

The most responsible and sustainable electricity company

– A rhetorical analysis of corporate environmental communication in the energy sector

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Abstract

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The energy sector has gone through changes, it has been liberalised, sustainable development has added a new dimension, and companies operating in it are increasingly expected to demonstrate environmental responsibility. In this thesis how the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility are treated rhetorically in the corporate environmental communication of three Swedish electricity companies is analysed. The corporate environmental communication is viewed as a part of the companies' public relations strategies. Rhetoric is used by companies to establish and maintain good relations with their stakeholders. If the premise that rhetoric has the ability to do something through its creation and promotion of meaning is accepted, the corporate rhetor plays a part in the definition and shaping of societal values, standards of business and public policy. It is argued that the electricity companies all present themselves as being responsible and sustainable though these claims contribute little to the definition of what environmental responsibility means and what sustainable electricity production is. The rhetoric used is a means for gaining legitimacy and competitive advantages to go on with business as usual. The electricity companies' very similar rhetorical strategies pose an obstacle for stakeholders trying to evaluate the environmental performance of the companies.

Key words: Corporate environmental communication, Rhetoric, Sustainable development, CSR, Energy Sector

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1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is a concept that has proliferated during the last two decades, not least in Sweden. The Swedish government ascribes to the vision of sustainable development and describes it as an overarching goal for its politics (Skr. 2005/06: 126). Two of the twelve indicators used in the striving towards sustainable development are “energy efficiency” and “greenhouse gases”, both which are connected to the production and consumption of electricity. To increase the energy efficiency it is important both to decrease the reliance on fossil fuels and to steer the energy system in a sustainable direction. The decrease of greenhouse gas emissions is also connected to electricity production as the way the electricity is produced affects the emissions. It is a goal of the government to increase the use of renewable energy sources, while decreasing the use of fossil ones (Skr. 2005/06: 126). This transition could be eased by customers willing to pay for green electricity (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001).

Because of the increased focus on sustainable development in society, there is a wish among companies to link their identity to environmental values and show that they take environmental responsibility (Cox, 2009; Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000). Communicating how responsibilities are undertaken is a central aspect of the interaction between corporations and society (Fredriksson, 2008). As electricity companies are part of the Swedish society that strives toward sustainable development it is reasonable to believe that the responsibilities they express and the values they want to align their identity with are connected to sustainable development. The identity is expressed in, among other things, corporate reporting and advertising, which is undertaken, at least in part, to communicate the identity of the company to affect the perceptions of stakeholders. This view of corporate communication places it in the realm of public relations (Cox, 2009; Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000).

The electricity market in Sweden was liberalised in 1996, meaning that consumers now have a choice to make regarding which electricity product they want to buy, and from which company. A characteristic that may influence the choice is an electricity product’s environmental performance. This can be seen as good from an energy policy point of view as it could be a way to get consumer preferences in line with societal needs. With the liberalisation, consumers are given a larger responsibility for the shift towards a more sustainable energy sector. One way for electricity companies to differentiate themselves in a liberalised market is through its environmental responsibility (Truffer, Markard &

Wüstenhagen, 2001). Differentiation in the environmental area does not matter if the customers are not active, changing electricity supplier or contract. Neither will customers be driving a shift towards sustainable development if they are not active (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). In 2009, almost 40% of Swedish customers were classified as active (SCB, 2009). For customers to be able to choose green electricity the companies must market environmental characteristics, and an essential part of marketing is communication. That customers rely on marketing claims is dependent on the credibility and identity that the companies have created for themselves (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). Therefore, companies invest in corporate environmental communication as a public relations tool (Dawkins, 2004). In public relations rhetoric is used to manage the identity and values of the company (Toth, 1999).

At the same time as companies are trying to manage their relationships with their stakeholders, they are also taking part in the definition of values in society. Through the rhetoric of public relations companies create meanings that they wish stakeholders to adopt (Heath, 2000). Since the purpose of public relations is to establish and maintain good relationships between company and stakeholders it is not enough for the companies to simply persuade stakeholders to agree with the company with clever wording, the companies must also adjust the messages to the stakeholders. The rhetoric of public relations is a dialogical process (Skerlep, 2001; Toth, 1999).

The corporate environmental communication, viewed as a part of the electricity companies' public relations strategies, can be used to demonstrate environmental responsibility and to establish an identity in line with sustainable development. Environmental responsibility is part of corporate social responsibility, which is supposed to contribute to some social good outside the company at the same time as it improves competitiveness and the company image (Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). This view of responsibility differs from that in neoclassical economic theory which gives that the sole responsibility of a company is maximisation of profit (Korhonen, 2002). How electricity companies demonstrate environmental responsibility in their communication affects how customers make their choices in the electricity market and influences the definition of values in society, which in turn have an effect on how the societal goal of sustainable development in the energy sector and outside it can be reached. As the companies make use of rhetoric in the environmental communication, the rhetoric is worthy of study.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

In today's society companies have grown more and more important as rhetors (Heath, 2000; Toth, 1999). What they say has the ability to influence our outlook on different issues (Ihlen, 2009b). The increased power of companies is used to promote issues, win public opinion, and to shape public and social debate (Toth, 1999). Companies communicate on their views, standpoints, and activities in a variety of ways, via websites, advertising, product information, press releases, and not least reporting. Corporate reports can be financial or non-financial and their audience is diverse, consisting of different stakeholders, i.e. entities that are affected by or affect the companies (Cerin, 2002). Companies in environmentally sensitive industries, like the energy one, tend to engage in environmental reporting to a greater extent (Ihlen, 2009b). What is being stated in non-financial reports does not always correspond with the content in financial reports or actual behaviour (Cerin, 2002).

An issue that has become more salient is sustainable development, not least in Sweden, and not least for companies. One sector closely related to sustainable development is the energy sector, or more narrowly, the electricity sector. Several sustainable development indicators and goals are connected to the generation and use of electricity (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Gan, Eskeland & Kolshus, 2007; Ihlen, 2009b; Skr. 2005/06: 126; Svensk Energi, 2011; The Swedish Government, 2008, p.11). Sustainable development has added a new dimension to the environmental concerns previously connected to the energy sector (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002). At the same time, environmental awareness has risen among various stakeholder groups, who are expecting that companies take environmental responsibility (Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Dawkins, 2004; Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). Despite the increased importance of sustainable development the rhetoric used by companies has focused more on strictly economic and technical issues. Fundamental problems of sustainability, like whether the industry and lifestyle it supports are inherently unsustainable have been dealt with to a lesser extent (Ihlen, 2009a). Furthermore, electricity markets have been, and are being, liberalised, providing customers with the opportunity to choose among electricity products and electricity companies with the opportunity to market their products as, for example, environmentally preferable to attract customers (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001).

That customers are being provided with a choice means that they, at least in theory, can influence the spread of renewable technologies in electricity production. The preferences of consumers and the expression of these in the marketplace can influence the design and

performance characteristics of electricity products. The development of consumer preferences is a function of learning and this learning is driven, to a large extent, by social exchange (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002). If customers are prepared to pay for green electricity it could promote innovation and increase the competitiveness of renewable energy sources (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). This requires customers being active in the electricity market and having sufficient information to exert pressure (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002). Evaluating the environmental performance of electricity companies is not always easy for the customers. To save the time and effort needed for the evaluation, the customers can rely on the marketing claims made by the electricity companies (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). The corporate environmental communication is part of the marketing strategies wherein rhetoric is used to ensure stakeholders, including consumers, that the companies are behaving appropriately. The rhetoric is revelatory of the values the companies adhere to but it may not ensure that the customers pick the most environmentally friendly alternatives (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). There is a need for a societal debate where different views can be exchanged and where the possible routes in sustainable development can be discussed. Due to the liberalisation of the electricity market, consumers, but also other stakeholders, can now be brought into the debate on how to steer the electricity production in a more sustainable direction (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002).

The electricity companies are forced to deal with the developments described above. They must assure their stakeholders that they are behaving appropriately, but they also have the opportunity to influence what is seen as behaving appropriately. How responsibilities are undertaken and how the values of a company are linked to environmental values and responsibility is conveyed through corporate environmental communication, which therefore can be seen as a public relations tool (Cox, 2009; Fredriksson, 2008; Hooghiemstra, 2000).

The conditions described above apply in Sweden. The Swedish electricity market was liberalised in 1996 (Gan, Eskeland & Kolshus, 2007). Sustainable development is something that the Swedish government is striving towards, using indicators like “energy efficiency” and “greenhouse gases” that are closely connected to the production and use of electricity (Skr. 2005/06: 126). The present Swedish government has proclaimed that climate change is the environmental issue with highest priority. The dependence on fossil fuels, which are still being used in electricity generation, is to be broken (Ministry of the Environment, 2009). The Swedish energy policy, as the EU one, should be based on ecological sustainability, competitiveness, and secure provision. The goals, among others, are to increase the share of renewable energy while improving energy efficiency (The Swedish Government, 2008, p.11).

Since 2006, the Swedish electricity distributors are obliged by law to disclose information on the sources used in the generation of the electricity sold, as well as its environmental impact. This information requirement was introduced by the second EU directive on the electricity market (2003/54/EC) and was designed to provide customers with the opportunity to choose electricity based on other criteria than economic ones (Svensk Energi, 2011). The electricity market in Sweden is no longer strictly Swedish, it has developed into a Nordic market (Statens Energimyndighet, 2006). In Sweden, the three largest electricity companies, E.ON, Vattenfall, and Fortum, are dominating the market. Together they control about 74% of the power assets in Sweden and produces approximately 79% of the total electricity output (Svensk Energi, 2010). The three companies use several energy sources and hydro power, which can be classified as a renewable source, makes up a large part of the electricity produced as well as the electricity sold. Still, the three companies rely heavily on nuclear power and still use fossil fuels (E.ON, 2009b, pp.20-21; Fortum, 2009a, p.4; Vattenfall, 2011c). For example, out of the electricity sold to Swedish customers by E.ON in 2009 22% came from fossil fuels (E.ON, 2011c). The corresponding number for Fortum is 13% (Fortum, 2009a, p.4), and for Vattenfall in 2010 0.5%. Almost half of the electricity that Vattenfall sold did however come from nuclear power (Vattenfall, 2011c).

Fossil and nuclear based energy have been associated with environmental concerns for a long time (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002). It follows that the energy sources that have been labelled green are not these two, but the renewable ones, i.e. photovoltaics, wind, geothermal, biomass, and hydropower. It is when consumers choose these that the competitiveness of them could increase, furthering sustainable development (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). As the choice can be based on the marketing claims that electricity companies make, regarding themselves as companies and their products, the claims play a part in whether the competitiveness of renewable energy sources can be increased (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). The three largest Swedish electricity companies all use energy sources that have been deemed unsustainable (Ministry of the Environment, 2009; Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001) but they also operate in an environmentally sensitive sector in which corporate environmental communication is common (Ihlen, 2009b). The companies have to deal with marketing themselves to attract consumers and keep other stakeholders happy, by demonstrating environmental responsibility at the same time as they are taking part in production that can be deemed as unsustainable. Looking at how the companies use rhetoric in their corporate environmental communication can unveil what values the companies hold in regards to this dilemma. How the companies relate to

sustainable development and environmental responsibility has implications for how, and if, the goals set up by the Swedish Government can be reached.

Many state that larger companies have more economic and political importance in the societies where they operate and are consequently more often in focus (Fredriksson, 2008, p. 100) why these companies are of interest when rhetoric is to be studied. How companies use rhetoric in corporate environmental communication, as a public relations tool, when dealing with different issues has been studied before (e.g. Feller, 2004; Fredriksson, 2008; Ihlen, 2009b) because what companies say matters outside the company structure. As public relations is influential in society, it has been requested that public relations be studied as a social activity (Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009). One of the theoretical frameworks suggested is the structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens that can be used to explore changes and reproduction over time (Falkheimer, 2007), which will be applied in this study.

2.1 Research objective

The purpose of the study is to analyse the rhetoric of the corporate environmental communication of the three largest Swedish electricity companies, E.ON, Vattenfall, and Fortum, to obtain knowledge about the values underlying their practices. The content of the corporate environmental communication is an indicator of the companies' self-perceptions. The corporate environmental communication that will be analysed is in the form of corporate reports and brochures. The focus is on how the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility are treated rhetorically, which will be analysed using the judgemental approach to ideas and a version of Toulmin's method for understanding reasoning (see p.24).

2.2 Research questions

- How, and to what extent, do the electricity companies make use of corporate environmental communication?
- How do the electricity companies use rhetoric when they convey how they relate to the concept of sustainable development?
- How do the electricity companies use rhetoric to motivate their environmental responsibility?

- How has the corporate environmental communication and use of rhetoric changed over time, and what are the differences and similarities between the companies?

3 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Various types of corporate communication have been studied by different scholars using different perspectives. This section is by no means an extensive account of all studies performed but centers on some studies and perspectives relevant to this thesis, with its focus on the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility. Certain results from previous studies have been more important for the framing of this study. Firstly, the use of environmental terms in corporate environmental communication does not ensure that companies are contributing to sustainable development. Whether the industry that the company is part of is sustainable or not is seldom addressed (Feller, 2004; Ihlen, 2009a, b). Secondly, that CSR, and companies proclaimed commitment to it, is the way towards sustainability is not an unequivocally accepted fact (Ihlen, 2009b).

The perspectives that will be treated are mainly the rhetorical one and structuration theory. While rhetorical theory has been used to explore public relations for a long time the application of the structuration theory is a more recent development (Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009; Toth, 1999). The rhetorical perspective is based on the premise that rhetoric has the ability to do something (Ihlen, 2009b). The rhetor does not have to be an individual, it can be also be a company (Toth, 1999). The application of the structuration theory to the field of public relations has been born from the wish to explore the relationship between public relations and society. Because it is a recent development there is still a need to adapt the structuration theory further to make it more relevant for the study of communication (Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009; Jensen, 2002).

3.1 Studies of corporate environmental communication

Researchers have studied both annual reports and corporate environmental reports when analysing corporate environmental communication. In her study, Feller (2004) has carried out an analysis of corporate environmental reports and proposes that they be viewed as narratives. She found that the reports centered around three themes that she dubs utopian. The first theme is that the corporate environmental reports state that the companies are to solve the problem of sustainability, however inconsistent their operations and sustainable development might be.

The second theme is that the corporate environmental reports contain many unqualified, absolute truths about corporate responsibility. These statements are often visionary and do not problematize any of the issues they relate to. The third theme is the provision of vivid images and stories that do not contain well-developed arguments for the companies' position on environmental issues. Feller concludes that the environmental reporting is separated from the financial accounting, despite claims in the reports about environmental responsibility equaling good financial performance. Another conclusion made is that the question whether the industry in which a specific company operates is inherently environmentally damaging is never addressed.

This last issue is discussed in relation to corporate rhetoric, CSR, and sustainability in the Norwegian oil sector by Ihlen (2009a), with reference to Feller (2004). It has been argued that corporate rhetoric has focused more on economic and technical issues without dealing with fundamental problems of ecological sustainability. One such problem is whether the industry and the lifestyle it supports are inherently unsustainable, because they produce more harms than benefits. Some look at sustainability as a concept that has lost its meaning and notice that changes that are effective or necessary are not taking place. Sustainability is by others viewed as an evolving process and one that needs to be opened up for public participation. Consequently, there are divided opinions on whether CSR is the way towards sustainability. Some argue that it is while others think that CSR means nothing without sustainability. Ihlen (2009b) has also carried out a rhetorical analysis of non-financial reports of the 30 largest corporations in the world with the objective of finding out how those companies treat the climate change issue rhetorically. That the rhetoric of companies has the ability to do something by directing the attention of people and creating meanings and understandings is the basic premise for the study. In addition to using Aristotelian topics as a way of finding arguments the researcher performed a simple search for keywords to uncover to what extent the companies addressed the climate change issue.

Stepping away from rhetoric in corporate reporting, one study has investigated all environmental reports produced in Sweden during 2000 and compared the information in those with the messages in annual reports and actual corporate behaviour. What was found was that there was a disparity between the content in environmental reports, the content in annual reports, and actual corporate behaviour. Another conclusion made was that different companies report in different ways, therefore the content in environmental reports varied between companies (Cerin, 2002).

Corporate social reporting has been studied using agency and legitimacy theories, of which the latter is the dominating one. Factors influencing corporate social reporting are the size of the company, the type of industry, profitability, and the country. However, results from studies examining why some companies partake more in corporate social reporting than others are diverse and inconsistent. The lack of a comprehensive theory has been pointed out as the main reason for this (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Other factors influencing reporting are the type of industry and the amount of contact between company and consumer. Companies in more environmentally sensitive industries tend to engage in more environmental reporting. The same has been indicated for companies that are in direct contact with their consumers, i.e. that those companies are more inclined to distribute environmental information (Ihlen, 2009b).

