

Professional boundaries in climate journalism:

Journalists and NGOs during Swedish media coverage of COP25

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Abstract

Climate change was the most covered issue in the media in Sweden during 2019 and the use of terms such as “climate emergency” and “climate crisis” increased significantly (Vi-skogen, 2020). These developments and the climate issue pose questions of future practices and purpose of journalism and therefore also its professional boundaries, not the least towards other social actors and institutions. This study focuses on journalists professional boundaries with their sources, specifically non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Environmental NGOs play an important role in climate- and international politics, such as for instance in the setting of United Nations’ climate summits (COPs), and are themselves engaged in producing public information (Powers, 2015b; Wozniak et al. 2017). The study therefore explores journalists’ conceptions of NGOs for climate journalism and these organizations’ roles in the climate reporting during COP25 in Madrid. It uses a theory of boundary work in journalism and applies a methodology of online interviews with journalists from Swedish national news organizations and with two representatives from environmental NGOs based in Sweden. The findings demonstrate four overlapping roles of NGOs in climate journalism based on the practices and views of the participating journalists: dependency; established source; partnering watchdog; and agenda-driven player. It further concludes that the climate issue and COP25 offer a context for blurred boundaries between the two actors, however, it is limited as journalists maintain control over NGOs’ participation in the news making process.

Key words: climate change, climate journalism, boundary work, journalists, non-governmental organizations, professional boundaries.

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Abbreviations

COP3 = The third session of the Conference of the Parties: the 1997 UN climate summit in Kyoto

COP14 = The 14th session of the conference of the Parties: the 2008 UN climate summit in Poznan

COP15 = The 15th session of the Conference of the Parties: the 2009 UN climate summit in Copenhagen

COP17 = The 17th session of the Conference of the Parties: the 2011 UN climate summit in Durban

COP21 = The 21st session of the Conference of the Parties: the 2015 UN climate summits in Paris

COP24 = The 24th session of the Conference of the Parties: the 2018 UN climate summit in Katowice

COP25 = The 25th session of the Conference of the Parties: the 2019 UN climate summit in Madrid

EU = European Union

IPCC = Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

NGO = Non-governmental organization

SR = Sveriges Radio (in Eng. 'Radio Sweden,' public service radio)

SVT = Sveriges Television (in Eng. 'Swedish Television,' public service TV)

UK = United Kingdom

UN = United Nations

UNFCCC = United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

WWF = World Wildlife Fund

U.S. = United States

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1. Introduction

Climate change¹ has been termed “*the* systematic problem of our era and coming future,” (Kunelius, 2019, p.218) and the year 2019 was a defining one in climate terms. Not only because of the many natural disasters, from record number cyclones in the Indian Ocean to extensive bush fires raging in the Amazon and Australia, but because of both political setbacks and a growing global movement for climate action led by the youth (Goldrick, 2019; Chow, 2019). The year 2019 also saw newspapers such as *The Guardian* change its terminology when covering climate change and term it a “climate crisis” or “climate emergency” (Carrington, 2019). In Sweden, 2019 was the year when the climate issue for the first time was the most covered topic in the media with more than twice as much coverage compared to other significant issues such as Brexit, the EU-election or migration (Vi-skogen, 2020, p.4). Even though Swedish news organizations have not adopted guidelines for how to report climate change such as *The Guardian*, the terms “climate emergency” and “climate crisis” are used more and more frequently. The prior has increased from only being mentioned in one article in 2018 to being mentioned in 2600 articles during 2019 (ibid, p.8). Additionally, in 2019 some Swedish news organizations dedicated more resources to climate journalism, such as tabloid newspaper *Expressen*, which initiated climate reporting as a separate beat produced by an individual newsroom. The newspaper further committed resources to educate 400 journalists about climate issues (Somnell, 2019). These are interesting developments because it poses the question of, if, and how journalists might change and expand their practices in this context of frequent disasters, political impasse and public awareness and protests.

Consequently, Kunelius (2019) argued that the climate change issue will challenge journalism to adapt logics and practices in several ways, not the least rethinking its institutional boundaries and professionalism, upheld through values such as *autonomy*, *neutrality* and *detachment*. Kunelius considered “professional reflexivity” to be central going forward, where standard journalistic professionalism is reconsidered. For instance detachment from issues will not necessarily be desirable and alliances and *coproduction* outside merely journalists can be important for quality journalism that serves public good (pp.218-219). This

¹ Climate change refers to the global warming of the planet due to greenhouse emissions and its resulting consequences. Global leaders have agreed to limit emissions so to keep global warming under 2°C, or preferably no warmer than 1.5°C. According to the United Nations’ climate panel IPCC the 2 degree level will already have serious effects, such as loss of biodiversity, farming being severely threatened and sea levels rising significantly (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020).

links to questions of “boundary work,” of how journalists struggle for authority as a profession by conceptualizing the boundaries of journalism in regards to practices and participants (Carlsson, 2015, pp.7-9). These boundaries have repeatedly been debated and challenged, from technological changes introducing new media, to new participants entering the field of journalism such as citizen journalists or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The latter has attracted increasing scholarly attention in later years as NGOs have grown and professionalized their activities for producing their own public information simultaneously as news organizations have been struggling financially (Powers, 2015a). Although scholars who have studied NGOs’ participation in journalism mostly have focused on foreign reporting and international humanitarian coverage, there are some examples of studies that include a climate change focus, such as Russell (2013) who studied the overlaps in practices of media activists and journalists in the coverage of the United Nations (UN) climate summit in Durban in 2011 (COP17). Wozniak, Wessler and Lück (2017, p.1435) also viewed the climate change debate, and even more so climate summits, as possible settings where traditional journalistic structures might be challenged and alternative voices or actors such as NGOs might have more power as sources in news coverage. In previous research they specifically focused on the term ‘coproduction’ when researching the ways journalists and NGOs interact with each other during climate summits and create common interpretations (Lück, Wozniak & Wessler, 2016). Is it then possible that NGOs can be more active participants in producing climate news?

Furthermore, studying journalists’ relationship with sources/non-journalists is important as this gives insight to news production and the power of media institutions. Ultimately, given not only the increasing media attention to the climate issue in 2019, but also the action by journalists and news organizations to frame it as a crisis, it is further important and relevant to study the boundaries of journalism and how journalists adapt to the challenges of reporting climate change – including how they interact with their sources.

1.1. Objective and research questions

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to analyze how professional boundaries between journalists and NGOs are shaped by the climate change issue. This is specified with a focus on primarily how journalists interpret their relationship when reporting from and about the UN climate summit in Madrid in 2019 (COP25). The study is mainly based on semi-structured interviews with journalists from Swedish news organizations, but also a couple of interviews with representatives from environmental NGOs based in Sweden in order to have

balanced information of their interactions. In focus are the following research questions:

RQ1: What are journalists' conceptions of NGOs when covering COP25 and other climate news stories?

RQ2: What role/s do NGOs have in the journalistic practice when covering COP25?

RQ3: What does the NGO-journalist relationship in climate journalism suggest about their professional boundaries?

1.2. Delimitations

This study will mainly focus on Swedish journalists' conceptions of their relationship with NGOs as sources and material for news reports from COP25. Furthermore, the views from NGOs regarding media receptivity during or surrounding the summit will be an addition to balance the testimonies, but not the central theme. There are other approaches to this topic and further dimensions to cover which is not going to be relevant in this case. For instance there are similar studies that focus much more on comparing reporting styles and content output between these two actors from a singular event (Russell, 2013). There are also studies that focus solely on the "journalistic" practices of NGOs (Powers, 2015b) as well as studies of NGOs' impact on setting the news agenda (Van Leuven & Joye, 2014; Waisbord, 2011). There are fewer studies however, that focus in-depth on how journalists interpret their practices and define the boundaries with NGOs as sources/non-journalists and even less so in a context of a Nordic media system and culture. Hence, this study chose that perspective and aims to add this approach to the previous body of literature while also position it in the area of climate journalism (which essentially refers to the practice of covering the climate change issue ²).

2. Background and definitions

2.1. What are COPs?

The acronym COP stands for "Conference of the Parties." This is an annual meeting for the states who have adopted the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the first meeting was held in Berlin, Germany, in 1995. A few meetings have been especially important, such as the third one in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997 (COP3) where the

² Throughout this thesis this will sometimes be positioned together with environmental issues as a broader term since not all journalists interviewed cover only the climate change issue in their work, and since NGOs often work with advocacy for several environmental issues (climate change included).

Kyoto Protocol was adopted, or the meeting in Paris in 2015 (COP21) where the Paris Agreement came to life (UNFCCC, 2020a). These two agreements are governing protocols for how the parties should regulate and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to curb global warming, which was the initial objective of the Convention as well. Today, there are 197 parties to the Convention (196 states plus the European Union, which means it is universally agreed upon), 192 parties to the Kyoto Protocol and 189 parties to the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2020b).

The 25th session, COP25, was held in Madrid during 2nd-13th December 2019. It was originally supposed to be held in Santiago de Chile, but because of violent protests in the country and Spain offering to host the summit instead of Chile, the meeting was announced to be held in Madrid in early November (Löfvenberg & Blomdahl, 2019). Although the conference (which ended two days late because of negotiations running long) was not expected to produce major new decisions on emission targets, it was still considered to yield few results. *The Guardian* reported for example that the activists and NGOs at the meeting were disappointed in the lack of cooperation between the countries (Harvey, 2019). Politicians have also voiced their concern in the media, such as Swedish environmental- and climate minister Isabella Lövin and she also emphasized the United States' declining ambitions as a current roadblock (Carp, 2019).

