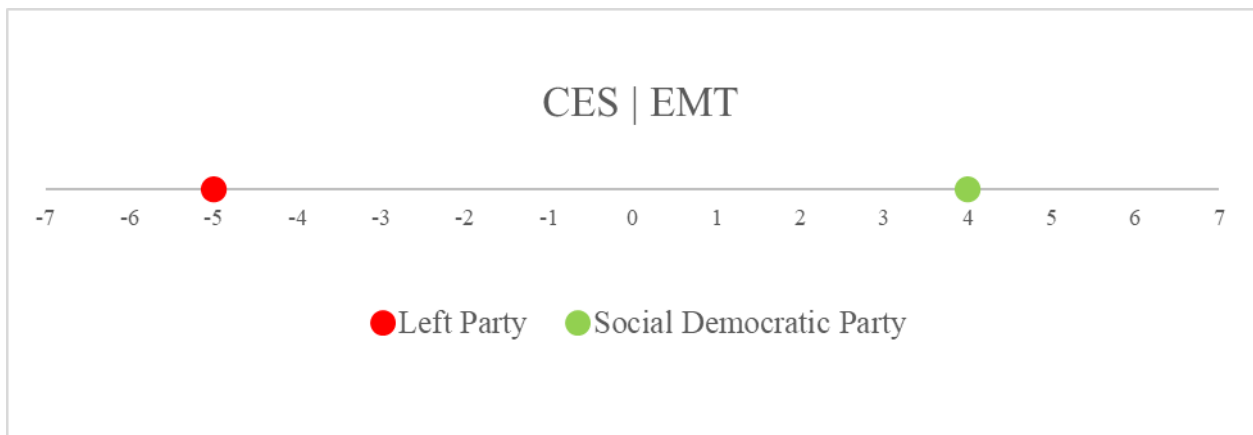


Figure 1 Visualization of results

There several aspects of the results worth discussing. First are the ideational differences in the ‘economic rationale’ exhibited by both parties. The Left Party align themselves closely to an economic rationale best explained by the ideal type of CES. This is evident through the presented ideas and arguments focusing on anti-capitalist sentiments, minimization of consumption, belief in the maximization of human needs and well-being as well as the ideas of degrowth. While the Social Democratic Party align themselves closely to an economic rationale best explained by the ideal type of EMT: exhibiting a reliance on capitalist structures (economic growth, mass production and consumption as well as the usage of market-based instruments as means to cultivate an ecological modernization), the expressed support of the development of green technological solutions to environmental impacts and a clear belief in the decoupling of economic growth from environmental impacts. Thereby, one could make the interpretation that the SDP favours ‘green capitalist approaches’ in their solutions to various environmental issues. While the Left Party seems to display a will to deeply reform

the 'growth logic' of modern capitalist societies with the objective of cultivating 'post-capitalist' values. This is a significant variation with regards to both parties being viewed as a cohesive 'red-green' alternative in mainstream environmental political discourse in Sweden.

Furthermore, there are ideational differences with regards to V's and SDP's ideas and arguments on the 'views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters' column. The SDP, in their definition of a 'social actor', seems to favour a technocratic (neo-corporatist) environmental decision-making process in matters of ecological modernization. While V seems to focus on an appeal to democratic decision-making at local, regional and multiregional levels in matters of ecological modernization. In comparison to SDP, V reasons that their environmental policies are to be sensitive and modified by the everyday life of individuals as well as various other actors working together to achieve an ecological modernization. This is further elaborated on in V's inclusion of eco-social enterprise (stronger forms of commons), organizations that usually focus on democratic stakeholder decision-making. SDP, on the other hand, displays ideas of 'traditional' social actors coming together as representatives of the interests of the members of the social group.

However, ideational similarities can be found in two accounts. The first account is that both V and SDP adheres to the feature of 'developed nations as supplementers of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies' found within the ideal type of EMT. One could interpret their 'correspondence' to this feature from different lines of reasoning. V seems to display a line of reasoning that is strictly moral in the sense that the emergence of ecological modernization is unequal and unjust, and therefore, 'green supplementation' to developing nations is needed. Although SDP displays such moral obligations as well, SDP also highlights that there are 'gains from trade' from being a net exporter of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies. And that such green exports would strengthen Sweden's economic-environmental 'competitiveness' in the international arena. Nevertheless, this ideational similarity could be characterized as an 'egalitarian supplementation of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies'. The second account is that both SDP and V adheres to the feature of a 'focus on the economic-environmental power relationships between core and non-core states'. Traditionally speaking, Left-wing parties in Sweden are usually associated with ideals that originate from, for example, socialist, social democratic and democratic socialist ideologies. These ideological origins have traditionally displayed a focus on the power relationship of different classes,

states and genders. A fundamental premise, is that there is a 'core and periphery' mindset of exploitation. In this case, however, the power analysis is applied on core and non-core states.