It has been claimed that companies do not strive to be green because of care for the environment, but rather because of external pressure from politicians, the mass media, NGOs, and consumers. Greening makes sense for the company as it brings more business, saves costs, and improves its reputation. To understand the strategies of companies in environmentally sensitive industries, the social and political context must be recognized as important factors. Ecological crises can be used by companies to gain competitive advantages. Introducing environmental terms in public documents does not mean that the environment is automatically improved, for that to happen more radical changes are needed, at least if sustainability is to be achieved (Ihlen, 2009a).

3.2 Structuration theory, rhetoric and public relations

Public relations has been explored using rhetorical theory since the 1970s (Toth, 1999). Not only has research focused on the rhetoric of individuals, corporations have also been seen as rhetors. The companies are then seen as “texts” and by studying corporate communication texts scholars have evaluated the identities and images of companies (Toth, 1999, p.147). The processes through which companies manage public policy issues have been examined and the proactive role that organisations take in shaping issues and values has been assessed (Toth, 1999, p.148). It has however been suggested that empirical studies of public relations have contributed little to theory building. To further theory building, analysis should pay attention to context, why sociological theories would be helpful. It is important to pinpoint which competing rhetorical strategies that are important for the outcome and in what way. The same goes for the kinds of resources available to the rhetors (Ihlen, 2004).

To move away from the managerial, instrumental perspectives that have dominated the studies of public relations, it has been proposed that researchers should make use of social theory. This would orientate research towards the relationship between public relations and the societies in which it is produced, as well as towards the social systems that are coproduced by public relations (Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009, pp.1, 3). One social theoretical perspective that has been proposed is the structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens (Falkheimer, 2007). Though the theory was not developed with public relations, or even communication, in mind it has been argued that it can be used in these research areas. It has for example been used as a lens to point to how public relations has developed in a sociohistorical context (Ihlen, van Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009, p.12). Yates and Orlikowski (1992) have used the structuration theory to describe and interpret historical and contemporary changes in communicative practices and as a lens through which the relationship between organizational communication and communication media may be examined. The structuration theory has also been used as a meta-theoretical framework in the field of media research to explain how the media works, as well as its role in society. Although key concepts of the structuration theory have been applied, there are still weak points in the theory's ability to handle aspects of media and communication, and the need to develop the structuration theory further to make it more relevant have also been pointed out (Jensen, 2002, pp.1-2).

4 THEORY

This chapter will give an account of the theoretical framework used in this study. The first section treats public relations, which is seen as the overarching framework. Corporate environmental communication, considered as a part of the public relations strategies of companies, will then be treated. One of the purposes of corporate environmental communication is the demonstration of corporate social responsibility (CSR), why this concept will also be brought up. This sorting of the theoretical concepts into a hierarchy is not clear-cut, as they are intertwined and overlapping. It could be argued that corporate environmental communication is subordinate to CSR as communication is a way of expressing CSR (Dawkins, 2004). The concepts will be considered from a rhetorical perspective, as well as from a structuration theory perspective. In addition to bringing up public relations, corporate environmental communication, and corporate social responsibility

a short discussion on the concept of sustainable development is included due to its increased importance in relation to the energy sector.

4.1 Public relations

The concept of public relations can be defined as the management of the communication between an organisation and its stakeholders (Ihlen, 2002; Skerlep, 2001; Toth, 1999). In this study the organisations are the three largest electricity companies in Sweden. Stakeholders on the other hand can be defined as those entities that either affect or are affected by the companies (Cerin, 2002). Stakeholders include legislators, business press, investors, non-governmental organisations, and the general public that consists of potential consumers (Dawkins, 2004). Public relations is communicative in nature and the objective of the public relations practice is to establish and maintain good relations between an organisation and its stakeholders. Companies try to reach this objective by using rhetoric as a tool to justify decisions as they communicate with stakeholders (Skerlep, 2001).

4.1.1 Public relations from a rhetorical perspective

Applying rhetorical theory in the analysis of public relations strategies is useful as public relations involve purposeful, symbolic communication and the rhetorical perspective addresses the impact that words and other symbols have (Ihlen, 2002, 2004; Toth, 1999). Scholars studying public relations from a rhetorical perspective highlights the symbol-making of public relations and do not merely see the communication as an exchange of information (Toth, 1999). There are multiple definitions of the concept of rhetoric available (Toth, 1999). It may be described as “the assumption that all facts, values, and policies (in the marketplace and the public policy arena) are subject to advocacy and counteradvocacy, a debate that has the potential for achieving better visions of reality and ourselves—collectively and individually” (Heath, 2000, p.70). The definition most compatible with the structuration theory is perhaps the abstract one provided by Crable and Vibbert (1986 cited in Toth, 1999, p.124), in their view rhetoric is “the art of adjusting organisations to environments and environments to organisations”, which is similar to that provided by Bryant (1953), here in the words of Heath (2000, p.78): “the process of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas”. These definitions are in line with the dialogical perspective on rhetoric. As structuration is the on-going interactions between individuals and institutions it, as rhetoric, is a process of mutual adjustment. There are social rules in society shaping the actions of

individuals, and at the same time, individuals drawing on the social rules reaffirm or modify the social institutions (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

The rhetorical perspective on public relations can help explain how public relations is a part of the creation and implementation of values in society. It may help us to understand the impact public relations has on the values guiding choices in society and how public relations adds value to the marketplace and public policy arena. In any and every society there are values embedded in culture. The definitions and priorities of those values are forged through rhetoric, at least when value creation is considered from a rhetorical perspective. As public relations make use of rhetoric, it too is a part of the development and refinement of values in society. The rhetoric of public relations crafts meaning and promotes the subscription to that meaning. This process is an addition to the narratives in society that show what is good, what needs change, and what should be done in the future (Heath, 2000). Rhetoric is not only words, but actually has the ability to do something. By directing people's attention and creating meanings and understandings it can, or at least has the potential to, influence people's outlook (Ihlen, 2009b).

There is a rhetorical dialogue going on between different parties in society, like companies and their stakeholder publics, that shapes standards of business and public policy. The open dialogue taking place also provides customers and stakeholders with the opportunity to examine facts, values, policies, identifications, and narratives that could lead to wiser purchases and public policies. The essence of the rhetorical processes is coming to agreements. In a society there are people with different views of the world. The rhetorical perspective gives that different ideas are put forward and opposed. Rhetoric is used by people, or in this case companies, who want to form, assert, and dispute ideas in public. The statements made by companies about their products, services, and indeed about the company itself, are read, assessed, and judged for quality by members of society in the public discourse. For the statements of the company to withstand scrutiny by stakeholders and to be persuasive they have to be sufficiently strong (Heath, 2000).

In public relations, the needs, concerns, and point of view of both the organisation and the stakeholders have to be considered. This is so because ideas that are not in line with what others than the organisation considers to be correct will be perceived as too self-interested and therefore disregarded by the public (Ihlen, 2002). Consequently, public relations communication may be described either as asymmetrical or symmetrical. Asymmetrical public relations communication is persuasive; the company only tries to make stakeholders adopt its interests. Symmetrical public relations communication involves both company and

stakeholders, both have the opportunity to participate to come up with a compromise on disputed issues. However, public relations does not have to be either symmetrical or asymmetrical, it might be more fitting to see it as a mix of both. Companies are self-interested and wish for stakeholders to adopt their interests, but at the same time the interests of the stakeholders must be taken into consideration if the public relations strategies are to be successful (Skerlep, 2001). From a dialogical perspective, rhetoric is not a one-way process manipulating audiences. While the rhetor is self-interested the responses of the audiences to the rhetor's messages is also influential. Neither is the self-interest static, it is negotiated in the society where ideas are put forward (Toth, 1999). Viewing rhetoric as a dialogical process means that the rhetorical process achieves a balance between organisations and their environment. The actions, ideas, products, and services of companies can be tailored to the preferences of stakeholders so that there is as little as possible of a legitimacy gap between the company performance and stakeholders' expectations. Similarly, the stakeholders may be persuaded to adopt the perspective of the company if that perspective is sufficiently compelling. The companies want the stakeholders to adopt opinions that support the goals of the companies and the way in which they want to reach them. Consequently, there is an ongoing, dynamic process of mutual adjustment (Heath, 2000). Typical public relations products are newsletters, mass-mediated messages and annual reports (Toth, 1999).

The rhetoric in public relations communication of Swedish electricity companies cannot be clearly tied to a single speaker. But the rhetor does not have to be a specific person; it can, as in this case, be an organisation (Ihlen, 2002; Toth, 1999). While it is individuals who design the messages, these messages are used as representations of the company trying to win public opinion. The power of companies as communicators has increased compared to that of individuals (Toth, 1999). Because society has grown so large, organisations have become one of the most important rhetors in matters of public policy. Though companies are not the only influential organisations, they are certainly one of them (Heath, 2000). The language strategies employed by the organisations are used to manage the values, issues, identity, and image of the organisation. Companies are using their power to promote issues, win public opinion, and to shape the public and social debate (Toth, 1999). The companies are battling other organisations and voices in society, each trying to gain advantage by persuading others. At the same time, the different sides are examining each other's points of view. The ideal, but not inevitable, goal for this process is the refinement of facts, values, and policies (Heath, 2000). It has been suggested that the rhetoric be dealt with as a structure and social processes (Ihlen, 2002). Though structure and social process in this case does not necessarily have the

same meanings as Giddens (1984) ascribes them it is clear that rhetoric cannot be viewed as the result of one individuals doing. The analysis of the rhetorical activity of an organisation should pay close attention to the context (Ihlen, 2002). It is also too narrow to think of the rhetoric in public relations as one company negotiating with one stakeholder group. It should be kept in mind that there are a multitude of different actors organized in different clusters in society that take part in the creation of values guiding society (Heath, 2000).

4.1.2 Public relations and structuration theory

Public relations can not only be viewed from a rhetorical perspective as mentioned above, it has also been proposed that the structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens (1984) can be applied to the field of public relations (Falkheimer, 2007), which will be done in this study. The structuration theory questions the dichotomy between instrumental agency-oriented theories that neglects power structures, but also the critical theories that views public relations communication as a way for elites to deliberately dominate the public sphere (Falkheimer, 2007). Giddens questioned both the theories that focused solely on structures while neglecting the influence of the agency and the theories that only give prominence to the actions of individual actors and claim that no structures existed without these. The structuration theory is Giddens' attempt to abolish this dualism between agency and structure. Through a continuous structuration process society is constantly created. The process is also called social praxis and is the mediating concept between agency and structure, and therefore central to the structuration theory (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.325). Agency is knowledgeable and conscious and often carried out on a level of practical consciousness. However, repeated agency often has unintended consequences, like reproduction when it is not the intended goal. The unintended consequences influence future agency. Therefore, history is not a rationally advancing process with an established goal. The structure, as Giddens sees it, only exists virtually. It not only constrains the agency but also enables it. The structure consists of rules and resources that are used by agents in the production and reproduction of the structure. A social system is social praxis reproduced, whereby a pattern of social relations emerges. The relations are between actors and collectives, agency is repeated and therefore goes beyond the individual action (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, pp.326-327).

In this view, public relations communication is viewed as a process and it may be used as a social instrument both for reproduction and transformation. A social structure can be a tradition, an institution, or a ritual, and in this sense corporate environmental communication could possibly be interpreted as a structure (Falkheimer, 2007). The relationship between

structure and agency should be viewed as a structure duality, meaning that a social structure is both a means for human agency, as well as the result of human agency and it may be changed, or replaced, through time and space (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.325; Falkheimer, 2007). The communication is not only adapted to stakeholders, but also reproduces or transforms the dominant ideology of an organization, in this case a company (Falkheimer, 2007).

To summarize, public relations is the management of the communication between an organisation and its stakeholders, with the objective of establishing and maintaining good relations between them (Ihlen, 2002; Skerlep, 2001; Toth, 1999). Corporate communication is one instrument with which the companies can try to form beneficial relationships with their stakeholders (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Consequently, in this study corporate communication is viewed as a subset of public relations, a subset that can be seen as a representation of the public relations strategies employed by companies. As the study centres on how companies relate to the environment, the corporate communication of interest is the corporate environmental communication.

4.2 Corporate environmental communication

There are different types of communication occurring between a company and its stakeholders (Hooghiemstra, 2000). The organisational rhetor uses different media and directs it to several audiences (Toth, 1999). Furthermore, the concept of public relations and corporate communication are partly overlapping (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Corporate communication has been defined as “an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent” (Van Riel, 1995 cited in Hooghiemstra, 2000, p.57). The rhetoric of an organisation has as its goals to secure support, to persuade, or to create understanding. The corporate rhetor chooses symbols and dialogical strategies consciously to persuade audiences (Toth, 1999). Viewed this way the corporate communication falls under the umbrella of public relations. If the corporate communication is seen as a structure, it both shapes and is shaped by communicative action. So the environmental public relations communication draws on social rules which influence what is put into the communication and the final product then informs the following communicative actions in a recursive cycle. Therefore the structuration process often reproduces the structure over time, but not necessarily. Communication is not seen as a result of isolated, rational actions, but as part of

an embedded social process that over time produces, reproduces, and modifies certain features (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

Corporate environmental reporting and green marketing, which are types of corporate communication and public relations strategies, have become more common as popular support for the environment has increased. In corporate environmental reports companies can demonstrate their integrated environmental management systems, implementation of codes of conduct, and their corporate responsibility (Cerin, 2002). The corporate environmental reports, as well as other environmental communication, allow companies to influence agendas and frame issues, both internally and externally. Furthermore the reports can influence stakeholders and companies can use them to apologise for misdemeanours or defend themselves (Feller, 2004). Corporate environmental reporting has become a key communication channel for environmental reporting, but it is not the only channel. Sections on a company's environmental responsibilities and commitment can also be included in for example annual reports, though some claim that this should not be called environmental reporting (Cerin, 2002).

Rhetoric is not the same as what actual measures a company takes to reduce environmental impact; rather it is used to create an identity of the company that is in line with the ideology of the company and the expectations of stakeholders (Feller, 2004). Therefore the practice and the rhetoric of a company can be separated, and it is most often the rhetoric used in presentations of the company that is being evaluated by stakeholders (Fredriksson, 2008, p.51). It has been stated that reports on environmental commitment function more as marketing tools than accounting ones (Cerin, 2002). Regardless of the environmental records of companies they are likely to adopt the same type of rhetoric and ideals as their competitors (Feller, 2004). In this study the environmental communication is analysed as part of the companies' public relations strategies, how well reporting is carried out and how close it is to a company's true performance lies outside the scope of the study.

According to legitimacy theory, environmental reporting is undertaken by companies to acquire legitimacy (Cerin, 2002). Stakeholders simply expect companies to be committed to dealing with environmental issues, and companies must therefore demonstrate to stakeholders how they do this (Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Ihlen, 2009b). It is necessary for a company to have legitimacy as it is a requirement for its continued existence. According to organizational theory, this is so because it is society who has made the decision that companies as institutions are needed and therefore society can also decide that they are not. Society has established boundaries and norms that companies must stay within to be perceived as legitimate, if they

do not, a legitimacy gap will occur. To close this gap companies can use education and information to change society's perceptions, describe their performance with different symbols, or change the performance (Ihlen, 2009b). As rhetoric is way of convincing audiences, the analysis of it can be used to look at the strategies used by companies to acquire legitimacy. CSR programs include these strategies and can therefore be seen as one way to acquire legitimacy and close legitimacy gaps (Ihlen, 2009b).

The rhetoric used in the corporate environmental communication is representations of social rules. Drawing on the social rules for the environment to design the corporate environmental communication reproduces the rhetoric and the social rules over time. All rules for the environmental sphere need not be used but enough for the social community to recognize the rhetoric as relating to the environment. Rhetorical forms are born as similar situations that require similar responses occur. Over time a discourse is shaped, this discourse has a power of its own as it sets the rules for communicative practices; what vocabulary, grammar and styles that are appropriate. The rules may be departed from, slightly or significantly, deliberately or unintentionally. Slight adaptation of the rules due to new conditions leads to an elaboration of the existing structures. Significant departure from the rules results in modification of the existing structures. Changes that may trigger modifications are alterations in the social, economic, or technological context, as well as social groups recognizing and responding to situations differently than before. At the same time, the communication itself may inflict changes in the rules that inform the communication (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

Consequently, environmental reporting is carried out both because it is seen as being a duty to the stakeholders and because of self-interest, meaning that environmental reporting creates added value for shareholders and the benefits outweigh the costs. Furthermore, good environmental performance is seen as a competitive advantage. It is the ability of stakeholders to affect the companies, through investments, sales, and governmental pressure, that is the driving force for the companies to communicate their environmental commitment (Cerin, 2002). Companies compete with rhetoric for customers in the marketplace. They also shape their images so that legislators will support them and investors make investments. Public relations must provide arguments that convince stakeholders to make choices that are beneficial to the companies (Heath, 2000). The company as rhetor can inform with descriptions of something, narration of relevant events, explanations, and argumentation to justify decisions. When stakeholders are of a different opinion than the company, the latter can try to persuade the former with the same strategies used for informing stakeholders

(Skerlep, 2001). Not all stakeholders have the same expectations and information needs, and they do not respond in the same way to different communication channels. A combination of different types of reporting, using the product or label, editorial mass media coverage, and marketing makes it more likely that the communication reaches several kinds of stakeholders (Dawkins, 2004).