Moreover, Nossek and Kunelius (2012, pp.73-74) have researched how journalists cover these climate summits and discovered a general global drop in news coverage of COP17 in Durban (2011) compared to the coverage of COP15 in Copenhagen (2009). However, other than countries more vulnerable towards the effects of climate change, Sweden was an exception with also a relative high level of coverage during the Durban summit. The authors' considered possible public awareness and "climate consciousness" among journalists to be a reason for this continuously stable coverage. Nevertheless, the climate issue has arguably become more acute since this study and interest in COPs may have increased globally in later years. Additionally, Nossek and Kunelius (2012) also noted that overall politicians and government sources were the most quoted in the study and that there was a slight drop in the amount of journalists who covered the summit in Durban on site. They considered the dedication of resources to cover the summits to be an indication of its news value. However, the number of stories through news agencies remained relatively stable globally between the summits, but with a few country exceptions such as the U.S. who relied much more on news agencies for COP17 (ibid, pp.72-77).

2.2. Climate change coverage in Swedish media

For the last six years, the Swedish NGO *Vi-skogen* has commissioned media analyst company *Retriever* to research how climate change is described and reported on in Swedish press. The report from 2019 saw significant changes in how much climate change were on the news agenda in 2018 compared to previous years – and found twice as much reporting than in 2014 (when the annual studies began). The highest number of articles appeared in August, at the end of a very warm summer in which bushfires in northern Sweden were a big issue and right before the general election in September. Furthermore, in the fall of 2018 Swedish teen and activist Greta Thunberg started her school strike for the climate outside the parliament in Stockholm, which sparked a global youth movement called “Fridays for future” going into 2019. Other peaks in the coverage during the fall of 2018 was the COP24 climate summit in Katowice, Poland (Vi-skogen, 2019, p.4). In the newest report released in May this year, the coverage of the climate issue had increased even more with almost twice as much reporting only from the year before. This is called the “Greta effect” in the report as the global ‘Fridays for future’ movement received a lot of media attention, but there were also extensive coverage in Swedish media of severe disasters such as cyclones and bushfires in different areas of the world (Vi-skogen, 2020, pp.3-5). Nevertheless, Greta Thunberg was by far the most influential person in the climate debate, surpassing politicians and policymakers who tend to dominate the list of most visible people in the media regarding this issue. A few other non-politicians made the list, however, such as Svante Axelsson, coordinator at the public-private partnership *Fossil Free Sweden* (at spot 17 out of 40), Johanna Sandahl, chairman of the Swedish NGO *Naturskyddsföreningen* (18) as well as researcher Johan Rockström (20) (Vi-skogen, 2020, pp.12-14).

2.3. Defining NGOs

The uptake in covering an environmental activist and social movement is an interesting context for the focus in this thesis, as NGOs are part of social movements yet also distinct from them. In academic terms, Kaldor (2003, p.589) call NGOs “tamed social movements,” since they often begin in activism organized around issues such as human rights and the environment, but at some point these movements will professionalize into an respectable institution and “partner in negotiations” (ibid). Kaldor actually considers this the “neoliberal version” of civil society, as these organizations operate at an intersection of the state and the market: namely, they can take on state-like functions through offering public services and they follow a market logic as they compete for resources and publicity. Additionally, NGOs

have significantly increased globally since the 1990s and have become more and more transnational or global, spanning networks across borders and appealing to a global governance structure of international legal frameworks and treaties, such as the UN declaration of human rights or the Paris Agreement (Kaldor, 2003, pp.586-589).

A practical definition of NGOs is offered by Waisbord (2011, p.142) as “... civil, nonprofit associations staffed by paid and voluntary personnel,” and who “perform a range of tasks, such as conducting local and transnational advocacy, delivering social services, implementing foreign aid programs, developing technical knowledge, and channeling local participation.” Clearly NGOs can be rather heterogenous, having different purposes and ranging from the grassroots to larger global entities. Hence, drawing a line between them and social movements is fairly difficult. In addition, according to the Swedish national encyclopedia (NE, 2020) the environmental movement as a whole is actually considered to encompass both popular movements, NGOs and even some research institutes. However, it is environmental NGOs, as professionalized advocacy organizations with full-time staff, that are the focus of this thesis and not the environmental movement in its entirety.

It is also relevant to note that historically civil society organizations have been vital for Swedish democracy, as popular movements and free associations such as unions “co-govern” society when cooperating with the traditionally strong state (Trädgårdh, 2007, pp.2-3). These are different from the environmental NGOs relevant for this study, but is still important to have in mind as this can make a difference for journalists’ attitudes and approach to them.

3. Previous research

As this thesis combine different subfields within journalism studies, the literature review is divided into two sections to first discuss previous research about NGO-journalist relations (3.1) and second, to relate this to research about climate journalism (3.2).

3.1. NGOs – from competitive sources to news producers?

Studying the source-journalist relationship has long interested scholars. The sources that appear in news reports represent what “interpretations of reality” are given legitimacy and can also say something about the social and cultural power of various actors, namely who’s interpretation receives authority to speak on an issue (Carlsson, 2009, pp.526-527).

Consequently, much of the literature that exist on the matter suggest that journalists tend to routinely favor official sources in most kinds of news stories, which Carlsson (2009) tried to explain with resembling journalists’ relationship with their sources to either a dance,

dominance or a duel. While a “dance” is meant as a *reciprocal and cyclical relationship* (i.e. sources are given legitimacy by appearing in the news as experts on matters and news organizations are given legitimacy by using trustworthy sources and routine practices), “dominance” is when official sources are ascribed to be ‘*primary definers*’ of news. In this view, journalism is responsive to the perspectives and debates of elite sources as well as dependent on authoritative sources in order to fulfill norms of objectivity and, conversely, independence. A “duel” on the other hand, suggests that *competition* between sources and news frames is the defining feature. This perspective assigns both journalists and sources a more active role in the news-making process, where sources can pursue the media and vice versa, but where journalists’ ultimately have the final say in defining news frames (pp.530-536).

In relation to especially the latter perspective, much of the literature about specifically the NGO-journalism source relationship refute that NGOs have any real influence over the media agenda despite media strategies being a common trait of their information practices. Many studies rather suggest that organizations adapt to a media or journalistic logic of neutral experts or sensationalism to compete for publicity for their causes (Fenton, 2010; Waisbord, 2011). However, there is also research that indicates NGOs’ strengthening position in some types of news, especially international humanitarian coverage, where organizations can fill a gap as “the new boots on the ground” while financially disabled news organizations spend less resources on foreign correspondents (Powers, 2016; Spyksma, 2019). For instance, Van Leuven and Joye (2014) demonstrated through interviews and content analysis that Belgian journalists’ tended to rely more on press releases from NGOs for international aid coverage than press releases from government agencies. This suggests that there might be instances when NGOs can act as gatekeepers in the news making process and that they have grown into a competitive source sometimes more favorable for journalists. Moreover, Cooper (2018, p.962) deemed the relationship between NGOs and journalists in the United Kingdom as “mutually beneficial” when reporting about humanitarian disasters, since journalists can have difficulties accessing these areas in short time without the help of NGOs, and NGOs in turn want the issue in the spotlight for fundraising purposes. This suggests a reciprocal rather than competitive exchange for NGOs as sources, although the journalists interviewed were often quite reluctant towards these cooperative practices and rather protective of their autonomy (ibid, p.958). Following the line of cooperation however, Camaj (2018) studied a case in Bulgaria where an NGO and journalists were organized around a common purpose to push for the government to adopt legislation ensuring access to public information. Because of this

they established a kind of collaborative partnership, which was referred to as “blurring the boundaries” between the two actors (ibid).

In addition, the literature above already move beyond a dichotomous source-journalist relationship, but several of these studies have also detailed how NGOs have professionalized their information practices to the degree that many organizations produce their own news content or “media packages” for the news media (Van Leuven & Joye, 2014, p.164; Powers, 2016; Fenton, 2010, Waisbord, 2011). This professionalization makes NGOs accessible and more reliable sources, but also demonstrates shifting barriers since sources can be more active participants in constructing news. In relation, Powers (2015b, pp.191-193) termed the development of NGOs as “journalistic entities” to be redefining boundaries of journalism, yet emphasized the importance of factors outside journalism for this development. In Powers research on Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, he argued that the professional status of NGOs as sources or news providers is a consequence of a process in which organizations developed strategies to gain legitimacy in making claims vis-à-vis political actors, and hence, is a byproduct of strengthening their advocacy work (ibid). Similarly, Fenton (2010, pp.154-155) has also written that the sociopolitical significance of NGOs is a product of globalization and the resulting prominence of transnational and non-state actors, which in turn deem NGOs more newsworthy sources in global news. Consequently, boundaries between NGOs and journalists might predominantly be influenced by economic, political and cultural developments that journalism has to adapt to.

Moreover, the studies accounted for in this literature review are situated in countries with both different and similar media and political systems as in Sweden according to Hallin and Mancini’s (2004, pp.67-68) three models of the Western countries. For instance, Cooper (2018) studied NGO/journalist relations in the UK, which would be classified as the Liberal model, and Van Leuven and Joye (2014) studied NGOs gatekeeping status in Belgium which just like Sweden fits the Democratic Corporatist model. Nevertheless, there are few studies exclusively focused on this issue in a Swedish context. Related however, are studies on journalists’ relationship with sources in political news. For instance, Johansson, Malling and Nygren (2019) describe relations between media and political executives in Sweden as “professionally symbiotic,” referring to how the interplay between the two actors in controlling information flows follows certain norms and mutual understandings. The increase in press- and communication staff at the government offices for the last decade is also noteworthy (ibid, p.100, p.104), as this growth in resources dedicated towards communication has occurred in the NGO sector as well (Powers, 2015a; Fenton, 2010). Further related is the

blurred lines between communication and journalism, as there are examples in Sweden of how public organizations adopt journalistic methods and formats in their information output, which has stirred discussions on how this impacts or changes the tasks of journalism in society (Rehnberg & Grafström, 2020). This issue and these questions are also at the core of the research on NGO-journalist relations.