There are some features that did not seem to capture and explain any ideas or arguments within the environmental documents of both V and SDP. These features are that of 'western countries as hegemonic beacons of guidance in notions of ecological modernization' and 'A distinct focus on environmental changes within the nation-state (close-ended framework)'. The first feature could perhaps be reformulated, and theoretically motivated, as 'developed countries are viewed as world leaders in notions of ecological modernization'. This could offer a deeper inference and explanatory force in the ideas and arguments that portray Sweden as a world leader in issues of environmental transition. These ideas and arguments are, indeed, displayed by both V and S and it would perhaps contribute to further study such aspects. The second feature could perhaps be useful for further studies on political parties that exhibit isolationist environmental policies. However, looking at figure 1, one can see that the distance between V and SDP is relatively large. And such distance could point to the precision of adopting the ideal types of EMT and CES. Clearly, the construction of ideal types reveals that there are great ideational differences between the two parties.

6. Conclusion

The research question of this dissertation was to illuminate whether the theories of ecological modernization (EMT) and critical environmental sociology (CES), constructed as ideal types, are able to explain the ideational differences and similarities put forth by the environmental policy documents of the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party. Through the literature review of ecological modernization theory and critical environmental sociology, I established 7 prominent features for each theory. These features were translated into an ideal type of EMT as well as an ideal type of CES. In subsequent sections, these ideal types were used as analytical tools to sort and identify the ideas and arguments put forth in the environmental policy documents of the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party. The results showed that the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party adhered to different ideal types. With the Social Democratic Party adhering to the ideal type of EMT and the Left Party adhering to the ideal type of CES. Therefore, one can draw the conclusion that the Left party and the Social Democratic Party have very different ideational cores in their views of ecological

modernization. Although they share ideational similarities, these similarities are undermined, primarily, by their different economic rationales and different views on democratic participation and voice in environmental matters. The strongest ideational similarities, however, lies within V's and SDP's views on the relationship between states. Which could be characterized as 'egalitarian supplementers of green technological solutions, goods, services and ideas or policies'. Furthermore, the results indicate that V could be classified as a 'critical environmentalist' while SDP could be classified as a 'green capitalist'. Thus, it could be said that the research question has been satisfied for the purposes of this dissertation.

7. Further studies

As previously mentioned in the methodology section, my hope is that the choice of constructing ideal types and applying them to an environmental political discourse could be used for further comparative research. For example, are there similar results if the researcher would compare the results of this dissertation with the results of an analysis on the domestic environmental political discourse in Denmark, Norway or Finland? Or the U.S.A, China, India or Russia? The results from such comparative studies would perhaps offer an interesting, transnational, visualization of the political parties on the x-axis.

Furthermore, using the results and the constructed ideal types from this dissertation as a point of departure, the researcher could also further explore the ideational differences and similarities in an analysis of all political parties in the Swedish environmental political discourse. Not only would the following results capture a greater, perhaps complete, part of the environmental discourse in the Riksdag, but the following results could also be visualized on the x-axis. Moreover, the researcher could also complement the x-axis of EMT and CES with a y-axis based on the traditional left-right scale which measures ideology. For example, normalizing the left-right scale, and the political parties' alignment within, with the x-axis of EMT and CES would enable the researcher to draw conclusion on the consistency of ideology: do the centre-left and centre-right parties show the strongest adherence to EMT or CES? What are the differences between right-wing parties and left-wing parties in terms of EMT and CES? Will there be any significant signs of clusters? Or will the results point to fragmentation in the environmental political discourse?

Once all of the mainstream political parties have been fitted into the x-axis of EMT and CES, another interesting case for further study would be to reflect on the real outcomes of the Swedish environmental politics based on the plausible party constellations reaching a 50 percent mandate in the Riksdag. The analyzed ideas and arguments that have been put forth by all mainstream parties could perhaps point to the most plausible short-term outcomes in terms of environmental politics during the Swedish 4-year parliamentary term. These are some of the suggestions on further research that could be conducted. Undoubtedly, there are more pathways that have gone unexplored in this section. However, unexplored or proposed, this dissertation may serve to inspire others to conduct research on environmental politics using ecological modernization theory as well as critical environmental sociology in tandem.

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