Corporate environmental communication is undertaken by companies to acquire legitimacy (Cerin, 2002). To achieve this, companies use rhetoric to create an identity that is in line with the ideology of the company and the expectations of stakeholders (Feller, 2004). A strategy for the acquiring of legitimacy is to commit to corporate social responsibility. For the commitment to be worthwhile in respect to how stakeholders perceive the company, the companies must use communication to convey how the responsibility is carried out (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Formulated in this way it might seem as if CSR is superior to corporate environmental communication. However, CSR is not the only public relations strategy that can be used by companies, neither is the corporate environmental communication only centred on CSR, which is why CSR is viewed as one of the strategies that companies can choose to convey through communication.

4.3 Corporate social responsibility

Providing one definition of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is as difficult as it is for many of the other concepts presented. One way to define it is that CSR is voluntary actions furthering some social good beyond company interest that improve both the competitiveness and the image of the company. In addition to CSR providing benefits for the company, it can be altruistic or coerced. Scholars differ on what social responsibilities entail. They range from strictly economic responsibility, i.e. maximisation of wealth for shareholders, to the balancing of the interests of various stakeholders, to the view that companies have economic, as well as legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities (Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). Corporate responsibility, or corporate social responsibility, may include both human rights, community development, and environmental issues (Feller, 2004). It has been pointed out that the economic paradigm in the western civilisation, with its roots in neoclassical economic theory focusing on profit maximisation and efficiency, poses problems for CSR (Korhonen, 2002). Though there is not a universally accepted definition of what CSR is, the notion that it entails actions that further some social good beyond company interests separates it from the neoclassical economic theory, even if demonstrating CSR can also provide benefits for the

company. Consequently it has been questioned whether the theory and practice of CSR, as well as sustainable development, can be advanced within the economic paradigm. Korhonen (2002) argues that CSR must be based on other principles than those that neoclassical economic theory puts forward.

Despite the debates regarding the nature of CSR, the view that environmental responsibility is an integral part of the concept is less controversial (Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). This study will focus on the environmental part of the corporate social responsibilities. As environmental issues have become more important, the environmental responsibilities have become more important to companies (Cox, 2009; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). The corporate environmental reporting is a response to pressure, both internal and external, for companies to reach a higher level of corporate responsibility (Feller, 2004). Companies invest in reporting, policies, practices, and management to make sure that stakeholders see them as responsible, i.e. to demonstrate corporate social responsibility. Investments are made because companies recognize that there are reputational risks and opportunities connected to corporate responsibility. To improve their reputation companies must align the communication on their corporate responsibilities with the concerns of the stakeholders (Dawkins, 2004). Companies partake in corporate social reporting to affect the stakeholders' perceptions of them, and to harmonise stakeholder expectations and business practice (Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000). The corporate communication on responsibilities is supposed to influence the stakeholders' and society's perceptions by providing information that legitimise the behaviour of the company to ensure its continued existence (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Using communication to mask low standards of corporate responsibility will increase the legitimacy gap. Being an effective communicator requires knowing and achieving high standards of corporate responsibility (Heath, 2000). Corporate social reporting may also contribute to the creation of a competitive advantage for the company, making it more likely that people will do business with it and buy its products. Therefore, corporate social reporting, in its various forms, can be classified as a public relations tool (Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000).

The purpose of communicating social or environmental responsibilities is to protect or enhance the corporate image (Fredriksson, 2008; Hooghiemstra, 2000). Image enhancement can be pursued both through advertising and through corporate reporting (Cox, 2009). The corporate image can be defined as how people perceive an organisation (Hooghiemstra, 2000; Toth, 1999). There is a link between the corporate identity and the corporate image, as the way companies present themselves to stakeholders may influence how the stakeholders

perceive the company. This relationship also works the other way around. The stakeholders' perceptions of a company may influence how the company presents itself (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Corporate identity has to do with how the organisation presents itself to an audience (Hooghiemstra, 2000; Toth, 1999). The corporate identity can be developed through behaviour, communication, and symbolism. Though behaviour is the most direct means to do so, communication and symbols can emphasize aspects of the behaviour of companies. By aligning communication with other discourses, like the sustainable development one, it is used to shape the stakeholders' perceptions and therefore is a way to manage the relationship between the company and the relevant stakeholders. Though the ultimate goal of the company is to be perceived as legitimate it can try to achieve that either by using communication to be identified with symbols, values, or institutions which are already viewed as legitimate, or communication can be used to attempt to alter the definition of social legitimacy so that it is more in line with the practices, output, and values of the company (Hooghiemstra, 2000).

In the corporate environmental discourse there are five stances that companies normally adopt, these are compliance, openness, integration, collaboration, and sustainability. It has become more common for companies to claim that they are sustainable and strive for sustainable development. These claims are common in CSR strategies and important for the acquiring of legitimacy (Ihlen, 2009b). The public is interested in getting information on companies' corporate responsibilities because it has become more aware of its consumer power and is ready to use it. Still, the public is not the primary audience for social reports. However, social reports is a communication channel that is fit to use when trying to convey how a company responds to corporate responsibility issues to stakeholders such as opinion leaders, i.e. legislators, business press, investors, and non-governmental organisations (Dawkins, 2004). If the communication on environmental responsibilities and green marketing is not only to reach the already environmentally aware customers it has to be designed thoughtfully. The environmental performance must be balanced with economic constraints and the customers' preferences. Credibility must be built up, which is not an easy feat, as it depends on the interplay between different market actors and stakeholders and not only on the marketing of individual companies (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001).

4.4 Sustainable development

Though the objective of this thesis is not to dissect the concept of sustainable development or its implications, it is nonetheless a concept that is often used in connection with the

electricity sector. Furthermore, it is common that companies adopt a stance of sustainability in their corporate environmental communication. Claims of being sustainable or striving for sustainable development are frequently occurring in CSR strategies (Ihlen, 2009b), why a short discussion on sustainable development and its connection to the electricity sector is in place.

Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

The above definition of sustainable development was offered in the Brundtland Commission's Report "Our common future", which went on to state that environmental protection is an inherent part of the sustainable development concept (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). However, sustainable development is not a straightforward concept. It is normative and its goals and implications have been debated. The concept of sustainable development has even been criticized for being virtually meaningless because the corporate world has hijacked it and defines it in a way that suits them. Regardless, sustainability, which as a concept stems from the science of ecology, is not as hard to define. It can be used at various levels, for a resource, an ecosystem, or a broader social context, and means that this entity, as a whole or part of it, is extended into the future. Related to sustainable development are the concepts of eco-efficiency and eco-effectiveness. Both are used in the field of environmental management (Ihlen, 2009a). The first one refers to businesses trying to find win-win solutions where environmental and economic goals strengthen each other (Cerin, 2002; Ihlen, 2009a). Eco-effectiveness takes the idea one step further and states that a company can not only be economically sustainable, it must also be ecologically and socially sustainable to be deemed truly sustainable. The definition of an ecologically sustainable company is that it only uses natural resources, and consumes these at a rate below the natural reproduction, or the development of substitutes. Neither should the company cause emissions at a rate that is beyond nature's capacity to absorb and assimilate them, nor engage in activities that degrades ecosystem services (Ihlen, 2009a).

The implications of sustainable development for the electricity sector are not easy to pinpoint. As stated previously, the goal in Sweden is to increase the use of renewable sources and reduce the use of fossil fuels, and customers should be able to choose which electricity to consume based on its environmental characteristics (Svensk Energi, 2011; The Swedish

Government, 2008, p.11). The immediate answer to what makes an electricity product environmentally preferable is that its environmental impact is low. However, it is not unproblematic to evaluate environmental impact. One way to look at it, and the view adopted by some eco labels and the Swedish government, is that electricity from renewable energy sources, i.e. photovoltaics, wind, geothermal, biomass, and hydropower, is green as it does not use up finite resources. Another more thorough, but also more complicated, approach is to consider the environmental impacts from cradle to grave, based on life cycle assessments. However, an even more encompassing approach would perhaps be necessary if the broader goals of sustainable development are to be fulfilled (Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001).

When trying to examine how companies relate to sustainable development, as well as CSR, the rhetorical analysis is a suitable approach. By performing a rhetorical analysis of public relations texts it is possible to obtain knowledge about the values underlying the practice of the companies. What is in the corporate communication texts and what is not is indicative of the companies' self-perceptions that are the basis of their operations. With this as a point of departure it is possible to say something about how the companies' understand specific situations, how they view their own significance, how they view stakeholders, and what responsibility they think that they should take (Fredriksson, 2008, p.51). How the companies value these concepts in relation to their own operations may influence the values held among stakeholders and in society.

5 METHOD AND MATERIAL

To reach the purpose of the thesis, which is to obtain knowledge about the values underlying the practices of energy companies, a rhetorical analysis of corporate environmental communication will be performed. Because sustainable development has grown in importance in the energy sector and because energy companies are expected to take environmental responsibility (e.g. Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002) the analysis will focus on how the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility are treated rhetorically by the companies. How sustainable development is treated rhetorically will be answered by the use of the judgemental approach to ideas. This approach allows for the identification of what the rhetor say about an issue, which is an indication of what values the rhetor hold. Furthermore, as this approach takes into consideration what judgements the rhetor asks readers to make it is possible to deduce something about the relationship between rhetor

and reader (Hart & Daughton, p.60). When examining how environmental responsibility is treated rhetorically the focus is on how companies motivate why they take environmental responsibility, which will be explored with the help of a version of Toulmin's method for understanding reasoning. This approach outlines messages in a way that makes it possible to hone in on the value appeals made (Hart & Daughton, p. 96).

The material that will be analysed to reach the objective is corporate environmental communication in the form of corporate reports and brochures. The material is viewed as public relations text, in the sense that they are used by the companies to establish and maintain good relations with stakeholders. Corporate reports are typical public relations products and corporate environmental reports have become a key communication channel for companies (Cerin, 2002; Toth, 1999) why it makes sense to study these to unveil how sustainable development and environmental responsibility is treated rhetorically in public relations. As these types of publications is one of the most important ways in which a company communicates with their stakeholders (Cerin, 2002; Fredriksson, 2008) what is stated in them will be viewed as representative of the companies' positions regarding sustainable development and environmental responsibility.

The electricity companies whose corporate environmental communication will be studied are the three largest ones in Sweden; Vattenfall, E.ON, and Fortum. These have been chosen as they have more resources to put into communication due to their sizes. Their sizes also mean that they have to interact with many stakeholders and that they are more visible in society (Fredriksson, 2008). Though these three companies will not be viewed as representative of all energy companies, i.e. they are not seen as samples used to make statistical generalisations, the rhetoric they employ is seen as having the ability to do something. What can, and will, be done in a study like this is the making of analytic generalisations (Yin, 2003, p.10). The choosing of several companies, rather than one, makes it possible to compare the companies with each other. What will be compared is the environmental communication of the companies and the rhetoric used in it. How the rhetoric is used is situated in a context of a society that is striving towards sustainable development. What values electricity companies, which employ unsustainable modes of production, hold and promote matters for this transition. The material that will be studied has been published in different years, which also makes it possible to make comparisons over time. The developments over time will be explored using structuration theory.

5.1 Interpreting meaning

Treating public relations texts as rhetoric rests upon the notion that meanings are socially, culturally, and historically determined. The construction of meaning is central in all communication and the constructed meanings can never be fixed. The meanings are not free from values, rather they represent assumptions with the objective to reach specific goals (Fredriksson, 2008, pp.52-53). Because meanings in texts are not fixed the study will look at documents that have been classified as part of public relations strategies over time so as changes in or recurring approaches to the concepts can be traced. To reach the objective of the study a rhetorical analysis is performed on a selected number of documents published by the electricity companies.

Finding the meaning in texts is a process of interpretation (Ekström & Larsson, 2010, p.15). Interpretation is inherent in qualitative studies, which examines processes, relationships, and qualitative characteristics thoroughly (Creswell, 2003, p.182; Ekström & Larsson, 2010, p.19). This type of research takes for granted that the social reality does not consist of observable and measurable objects. Rather the social reality is made up of meaningful actions and the results of those actions. Everything that expresses and symbolises something, including but not limited to texts, has a meaning. The meaning can be understood if the codes of society and culture are available. Such codes are a presupposition for all communication. The meanings of texts cannot be observed; they must be interpreted and understood. Interpretation is an active process, not a passive observation. This is so because interpretation requires a previous understanding, without the previous understanding it would be impossible to make sense of the texts that are to be interpreted. The scientific value of interpretative methods has been questioned because of this. It is important to keep in mind that not all interpretations are equally valid. Criteria for the judgement of the scientific soundness of interpretations have therefore been developed, these are coherence, width, intersubjectivity, openness, depth, and contextuality (Ekström & Larsson, 2010, pp.15-17). This study involves making a description of the data collected, an analysis of it, and drawing conclusions. Still, it is impossible to deny that this will be filtered through the researcher and the data collection, analysis, and conclusions will be a personal interpretation (Creswell, 2003, p.182).

5.2 The procedure of the rhetorical analysis of the public relations texts

The first overarching research question of this study is; **How, and to what extent, do the electricity companies make use of corporate environmental communication?**

To answer this question the web pages of the three electricity companies will be searched, and documents that can be classified as environmental communication or contains environmental communication will be saved. The documents will then be perused so that a sense of their importance for the public relations strategies of the companies can be obtained. Furthermore, the way in which the environmental communication is presented, and the amount of it available will be recorded. By doing this it is possible to get a sense of how the environmental communication on a more general level has changed or been reproduced over time. This overview of the environmental communication will also serve the purpose of identifying the most important documents in the companies' environmental communication. After the first read through, when a sense of the material has been obtained, a search for key words in the documents selected will be performed. The words that will be searched for are sustainable/-ility, climate, greenhouse, responsible/-ility, and environment(al). The purpose of the search for key words is not to determine differences or similarities between documents statistically. Rather the search for key words is used to discover when and where certain value laden words are used which can point to how different types of documents are used as well as in what times certain words are used more often. A search for keywords can show to what extent certain issues are addressed (Ihlen, 2009b). The inclusion of the word environment(al) is therefore seen as a way to answer the part of the research question concerning to what extent the companies make use of corporate environmental communication.

The first question that is to be answered by the rhetorical analysis is: **How do the electricity companies use rhetoric when they convey how they relate to the concept of sustainable development?**

To answer this question the judgemental approach to ideas will be used. By analysing ideas it is possible to point to what the rhetor, i.e. the company, say about the issue at hand, in this case the issue of sustainable development, and what judgements the readers are asked to make. It also allows for the identification of ideas not presented, meaning the ideas that the companies do not include when it comes to dealing with sustainable development (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp.60). Due to the vast amount of communication issued by the electricity companies it is not possible to go into detail of all statements put forward by the electricity

companies, why the judgemental approach is suitable. It makes it possible to deduce what values the companies hold without breaking down each statement. Looking at what judgements the companies ask the readers to make tells us something about how the companies view sustainable development.

There are four assumptions on which the approach is based. The first is that the audience is assumed to make judgements about the rhetor's statements. The second is that the kinds of judgements the audience are being asked to make are recorded in the texts. The third assumption is that the judgements recorded are the potential, not the actual, judgements that the audience makes, and the fourth is that there are a limited number of classic judgemental requests. This is so because rhetorical occasions are often standardized. The four classic judgemental requests are factual, desirable, adjudicative, and directive (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp.67-69). Descriptions of these can be found in Table 1. The statements in a text does not necessarily have to be categorised as one of the types of judgements, they can also be a mix of types (Hart & Daughton, 2004, p.69).