3.2. NGOs in climate journalism

Climate change, just like humanitarian and human rights issues, is a field where NGOs around the world are particularly active both operative on the ground and in public and political debates. The work of global organizations that pursue advocacy for climate change issues range from disaster relief during natural disasters (e.g. Red Cross) and conservation of nature and wildlife (e.g. WWF) to poverty alleviation (e.g. Oxfam) and political advocacy (e.g. Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth). They therefore have expertise and access to information that can be useful for journalists reporting the climate change issue and it might be reasonable to expect NGOs to have greater power as sources in specifically climate coverage. A lot of the research about journalism and climate change is further focused on climate summits, where transnational actors such as NGOs play an increasingly key role in the international political landscape, with some occupying the status of official observers during UN climate conferences (Wozniak et al. 2017, pp.1435-1436, p.1446; Powers, 2015b, pp.188-189).

In her comparative study of how mainstream media and NGOs/activists covered COP17 in Durban, Russell (2013) argued that these “hybrid spaces” are examples where boundaries between participants, activists and journalists are shifting, mainly referring to the hybrid practices media activists and journalists adopt that include both advocacy and journalistic values (p.908). Consequently, the separation between advocacy and journalism is a key issue in the research about NGO-journalist relations (Powers, 2015b, p.186), but this expansion and shift in journalistic professionalism is also present in literature about media and the climate. As exemplified in the introduction, Kunelius (2019, p.219) argued that coverage of climate change will demand journalists to think in terms of ‘coproduction’ and ‘professional reflexivity’ rather than strictly relying on norms of autonomy and detachment. The coproduction term has further been used by Lück et al. (2016) when studying specifically the interactions between environmental journalists and NGOs at climate summits. They emphasized how different beats (i.e. science, politics, business, environment), media outlets (e.g. transnational or national) and target audiences (i.e. policy-makers or general public) shape the “coproduction networks” and common interpretations of the summits, and

consequently, the degree and character of journalists' collaborations with NGOs. On the other side of it, environmental NGOs' strategic interests are also relevant for the character of cooperation (pp.35-42).

The presence of NGOs in climate journalism also invokes questions of *advocacy* versus the professional journalistic value of *objectivity*. For instance, Rhaman (2012) studied the prevalence of advocacy journalism for climate summit press coverage in Bangladesh, defined as either *civil society advocacy* (where traditional advocacy actors, such as NGOs and citizen groups, pursue and use the media to shine light on issues) and *journalistic advocacy* (where journalists take on a more active stance, promoting a particular cause) (p.148). However, Rhaman basically converged these two and considered giving space to civil society groups in news reports as an indication of advocacy journalism in general. Essentially, he argued that the voices being heard and quoted in news reports help frame an issue in advocacy terms. Moreover, this advocacy journalism was common in Bangladeshi coverage of COP15 in Copenhagen and COP17 in Durban, where news articles increasingly included advocacy for more specific climate action (ibid, pp.154-156). Rhaman did, however, also refer these trends to Bangladesh being severely affected by climate change – and this may not be the same in countries that are currently less vulnerable towards its effects, such as Sweden.

In relation, several studies of climate change coverage have focused on the norm of *balance* (giving space to opposite sides of an issue, usually an essential part of objectivity), which have generated space in the news for disputing scientific evidence of climate change usually termed “false balance” in the research. A few studies, however, indicate that climate journalists in countries such as the U.S., UK, Germany and India in later years have tended to exclude climate sceptics more in favor of a “weight-of-evidence approach” and hence, have shifted towards more interpretative practices when evaluating sources. Consequently, they are redefining their views on objectivity. (Hiles & Hinnant, 2014, pp.445-449; Brüggemann & Engesser, 2016) However, this particular debate is less relevant in the Swedish context, where there has not been that much political dispute over the accuracy of the greenhouse theory (Zannakis, 2009, p.104). Nevertheless, the shift in the definition of objectivity is an example of how norms and practices can be adapted to the character and political circumstances of the climate change issue. This, on the other hand, has been studied in Sweden as well, in how reporting climate change can demand journalists to think “beyond media logic,” since the climate issue for instance cuts through separation of domestic and foreign news, as well as political, financial and scientific beats (Berglez, 2011, pp.459-462).

Returning to NGOs in climate news, Wozniak et al. (2017, pp.1443-1445) further found that they were quite successful as competitive sources in visual framings of UN climate conferences with especially environmental protests being featured (40% of the visual frames). However, NGOs were less successful in text production where the most quoted sources were national politicians. Situating these types of studies in a Nordic context, Krøvel (2012) studied NGOs' ability to set the agenda for environmental news in Norway during a ten year period and concluded that the organizations' with the most growth in media attention were the ones focused on producing knowledge. The study also analyzed the coverage of COP14 in Poznan, Poland (2008) and noted that sources were generally quoted for their expertise, NGOs included. In turn, coverage of activism, protests or other activities were rare (ibid, pp.270-271).

In that sense, there are conflicting studies on to what extent journalists use NGOs for the coverage of climate summits and climate change stories in general, as well as the character of their interactions for this coverage. This is also less researched in a Swedish context, which this study aims to add, while further focusing more in-depth on how journalists view their relations with NGOs and interpret the professional boundaries between the two.

4. Theoretical framework: boundary work in journalism

According to Carlsson (2015, p.9), the concept of '*boundary work*' – based on the work of sociologist Thomas Gieryn – has inspired a growing body of research in journalism studies "... to understand the demarcation of journalism norms, practices, and participants." This is particularly related to journalism's status and claim as a profession, which generally has had a shaky history. Partly because journalism has lacked common denominators of professions such as licensing and exclusive discourse, but also because it has constantly had to adapt to technological changes. Carlsson states that the introduction of radio, TV and later the Internet meant that journalists had to expand and integrate new practices and new media in what constitute as journalism. However, economic and cultural changes have also played their part for the negotiations of journalistic boundaries. (ibid, pp.7-9) Hence, the boundaries that separate journalism from other institutions or professions have long been contested, and even more so in the era of Internet where non-journalists now can participate in news production, for example as citizen journalists or as NGOs that now take on activities previously assigned to journalists. Economic changes in terms of shrinking newsrooms is also an example of how journalists who work under constraints of time and resources might accept other actors'

participation in the news-making process – which would imply that boundaries are taking on new forms partly because of external pressures.

As mentioned, Carlsson bases his discussions on the work of Gieryn, who was concerned with boundaries between science and “non-science” and the competition between social actors for intellectual authority (Gieryn, 1983; Carlsson, 2015, pp.3-5). Carlsson also links this to other work within sociology that is not focused merely on science, such as Bourdieu’s field theory, which views society as constructed through different fields that only exist in relation to one another (Carlsson, 2015, p.5; Waisbord, 2013, pp.12-13). The theoretical framework for this study, however, will primarily be based on Carlsson’s adaption of boundary work to journalism, which means studying either participants, practices or professionalism from the classic boundary work dimensions of *expansion* (inclusion of non-traditional journalists, embracing new practices and accepting new media as journalism), *expulsion* (rejection of deviant journalists, abnormal practices and abnormal norms and values) and *protection of autonomy* (exclusion of other “informational actors”, protection of own definitions and editorial control) (Carlsson, 2015, p.10; Gieryn, 1983, pp.791-792). In an analytical matrix (table 1) Carlsson includes the different dimensions of boundary work with the dimensions of journalism:

Table 1. “Forms of boundary work in journalism.” (from table 0.1 in Carlsson, 2015, p.10)

| | Participants | Practices | Professionalism |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Expansion</i> | Incorporating non-traditional journalists. | Taking over new media practices as acceptable. | Absorbing new media as acceptable journalism. |
| <i>Expulsion</i> | Expelling deviant actors. | Expelling deviant practices. | Expelling deviant forms and values. |
| <i>Protection of autonomy</i> | Keeping out non-journalistic informational actors. | Defense and ability to define correct practices. | Defense from non-professional outsiders. |

Carlsson explains it as follows:

... boundary work surrounding “Participants” involves placing lines separating journalists from non-journalists. But it also points to complex efforts to stratify actors both inside and outside of news. If the question at the heart of participants-based boundary work is “who is appropriate?”

then the basic question for the second column “Practices,” concerns “what is appropriate?” It is here the boundaries of acceptable newsgathering or distribution methods are set. (Carlsson, 2015, p.10)

Basically, ‘participants’ can refer both to acknowledging or dismissing who is a journalist and to classifying sources or valuing journalists dedicated to certain beats, genres or formats differently. In addition, ‘practices’ embody professional norms of neutrality, factuality, independence, detachment etc., and these two are both included in the third level of ‘professionalism’, which is all about establishing journalism as a distinct profession. Moreover, this thesis focuses on the column ‘participants’ and the boundaries surrounding NGOs in climate journalism, however, the other columns will also be discussed to some extent (see Section 5.3).

Additionally, most boundary research has focused on the dimension of ‘expulsion’ with for instance journalists disqualifying certain practices (Carlsson, 2015, p.11). Scholars have further been concerned with various forms of participation in the news making process, such as audiences engagement in digital media (Lewis, 2012) or efforts to differentiate between citizen- and professional journalists (Örnebring, 2013). The source-journalist relationship between Wikileaks and the newspapers the *Guardian* and *New York Times* is another example of boundary research concerning participants, where especially the *New York Times* emphasized Wikileaks’ lack of objectivity as a way of distancing themselves and excluding the website from journalism’s professional realm (Coddington, 2012; Carlsson, 2015, pp.11-12). Subsequently, it is exactly “the arguments for establishing - or erasing - divisions” which are the most interesting to uncover for boundary studies (Carlsson, 2015, p.12).

However, as most of these examples refer to ‘expulsion’, for NGO-journalist relations or even climate journalism it is most often the ‘expansion’ of boundaries that have been of interest as new norms, practices and participants can be embraced. This was discussed in the literature chapter with examples such as evolving conceptions on objectivity in journalism (Hiles & Hinnant, 2014), ‘coproduction’ networks at climate summits (Lück et al. 2016) or ‘hybrid’ media practices that link activists and journalists (Russell, 2013).

5. Methodology

This study has an emphasis on qualitative research and adopts a hermeneutic tradition with the focus on how journalists perceive and interpret their relationship with NGOs in/for climate

journalism, with the main method being semi-structured interviews with journalists and two environmental NGOs. In this chapter the sampling-, interview- and analytical method will be covered, as well as a section which discusses the methodology and ethics of the study.

5.1. Sampling/sample

This thesis mainly adopts a purposive sampling technique, with the research questions dictating the relevance of journalists and news media to include in the sample. According to Bryman (2012, pp.418-419) this is a common approach for qualitative research, but includes variations. The very first part of the sampling process was to choose the case or context to investigate the boundaries between journalists and NGOs, namely COP25 in Madrid. This case was chosen based on previous research on both climate journalism and NGO-journalist relations, where climate summits have been a common point of departure and a setting where these actors possibly interact more than usual. Hence, it can be classified as a “typical case” for the research area and, consequently, is a variation of purposive sampling called *typical case sampling* (ibid, p.19). Furthermore, when sampling news media and journalists there was mostly an approach of *criterion sampling*, following some specific criteria that were necessary for the relevance of participants (ibid). However, this also fits the *generic purposive sampling* model where criteria for sampling are informed by the RQ:s (ibid, p.422). There were criteria both for news media (see section 5.1.1) and for journalists (see section 5.1.2).

Additionally, there was an element of *snowball sampling* (Bryman, 2012, p.424), as some identified journalists proposed other relevant suggestions. The chosen NGOs were also an example of snowball sampling, since this choice was done based on information from the interviews with journalists. Namely, the organizations’ that were mentioned in journalists’ interview answers as contacts and sources during COP25 were the ones contacted for interviews later in the research process. This resulted in one representative from the Swedish branch of *World Wildlife Fund* (WWF) and one representative from *Greenpeace Sweden*, that both either were in contact with journalists during COP25 and/or worked with communication and advocacy at these organizations. They were contacted through emails and calls to their press centers.

5.1.1. Criteria for selection of news media

The primary criteria for choosing relevant news media were *size/reach* (national or regional outlets with a fairly large audience) and the *frequency in which they covered COP25*. These two will be detailed below.

However, a secondary criterion was also used, namely if the outlets had any *particular climate/environmental focus*. It was taken into account that the public broadcasting television *SVT*, commercial broadcasting channel *TV4* and tabloid/evening newspaper *Expressen* are all partners in a global initiative called “Covering Climate Now”, which includes more than 400 news outlets globally and was created to boost climate coverage worldwide (Covering Climate Now, 2020). *Expressen* further has its newly introduced climate newsroom (Somnell, 2019).

Size/reach

According to a 2019 report from the Swedish agency for print, radio and TV (MPRT, 2019, p.24), *SVT* and morning papers are the biggest platforms for news in the country, with *TV4*/public broadcasting radio *SR* and evening/tabloid newspapers being on a fairly equal percentage on third and fourth place. However, aside from social media and push notifications, the evening outlets were the biggest platform for a younger audience in the age group 15-25 years (ibid), which arguably is an important audience for the climate change issue. According to a 2017 Sifo investigation commissioned by *WWF*, climate change is the most important societal issue for young people in Sweden in the ages 16-25 (*WWF*, 2017). In addition, these larger media outlets are also important because it is more likely that they have covered COP25 at site – or at least had their own reporters on it – in contrast to smaller, local medias who possibly rely more on news distribution from the Swedish news agency *TT* for these types of news stories.

Coverage of COP25

When conducting a search in the database Retriever (previously “Mediaarkivet” in Swedish) of the key words “COP25” and “klimatmöte Madrid” (in Eng. "climate summit Madrid") in the time period October 30th to December 31st 2019 ³, you get an overview of the articles and broadcasts of the climate summit in Swedish media. However, it should be noted that it is not likely that all items are exclusively focused on the summit, but also include articles and broadcasts where the summit is merely mentioned. Nevertheless, the media with the most items are summarized in figure 1 below, whether in print press, TV/radio or web publications.

³ This time period of approximately two months was chosen because in the end of October/beginning of November, COP25 was announced to be held in Madrid, Spain, rather than Santiago, Chile, because of political protests and riots in the South American country (Löfvenberg & Blomdahl, 2019). The summit was further held between December 2nd and 13th. However, reports and analyses also occurred in the aftermath of the meeting – hence the whole month of December was deemed a central delimitation for this search as well.

The latter was further the medium with the most coverage, with 2934 news items that mentioned COP25/climate summit Madrid.

It should further be noted that the broadcasts of different programs/channels in the TV/radio categories are added together (except local ones) and counted as one figure for these outlets. Nevertheless, the morning studio at *SVT*, *Expressen TV* and *Aftonbladet TV* (both part of the web versions of each of these tabloid/evening newspapers) were in the lead. Moreover, *TT news agency* is dominant in print press, while the morning paper *Svenska Dagbladet* and the tabloid newspapers had the most coverage in web media. However for web media, regional newspapers also accounted for a significant number.

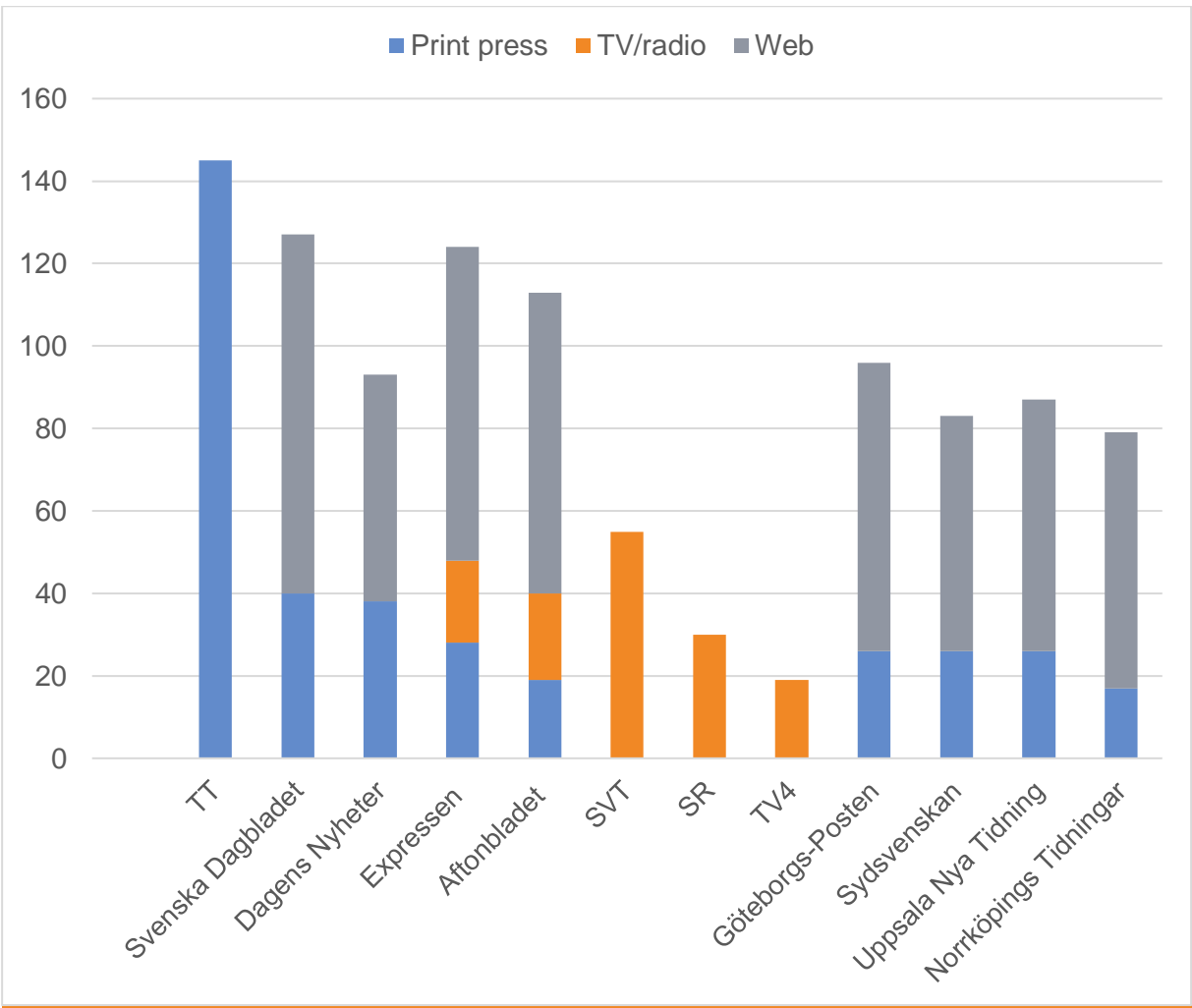


Figure 1. News items in Retriever in the time period 30th of October to 31st of December 2019, with the search words “COP25” and “climate summit Madrid.”