Table 1 The four classic judgemental requests (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp.68-69)

Judgement Type	Description
Factual judgements	Statements presented as common-sense facts, but does not meet rigorous empirical standards of factuality, that ask the audience to consider what is true by consulting the surrounding world
Desirable judgements	Statements that ask audiences to consider what makes them happy or unhappy by consulting their own, or their social groups', preferences
Adjudicative judgements	Statements that ask the audience to consider whether a specific behaviour measures up to some formal code of behaviour
Directive judgements	Statements that ask the audience to consider whether a course of action is appropriate or harmful, i.e. ask the audience to approve the means for reaching the desirable goal

The selected material will be read through and statements relating to sustainable development will be identified and highlighted for easy access. All parts of the documents are not read, parts containing strictly financial information as well as other parts that do not relate to the environmental issue area will be excluded. The statements that will be highlighted are those concerning how the electricity companies view sustainable development in general. The

companies' views on specific issues and specific energy sources will not be considered as that would make the scope of the study too wide. The statements highlighted will then be taken out of the documents so that they can be grouped together according to type of judgemental request and theme. The page number where each statement was found will be noted so that it is possible to go back and read them in their context. Each statement will also be assigned a letter, corresponding to the document where it was found. The identified statements will then be read through and labelled according to the judgemental requests they make of the audience. After this sorting of statements the following questions, as suggested by Hart and Daughton (2004, p.69) may be asked: Which judgemental clusters are developed? Where in the message do the clusters occur? Which judgements are missing or underrepresented? What are the implications of the clusters and their positioning? How do they invite audiences to respond to the texts? By asking these questions how the companies view sustainable development, i.e. the values they hold in connection to it, and how they view their stakeholders can be deduced.

Two of the advantages with the judgemental approach to ideas that makes it a suitable method for answering the research question on how the electricity companies relate to the concept of sustainable development are that it is a method that increases sensitivity to ideology and can be used to index cultural change. The sensitivity to ideology is because of the distinguishing between Desirables and Adjudicatives, or informal and institutionalised beliefs. The simplicity and comprehensiveness of the method is what provides it with the possibility to detect changes in rhetoric. By grouping statements together based on the judgements they ask the stakeholders to make over time, alterations become apparent (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp. 72-73).

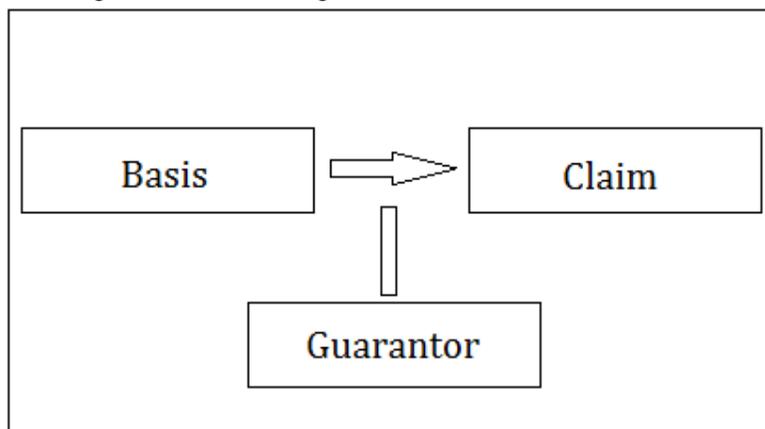
The third research question that is to be answered by the rhetorical analysis is: **How do the electricity companies use rhetoric to motivate their environmental responsibility?**

As persuasion is a large part of rhetoric there are different ways to go about picking apart the reasoning employed by the rhetor to persuade. In this study the analysis will primarily rest on a method proposed by Vigsø (2010). That method bears many resemblances with Toulmin's method for understanding reasoning as presented by Hart and Daughton (2004, pp.93-94) though different terminology is used. Features from both these methods will be employed as appropriate.

As with the use of the judgemental approach to ideas the first step will be to read through the selected documents to identify relevant statements. In this part of the analysis the arguments of interest are those that are connected to how the electricity companies argue for the environmental responsibility they take. The statements will be highlighted and then

studied more in depth. What will be searched for are the bases, the guarantors, and the claims in the reasoning (Vigsø, 2010). In Toulmin's terms these features are called the major data, the warrants, and the major claims (Hart & Daughton, 2004, p.93). The basis is the foundation that the claim is resting on and the guarantor is the rule that guarantees that the basis leads to the claim (Vigsø, 2010, p.223), see Figure 1.

Figure 1 How basis, guarantor, and claim relate to each other.



The claim is what the rhetor, i.e. the respective electricity company wish the stakeholder to accede to and remember. The claims are often frequently repeated. The basis for the claim is often adjacent to the claim, but not always, and may appear in the form of facts, illustrations, bits of evidence, and other tools that clarify why the rhetor makes the claims it does. The guarantor can either be provided by the rhetor or left out. Either way, it is what makes the move from basis to claim possible (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp.93-94; Vigsø, 2010, p.225). The claims made about environmental responsibility will be identified first. Thereafter, the bases for the claims will be identified and in the cases where those are provided, the guarantors. When the arguments have been identified they will be compared with each other, both over time and between the companies to find changes over time and differences and similarities between companies.

To obtain knowledge about the values underlying the practices of electricity companies, how the companies treat sustainable development and environmental responsibility rhetorically in corporate environmental communication will be analysed. The first step is to look into how, and to what extent, the companies partake in corporate environmental communication. This will be done by simply going through the company websites, noting what types of documents they have available, as well as going through selected material and

performing a search for key words. The next step is to identify statements concerning sustainable development and environmental responsibility. By looking at how the companies treat the idea of sustainable development rhetorically through the judgements they ask their audiences to make the values underlying the practices will be depicted. The extent to which the companies make use of factual, desirable, adjudicative, and directive judgemental requests is the main analytical tool that will be used. To answer how the companies motivate their environmental responsibility the reasoning behind it will be picked apart. Bases, guarantors, and claims will be identified, which is also a way to find out what value appeals the companies put forward. What has been found out through the analysis will be compared between companies and over time.

5.2.1 Difficulties

The electricity companies have published many different documents where they partake in environmental communication. Furthermore, many of these documents are about 100 pages long which results in a vast amount of material that have to be gone through, even with the limitations in scope that have been set up. This presents difficulties for the selection of statements that are to be included in the analysis. A further difficulty with the selection of relevant statements is that there is no sharp delineation between the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility, which makes it hard to decide in which part of the analysis they belong. The solution to this problem has been to include a section in the analysis of the results on how the electricity companies use the different concepts in relation to each other.

Documents in both Swedish and English has been studied which means that some of the statements have not only been interpreted, their meaning has also been translated which presents another layer of interpretation to the analysis. However, since some reports had only been published in Swedish there was no way to go around the problem. The three electricity companies studied all operate in countries other than Sweden, which means that the information presented does not only concern Sweden but other countries as well. There is also country specific information presented which means that selection of statements had to be done with that in mind so that no statements that were only valid in other contexts than the Swedish one were chosen. However, much of the information submitted in the documents is general for all company divisions, for example visions, positions on different issues, and policies. A difficulty when trying to follow the development of the corporate environmental

communication is that not all reports that have been published are available now. This mainly concerns earlier non-financial reports and even though the companies have been contacted, it has not been possible to get a hold of those earlier reports.

The original idea was to go through the documents in their entirety, not excluding any parts, to make sure that no important statements illustrating how rhetoric is used were missed. It became apparent that the time available did not allow for such a thorough review of the material. Therefore focus was put on the narrative parts of the reports, and more specifically those that treated environmental aspects. There was a fear that relevant statements would be missed but the search for key words made it possible to discover when environmental responsibility and sustainable development were treated in other sections of the documents than one would instinctively expect. That this occurred was however uncommon.

5.3 Choice of material

The material that will be analysed is different types of documents published by the three electricity companies. All documents are available through the home pages of the respective company but most of them have been published as well. Though one part of the objective of the study is to look at how rhetoric has developed over time, from 1999 to 2009, not all material published during the ten year period will be examined. Three years have been chosen, these are 1999, 2004, and, 2009. Annual reports as well as separate environmental reports of different kinds, when available, will be examined. In the cases where other types of documents pertaining to the environmental issue area have been published during these years, these too will be part of the study. In addition to these documents material that have been deemed to be of high relevance to the different companies' stances on environmental responsibility and sustainable development will be included.

1999 has been chosen as the first year as all three companies published at least annual reports in that year. By 1999 the electricity market had been liberalized for three years and all three companies should have established themselves on the market. 2009 was set as the end of the time period as not all reports for 2010 had been published at the time for this study. 2004 was chosen because there is an even time interval between the years 1999 and 2004 and the years 2004 and 2009. Certainly documents from other years could have been studied but even with the limitations of the number of years it should be possible to see changes in rhetoric, if there are any. Furthermore, the number of environmental reports and other documents pertaining to the environment is limited in the years 1999-2002. The addition of other relevant

documents published in other years should cover any changes or differences in the public relations communication between the selected years.

Only using material that has also been published, if only as pdf-versions, have its reasons in the wish to trace developments over time. As the material has been published it is possible to analyse the rhetoric from specific time periods. Texts from the web sites of the electricity companies that can be classified as corporate environmental communication will not be analysed. As that text may change at any time it is impossible to see a development over time. Furthermore, key texts, such as vision and policy statements, are included in published annual and environmental reports.

The annual report is one of the most important documents published by companies. It is a communication form prioritised by companies as it is a document widely distributed and used by many stakeholder groups, such as shareholders, the media, NGOs, and authorities. These groups read annual reports to examine the operation of the companies, not only the economic performance but also how the companies deal with other responsibilities (Fredriksson, 2008, p.82). Therefore it is reasonable to include annual reports in the analysis. Furthermore, even in those years when the electricity companies have not published any specific environmental reports they have still published annual reports. Still, the annual reports do not focus solely on the environment and the responsibility companies take in that area, which non-financial reports to a large extent do. As the objective of the study is to analyse how electricity companies use rhetoric when they motivate their environmental responsibilities and in how they relate to sustainable development it is natural to include such reports. Some companies only have one type of environmental report while others have several. In the case where several reports from one year are available all have been included as their purposes and focuses differ. This is to ensure that all aspects of the company's view of environmental responsibility and sustainable development have been included. See Table 2 for an extensive list of the material included in the study.

The material that will be collected and analysed is texts. The advantage with texts, compared to for example interviews, is that texts are ready for analysis and the researcher does not have to be a part of the production of the material. Still, the material that is used is a result of a selection process (Ekström & Larsson, 2010, p.21). To a certain degree, the texts are used to draw conclusions about the organisations that have produced them, i.e. the electricity companies. The texts are in the form of public documents. One advantage with such documents is that they can be accessed at any time, both by the researcher and by others reading the research. Also, documents are thoughtful data as the one producing it has invested

time and effort. A disadvantage that has been pointed out for the use of documents as the material for analysis is that it entails the risk of the documents being incomplete, not authentic or inaccurate (Creswell, 2003, p.187).

Table 2 The material included in the study.

Year	E.ON	Fortum	Vattenfall
1999	Annual report, Environmental report	Annual report	Annual report
2004	Annual report, CR report, Environmental report, Environmental and sustainability report	Annual report	Annual report, CSR report
2009	Annual report, CR report, Climate report, Environmental report, CR magazine	Annual report, "Fortum and Climate Change"	Annual report, CSR report
Other documents	CR publication: "Who Cares?" 2007	"Sustainability: Next-generation energy", Sustainability Report 2010	"The Environment – Number One for Vattenfall" 2007

Though many studies have analysed only annual reports it is more uncommon to use both annual and environmental reports as well as brochures. Analysing only annual reports would perhaps make it easier to compare this study with other studies. However, there are likely other factors that differ between this study and other studies that analyse annual reports, which would make comparison difficult anyway. Using different types of documents makes it more likely that different types of statements pertaining to environmental issues are included in the analysis, which is seen as more important than the comparability. It has been stated that annual reports reach a limited audience and are not being produced to give an account of companies' positions on various matters, other than economical ones. When the analytical focus is on other areas than the economic one, which it is in this study, other material than annual reports are more valid units of analysis (Fredriksson, 2008, pp.83-84). Including annual reports in the analysis anyway make sense as the way the companies treat environmental issues when communicating with groups primarily interested in economic performance is also of interest. In this way material that is meant for different stakeholders and with varied content and structure can be analysed.

Even more types of corporate environmental communication, like press releases, advertisements, and product information, could have been included in the analysis for an even more complete picture. However, the amount of communication produced by the three

electricity companies is very extensive and including all types of information would render an unmanageable amount of public relations documents to map out and analyse. This is a problem connected to the selection of the three largest electricity companies as they have the time and resources to put into the production of public relations texts.

5.3.1 The companies studied

The three Swedish electricity companies, i.e. E.ON, Vattenfall, and Fortum, whose corporate environmental communication will be analysed, were chosen purposefully. The reason for limiting the study to Sweden is one of convenience as it makes it easier to procure documents, both from the companies and from other sources. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, Sweden is an example of a country with a liberalised electricity market, set goals for sustainable development, and a wish to shift the production of electricity to renewable sources. The liberalisation of the electricity market and the wish to make a shift towards more sustainable production methods are not developments confined to Sweden. They are taking place in other countries as well and therefore Sweden could possibly be seen as an example of these developments and the results could be interesting for other settings as well.

Though the developments on the electricity market and in the energy sector in Sweden are similar to those in other countries it should be kept in mind that settings and circumstances differ between countries. The way in which electricity companies use rhetoric in Sweden cannot be assumed to be representative for how electricity companies use rhetoric in other countries. Neither can the rhetoric of the three selected electricity companies be assumed to be representative of all electricity companies within Sweden. That such statistical generalisations cannot be made is connected to the design of the study. As the companies chosen are not representative samples, no inference about larger populations can be made. Rather, the aim is to make analytical generalisations, meaning that the findings will be generalised to the level of the theory applied in this study. The theory, which has been previously developed, is seen as the template with which the findings will be compared (Yin, 2003, pp. 31-33).

The three electricity companies chosen are somewhat similar. Their sizes, number of employees, turnover, and structures are comparable. All three companies are part of larger corporate groups (E.ON, 2011a; Fortum, 2010b, p.3; Vattenfall, 2009a). The Swedish part of E.ON came to be in 2001, when the company Sydkraft was bought by E.ON (Sydkraft, 2001). In 2005 Sydkraft changed its name to E.ON Sweden (E.ON, 2011b). None of the companies have electricity generation, distribution, and selling as their only focus, but it is a central part

of their operations (E.ON, 2009, p.3; Fortum, 2009a, p.3; Vattenfall, 2011a). The sales of E.ON Sweden were about 36 billion SEK in 2009, and in that same year the staff was made up of about 5,700 people (E.ON, 2009c, pp.3-4). The sales in 2008 for Vattenfall in the Nordic countries were 54.7 billion SEK, and the company had about 9,500 employees (Vattenfall, 2011b). The sales of the Fortum corporation were 5.4 billion euro in 2009, and the number of employees in Sweden was about 2,400 (Fortum, 2009a, pp.2, 4).

The three companies have more in common with each other than they have with the electricity companies that have not been included in the study. All three companies are among the ones whose electricity is produced with non-renewable resources and nuclear energy, even though all companies also use renewable resources (E.ON, 2011c; Vattenfall, 2011c; Fortum, 2009b, p.24). Furthermore, these three companies are the dominating ones on the electricity market, together they produced approximately 79% of the total output in Sweden in 2009 and each company has around 900,000 distribution customers (E.ON, 2009c, p.24; Fortum, 2009a, p.2; Svensk Energi, 2010; Vattenfall, 2011a), meaning that they reach a lot of customers and can put more resources into public relations strategies and communication. As the rhetoric used by the electricity companies studied is viewed as having the ability to actually do something, what the companies express do matter and is part of the on-going debate in society regarding sustainable development (Heath, 2000; Ihlen, 2002; 2004; Toth, 1999). Due to the big size of the chosen electricity companies and their importance for the Swedish electricity production it is probable that their rhetoric is more visible than that of other, smaller electricity companies. With the larger visibility and greater reach of the rhetoric in the public relations communication it could be that the three selected companies have more influence in the societal debate. However, the influence of the rhetoric will not be studied or measured in this study, neither will the response of various stakeholders to the public relations strategies of the companies. Still, by focusing on the three largest electricity companies a lot of the public relations communications aimed at different stakeholders can be covered, without having to examine each and every electricity company operating in Sweden.

That the three selected electricity companies are somewhat similar could mean that the use of rhetoric is similar as well and that other uses of rhetoric are not being covered in this study. For example, there are electricity companies that only produce and sell electricity that comes from renewable sources and those might have a different view on environmental responsibilities as well as sustainable development than do the selected companies. An alternative approach would have been to select companies that are more different from each other. Though most of the companies that were left out are considerably smaller than the ones

selected, which would have presented other types of problems. One example is that the smaller companies do not produce as many public relations texts why the material available for the study would have been more limited.