Consequently, I contacted 17 journalists in total from different national and regional news media in Sweden (including *TT news agency*). However, this also included two news media

not part of the figure above, namely business media *Dagens Industri* (DI) and the leftist newspaper *Dagens ETC*. Nevertheless, ten people responded, but three journalists declined immediately because of limited time or that they did not feel they had reported enough on COP25. In addition, two journalists first responded positively and later opted out before the interview because of different reasons (personal or not agreeing with the level of anonymity). Hence, in the end availability of journalists also played an important part in forming the sample.

The current sample consists of five journalists, one from *SVT*, as the biggest news platform and a public broadcasting outlet, one from *TV4* as a commercial broadcasting alternative (and also part of the Covering Climate Now initiative) and three from evening/tabloid newspapers *Aftonbladet* (1) and *Expressen* (2). Both papers were prominent in web and TV coverage of COP25 according to the search in Retriever and *Expressen* is also of further relevance because of its climate newsroom. Additionally, the editorials of these two newspapers are categorized as social democratic and liberal respectively.

5.1.2. Criteria for selection of journalists

The criteria for journalists are more directly connected to the research area of climate journalism than the choice of news media, where other factors such as size also played a significant part. The criteria for journalists were twofold; (i) they are titled climate/environmental/science reporters or correspondents and work regularly with reporting climate change; and/or (ii) they reported actively during COP25 on site in Madrid or through desk-reporting at home. The journalists were scouted through searching after articles/broadcasts of COP25 at the chosen news media's websites and then noting who the authors were, or through researching if the news media in question had specific journalists designated for climate change reporting.

The sample of five journalists include one environmental reporter at *SVT*, two climate reporters from the climate newsroom at *Expressen*, one political/societal reporter at *Aftonbladet* and one climate reporter from the science newsroom at *TV4*. They were all contacted via their professional emails or Twitter accounts.

5.2. Semi-structured online interviews

The research data consists of in-depth semi-structured interviews, with the interview guide or questionnaire being guided by the principles in McCracken's (1988) *The long interview*. In this, he advocates a semi-structured approach, that allows for open-ended questions but has a

predefined structure and string of questions in order to systematize the interview process and manufacture distance between the respondent and the interviewer (ibid, pp.24-25). This study is also focused on *respondent interviews* for the journalists, as it is their attitudes, interpretations and reasoning that are of interest (Esaïasson et al. 2017, p.271). However, the interviews with NGO representatives should be considered as more of *informant interviews*, because these were focused on information about the characteristics and practices of the two NGOs as entities (both during COP25 and in their interactions with the media in general) (Bryman, 2012, p.253). Hence, there was not a focus on the NGO representatives' individual views of their work, which is another approach possible to take for this type of study and which would be more focused on comparison between the practices and views of media officers at organizations and journalists. In this case the interviews with NGOs solemnly functioned as a counterbalance to journalists' testimonies about their practices in regards to NGOs as sources.

In addition, McCracken (1988, pp.24-25) also emphasized the importance of the context for ideas and conceptions of the interviewees, as these contexts usually are what foster individual interpretations. Hence, the questionnaire used for this thesis has also included questions about journalists' backgrounds and familiarity/closeness to the topic of climate change. This is also relevant because a previous study has demonstrated that the different media outlets or beats that the journalist work in will define possible coproduction or interaction with NGOs (Lück et al. 2016). Subsequently, the themes of the questionnaire for journalists include: (i) background; (ii) practices during COP25; (iii) using NGOs as sources; and (iv) views on NGOs and journalistic values (see Appendix i). For NGO representatives the themes are pretty similar: (i) background; (ii) practices during COP25; and (iii) relationship with media (see Appendix ii).

Moreover, the semi-structured interviews were conducted through online video calls, using tools such as Skype, Zoom and FaceTime (depending on the most suitable option for the respondents) and lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. They were further conducted in Swedish. Although face-to-face interviews are the most common for qualitative work, it is not uncommon taking to other means in order to adapt to the interviewees' situation or time (Stokes, 2013, p.118). James and Busher (2016, p.251) have argued that online interviews "are not any less authentic or truthful than offline," and what should guide a research project is its context and goals. The ability to conduct remote interviews has further been considered to provide flexibility and cost efficiency, as the sample can be geographically more diverse while travel expenses reduced (Weller, 2017, p.614). This flexibility was also necessary since

this study is conducted during the global pandemic of covid-19 when authorities recommend limiting social contacts and working from home where possible to decrease the spread of the virus (Public Health Agency of Sweden, 2020). Moreover, Weller (2017) went beyond focusing on the practicalities of using online video interviews and compared it with face-to-face meetings in regards to shaping a mutual understanding and connection so participants are comfortable and willing to share their ideas – which is central for qualitative research. However, she focused on longitudinal research where online interviews were a good way of staying in contact with the people in the study and follow up with interviews at different times in their lives. In contrast, my research design is cross-sectional and focused mainly on one interview moment at one point in time and where the relationship and conversation has to essentially be constructed at that one moment. Hence, establishing a comfortable and trusting relationship between researcher and participant is a slight challenge, but as at least journalists are used to interview situations themselves this was regarded less of a problem than for other respondents. Additionally, Weller actually found that remote interviews had advantages as they are considered more informal than physical meetings and the interviewees generally felt more relaxed and could be comfortable in their own environment (ibid, pp.618-619).

5.3. Analytical method

The analytical method for this thesis encompasses a process of coding and interpreting the material with a thematic analysis as outlined in Bryman (2012, pp.575-581). The coding process started with transcribing the interviews and then reading them thoroughly several times, marking sentences, expressions and words that highlight journalists’ descriptions of their practices reporting COP25 and their conceptions of NGOs as sources (connected directly to RQ1 and RQ2). In the interview transcripts for NGO representatives, communication practices and interactions with journalists were highlighted. This was later helpful when summarizing the material in schemes in Excel where respondents’ answers are concentrated in line with a suggested memos model in Esaiasson et al. (2017, p.280), demonstrated in table 2. In Excel, the different summaries were all positioned next to one another, making it easier to compare respondents’ answers.

Table 2. Scheme for summarizing transcripts (adapted from Esaiasson et al. 2017, p.280).

| |
|--------------------------------------|
| Respondent, date, interview question |
| Summary of the answer |

| |
|---|
| Relevant quotation |
| Researcher's individual comments, suggested codes/categories, comparisons |

Nevertheless, the coding approach faces criticism for the danger of losing the social context of answers when taking out bits and parts (Bryman, 2012, p.578). Hence, even though these summaries are helpful for analysis in detecting patterns and forming categories, it has been important to go back to the original transcripts at times in order to not assign the respondents interpretations that do not have sufficient arguments.

Furthermore, according to Bryman, the thematic analysis has been criticized for lacking an universal and developed systematic approach, yet it is an increasingly popular method in qualitative research. The themes are generally the broader categories identified in the transcripts related to the research focus and can be established through for example *repetitions* in the empirical material, *similarities and differences*, *missing data* (what has not been answered) and *theoretical concepts* (Bryman, 2012, pp.578-580). While there are other examples as well these are the main points of departure in this analysis.

To help systematize the process the themes were further informed and shaped by the theory of boundary work and Carlsson's (2015, p.10) matrix. The matrix is adapted to this thesis in table 3 and were operationalized as interview questions and analytical categories that focus on journalists' perceptions of NGOs, their interactions with them for journalistic practice, and professional norms guiding said practices. Consequently, although there is an emphasis on the first pillar of Carlsson's matrix in this study (participants), questions regarding professionalism and practices are difficult to separate completely, since journalists' relationship with NGOs as sources and participants in the news making process are part of their practices and influenced by their professional values. The operationalization of the matrix and theory of boundary work therefore include interview questions that also touch upon journalists' views on professional values such as neutrality and balance in climate journalism, as well as their views on journalism's impact in the climate debate. Interview questions that include descriptions of practices when reporting COP25 were also essential in order to understand journalists' interactions with different sources and attitudes towards NGOs for climate journalism.

Table 3. Boundary work in journalism with NGOs as participants (Carlsson, 2015, p.10).

| | Participants | Practices | Professionalism |
|-------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Expansion</i> | Incorporating non-traditional journalists. Example: collaboration with NGOs | Taking over new media practices as acceptable. | Absorbing new media as acceptable journalism. |
| <i>Expulsion</i> | Expelling deviant actors. Example: Clear distinctions are made, emphasis on NGOs as one source of many and who do not fulfill journalistic norms such as objectivity. | Expelling deviant practices. | Expelling deviant forms and values. |
| <i>Protection of autonomy</i> | Keeping out non-journalistic informational actors. Example: Journalists are careful towards NGOs' influences on the journalistic practice and product | Defense and ability to define correct practices. | Defense from non-professional outsiders. |

Already during the coding process in Excel, certain quotations or summarized answers are marked with colors green, red and yellow to represent the levels of expansion, expulsion and protection of autonomy from the matrix. If quotations and descriptions of the NGO-journalist interactions are particularly positive, describing or reflecting about similarities between the actors or dependency/collaboration these were marked as green (suggesting expansion in terms of boundaries). In contrast, when arguments were made of distinctions between the two in different ways, this was marked as red (suggesting expulsion or protection in terms of boundaries). Expulsion and protection were both colored red because these are considered to often be connected. The color yellow is used when there is an ambiguity or a mixture of the two. These identified boundaries then helped forming broader themes in terms of NGO-journalist relations when reporting climate change and COP25, especially in regards to the roles NGOs play in the journalistic practice and journalists perceptions of them as sources (RQ1 and RQ2).