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 The corporate environmental communication of the electricity companies

The first research question of this thesis asks how, and to what extent, the electricity companies make use of corporate environmental communication, which will be answered in this section. The first part maps out what communication there is, and in what form. This overview is based on the review of company web sites and references to other material made in corporate reports. The second part goes into the content of the material selected, describing the material, as well as the companies' view on corporate environmental communication as provided by them. The results from the search for key words will also be presented, as a way to show to what extent the companies treat different issues in their communication. The overview, as well as the account of the content of the selected material will include comparisons between the different companies and over time. The analysis of the development of the corporate environmental communication of the different companies over time is made with the structuration theory as an analytical tool. Applying structuration theory, corporate environmental communication viewed as a structure, is both the means for human agency, here represented by stakeholders within and outside the electricity companies, and the result of human agency (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.325; Falkheimer, 2007; Giddens, 1984). Society is constantly created through a continuous structuration process, which is the mediating concept between agency and structure (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.325). The communication is part of a process that produces, reproduces, and modifies features of it. It is not seen as a result of isolated, rational actions (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992).

6.1.1 Overview of the corporate environmental communication

Corporate environmental communication is a tool that can be used in public relations, when companies try to establish and maintain good relations with their stakeholders (Hooghiemstra, 2000; Skerlep, 2001). There is no fixed formula when it comes to the use of corporate environmental communication. A company communicates with its stakeholders in a variety of

ways, using different media and directing it to different audiences (Hooghiemstra, 2000; Toth, 1999). Corporate environmental communication may come in the form of non-financial reports focusing on the environment or the broader concept of CSR, but sections may also be included in, for example, financial reports (Cerin, 2002).

The three largest Swedish electricity companies, E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall, offer a wide variety of material via their websites (see Table 3). Though most of the material is available in print form, it is also distributed electronically. Some reports are however only available via the company websites. This mapping out of the corporate environmental communication of the electricity companies focus on the material that is available via their websites. However, it is of course possible that other reporting has taken place and that this might not have been published on the websites or removed from them. When the reports that have been studied more closely make references to reports that cannot be found on the websites, this is pointed out. All companies have published yearly annual reports during the ten-year time period of interest, but they vary with respect to the number of environmental and CSR reports and other types of environmental communication published.

Corporate environmental reporting in general has increased as environmental awareness has been raised (Cerin, 2002). To say that the amount of environmental reporting the companies studied engage in has increased is perhaps possible but the picture is a bit more complicated than that. Looking at the number of reports issued, the number has increased. All three companies have also published material that can be seen as corporate environmental communication, but is not in the form of reports. None of these dates back earlier than 2004. In general the amount of corporate environmental communication has increased beginning in 2004. Another example of this is that several different types of information on climate change is available from all three companies, but all are dated 2004 or later. The production of non-financial reports devoted to environmental performance and CSR, which is fairly common among the studied electricity companies, can be viewed as a way to demonstrate to stakeholders that the companies are committed to dealing with environmental issues, which in turn is a way to acquire the legitimacy necessary for the companies' continued existence (Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Ihlen, 2009b).

Table 3 Overview of the material relating to the environment published by the electricity companies.

Year	E.ON	Fortum	Vattenfall
1999	Sydkraft & the Environment	Report: "Fortum in society"*	Environmental report*
2000	Sydkraft & the Environment	Report: "Fortum in society"*	
2001	Environmental report, "Responsible operations"	Report: "Fortum in society"*	
2002	Environmental report	Report: "Fortum in society"*	Sustainability report
2003	Environmental & Sustainability report	Report: "Fortum in society"*	CSR report
2004	CR report, Climate report, Environmental report, Environmental and sustainability report	Report: "Fortum in society"*	CSR report, EPD Forsmark & Ringhals
2005	CR report, Climate report, Environmental report	"Climate change and emissions trading", "Support system for electricity from renewable sources"	CSR report, LCA for electricity in Sweden
2006	CR report, Climate report, Environmental report, CSR report "Who Cares?"	"Fortum and climate change"	CSR report, "Curbing Climate Change", EPD electricity, Speech by CEO on climate change, Presentation on climate change
2007	CR report, Climate report, Environmental report, CSR Report "Who Cares?"	"Hydropower for environmentally friendly energy", "What does Fortum do for the climate?", Fortum climate profile, "The emission free energy systems of the future"	CSR report, "The Environment – Number One for Vattenfall", EPD windfarms, Speech and presentation made at climate seminar
2008	CR report, Climate report, Environmental report, CR magazine, Climate change and environmental policy note		CSR report
2009	CR report, Climate report, Environmental report, CR magazine	Sustainability report*, "Fortum and climate change", Sustainability report 2010, "Sustainability: Next-generation energy" 2010	CSR report, Environmental report for hydro power, Forsmark & Ringhals, EPD hydro power, Interview with CEO on climate change
Not dated	2 short films on responsibility, 9 brochures for customers on energy efficiency, "The products and services of E.ON from a climate and environmental perspective"	Presentation on renewables and energy efficiency	Vattenfall's strategy and vision for sustainable development

*Material not available

The environmental communication does not only have to be viewed as a response to requests and demands from stakeholders, but can also be viewed as a way to prevent complaints and the occurrence of legitimacy gaps, or as a way to try to change the perceptions of stakeholders, i.e. persuade them to adopt the same way of thinking about environmental issues as the companies do (Ihlen, 2009b). Effective public relations strategies provide arguments that convince stakeholders to make choices that are beneficial to the companies,

and good environmental performance, which can be conveyed through environmental communication, can be seen as a competitive advantage (Cerin, 2002; Heath, 2000).

E.ON has published some sort of environmental report each year. However, the name of the report has changed over the years, and the number of different reports has increased. Up until 2004 only one report was issued each year, with the exception of 2001. From 2004 onwards three reports pertaining to the environment and CSR have been issued per year. In addition to the yearly reports other communication, which can be found on the same page as the reports, has been issued, most of it since 2006. This communication is in the form of magazines. E.ON also has an archive of brochures, with brochures about E.ON, brochures aimed at private customers, and brochures aimed at corporate customers. Not all brochures treat environmental issues or CSR, but some do. In addition to all these print materials there is a note on the environmental policy of E.ON and two short films on responsibility.

Vattenfall has published a separate non-financial report from 2002 onwards. The report from 2002 is called Sustainability Report, while the later ones are called CSR Reports. These are the only yearly reports, apart from the annual reports, available through the website. However, in the 1999 Annual Report a reference to a separate environmental report is made. No such references are made in the 2000 and 2001 annual reports. In addition to the reports valid for the whole company there are other reports valid for specific company activities. These are Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) and Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs) issued between 2004 and 2009. Two other reports, on Vattenfall's position on the environment and climate change respectively, have also been issued. Other communication strategies relating to the environment are speeches and presentations made during seminars and for the UN in 2006 and 2007, as well as an interview with the CEO of Vattenfall. All these treat the issue of climate change.

Fortum differs from the other two companies in that there are almost no yearly non-financial reports available on the company web site. This does however not mean that the company does not engage in corporate environmental communication. There is a sustainability report from the year 2010 as well as documents on climate change from 2005, 2006, and 2009. Fortum also offers a pamphlet on sustainable development as well as various documents that are more product information than reports. These are called "Support system for electricity from renewable sources" (2005), "The emission free energy systems of the future" (2007), and "Renewables and energy efficiency". Other documents focus specifically on hydro power. Still, there are no available documents, reports or similar focusing on the environment prior to 2005. However, from 1999 until 2004 a yearly report called "Fortum in

society” was published. This can be deduced from the annual reports. From 2005 to 2007 the annual reports state that sustainable development is reported in these and in the annual reports from 2008-2009 the reader is advised to go to the company website for more information. In 2009 a sustainability report was published, but only online, and it was removed as the report for 2010 was published.

While E.ON has published several separate yearly environmental reports since 2004 the situation is not the same for the other two companies, as has been stated above. The companies’ reporting has begun during different years, and it has gone through changes that have not happened at the same time for all companies. The exact reasons for these developments are not possible to pinpoint based on the quick review performed in this study, and that is not the purpose either. However, to understand these parallel developments it might be helpful to think of the development, or structuration process, of the corporate environmental communication as taking place at different levels. Corporate environmental communication is one structure, but at a lower level the corporate environmental communication of each company is a separate structure. Viewing the corporate environmental reporting as one structure, this structure has affected and been affected by the agency. Rising environmental awareness among stakeholders, that represent the agency, has led to an increase in reporting as stakeholders expect companies to take more environmental responsibility.

It is however important to remember that it is not only the stakeholders that affect the environmental communication, it is after all the companies that design it and they do not only respond to stakeholders (Cerin, 2002; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Toth, 1999). The electricity market is a competitive one, being proactive, taking environmental responsibility and demonstrating it to stakeholders can be a competitive advantage (Cerin, 2002; Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002). One way for the companies to express their environmental responsibility is through the structure that is the environmental communication why it increases. In this sense, the structure is at the same time enabling and constraining (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.326). It enables the companies to communicate with stakeholders about environmental policies, responsibilities, and management. But there are also rules and resources connected to the structure affecting how agents produce or reproduce it (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.327). These can be constraining, and affect the way in which companies can demonstrate environmental responsibility, i.e. in the form of different types of environmental reporting.

That the companies have gone down different routes in their environmental reporting could be because they have different starting points. According to structuration theory

structuration is a process of adjustments, but it is not a rational process with a specific ending (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). The structuration processes have been different for each company; both structure and agency may look different between the companies, with agents drawing on different rules and resources connected to the corporate environmental communication of each company. As will be seen, the differences between companies can also be seen when going into more detail on the different environmental and annual reports.

6.1.2 The content of the corporate environmental communication

In this part of the analysis the content of the selected material will be described. The description of each company's corporate environmental communication will be followed by a comparison of the companies where similarities and differences are highlighted, as well as a discussion on the development of the corporate environmental communication over time.

In the 1999 Annual Report of Sydkraft there is a six page section devoted to the environmental work of the company. It is made up of text primarily, with very little space for quantitative information. The non-financial report is called "Sydkraft and the Environment" and is described as a more thorough representation of what Sydkraft has done in the environmental area over a longer period of time and what their future goals are. The point of departure for "Sydkraft and the Environment" is the 15 environmental quality objectives that were laid down by the Swedish parliament in 1999 (Sydkraft, 1999b, p.3). The objectives are presented and Sydkraft provides their view on them. A summary of the environmental impacts of the company is also included; this is done due to a wish made by the company's customers (Sydkraft, 1999b, p.3).

The 2004 Annual Report of Sydkraft only contains financial information and refers the reader interested in the work of Sydkraft in the environmental area to the company's web site. In 2004 three non-financial reports were published; an Environmental Report, an Environmental and Sustainability Report, and a CR Report. While the Annual and the Environmental- and Sustainability Reports are published by Sydkraft, the Environmental Report and CR Report are published by E.ON and consequently do not only cover the activities of Sydkraft. The aims of the Environmental Account is to present the environmental impacts of E.ON Nordics' activities, to follow up on the results of the environmental work of the company, as well as how legal and other requirements have been observed (E.ON, 2004a, p.5, 18). The information in the Environmental Report is mainly of the quantitative sort. In the Environmental and Sustainability Report on the other hand, Sydkraft has given itself different

roles depending on their role in relation to stakeholder groups. The different roles are used as points of departure as an account of the responsibilities for sustainable development is given (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.5). In the report a reference is made to a separate climate report that is supposed to be available on the E.ON website (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.23) but the link redirects the reader to the Environmental and Sustainability Report. The CR Report from 2004 is the first one published by E.ON and is seen as a first step in E.ON's strategy for sustainable development. With the report E.ON wishes to describe the present situation of the company, as well future prospects. Not only are the environmental activities depicted, E.ON also sets out to elaborate on how the company perceives and expresses its responsibilities to society as a whole. The CR Report is structured in four parts according to responsibility areas. The responsibility areas are business, environment, employees, and society. Of the four sections, the one focusing on environmental responsibility is by far the most extensive one. The information is provided in the form of text, with a few tables and figures illustrating quantitative data. Several large colour pictures are also included in the report.

In 2007 E.ON Nordic published their second magazine titled "Who cares?". The company describes it as a small part of their long commitment to Corporate Responsibility, which by E.ON Nordic is defined in this way:

Corporate Responsibility – CR – covers a company's responsibility towards many different groups of people. It involves everything from the responsibility to shareholders, customers, employees and public authorities to taking broader social responsibility for its operations. The aim is to promote positive and sustainable social development. Over the long term and for everybody (E.ON, 2007, p.2).

The purpose of the magazine is to deal with some of the energy-related issues that E.ON care about the most. The company claims to want to know who cares about the same issues (E.ON, 2004, pp.2-3). The format differs from most of the other publications, except for the 2009 CR Magazine, as it is a magazine and that is what the layout signals to the reader.

The 2009 Annual Report, as the 2004 version, contains virtually nothing in the way of how E.ON relates to the environment. According to E.ON (2009a, pp.2,5) the environmental report, which is a detailed description of the operations and environmental impacts of E.ON, is published so that the various stakeholders in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland may examine the environmental impact of E.ON in those countries. In their 2009 Climate Balance Sheet E.ON presents numbers for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and provides examples

of the measures taken through narrative stories. Numbers presented in tables and diagrams make up a minor part of the report, which stands in contrast to the Environmental Report that to a large part consists of different numbers. In the 2009 CR Magazine E.ON present their positions on different issues through articles. The magazine is described as part of E.ON's dialogue with their stakeholders. The magazine focuses on five areas that have a lot of influence on E.ON and their stakeholders with the point of departure being the so-called energy trilemma; meeting a higher energy demand, offering affordable energy, and reducing carbon emissions (E.ON, 2009d, p.3). The 2009 CR Report is the most extensive, seen to the number of pages. It is a summary of the information pertaining to CR that has been published on the web site of E.ON and is only available online. The design of the 2009 CR Report is very different from the 2004 version. The 2009 report contains very little in the way of narratives, no pictures have been included and it is very technical in its presentation. The focus is on relaying how reporting is carried out and the provision of quantitative data. The purpose of the report is to offer various stakeholders information on CR activities (E.ON, 2009e).

The 1999 Annual Report of Vattenfall contains a six page section titled "Environment". This section contains a summarized environmental account with data concerning use of resources and environmental impacts of the activities of Vattenfall. Also included is reasoning on the economic aspects of the environment. A link to a detailed environmental report for the year 1999 is provided but the link is no longer in function and the report is not available. According to Vattenfall (1999, p.67) the environmental report contains a more detailed environmental account, as well as a description of the internal environmental work of Vattenfall complete with examples from their activities, and information about the environmental aspects of business.

In the 109 pages long 2004 Annual report no specific section has been devoted to the environment, but the report do contain some environmental information. For the year 2004 Vattenfall published a separate CSR Report. The CSR Report with its 88 pages is almost as long as the Annual Report. According to Vattenfall (2004b, p.6) the CSR Report is designed in line with the company's approach to CSR, namely that listening to and communicating with stakeholders is an important part in the work with CSR. The objective with the report is to present information that enables the stakeholders to evaluate whether Vattenfall has met their expectations. Therefore, the report is seen as a response to the expectations of stakeholders and is supposed to show that Vattenfall is susceptible to the wants, needs, and expectations of stakeholders. The CSR Report is made up of two parts. The "Expectations and Performance

Section” presents the stakeholders' expectations. For each expectation it is specified which stakeholders who hold the expectation. Also included is how Vattenfall has lived up to the expectations put forward. The “Reporting Section” is an account of the work of Vattenfall in areas related to sustainability with the aim to provide the reader with the opportunity to evaluate the sustainability performance of Vattenfall (Vattenfall, 2004b, p.7). As it is a CSR Report it does not only contain information on environmental expectations but also social and financial ones. Two environmental topics have been allocated longer sections, namely renewable energy sources and climate change.

In 2007 Vattenfall published a pamphlet called “The Environment – Number One for Vattenfall”. It is supposed to provide the readers with a summary of the environmental work of Vattenfall. For more in-depth information, the readers are advised to look into more detailed reports, for example the CSR Reports (Vattenfall, 2007, p.2). The pamphlet contains lots of full-page pictures, and is text-based with little quantitative data.

The 2009 Annual Report comprises 142 pages. Despite its length no specific section has been devoted to the environment, CSR, or sustainability. However, statements and information regarding environmental issues and responsibility can be found in various sections. While the annual report has become more extensive the length of the CSR Report has remained virtually the same. In the 2009 CSR Report it is not explicitly stated what its purpose is, as it was in the 2004 version. Neither are the reports structured exactly the same, though there are certainly similarities. The 2009 CSR Report has three main sections called “What we want”, “What we do”, and “What we have achieved”. While the first bears many similarities to what can be found in the annual report, the second is a narrative section, and the third is the reporting section. The content in the narrative section has been influenced by the result of a stakeholder survey, but also by what topics that had been covered the year before, the newsworthiness of topics, and editorial considerations.

In the 1999 Annual Report of Fortum the environmental information is presented under the heading “Environment, Health and Safety”. The section is only four pages long and for further information the reader is directed to the separate report “Fortum in society” and to the company's web site (Fortum, 1999). The report, however, is not available through the website. In the 2004 Annual Report the section “Environment, Health and Safety” is even shorter, namely 2 pages. As in the 1999 Annual Report the separate report “Fortum in Society” for 2004 is mentioned, but neither this report is available.

The 2009 Annual Report differs from the two earlier reports in several ways. First of all, it is almost 200 pages long and the format is a glossier, colourful, more brochure-like one filled

with pictures. Though a large part of the report is devoted to strictly financial information there is a chapter called “Sustainability” with the sub-heading “Environmental responsibility”, which is four pages long. In that chapter, the reader is referred to the company website for the Sustainability Policy and the Sustainability Report (Fortum, 2009a, p.41). The Sustainability Report is however no longer available. In 2009 a report called “Fortum and Climate Change 2009” was also published. As the name indicates it is completely dedicated to the issue of climate change and its different aspects. The report mixes descriptions with tables, figures and pictures. A lot of the content can also be found in the Annual Report, but not in one place, as is the case with the climate change report.

The 2010 Sustainability Report, which is the only accessible sustainability report, is similar to the 2009 Annual Report in its format, though the content is not the same. The theme for the report is next generation energy (Fortum, 2010a). Fortum states that the 2010 Sustainability Report is only the first step, and that reporting is to be extended in the following years as it is not yet comprehensive. The readers are also directed to the annual reports, interim reports and the company website for reporting on sustainability activities (Fortum, 2010a, p.4). In 2010, Fortum also published a brochure with the title “Sustainability: Next-generation energy”. In this brochure Fortum gives its view on what energy systems, and Fortum’s own energy production, will look like in the future. It focuses on sustainability and the information provided is qualitative rather than quantitative, though certain key figures are presented.

Going through the documents that have been chosen for the study makes it clear that the corporate environmental communication of E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall has gone through changes, both when one looks at the three companies together and separately. One general development that is apparent is that the environmental reporting has more and more been moved from the annual reports to the non-financial reports. At the same time the amount of quantitative data reported has increased. E.ON, which is the company who publishes the most non-financial reports, has a more differentiated corporate environmental communication strategy. The quantitative information has become concentrated to the CR Report and the Environmental Report while narratives can be found in the magazines they publish. Vattenfall and Fortum also concentrate their environmental communication to the non-financial reports in the later years but they include both narratives and quantitative data in the same reports. The readers are often referred to the three companies’ web sites for more information on environmental issues, this is most apparent in the later publications, issued in 2009. E.ON

(2009e, p.26) explicitly states that they are aiming at establishing the internet as the primary information channel for their stakeholders.

Another interesting general feature is that the non-financial reports emphasize stakeholder involvement and stakeholder dialogue (Sydkraft, 2004b; E.ON, 2009a, d, e; Vattenfall, 2004b, 2009b; Fortum, 2010a, b). All three companies identify their key stakeholders. The stakeholder groups identified by E.ON (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.6; E.ON, 2009d, p.2) are; authorities, neighbours, employees, media, trade unions, environmental organisations, and politicians. Vattenfall (2004b) identifies their main stakeholder groups as being neighbours, citizens, potential employees, media, politicians, authorities, non-governmental organisations, employees, employee representatives and managers, the owner, other capital providers, and prospective and existing business and private customers. The stakeholders identified by Fortum (2010a, b) are customers, services and goods suppliers, personnel, investors and shareholders, authorities and decision-makers, local communities, energy-sector organisations, and public, media and non-governmental organisations (Fortum, 2010a, b). Consequently, the companies envision very diverse audiences for their corporate environmental communication.

The companies also claim that the reporting has been influenced by the priorities of the different stakeholders. What this conveys is that the companies want to present their views about the topics that their stakeholders see as most important. Designing the corporate environmental reporting with stakeholder preferences and needs in mind makes sense for the electricity companies as the purpose of this kind of reporting is to protect or enhance the corporate image, i.e. how people perceive the company, and increase legitimacy (Fredriksson, 2008; Hooghiemstra, 2000). This could be seen as a reactive strategy by the companies. However, that the topic choices in the corporate environmental reporting have been influenced by stakeholder priorities does not mean that the electricity companies only adopt a reactive stance. The environmental communication can also be used by the companies to try to change definitions of social legitimacy, making them more in line with the practices, output, and values of the companies, which is a more proactive strategy (Hooghiemstra, 2000).

6.1.3 Issues treated in the corporate environmental communication

To find out to what extent the electricity companies treat different issues in their corporate environmental communication a search for key words was performed. As in the case with the

number and types of documents issued by the electricity companies there are differences as well as similarities between the companies also when it comes to the use of key words.

In general, the use of several of the key words has increased over time, but most apparent is the increase in the case of the word “climate”. Not surprisingly, the word “climate” is most frequently used in the publications with the word climate in the title. The same can be said for the words “sustainable” and “sustainability” in the publications with those words in their titles. The difference in the use of words between 2004 and 2009 is not as big as it is between 1999 and 2004. Neither is the increase as apparent in the corporate environmental communication of E.ON as it is in that of Vattenfall and Fortum. For the two latter companies, the key words are used frequently both in the later annual reports and the non-financial reports, meaning that the difference is not as big between the two types of reports as in the case of E.ON. Going into specifics on the different words, “sustainable” and “sustainability” are more common in the non-financial reports, as are the word “environment” and “responsibility”. “Climate” is however used as much in financial and non-financial reports. The biggest difference during the same year in the number of times the key words are used, when it comes to Fortum and Vattenfall, can be found between Vattenfall’s 2004 Annual Report and CSR Report.

That the use of the word climate has increased during the time period studied might be explained by the same mechanism that has been proposed for the increase in environmental reporting in general, i.e. that as environmental issues has been granted more attention in society and environmental awareness has risen companies partake in environmental communication to a greater extent (Cerin, 2002). As climate change has made its way up the issue agenda, the interest and need for companies to deal with the issue has grown, which is reflected in the environmental communication. Acquiring legitimacy is important for the continued existence of companies (Cerin, 2002; Ihlen, 2009b). Communication with stakeholders to convey that the company is a responsible one is a legitimacy acquiring strategy (Cerin, 2002; Hooghiemstra, 2000). Aligning the company identity with other discourses through communication is one way to shape the stakeholders’ perceptions (Hooghiemstra, 2000). Climate change can be seen as such a discourse that the three electricity companies have increasingly chosen to align their identity and environmental communication with.

Of the three companies, E.ON stands out with respect to how often it uses the key words and in what reports they appear. E.ON makes less use of the words sustainable and sustainability, with the exception of the CR Reports. All of the key words are nearly absent in

the annual reports, while present in the various non-financial reports, i.e. the difference between the annual reports and other documents is clearer compared to the other companies. Though the words are used quite frequently in the non-financial reports the use in the environmental reports, the climate report and the 2009 CR Report is often limited to explanations in tables and figures. These differences could be connected to the types and number of reports published by E.ON. The strict reporting design of some of the reports, i.e. the environmental reports, the climate report, and the 2009 CSR Report, constrains the use of words as they to a very large part are made up of quantitative information. The development with an increased number of reports on the other hand enables the diversification of reporting, allowing for each type of report specialising on a specific way of reporting.

Responsibility, in connection with the environment, is not used as often as several of the other key words. When it appears, it is often in headings and as a generic term for the different measures, policies and positions relating to the environment that the companies have. As CSR is a concept and not really an issue, in the sense that climate change is an issue, it might not be that surprising that it is not discussed more in the reporting. CSR can involve many different things, as it is a concept for voluntary actions furthering some social good (Feller, 2004; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). The sections with headings like “Environmental responsibility” therefore become presentations of how the companies view their responsibility and what they do in that area. Consequently, looking at how many times the companies use the key word “responsibility” does not tell us much about how important they believe it to be or how they view it.

To summarize how, and to what extent, the electricity companies engage in corporate environmental communication the most apparent feature is that the companies have published a lot of material that can be viewed as corporate environmental communication, more so in recent years. The development of the corporate environmental communication can be viewed on two levels, a general one and one for each company. General developments are that the amount of corporate environmental communication has increased, that it has been concentrated to non-financial reports, and that the focus on the climate change issue has increased. As the publishing of non-financial reports has become more common, so has the emphasis of the importance of a dialogue between the companies and their stakeholders. The search for key words showed that sustainable development and environmental responsibility are two concepts that are frequently treated in the corporate environmental communication of the three electricity companies. Counting how many times they appear does however not tell us much about how the electricity companies relate to and view the concepts. To reveal this it

is necessary to look closer at the meanings ascribed to the concepts. The following parts will attempt to do this by looking at how the electricity companies treat the concepts rhetorically in their corporate environmental communication.

6.2 Sustainable development through the rhetoric of electricity companies

The second research question asks how the electricity companies use rhetoric when they convey how they relate to the concept of sustainable development. To answer this question the judgemental approach to ideas was used. Statements treating sustainable development were analysed to interpret whether they made factual, desirable, adjudicative, or directive judgemental requests to the readers. Based on the types of judgemental requests made and where they appeared in the corporate environmental communication the values in connection to sustainable development held by the companies will be examined through the way in which the companies' view the concept and their relation to it. As in the case of the first research question, similarities and differences in the way the companies use rhetoric to convey how they relate to sustainable development will be brought up, so will the development in the use of rhetoric over time.

6.2.1 Devotion to sustainable development

E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall all emphasise that they are devoted to sustainable development. The devotion is expressed in different ways; the companies are committed to sustainable development, strive towards sustainable development, support and contribute to sustainable development, promote sustainable development, and develop and provide sustainable solutions. There is an abundance of variations along these lines, often the devotion is conveyed through factual judgemental requests. Factual judgemental requests are presented as commonsense facts, and are used to establish substantiveness (Hart & Daughton, 2005, p.69). The rhetoric is used in such a way that the readers of the corporate environmental communication are supposed to understand it as being a given that the electricity companies are a part of sustainable development. Rhetoric can be, and is in this case, used to create an identity of the company (Feller, 2004). The three companies studied connect their identities with sustainable development. Aligning the environmental communication with other discourses, like the sustainable development one, is a tool used by the companies to manage

their relationship with stakeholders. Identifying themselves with values already viewed as legitimate is a way to increase their own legitimacy (Hooghiemstra, 2000).

In addition to presenting the devotion to sustainable development as facts, the claims in question appear in such central parts of the corporate environmental communication as vision, mission and purpose statements. This is a further indication of the importance of being viewed as, and perhaps just being, a company devoted to sustainable development. The following quotes from each electricity company are such central statements:

Fortum's purpose is to create energy that improves life for present and future generations. We provide sustainable solutions that fulfill the needs for low emissions, resource efficiency and energy security, and deliver excellent value to our shareholders (Fortum, 2010b, p.5).

Vattenfall supports sustainable development in society by managing the balance between secure energy supply and environmental and social consequences in a responsible way...The guiding principle is that meeting the needs of the present must never compromise the ability of future generations to meet theirs (Vattenfall, 2009b, p.5).

We seek to improve lives everywhere we operate, aiming for a healthy, safe and sustainable environment. We consider the needs of the present generation and also anticipate the needs of future generations (E.ON, 2009e, p.3).

The three quotes are not only central in how the companies wish to present themselves to their stakeholders, they are also very similar. That companies assume the same rhetoric and ideals as their competitors regardless of their environmental records is common (Feller, 2004).

The above quotes come from non-financial reports. Though similar reasoning can be found in the annual reports, the connection between company visions and sustainable development is not emphasised in the same way in those. That all three quotes are from the latest non-financial reports is also significant, as the inclusion of sustainable development into visionary statements is more common in the later reports than in the earlier ones. However, the most common theme in the visionary statements concerns becoming the market leader, the customer's first choice et cetera (see Table 4).

Table 4 Main themes in the companies' visionary statements

Year	E.ON	Fortum	Vattenfall
1999	Developing brand Zero CO ₂ -emissions	Leading energy company, renowned for environmental responsibility	Leading energy company, environmental performance
2004	Leading energy company	Leading energy company, renowned for sustainable development	'Number One' for the customer, environment and economy Leading role in renewable energy Industry leader environmental issues
2009	Customer's primary choice Leading role in CSR	Benchmark company, excel in sustainability, provider of energy for the future Becoming CO ₂ - free	Leading energy company Climate neutral by 2050

In 1999 Vattenfall's vision was becoming one of Europe's leading energy companies with respect to, among other things, environmental performance (Vattenfall, 1999). In 2004 the vision had been slightly changed and it was stated that Vattenfall was to become 'Number One' for the customer and the environment (Vattenfall, 2004a, b; 2007). In the CSR Report it was added that Vattenfall wanted to become 'Number One' also for the economy (Vattenfall, 2004b). An additional aspiration was to hold a leading role in renewable electricity (Vattenfall, 2004a). It was also stated that Vattenfall was going to become the industry leader within environmental issues (Vattenfall, 2004a, b). In 2009 the vision was again to become a leading European energy company, but a vision regarding climate change had been added, namely that the company was to become climate neutral by 2050 at the latest. Vattenfall claims to be the first energy company to formulate such a vision (Vattenfall, 2009a). E.ON's vision in 1999 focused on the development of a strong brand (Sydkraft, 1999a). The company also presented a long-term vision about having zero emissions of CO₂ (Sydkraft, 1999b). In 2004 the vision was simply becoming the leading power and gas company (E.ON, 2004a, b). The 2009 vision was becoming the customers' primary choice, as well as having a leading role in CSR, not only within the energy sector but also outside it (E.ON, c, e). Fortum's 1999 vision was to become the leading energy company in northern Europe and becoming renowned for their environmental responsibility (Fortum, 1999). In 2004 the vision was still to become the leading energy company in the Nordic area, but instead of being renowned for their environmental responsibility the company was to be known for having a strong commitment to sustainable development (Fortum, 2004). The latest version of the vision is that Fortum is to become a benchmark company that excels in sustainability and is the energy

supplier for future generations (Fortum, 2009a, b; 2010b). A long-term vision about becoming a CO₂-free company has also been formulated (Fortum, 2009b; 2010a).

Establishing that sustainable development is portrayed as being central in the work of the electricity companies is one thing, figuring out what this entails is another. As has been stated before, the sustainable development concept does not have one definition agreed to by each and every one. Vattenfall (2009b, p.1) combines their commitment to sustainable development with a remark on the relativity of the concept:

Our journey alongside our stakeholders continues – towards the development of a more sustainable society. Sustainability is a relative concept – almost no human activity can be expanded forever. The important thing is that societies choose the most sustainable options that can reasonably be developed and implemented. For us, this is not an abstract concept but a daily mission – to work with society to understand, prioritise, develop, and implement more sustainable solutions.

By pointing out that sustainable development is a relative concept Vattenfall gives their interpretation of its validity. Critical voices have accused the corporate world of hijacking the concept of sustainable development by defining it in whatever way they see fit (Ihlen, 2009a). Though sustainable development may not have one definition agreed to by all it does not mean that any and all activities can be deemed sustainable.

If the readers of the corporate environmental communication are expected to accept the electricity companies' commitment to sustainable development as fact, it begs the further question; what exactly are the companies committing to? All three companies borrow from the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) in their focus on both present and future generations. Another feature in common is the inclusion of three dimensions in the concept, the economic, the social, and the environmental. Only one company does not bring up sustainable development in each year studied. This is Fortum, in 1999. They do however use eco-efficiency instead. Though eco-efficiency is not brought up in later reports, or by the other companies, the meaning of it is often emphasized in the rhetorical treatment of sustainable development. In addition to sustainable development being described as a way to ensure that the needs of future generations can be fulfilled it is depicted as being good for business. If the companies' commitment to sustainable development is established with factual judgemental requests, the concepts' merits and the vision about companies becoming sustainable are being put forward in desirable and factual/desirable judgemental requests. Desirable judgements are evaluative in that they ask the readers to consult their

preferences to decide what is desirable. A statement combines factual and desirable judgemental requests when proof for an evaluation offered is contributed. This is a way to show that what the rhetor considers to be desirable is a fact (Hart & Daughton, 2005, pp.68, 70).

That different desirables are put forward in visionary statements can be seen in the light of the diverse stakeholders envisioned as readers of the corporate environmental communication. Public relations is about maintaining good relations with all stakeholders, not only a select few, to gain legitimacy and secure the continued business activity (Skerlep, 2001; Toth, 1999). Consequently, the rhetor must think about the needs of a variety of actors, ergo the use of different desirables. As hinted to above, the most common benefits of sustainable development alluded to are the economic and the making of a better world. Sustainable development would make for a society in which people are better off than they would otherwise be. An essential part in this sustainable society is the access to electricity; in fact the companies depict the production and use of electricity as the way to reach sustainability. The other pattern is the one focusing on the connection between the economic and ecological dimension of sustainable development. Business opportunities are supposed to be created by the striving towards sustainable development, consequently sustainability is made out to be a success factor for business. This reasoning is most apparent in the communication of Fortum and Vattenfall, while E.ON emphasizes that financial strength is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Vattenfall also presents this view in a factual/desirable judgemental request:

Vattenfall's actions on environmental issues will create the necessary conditions for ensuring a positive business development and for reinforcing Vattenfall's competitive strength (Vattenfall, 1999).