5.4. Methodological and ethical discussions

5.4.1. Limitations

With any interview situation there is a potential issue that the interviewees may give answers to fit norms they think they should live up to and which do not necessarily reflect their actual

practices nor their true ideas and conceptions of the issues (Stokes, 2013, p.120). For example, in journalism studies there is research that showcases a gap between journalists' role conceptions and the role they take on in practice, often influenced by external constraints (Hanitzsch et al. 2019a, p.163). To have a better understanding of practices, combining interviews with participant observations (Stokes, 2013, p.120) and/or content analysis is a way to get around this issue. In this case, also conducting interviews with NGO representatives for their accounts was a way of forming a sort of middle ground of their actual relationship, albeit this was a secondary focus and journalists' attitudes and interpretations were the most important aspects. Subsequently, it is quite interesting in this case to unveil what journalists are saying about their practices and interactions with NGOs, because this suggests something about standard methods. The argument itself unveils what is considered important for quality journalism, as well as if there are ideas shifting or deviating from the norms.

A disadvantage regarding remote interviewing and video interviews is the limitation for the researcher to understand the context when not viewing the social settings of the participants (Weller, 2017, pp.618-619). However, this is not necessarily relevant in this case as I would have needed to be present at COP25 or in the newsrooms to observe the work environment for the journalists in order to gain that knowledge, which also was not a possibility for this study as it is conducted after the summit and during a global pandemic. Moreover, the flexibility of online interviews has proven to be an asset in these times and in accommodating journalists' busy schedule since interviews could be scheduled and rescheduled easily.

Another significant disadvantage of online video interviews, however, is potential technological difficulties, which can impact the quality of data if issues with internet connection or the tablet/application used for communication are present and distract from the conversation (Weller, 2017, p.620). Hence, setting up the interview so to avoid technical issues was an important priority, but this is nonetheless difficult to control if the respondents experience difficulties on their end.

5.4.2. Reliability and validity

Regarding the above discussion, unfortunately there were instances of technological issues in the end of one interview and in the beginning of another. While both times it was resolved quickly it distracted a little from the interview, and especially when respondents had to repeat an answer or got interrupted mid-sentence. This only happened for one and two questions respectively, but it is still possible that *reliability of the data* has been affected slightly, since

when repeating the response it is likely that the respondent shortened their original answer. Potential reflections might also have gotten lost when interrupted. Reliability generally refers to unsystematic mistakes, such as issues with transcriptions or misunderstandings in interviews (Esaiasson et al. 2017, p.64), which are more likely when answers are unclear due to issues with Internet connection. Nevertheless, as mentioned, respondents were asked to repeat their answer and these interruptions were included in the transcripts so to be aware when coding and analyzing.

However, reliability can also relate to the criterion of *replicability*, where *transparency* of choices and procedures are very important in order for other researchers to be able to repeat the study (Bryman, 2012, pp.46-47). In order to be transparent (other than detailing my choices and methods), the questionnaires applied are available in appendix i (journalist interviews) and ii (NGO interviews). Additionally, there is an issue with replicability for qualitative studies because interpretation is a key part of the process, where the researchers themselves are a tool for data collection and analysis. This means that the researcher's own experiences and knowledge most likely influence the results, as another researcher might interpret the data differently even with the same procedures (McCracken, 1988, pp.18-19). Nevertheless, the use of theory to interpret the data is a way to systematize it and not overtly relying on individual experiences for interpretations.

The use of theory also relates to *validity* in terms of how well theory is being translated, or operationalized, to the empirical indicators (Esaiasson et al. 2017, pp.59-61; Bryman, 2012, p.47). This is of course challenging, because journalistic boundaries are not obvious and what is acceptable practices and considered professional journalism can differ between cultural contexts (Hanitzsch et al. 2019b). Nevertheless, to particularly address journalists' 'perceptions' or 'attitudes' towards NGOs and 'descriptions of practices' covering COP25 and climate journalism in general are still relevant for how boundaries of what constitutes as journalism are considered surrounding NGOs as a participant in the journalistic process. The translation of the dimensions 'expansion,' 'expulsion,' and 'protection of autonomy' is further informed by Carlsson's matrix and previous research on boundary work and NGO-journalist relations.

Moreover, the representativeness of the sample can also be discussed. There are significant news media that are absent in my sample, such as *SR* (radio) or *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (morning newspapers). Arguably, *SR* belongs to public service which is represented in the study although it offers another medium. However, the perspectives from journalists working for the morning papers would have strengthened the sample since this is an

established and important print and web media. The same goes for business media, which likely could have had a different focus when reporting from COP25 and perhaps different attitudes towards NGOs. Yet the sample still includes representations from different types of media (i.e. public service and commercial TV, and tabloid/evening press) as well as different mediums (TV and newspapers), which makes it valuable for comparison.

In relation, *external validity* generally refers to the possibility to generalize the findings to a larger population or across social contexts, which is often an issue for qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, p.390). Although the results from this sample is not representative for generalization – and certainly not for journalists reporting about COPs on a global scale – the focus on Sweden and national/regional newspapers and mainly climate journalists already constitute a quite small group of people. Consequently, it still makes this slightly smaller sample and study valuable in comprehending the attitudes and ideas of these particular journalists in this particular media context. In fact, Hanitzsch et al. (2019b) have convincingly argued for the cultural contexts importance for how journalists interpret and understand their work. Hence, this study can be viewed as a small contribution addressing questions of boundaries between NGOs and journalists in climate journalism in Sweden. For further research, it would be important with studies that have a broader base of journalists and/or a comparative focus (how journalists across media systems and cultures interact with NGOs when reporting COPs or climate change stories). Additionally, with a larger sample within Sweden or another cultural context/media system, it would also be interesting to compare more extensively journalists who work for different beats and their conceptions of sources and news production.

5.4.3. Ethics

The ethical principles for social research generally include (i) harm to participants; (ii) lack of informed consent; (iii) invasion of privacy; and (iv) deception (Bryman, 2012, p.134). While this study does not handle a particularly sensitive topic (NGO-journalist relations) nor sensitive information (attitudes/interpretations regarding work practices and sources, and not any personal information), this should still be accounted for as these are all important principles for this study. For instance, a letter of information has been sent out before any interview stating the purpose with the study (transparency, avoiding deception), handling and storage of data and the rights of participants, with contact information to the student/researcher, supervisor, university and the data protection agency (See appendix iii). The consent has been stated in a written email by the respondent and later repeated orally in

the beginning of the interview when the interviewer repeated the purpose of the study and asked for permission to start recording. Confidentiality of records has also been important, which are being stored locally and not through any third parties on commerce cloud outside the university. The keeping of records (referring to recordings of interviews, transcripts, names and contacts) is further restricted to a limited time period, following GDPR guidelines. However, anonymity has not been promised, rather it was stated in the information letter which respondents consented to that the participants will receive pseudonyms in transcripts and the written results (respondent A, B, C... etc.), but titles such as environmental reporter have been disclosed and news organizations or NGO mentioned by name. Hence, it is possible to identify the participants, but their quotes are still only referred to by pseudonyms and any potential harm personally or professionally derived from the study is deemed unlikely. Nevertheless, any sensitive material in the recordings/transcripts were considered carefully (such as personal details). This also intersects with the issue of privacy as any potential personal details of respondents not related to their professional roles as journalists are not disclosed in any way in the thesis. The same goes for the NGO representatives, although their interviews were focused to a larger degree on the practices of their respective organizations rather than their individual attitudes and opinions.

6. Analysis/Discussion

In this analysis I will first discuss a few points about reporting climate change/COPs in general (6.1) and after that focus specifically on NGO-journalist relations within climate journalism. I have categorized the latter in four different themes; (6.2) *dependency*; (6.3) *established and professional source*; (6.4) *partnering watchdog*; and (6.5) *agenda-driven and powerful player*. This is based especially on journalists' views and arguments of what role NGOs can be assigned in and for climate journalism, sometimes countered or supported with the testimonies from NGO representatives. However, most often interviewees would not stick to one role throughout the interview, rather these roles could exist together and overlap with one another. This is also referring to Carlsson's (2015, p.12) discussion on his matrix of boundary work in journalism and the fact that "to explain boundaries, this matrix creates boundaries," which is essentially what these themes do as well. They are not static, but conceptualize different interactions or views which can also transcend one another.

Moreover, the respondents are termed with letters A-E and are from interviews with journalists while informants 1 and 2 are representatives from Swedish *WWF* and *Greenpeace Sweden*.

6.1. Reporting climate change and COP25

Firstly, three out of five interviewed journalists were on site in Madrid covering the COP25 summit. Two were covering from their desks at home, but one of these respondents still stated COP25 to be their climate newsrooms “biggest story” (Respondent B). In contrast, neither of the two NGO representatives interviewed were at the summit but the organizations still had international teams on site with one or no colleagues from Sweden present. The fact that the majority of journalists interviewed were in Madrid, however, can be an indicator of the news value of reporting climate summits, as it requires dedication of more resources to have journalists on site rather than covering from home or using news agencies (Nossek & Kunelius, 2019, pp.75-76). Yet, COP25 was termed an “in between year” (Respondent C) where more technical details were discussed and there was not an expectation of big decisions regarding ambition levels, which rather would suggest it having a lesser news value. Subsequently, the technical character of the summit was also considered a challenge in finding an angle and making the summit interesting for the audience. One journalist working for TV particularly emphasized the importance in describing the bigger picture of the meeting and especially journalists from tabloid/evening papers said that they would sometimes approach the meeting by looking for tensions, such as to perhaps find countries that resist or disagree with the general international community, hence valuing an element of conflict and dramatization in the reporting. It was also mentioned that it was important to explain the decisions and events for the audience and to make a connection to the Swedish context. A further technique to make the summit interesting was to use interesting profiles as a kind of vessel to report the issues:

I think it was pretty difficult to create interest for such detailed issues, then you almost need someone who says something - well like Greta Thunberg for example. (Respondent C) ⁴

Greta Thunberg and the ‘Fridays for future’ movement were not discussed in all interviews, but when it was brought up journalists generally considered the movement to have had a profound impact in making the climate issue an interesting and prioritized topic. One

⁴ All quotes are translated from Swedish to English, however, all participants in the study have had the opportunity to read their translated quotes and confirm them before publication.

respondent also had as one main goal at COP25 to interview Greta and another said that their newsroom regularly covers the global climate protests.

Noteworthy, but not surprising, is also that all journalists would give examples of standard journalistic methods and emphasize their importance, which included such things as verifying all facts and claims, no matter where they came from and usually balancing the stories with two opposing or several different perspectives and voices. Values such as factuality and independence were also indicated. However, even though balance was the most common to declare as a key journalistic method, aspects of objectivity and neutrality were still variously discussed in the interviews and there were instances where journalists' appeared to consider the climate change issue to push these boundaries slightly. For instance, one respondent explicitly discussed how they considered the climate- and environmental debate to be different from other political issues:

I think it's difficult defining neutrality sometimes. I mean as a political reporter you often present "on the one hand, on the other hand," but if you cover a big climate summit there's a kind of consensus about what the big challenge is, what the end goal is, where the countries want to go ... The climate- and environmental issue is interesting, because of course there's a political discussion about how to reach these end goals, but most people agree on what the goals are. (Respondent D)

The suggestion of a general consensus regarding the science of anthropogenic climate change and the severity of the issue was mentioned in another interview as well and this can also modify how journalists sometimes treat balance in a news story:

But if you report pretty dry facts from a new investigation perhaps you don't have to search for critical voices every time in the same way as in other issues. Because well, it's disclosing facts and you don't have to let climate sceptics have a voice in every article. (Respondent C)

Hence, the respondent suggests that they do not always include critical voices in news stories which are mainly focused on sharing new research on climate change. This answer suggests the journalist to have some degree of professional reflexivity with adapting methods and professional norms to the character of the climate change issue, as objectivity in terms of balance can be altered in favor of factual reporting that prioritizes scientific evidence. This also fits well with previous research on how climate journalists in other countries have evolved their standards of objectivity (Hiles & Hinnant, 2014; Brüggemann & Essinger, 2016) and is an example of how standard practices can be redefined, pushing and expanding professional boundaries (Carlsson, 2015). One respondent further mentioned that the

legitimacy of being in contact and include sources that pursue advocacy work perhaps is different when reporting climate change compared to other issues:

Well like with your topic, that you sit and are in contact with advocacy organizations which in other political issues might be viewed more controversial. I can't really think of an example, but I do believe it isn't really the same way when it comes to environmental- or climate issues. (Respondent D)

These reflections from the respondent suggest that contact with NGOs is more frequent and normalized for climate change coverage than other beats or topics, albeit this is not confirmed in the other interviews. The inclination to more often use advocacy organizations can also be related to objectivity discussions, such as discussed by Rhaman (2012) with the concept of 'advocacy journalism,' whereas one dimension is to give space in news coverage for the arguments and causes of civil society groups. Nevertheless, not all journalists stated a kind of reflexivity when it comes to professional norms:

I try not to view it any different than when reporting other issues. The most important thing is impact neutrality, give space to all sides, verify all tip-offs. That's the same journalistic method albeit on an issue which is always highly interesting and always extremely examined. (Respondent B)

In this case norms of neutrality and balance are at the core of journalistic practice and should not be altered or considered differently because of the climate change issue.

Another aspect of neutrality or objectivity is detachment. This was rarely explicitly discussed in the interviews with journalists, but rather mentioned in what role journalism was perceived to have in the climate debate. There is a general agreement that journalism play an important part in informing and educating the public on the issue, including what politicians are doing about it (Respondent E), which in turn has a democratic purpose as the audience can be informed citizens and voters. However, some journalists set up boundaries for what the purpose of journalism is compared to other actors or institutions by refraining from normative action and advocacy of any kind:

I believe we as journalists in this, our role is not necessarily to come with answers and say "this is what you should do," because that's the politicians' task. Our job is to explain for the readers and viewers what's going on, why this issue is so important, what the countries are doing, what'll happen in ten years. That's a completely sufficient task, there's enough to do. (Respondent B)

Yet this does not mean indifference towards the climate change issue nor that journalism is not considered to have an impact, as public knowledge can be important for engaging change. One journalist further reflected about how frustration can be a driving force in their work:

A lot of things are freaking upsetting and of course I'm also driven by that. When you see there's a risk that the corals might disappear or forestry business that cut down primeval forest in Norrland that have been standing for centuries untouched. Of course that's upsetting and that's a driving force for me to report it. But I think that if it interests and upsets me, then it'll also interest other people.
(Respondent A)

For this journalist, neutrality and objectivity seemed to be dependent on the journalistic methods, such as using trustworthy sources and balancing the news content and did not necessarily mean complete detachment from the issues. This also suggests a kind of reflexive approach to journalism (Kunelius, 2019, p.219), although it does not really change the actual practices.

6.2. Dependency on NGOs at COPs

Previous research has demonstrated that journalists often tend to rely on official sources at climate summits (Wozniak et al. 2017; Nossek & Kunelius, 2012, pp.72-77; Comfort, Tandoc and Gruszczynski, 2020). Subsequently, the first source mentioned in the interviews when reporting COP25 generally was official sources and most often it was the Swedish delegation (representatives from the government, negotiators) present at the summit in Madrid, which had briefings on the negotiations almost every day. Moreover, journalists not on site but reporting from Sweden also mentioned following the output from international news agencies and being present in social media channels for keeping track of the summit. When reporting from a distance one respondent said that the official sources are the primary ones because it is important that the information is correct, as the goal is then not to “break” a news story about for instance a decision at the summit, but to rather be quick taking that information and contextualize and explain it for their audience in Sweden (Respondent B). Nevertheless, NGOs were often offered as a secondary go-to source for information about the negotiations and happenings at the summit both through social media and when at the summit:

I would say that all parts of the UN and EU that have something to do with climate and have their own [social media] accounts are crucial ... But also all large non-governmental organizations like World Wildlife Fund, Naturskyddsföreningen, Greenpeace ... All those who are truly global giants.
(Respondent B)

A lot comes from the Swedish delegation, that's always a great source. Then there's always good NGOs and you know over the years which ones have the best access to negotiators and to what actually goes on in closed meetings. (Respondent E)

This last quote was a factor usually mentioned by the journalists that were at the summit; that NGOs had a more direct insight to the actual negotiations than themselves since they were either observers during some meetings or, as one respondent mentioned, could have another access to the Swedish delegation than journalists through for example receiving briefings from them directly (Respondent E). This suggested a kind of necessary relationship with NGOs during COPs:

Some [meetings] are completely closed for the media, others are opened not so much to the media but for observers - NGOs and others get to take part. So they often become the media's extended arm in a way. (Respondent A)

Hence, another important source for journalists was NGOs own press briefings, which were usually a daily occurrence as well. These press briefings were considered useful, but there were also different levels of skepticism for sometimes acquiring information that way:

Another important source is this Climate Action Network, a kind of umbrella organization that gathers many different environmental organizations around the world. They have on both the two summits I've attended had daily press briefings where they summarize their most important messages. (Respondent C)

NGOs and the environmental movement have every day different press meetings that partly is about making themselves available to the media, but also to share the latest news in the negotiations ... If you attend them you'll at least get their view of it, which you of course have to interpret based on that it's the environmental movement who has listened and it's their version of everything, because as I said they're always critical. (Respondent A)

While the first quote above is more neutral or even quite positive towards NGOs' press briefings as a way to gather information by terming them an important source, the second quote suggests a bit of reluctance to rely on a secondary source. Possibly because when having access to the negotiations NGOs can act as a kind of gatekeeper, filtering the news before it reaches the journalists – which usually is the journalist's job and this intersects with their autonomy and authority to interpret what the news are. A critical approach can therefore also be viewed as a protective measure, protecting journalists' role as the sole interpreter

(Carlsson, 2015), albeit to be fair it is also a general journalistic method. In contrast, the countries' own press briefings are described as "coming directly from the horse's mouth" (Respondent A) as they are part of the meetings and their standpoints are more often the actual news stories. The same respondent later reflected on this as a kind of dependency when asked if they used NGOs more during these summits than other circumstances:

I don't really know ... At these summits journalists are pretty, not dependent on ... but you still can make a lot of use of environmental organizations because they have access to these meetings and sit in on many negotiations. And that makes you dependent on them in some ways, at least to paint half the picture. (Respondent A)

Additionally, while some of the journalists in Madrid would say that they use NGOs more during COPs than perhaps other times because of their accessibility at the summits (Respondent C), or at least more intensely in that short time frame (Respondent E), the journalists that were not in Madrid but reporting from home did not agree that they used NGOs more or less during the summit:

No not really. We kind of have a continuous dialogue with them I'd say. I don't think we had any more contact than other times. (Respondent D)

The NGO representative from *WWF* also agreed that they were more in contact with journalists during these summits, but further considered COPs to be less important these days for them to push climate issues on the media's agenda. This is because newsrooms now dedicate more resources to climate journalism and consequently, the general interest for climate related news stories has increased. Nevertheless, climate summits possibly offer a setting where interactions with NGOs become more common and even necessary for journalists as a method to gather information about the proceedings. NGOs also tend to arrange different events apart from the meetings, which can vary from being demonstrations and protests to workshops or meetings with different actors at the summit.