The multitude of stakeholders that the electricity companies have to relate to could be a reason as to why the rhetoric used to convey the companies' views on sustainable development is almost completely devoid of adjudicative judgemental requests. Another possible reason is the lack of a universally accepted definition of sustainable development. Adjudicatives can only be used when beliefs about what is right and what is wrong have been institutionalised among an audience (Hart & Daughton, 2005, pp.70, 72). The electricity companies' stakeholders might very well hold different beliefs about what is right and what is wrong when it comes to the behaviour of the companies in relation to sustainable development. As the corporate environmental communication documents studied have an

intended audience that is varied it is hard to issue statements that will be judged as the company behaving in the right way by all stakeholders.

6.2.2 The relation between sustainable development and environmental responsibility

Though the second research question only concerns how sustainable development is treated rhetorically the concept is often used in close connection to that of environmental responsibility. Therefore it will be clarified how these concepts relate to each other, or rather how the electricity companies view their relationship. The concepts are interlinked and it is not always easy to deduce what meanings they have been given. Sustainable development and CSR are similar in that both concepts have several dimensions. Depending on whom it is doing the defining the dimensions may differ. Common for both concepts is that social, environmental and economic dimensions are often distinguished. Despite this similarity, the concepts do not mean the same thing. The three electricity companies all provide their views of the concepts, but they differ in their treatment of how the concepts relate to each other.

Either, environmental responsibility is seen as a part of sustainable development, together with social responsibility and economic responsibility. Or, sustainable development is what the company needs to take responsibility for. Fortum ascribes to the first view, while E.ON and Vattenfall express the latter. Already in their 1999 environmental report E.ON stated that they have a responsibility for the environment and a responsibility to contribute with solutions for sustainable development. Similar statements can be found in 2004 as well as 2009 reports. The following quote illustrates this view, and is taken from a section with the telling heading “Responsibility for sustainable development”:

To show how Sydkraft works with taking responsibility for a sustainable development we present our work according to the roles we have in relation to different stakeholder groups [translation by author]¹ (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.5).

Vattenfall states that the company takes responsibility for the intertwined environmental, social, and economic areas and that they, like E.ON, have a responsibility to contribute with solutions for sustainable development (Vattenfall, 2004a, b). In the latest CSR report

¹ Quote in original language: ”För att visa på hur Sydkraft arbetar med att ta ansvar för en hållbar utveckling presenterar vi här vårt arbete efter de olika roller vi har i relation till olika intressentgrupper” (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.5).

Vattenfall conveys that sustainable development is supported by the company's responsibility for environmental and social consequences. Sustainability and responsibility are also used in a complementary way, by talking about responsibility and sustainability issues, and by stating that electricity should be provided in a sustainable and responsible way. Fortum on the other hand views environmental, economic and social responsibilities as the three subareas of sustainable development (Fortum, 2010b) and sustainability is defined in the following way:

At Fortum, sustainability means balanced management of the economic, social and environmental responsibility in the company's operations (Fortum, 2010a, p.).

The way in which the companies define the relationship between sustainability and environmental responsibility has not gone through any major changes. E.ON has consistently defined the relationship in the same way, while a minor shift can be detected in the rhetoric of Vattenfall. In the latest report sustainability and environmental responsibility are treated more as complementary concepts than before. If Fortum has changed their view is not possible to tell as the relationship between the two concepts is not treated in the earlier available reports.

These differing approaches does not have to be affecting the environmental work in any great way but they do tell something about how the corporate environmental communication of the companies have developed when put into perspective with their respective reporting strategy. E.ON and Vattenfall depart from CSR, while Fortum departs from sustainable development. E.ON and Vattenfall both produce separate CSR Reports while Fortum publishes a Sustainability Report, which is line with the respective company's point of departure.

6.2.3 Sustainable development and environmental responsibility, or climate change mitigation?

The major challenge for the future involves contributing to sustainable development – climate change is the driving force that is changing our business (Vattenfall, 2009a, p.4).

The above factual statement comes from the CEO's message in the 2009 Annual Report of Vattenfall and exemplifies the close link between climate change mitigation and sustainable development that is established by the electricity companies. The appearance of climate change in close connection to sustainable development and environmental responsibility is something that is not uncommon in the corporate environmental communication of the

electricity companies, especially in the later years. Furthermore, climate change has come to signify what sustainable development and environmental responsibility are primarily about for the electricity companies; producing electricity in a way that contributes to the mitigation of climate change and assuming responsibility for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. One example of this is the way in which Fortum (2009a, p.10) connects the responsibility of energy companies to climate change mitigation:

As an energy company, it is our responsibility to contribute to the mitigation of climate change. That's why we make it a priority to develop our expertise in energy technology and support the transition to a largely carbon dioxide-free energy system. Our long-term goal is to be fully CO₂-free. We strongly believe that mitigating climate change is also a commercial success factor for forerunners (Fortum, 2009a, p.10).

As the search for key words showed, the use of “climate” in general has increased between 1999 and 2009. The same goes for the practically interchangeable use of climate change mitigation and sustainable development or environmental responsibility. To say that sustainable development is only explained as a strategy to mitigate climate change would however be an exaggeration. Other features often mentioned are the importance of increased energy efficiency as well as the efficient use of resources. Neither is climate change mitigation the only environmental responsibility mentioned, but it does get a lot more attention than do other issues. In the various reports, the companies themselves establish that climate change is the most serious problem facing the energy sector. In later reports, where results of stakeholder surveys are presented, the stakeholders as well identify climate change as one of the most important issues. The coupling of climate change and sustainable development and environmental responsibility comes with an increased focus on the promotion of so-called climate benign energy sources, as opposed to the focus on renewable sources.

That sustainable development or environmental responsibility and climate change are treated similarly with respect to rhetoric can be viewed in the light of the rhetoric being used in the corporate environmental communication as being a representation of social rules. When the communication is designed the rhetor draws on the social rules pertaining to environmental issues, which reproduces the rhetoric as well as the social rules. As similar situations requiring similar responses occur rhetorical forms are born (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Although sustainable development and climate change are by no means synonymous

they do touch upon the environmental area and both pose challenges for the electricity companies. When the corporate rhetor deals with these issues, it is likely to draw on the same social rules, resulting in a common rhetorical form. As climate change is an environmental issue for which the electricity companies are expected to take responsibility it is likely to adopt the same rhetoric when discussing the responsibility for this specific issue as when discussing environmental responsibility in general.

To summarise the rhetoric used by the electricity companies when they convey how they relate to sustainable development, the most apparent feature is that the companies present their devotion to sustainable development as a fact. The readers are asked to believe that the companies are really committed to sustainable development. Aligning their identities with sustainable development, which is already viewed as legitimate, is a way for the companies to manage the companies' relationships with their stakeholders and to gain legitimacy. By doing so, the companies are also reinforcing the view that sustainable development is something desirable which companies should be devoted to. Sustainable development has been worked into the visions of the electricity companies, more so in the later years. The concept is described both as the way towards a better society, for present and future generations, and as being good for business. The visionary statements and merits of sustainable development are put forward in desirable and factual/desirable judgemental request, asking the readers to consult their preferences to decide what is preferable. In this case the companies want the readers to conclude that the companies' commitment to sustainable development is a good thing as sustainable development will create a better world at the same time as it is good for business. Sustainable development has been more and more connected to climate change in the electricity companies' rhetoric, the same goes for environmental responsibility and climate change. Furthermore, the relationship between sustainable development and environmental responsibility is not a clear-cut one; the electricity companies define it in different ways. To further straighten out how the companies view environmental responsibility, how the companies reason about it will be analysed.

6.3 Environmental responsibility in the electricity sector

The third research question asks how the electricity companies use rhetoric to motivate their environmental responsibility. To answer this question a version of Toulmin's method for understanding reasoning was used in the analysis of the companies' use of rhetoric. By first identifying claims made in connection to environmental responsibility, then looking for the

bases for these claims and finally deducing the guarantors the companies' reasoning behind their environmental responsibility can be understood. The outlining of the messages makes it possible to identify the value appeals made by the electricity companies as rhetors. The rhetoric used by the electricity companies in their corporate environmental communication, which is a part of their public relation strategies, contributes to value construction in society. There is no consensus on what CSR means, what it entails and why it is to be carried out. That environmental responsibility is an integral part of CSR is however widely accepted (Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). The idea with CSR is that it should provide the company with a competitive advantage, improve the image, and gain or increase the legitimacy for and of the company (Feller, 2004; Fredriksson, 2008; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). As environmental awareness has risen it has become more important for companies to be seen as environmentally responsible (Cox, 2009; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). All three electricity companies are eager to present themselves as responsible.

The claims, i.e. what the companies as rhetors want the readers to accede to (Vigsø, 2010, p.225), which can be found are two. The first is that the company in question is environmentally responsible, the other is that electricity companies have a, and should take responsibility for the environment. These claims may seem very similar, but there is a difference between them. The first claim is directly connected to how the company wish to present itself. The second claim does not tell anything directly about what the company does or does not do, but it provides the company view on how companies should behave.

The claim that the electricity company in question takes environmental responsibility is a way to develop the identity, i.e. how the company presents itself (Hooghiemstra, 2000), of the company according to societal norms and values. The aim of this is to enhance the corporate image, and in turn the legitimacy so that the continued existence of the company can be ensured (Fredriksson, 2008, Hooghiemstra, 2000). If the claim is to be accepted by the stakeholders, the companies must demonstrate how responsibility is taken, which can be done with rhetoric through communication (Hooghiemstra, 2000; Toth, 1999). This is where the basis of the claim comes in. When the claim that a specific company is environmentally responsible is made it is not always easy to pinpoint the basis. Going back to the definition of CSR, it gives that CSR is voluntary actions furthering some social good beyond company interest that improve both the competitiveness and the image of the company (Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). Given that this is quite a wide definition a lot of what is written in the corporate environmental communication of the companies may be interpreted as bases for the claim that a company takes environmental responsibility. The different measures, the

environmental policies presented, the environmental management systems implemented, and results in for example emissions reduction can be seen as bases even if the companies do not explicitly make the connection between these and the claim that they are environmentally responsible. It has been stated that companies do demonstrate their corporate social responsibility to stakeholders in a variety of ways; by investing in reporting, policies, practices, and management (Dawkins, 2000). As has been stated several times before, stakeholders expect companies to be committed to dealing with environmental issues (Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Ihlen, 2009).

The guarantor, i.e. the rule that makes sure that the basis leads to the claim (Vigsø, 2010, p.223), is often left out. Implicitly though, what is conveyed in the corporate environmental reporting is the manifestations of responsible actions, meant to show stakeholders that the companies are responsible. For this to make sense the stakeholders reading the reports must have the same perceptions about what constitutes as environmental responsibility as the companies do. Either, the companies can present environmental responsibility that is in line with what stakeholders expect of the companies, or they can try to influence what the stakeholders perceive as environmental responsibility. Adopting the dialogical perspective on rhetoric, rhetoric is not only about persuading an audience to adopt the ideas of the rhetor, neither is it only about presenting the ideas that the audience already believe in (Heath, 2000; Skerlep, 2001; Toth, 1999). Rather rhetoric is “the process of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas” (Heath, 2000, p.78).

To untangle what is being stated because it is the companies’ own ideas and what is being stated because it is being requested by the stakeholders therefore becomes unnecessary, and even impossible. The rhetoric used is the result of an on-going process between the companies and stakeholders, but it also influences how the rhetoric will be designed in the future, as well as what values will be held in society (Toth, 1999; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). The meanings ascribed to environmental responsibility by the companies influence society as the power of companies as communicators has increased and the power is used to try to promote issues, win public opinion, and shape the public and social debate (Toth, 1999). However, this does not mean that the rhetoric employed by the electricity companies is directly accepted by each and every one in society, there are other influential organisations taking part in the public and social debate (Heath, 2000). Furthermore, the three electricity companies are also competing with each other as they are managing their values, issues, identities, and images. While the companies use rhetoric in similar ways, they put forward slightly different motives for

environmental responsibility and are trying to position themselves as forerunners in a competitive environment, which will be elaborated on below.

As for the second claim, it is easier to distinguish the bases, even though different ones are used. The bases appear both in annual reports and in non-financial ones. All are given in connection to the claim that electricity companies have and should take environmental responsibility. Considering the length and number of reports being published by the companies both the claim, as well as the bases for the claim, are made surprisingly few times. Vattenfall presents several bases, but none previous to 2004. E.ON puts forward five different bases for the claim that electricity companies have and should take environmental responsibility. The basis appearing in documents from all the years studied is the one that the operations of electricity companies, i.e. the generation, distribution, and supply of electricity, have environmental impacts (Sydkraft, 1999b; 2004b; E.ON, 2009a, e). The second basis is provided three times, in different reports. The basis is that the generation, distribution, and supply of electricity is of service to society and is therefore a part of the fundamental structure in society. The services provided are prerequisites for the development and welfare of society (Sydkraft, 2004b; E.ON, 2004b; 2009a). This view is presented in the following way:

Sydkraft delivers services of service to society and is consequently a part of the fundamental structure in today's society. With the operations comes a responsibility – to manage the company in the best way for all of Sydkraft's stakeholders. The best management balances economic, environmental, social, and ethical factors. Responsibility is about acting promptly, effectively, and correctly, both in the continuous running of the operations and when something unexpected happens, as well as in the long-term [translation by author]² (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.2).

The connection between the basis and the claim in this quote is not crystal clear. One way to interpret the link is that because E.ON's services contribute to, or are at least claimed to contribute to, some larger social good, i.e. the development and welfare of society, the company have taken responsibility just by carrying out their business idea. In one of the documents where this basis and claim appear, namely the 2004 CSR Report, the reasoning is developed further and a guarantor is submitted. Because an efficient energy supply is a

² Quote in original language: "Sydkraft levererar samhällsnyttiga tjänster och är därmed en del av den grundläggande strukturen i dagens samhälle. Med verksamheten följer ett ansvar – att driva den på bästa sätt för Sydkrafts samtliga intressenter. Det handlar om att balansera ekonomiska, miljömässiga, sociala och etiska faktorer. Ansvar handlar om att agera snabbt, effektivt och riktigt dels i den kontinuerliga driften av verksamheten och dels då något oförutsett inträffar men även långsiktigt" (Sydkraft, 2004b, p.2).

prerequisite for the economic growth and prosperity in the world E.ON, by striving to make their operations more efficient, is taking responsibility. Efficiency is also made out to be the main driver of sustainable development (E.ON, 2004b). This focus on efficiency is not apparent in the other documents where a similar basis is presented.

The third basis is that as producers of, and not only traders in, electricity the company has the ability to impact the whole energy system. This basis is presented in an interview with the environmental director of E.ON (2007, p.12):

“There is one thing that annoys me. Some power traders sell electricity by promising only wind and water. They claim that they are ‘blowing away all coal power’ by doing so. But they are not producers themselves, they only trade in power. Thus, they take no responsibility for ensuring there is energy available either – for making sure everyone has electricity, every day, all year round. We want to impact the system as a whole. That is how we can really take responsibility.”

The guarantor is omitted but what is intended is that having control of production means being able to change how electricity is produced, which constitutes real responsibility. Two things are implied here, the first one being that E.ON is actually doing something to change the production to make it more environmentally friendly and thereby influencing the entire energy system. The second is that companies who only distribute but do not produce electricity are not taking environmental responsibility. It also conveys to the reader what environmental responsibility is about in a matter of fact way. By positioning E.ON as a company that is more environmentally responsible than others, one can deduce that a strong CSR commitment is viewed as a competitive advantage. This has also been pointed out by several scholars (Cerin, 2002; Feller, 2004; Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Hooghiemstra, 2000).

The fourth basis is that the company’s activities affect many people whose trust must be earned. This is the only basis for which the guarantor is submitted to the reader, namely that to earn the trust of the people affected the company must be a responsible one (E.ON, 2007). A basis concerning trust can also be found in the 2004 Annual Report of Vattenfall; the stakeholders’ trust in Vattenfall is essential for the company. The guarantor, also provided, is that the company must take environmental responsibility if trust is to be created (Vattenfall, 2004a). The view presented by E.ON and Vattenfall in these two arguments borders on what has been stated about CSR according to legitimacy theory. CSR can be used to acquire legitimacy and close legitimacy gaps, with the ultimate objective of ensuring the company’s continued existence (Ihlen, 2009b). Just claiming to be an environmentally responsible

company in corporate environmental communication is however not enough; the company must know and achieve a high standard of CSR (Heath, 2000). Furthermore, these two arguments show that E.ON and Vattenfall thinks of CSR as a public relations tool. Public relations must convince stakeholders to make choices that are beneficial to the companies (Heath, 2000). That stakeholders choose to trust the electricity companies is beneficial to the latter, and the way to get stakeholders to trust them is by committing to CSR.

The last basis is that E.ON is one of the world's largest investor-owned power and gas companies (E.ON, 2009e). Vattenfall provides a similar basis; that Vattenfall is a major European energy company, a major player in the European energy market and the largest generator of renewable energy in Sweden (Vattenfall, 2004b). This basis, like the second one, has a less clear link to the claim. The most straightforward interpretation is that large companies always have to take environmental responsibility. Connecting it to the other bases however, it makes more sense. Then the statement about the company being large implies that they have a lot of stakeholders with expectations regarding how E.ON and Vattenfall handle environmental issues. That the companies operate in the energy sector can be connected to the first basis stating that generating, distributing, and supplying electricity entails environmental impacts. As for the second part of the basis of Vattenfall, it conveys that because Vattenfall is a large generator of renewable electricity it is already taking environmental responsibility. The simple fact that Vattenfall is a generator of electricity is also presented as a basis in the company's 2004 Annual Report. There, the guarantors can be found in the text. These are that the trust in a company increasingly depends on progress in the environmental area, and that the way Vattenfall, as well as other electricity companies, is perceived by various stakeholders has a large effect on public opinion (Vattenfall, 2004a).

Fortum only makes the claim that electricity companies have and should take environmental responsibility twice. The same basis is provided both times; that the production and consumption of energy is the cause of the majority of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (Fortum, 2009a, b):

Because most global greenhouse gas emissions are generated in the production and use of energy, our industry has the responsibility of assuming an active role in the mitigation efforts. The role of energy companies is to provide the political decision makers with solutions, i.e. the most efficient mitigation measures.

A similar basis is submitted by Vattenfall in the 2009 Annual Report; Vattenfall is one of the largest electricity generators in Europe, but also one of the largest CO₂-emitters (Vattenfall, 2009a). The first part of this basis is very similar to the one also given by Vattenfall in the 2004 CSR Report. All three companies provide one basis connected to the environmental impact that their activities result in. Though neither company explicitly states the guarantor for these, the logical connection between the basis and claim in this case is that the activities have environmental impacts that are not desirable and because the companies are the cause of these undesirable impacts they have a responsibility to deal with them.

Rhetoric is used as a tool by the companies in their communication with stakeholders to justify the decisions taken by the company. This is done so the objective of public relations may be reached, namely establishing and maintaining good relations between the company and its stakeholders (Skerlep, 2001). Demonstrating environmental responsibility can give a competitive advantage to companies, making it more likely that people will do business with them (Cerin, 2002; Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000). With this in mind, it is not surprising that when it comes to environmental responsibility the companies are trying to demonstrate that they are responsible. They are also justifying, to their stakeholders, why they are taking environmental responsibility by reasoning about why this is a necessity for, and an obligation of, electricity companies. Fortum does not put as much effort into the justifications as the two other companies do, but they are focusing more on the overarching, as they see it, concept of sustainable development throughout their corporate environmental communication. Establishing that companies operating in the energy sector should take environmental responsibility, while at the same time claiming that this energy company is responsible signals to the reader that the company is behaving appropriately while other companies that do not take environmental responsibility are not.

6.4 Summary of findings

There is no shortage of corporate environmental communication published by the electricity companies. To say something in general about how much environmental communication that is being carried out and how it has developed between 1999 and 2009 is difficult as the strategies differ between the companies. A suggestion, stemming from the premises outlined in structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), to handling these differences while also looking at the general development is to think of the developments as parallel processes occurring at different levels. The companies, at least in the later years, have all published non-financial

reports. This can be seen as a response to requests from stakeholders expecting the electricity companies to demonstrate corporate social responsibility (Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Dawkins, 2004; Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). At the same time it can be viewed as a more proactive public relations strategy, where the electricity companies are trying to justify the decisions that they have made to gain legitimacy and ensure their continued existence (Ihlen, 2009b). How the non-financial reports are designed, where their focus lie, what their point of departure is, as well as how the reporting have changed over the years are all things that differ when looking at the different companies. Though there are differences in how the corporate environmental communication of the three companies has developed the way each company use rhetoric in its public relations strategies bears many resemblances to how the other companies use rhetoric.

The electricity companies convey their commitment to sustainable development through factual judgements, meaning that they try to establish their devotion as a truth that stakeholders should accept (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp.68-69). This means that the electricity companies are aligning their identities with sustainable development as a public relations strategy. The commitment to sustainable development is something that is supposed to affect the electricity companies' relationships with stakeholders in a positive way (Hooghiemstra, 2000; Ihlen, 2009b). The merits of sustainable development are presented as desirable or factual/desirable judgements. Sustainable development must be conveyed to the stakeholders as something desirable if the commitment to it is to be an effective public relations strategy. The factual/desirable judgements are provided as proof that sustainable development is desirable (Hart & Daughton, 2004, pp.68-69). One common way in which this is done is by the highlighting of the connection between sustainable development and business opportunities. Sustainable development is desirable because it is a success factor for the company. The other common theme is that sustainable development leads to a better world, and the providing of electricity is an essential part in making sustainable development a reality.

That the individual electricity company is an environmentally responsible one is a claim commonly made by all three electricity companies. So is the one that companies should take environmental responsibility. That the public expects companies to take environmental responsibility has been established (Cox, 2009; Dawkins, 2004; Feller, 2004) and the companies do consequently use environmental responsibility as a public relations strategy. By doing so they are contributing to the establishment of the norm in society that companies must take environmental responsibility. One reason given as to why electricity companies should

demonstrate environmental responsibility is that their operations have environmental impacts. This reason is presented by all three companies studied, in slightly different ways. That the three electricity companies are marketing themselves in very similar ways, using the same rhetoric, makes it hard for stakeholders to exert the power they have in relation to the companies to steer the electricity sector in a more sustainable direction. One of the proposed advantages with the liberalisation of the electricity market was that consumers would get the possibility, through their choice of electricity company and product, could promote sustainable development.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 The role of corporate rhetoric in the energy sector

Several important developments that have had an influence on the energy sector have been pointed out in this study. One is the increased focus on sustainable development, another the liberalisation of the electricity market (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Gan, Eskeland & Kolshus, 2007). This has provided the customers with the opportunity to choose between electricity products and the companies with the need to compete for customers. One way to attract customers is by conveying the company's environmental benefits. A societal debate where different views can be exchanged and where the possible routes in sustainable development can be discussed has been requested. There is also a need to discuss what environmental responsibility the companies have and should take. The liberalisation of the electricity market opens up this societal debate to customers. At the same time the power of companies as communicators has increased compared to that of individuals. The values and norms of society are created when different actors present their views and ideas through rhetoric. Therefore, how the electricity companies rhetorically treat sustainable development matters, not only for customers choosing among different electricity products, but also for the development in society at large.

The way in which the electricity companies studied present their views on, and commitment to, sustainable development does little for the customer trying to choose between their services as all three companies claim to have a strong commitment to sustainable development. Their definitions of sustainable development are also similar to each other's, and the ones provided by scholars and the World Commission on Environment and Development. To evaluate if and how the rhetoric of the electricity companies may affect the

shift towards a more sustainable electricity system it would be necessary to go more into detail and analyse how they evaluate different energy sources and suggested policy measures. This lies outside the scope of this study but would be interesting to go into as there are different views on what constitutes as sustainable electricity production. Previous research has suggested that it is hard to evaluate the environmental impact of different energy sources because there is no uniform reporting system (Cerin, 2002). Another problem might however be that the companies employ rhetoric in the same way, which also presents a problem for customers trying to choose an alternative that they believe can contribute to the shift towards sustainable development.

Despite the debates regarding what can be classified as sustainable energy production, the Swedish government has set up sustainability goals which do judge certain energy sources to be preferable to others. These are the renewable energy sources. Fossil fuels on the other hand, are to be phased out (Ministry of the Environment, 2009; The Swedish Government, 2008; Skr. 2005/06: 126). This distinction between different energy sources is not apparent in the marketing claims made by the three largest Swedish electricity companies; E.ON, Vattenfall, and Fortum. Though they are all relying on both fossil fuels and nuclear power they do not hesitate to proclaim themselves as being both sustainable and environmentally responsible. This adds a dimension to the problem mentioned above. The similar use in rhetoric can make it hard for customers to choose between companies all claiming to be “green”, but furthermore when companies market themselves as sustainable and responsible even though they are producing and selling electricity from non-renewable sources there is a discrepancy between the market claims and actual company behaviour. This discrepancy has been pointed out in previous research (Cerin, 2002; Feller, 2004) and is something that could possibly hinder the desired transition to sustainable development.

7.2 Structuration theory and corporate environmental communication

The structuration theory developed by Anthony Giddens (1984) has been suggested as a theory that could be fruitfully applied to public relations (Falkheimer, 2007). One of its, and social theory in general, benefits is that the analysis of public relations could be moved away from the instrumental perspectives that have dominated the public relations research. As public relations is a social phenomenon it has been requested that social theories be used to study it, to illuminate the relationship between public relations and the societies in which it is carried out, as well as the social systems that are coproduced by public relations (Ihlen, van

Ruler & Fredriksson, 2009, pp.1, 3). Another benefit is that structuration theory can be applied to public relations to explain reproduction and transformation of communication (Falkheimer, 2007). Though this has not been done to any great extent, one example is a study on which forms organisational communication has taken (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Results from this study, on how the corporate environmental reporting has developed and where focus is put in the reporting, suggest that it would indeed be worthwhile to continue research along this road. A proposition forwarded in this study, which could help explain the general, as well as particular developments of the corporate environmental communication of the electricity companies is that the communication be viewed as a structure on different levels. This way of viewing corporate communication could possibly be extended to other types of companies and other settings, which could increase the understanding of why companies communicate the way they do and how the communication is in interplay with the society in which it is produced.

The general development, in this case the increase in corporate environmental communication of the three companies between 1999 and 2009, can be understood as part of a structuration process in which the structure, i.e. the communication, and the agency, i.e. stakeholders, are interacting. If the increase is seen as a form of change in the structure it could be explained by the increased environmental awareness in society. Increased environmental awareness is quite a sweeping term, but the developments in the energy sector and in society at large cannot be disregarded either. Pinpointing what brings about change is not easy as modifications to the structure can be triggered by changes in the social, economic, or technological context, by social groups changing their perception of a situation, as well as by the structure itself (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). The electricity companies operate in the same society but that does not necessarily mean that the agency is exactly the same for all three companies. The corporate environmental communication of the three companies has developed differently from each other, or it has gone through different structuration processes. The factors that can trigger change mentioned above do not have to be, and are likely not, exactly the same for the three individual electricity companies.

While the developments in how and to what extent the corporate environmental communication is carried out differ between the three electricity companies, the rhetoric used by them and the changes in it are similar between the companies. It should be kept in mind that the three companies included in this study are similar to each other, not least when it comes to what types of energy sources they use in production, and which electricity products they sell. This could indicate that they are facing many of the same problems when it comes

to demonstrating CSR and showing that they are committed to sustainable development. Though the similarities could be explained by the same factors affecting the general increase in corporate environmental communication, further research would be needed to unveil why certain features of the public relations strategies of the companies are similar while others are not. As the scope of this study is limiting to the conclusions that can be drawn, one idea would be to include individuals responsible for the public relations and corporate environmental reporting to find out their view on what influences how the reporting is designed. This would however only shed light on the micro and meso-levels of the structuration processes at work, i.e. how specific electricity companies and electricity companies in general develop their public relations communication strategies. To include the macro-level it would be necessary to carry out studies on how stakeholders perceive the electricity companies and their corporate environmental communication, and how values as well as policies have changed, to the extent that this is possible. Another idea is to study the media representations of the companies, as these are an important link between the companies and stakeholders. By only looking at the available published material it becomes hard to say anything conclusive about why certain features have been reproduced while others have not. As structuration is a constant interplay between agency and structure (Andersen & Kaspersen, 2007, p.325), only looking at the structure that is the corporate environmental communication can only tell us so much.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable development has been established as an overarching goal by Swedish decision-makers, and part of the strategy to reach it is a transformation of the energy sector as certain energy sources are seen as less sustainable (Skr. 2005/06: 126; Svensk Energi, 2011; The Swedish Government, 2008, p.11). At the same time, the rise of environmental awareness has put a pressure on companies to take and demonstrate environmental responsibility (Cerin, 2002; Cox, 2009; Dawkins, 2004; Feller, 2004; Hooghiemstra, 2000; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). In this thesis it has been discussed how the three largest electricity companies in Sweden treat the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility rhetorically in their corporate environmental communication, to unveil what values they ascribe to and promote.

E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall share the goal of sustainable development with the Swedish government, if they are to be believed. These three electricity companies' proclaimed

devotion to sustainable development cannot be mistaken. By expressing their commitment to sustainable development as fact, the electricity companies are contributing to the view that sustainable development is something desirable and that they as energy companies play an important part in getting there. The easy access to and supply of electricity is depicted by E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall, as being paramount for sustainable development. So in their view, by just carrying out what lies at the core of their activities the companies are contributing to sustainable development. What is addressed to a much lesser extent is the question whether all electricity generation is sustainable. Scholars, as well as decision-makers have reached the conclusion that it is not, and the three electricity companies included in this study all make use of energy sources that have been are being questioned from an environmental, as well as from a sustainability point of view. Not dealing with inherent features of unsustainability in company operations in corporate environmental communication is not uncommon but nevertheless a problem if a shift to a more sustainable energy production is to take place (Feller, 2004; Ihlen, 2009b).

All three companies do also establish that as energy companies they have an obligation to be environmentally responsible. Of course, according to them, they are also shouldering this responsibility. The most frequently made basis for the claim that energy companies have an obligation to act responsibly towards the environment is that the generation and distribution of electricity has environmental impacts. What is missing is however, as in the case of how the companies relate to sustainable development, whether it is sufficient to simply assume responsibility. CSR has been defined as voluntary actions furthering some social good beyond company interest that improve both the competitiveness and the image of the company. In addition to CSR providing benefits for the company, it can be altruistic or coerced (Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman, 2011). That CSR is a way for E.ON, Fortum and Vattenfall to improve their competitiveness and images seems likely. Whether it furthers some social good beyond this is more unclear. CSR as a means for sustainable development has been questioned (Ihlen, 2009b) and the way E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall treats the concept rhetorically does little to prove that it is. The way these companies do this indicates that Korhonen (2000) was on to something when he suggested that CSR is not compatible with the strong focus on wealth maximisation and efficiency in the reigning economic paradigm.

The electricity market, due to the liberalisation of it, is a competitive one. Companies compete for customers who are now provided with the opportunity to choose between electricity suppliers and products. This ability to choose has been presented as a way to affect the shift towards a more sustainable electricity production, as customers choose

environmentally preferable electricity products. To be able to make a choice based on environmental performance sufficient information is a prerequisite (Fuchs & Arentsen, 2002; Truffer, Markard & Wüstenhagen, 2001). The similarity of the rhetoric used by, but seemingly not always corresponding to actual behaviour by, the electricity companies included in this study does not facilitate the customers' choice. E.ON, Fortum, and Vattenfall all claim to be very responsible and strongly committed to sustainable development. Therefore customers cannot rely on the marketing claims, if they want to choose an environmentally preferable product they have to put time and effort into figuring out what lies behind those claims. In this sense, the role of the stakeholders representing the agency, or at least those hoping for a shift towards sustainable development, has up to this point in time been rather limited. They have possibly been playing a part in the development of the rhetoric used in the corporate environmental communication by the electricity companies but have not, as far as this study can show, affected any change in how the companies produce electricity. Consequently, the requested shift towards sustainable development has not been affected in any great way for the three companies studied.

The straightforward claims about having a strong commitment to sustainable development and being environmentally responsible are rhetorical strategies used by the companies to gain legitimacy as well as competitive advantages. The theory on CSR gives that it is indeed a strategy adopted by companies to ensure their continued existence by adapting to, and trying to influence, the wants and needs of stakeholders (Hooghiemstra, 2000). As the companies studied treat CSR in this way it is used as a public relations tool by them, i.e. it is used to establish and maintain beneficial relationships with their stakeholders. The rhetoric used in the corporate environmental communication by the electricity companies is a way to achieve this end (Skerlep, 2001). But the rhetoric employed by the companies is also a part of the creation of values in society. Companies as rhetors have gained power and use it to promote issues, win public opinion, and shape the public debate (Heath, 2000; Ihlen, 2009b; Toth, 1999). Not only is it important for the companies to demonstrate to stakeholders that they are sustainable and responsible, it is also important to get the stakeholders to ascribe to the meanings that the electricity companies have given the concepts of sustainable development and environmental responsibility.

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