We try to get journalists' attention for these side events too. That's just as much our purpose as the actual negotiations. (Informant 1)

These were rarely considered newsworthy by journalists however, but it was mentioned in one or two interviews that the "happenings" would present good photo opportunities:

That works for TV, you need a little bit of that. Even if it's not the main act in a segment you can include a few images that illustrate the environmental movement ... or someone doing a show or

something. But that's not ... That's more a splash of color in everything. (Respondent A)

Wozniak et al. (2017, p.1445) found that NGOs were more successful in being represented in the visual coverage of climate summits than in being quoted in articles and segments. This is also indicated by the journalist above, although not possible to confirm without a content analysis of the COP25 coverage. Subsequently, these events may answer to journalistic criteria of an “happening” to a larger degree than the negotiations (ibid) and will create more interesting visuals of COPs. However, as stated above it is mostly an addition and never the main attraction during these summits. It is further an example of how NGOs follow a “journalistic logic” (Waisbord, 2011) to gain attention for their causes and demonstrates that it is journalists who still determine their news value and acceptable participation.

Nevertheless, journalists rely on NGOs at climate summits to different degrees, as they are both helpful for information about the proceedings and can create opportunities for engaging photos. This is a practical and mostly neutral relationship. It can perhaps be viewed as expansive in terms of Carlsson's (2015, p.10) matrix on boundary work in that NGOs play a central role in the COP setting and can therefore be incorporated in the news making process, but it still generally lacked strong arguments of either expulsion nor expansion of boundaries. However, it invoked some degree of protection of autonomy as journalists emphasized that press briefings and information from NGOs were only pieces of the puzzle to find and create a news story, keeping some distance between themselves and the information provided by NGOs.

6.3. NGOs as experts and an established source

The most common and agreed upon role of NGOs for climate journalism is that they are a valuable and knowledgeable source. Albeit they are also stated to be important for comments, it is their expertise of the topics which is repeatedly mentioned.

I think they're a really good and valuable contact. They're truly needed ... They're somewhere between the scientific world and policymakers, or not between, but there's like three pillars. And they're valuable for comments, for exchanging ideas with, for background information. So I'd say they're very important. (Respondent C)

This comment certainly indicates that environmental NGOs have established themselves as an authoritative voice and legitimate source for climate journalism and even an institution in their own right, since they are being positioned next to policymakers (which generally is a prioritized source) and scientists. However, because NGOs are somewhat heterogeneous,

journalists considered some criteria for what organizations they would mostly use. For instance, they tended to distinguish between more professionalized NGOs and the ‘Fridays for future’ activist movement, where the former was considered to be more of a technical expert and the youth environmental movement to be more emotionally driven.

Now we have this youth movement to a larger degree, but these traditional environmental organizations kind of ... They have their agenda and things they want to push for, but they’re often pretty balanced in their criticism. Naturskyddsforeningen carries out a lot of investigations and compiles reports. There’s often a pretty solid scientific base, which means there’s not that much emotion. (Respondent D)

In this case NGOs are almost considered apolitical in comparison to the social movements and embody journalistic values of factuality and evidence and even objectivity to a degree because it is the investigations they produce that is of value. This also aligns with research conducted in Norway that suggested that NGOs who are expert oriented and focused on producing knowledge are the ones who have appeared more frequently in the media in later years (Krøvel, 2012). This might be an important factor for the validity of using NGOs for comments, but one NGO representative considered it being less common in later years for journalists to use them purely for educational purposes.

In some ways certain contacts might have decreased, regarding questions and purely acquiring knowledge. On a basic level [journalists] can deliver columns and much else now on their own, without being in contact with environmental organizations but through having that level of knowledge themselves. (Informant 1)

This informant referred this especially to the group of climate journalists working extensively covering climate change and the fact that they are themselves knowledgeable on the issues and do not need NGOs for that purpose. However, it is also interesting that the informant noted this to result in journalists’ pursuing more interpretative reporting by producing columns or analyses that can require more subjectivity.

Moreover, other criteria for the validity of organizations were their size and if they were established in society. Organizations were considered to be more dependable if they have had a long history working with the issues and had nurtured “credibility” (Respondent D).

Interestingly, international organizations were also emphasized:

The bigger, the better. That’s how it is, partly because there’re more people who know about them, they have a stronger brand. Greenpeace is a stronger brand than Naturskyddsforeningen for example because Greenpeace is more international. (Respondent B)

Despite this assertion, the report on Swedish media coverage of the climate issue in 2019 found that the most frequently quoted NGO source was the chairman of Naturskyddsföreningen (Vi-skogen, 2020, p.14), which rather suggests national actors and a national news frame to be dominant. The informant from Greenpeace also considered that they got more coverage when they were working with something in Sweden than for global campaigns (Informant 2). Nevertheless, that international/global organizations are regarded to have more credibility is probably related to the growth of NGOs as part of the globalization process and their status in especially international politics (Fenton, 2010). It is also argued by Powers (2015b, p.193) that it is foremost NGOs' legitimacy in the political landscape that determine their news value as this is being mirrored by journalists in including these organizations in the debate and accepting their information materials. This political significance of environmental NGOs is also mentioned by one journalist in relation to an article they had written on EU-politics and lobbying in Brussels:

All politicians I talked to, no matter what political party, said the same thing – that the environmental NGOs have such momentum right now. Everyone wants to meet them, everyone wants it to be known publicly that “we have Greenpeace with us” or “we have WWF with us” or whatever it may be. (Respondent B)

Both NGO representatives also considered the mere increase in climate coverage in general to be the main factor for them having it easier to push climate stories on journalists and attain more attention in the media. Hence, NGOs as influential sources and possible participants in constructing news might be partly because of their professionalization and status in the political landscape and partly because of the climate change issue being on the media's agenda.⁵ Nevertheless, to use international NGOs also had a practical implication during COP25:

You check with several different ones, but it's probably the biggest and most influential environmental organizations that have the best sources. Especially the large international ones, because they have representatives who know delegates from both developed and developing countries, and it's very important in these negotiations to get both sides. (Respondent E)

In this case NGOs are valuable because of global networks that result in contacts from different countries, which was also mentioned in one other interview. The journalist quoted

⁵ It should be noted that the priority of climate change issues has taken a hit during the pandemic of covid-19 as several climate journalists witnessed to having to redirect their focus and report the pandemic instead of climate change. However, this is not a subject for this thesis and will therefore not be discussed here.

above however, especially emphasized this importance of not only communicating the view of the Swedish delegation but the need to talk to negotiators from other countries and consult with foreign colleagues since they have their own sources. This commonly also occur in corridors and informal settings, including interactions with NGOs (Respondent A; Respondent E). Nevertheless, these methods highlight that climate change is a transnational issue, which means it also cuts through journalism as a mainly national practice (Kunelius, 2019, pp.219-220). In this context, the larger global NGOs have an advantage because they already work transnationally and have better access to information from different parts of the globe. Nevertheless, another journalist emphasized the importance of connecting the climate change issue and COP25 to their audience and to Sweden for it to be relevant (Respondent B), rather focusing on domestication as a news value than transnationality.

Moreover, the interactions between organizations and journalists are both described as mutual and mostly one-sided. The prior was more common and considered in that both NGOs reach out with comments on decisions at COPs and generally inform journalists about activities and new report releases, as well as that journalists can contact NGOs for their views and comments on different matters.

They contact me when they want me to bring attention to their message and I contact them when I want to milk them for information. So it's pretty mutual, you could say. But it's not always I pick up on their propositions, it depends on the news situation, what you have time and opportunity to do, and the news value of course. (Respondent E)

Even though interactions are considered mutual, here the journalist also asserts that they have the final say in determining the news value. This was also mentioned by Powers (2015b, p.194) that “while the boundaries of journalism have expanded to include NGOs as legitimate news providers, it is not the case that journalists mechanically accept and use NGO information materials.” Not all information provided by NGOs will be picked up by journalists despite their credibility, but in the end journalists exercise control over their boundaries and what is included and not (ibid). One journalist emphasized this even more with it most often being NGOs that reach out than the other way around:

[I'm] most often contacted, absolutely. They're good at reaching out, they have very competent press people almost all of them and they know who works with these issues. It's not just me, it's my colleagues and climate reporters in other newsrooms. I think it's a good thing because you often receive news suggestions or perspectives from them, and it's also worthwhile to have a dialogue with that part of society. But I'd almost say that it's just as common to have a company as an NGO reaching out and wanting to share something good they've done. (Respondent B)

This quote is interesting because it demonstrates a few different things. Firstly, NGOs contact journalists who in turn evaluate the information they are given. The relationship is not cyclical or mutual, but goes most often in one direction. This is the same as with any other source that might have a PR interest. Although other respondents said the interactions were more mutual, there were several other cases of pointing out that NGOs are just one source, one perspective out of many, and hence holding them at an arm's length. Secondly, NGOs and the interactions are considered professional. This was also brought up by the NGO representatives interviewed; that there are professional routines on their part when presenting information to journalists (press releases mostly) and established channels for journalists to go through via their press centers and press officers. Although one representative also suggested that some interactions can be more informal, especially if the media officer is a former journalist and have contacts that way (Informant 2). The representatives were also knowledgeable of who the journalists working with climate issues are, and always assess before COPs which journalists are likely to be present. Third, the attitude of the journalist in the quote is quite positive as NGOs are considered to provide useful information and be an important channel for dialogue.

Generally it summarizes this role conception pretty well, as NGOs are viewed as one valuable and professional source and as legitimate actors in climate change or global news. Yet, journalists maintain control over boundaries with assessing when NGOs' information materials are relevant and not, rather than it being a collaborative effort. As a result the expansive effects are limited (Carlsson, 2015, p.10).

6.4. NGOs as a partnering watchdog?

One of the most expansive role conceptions is when NGOs are discussed as intersecting with the purpose of journalism itself. This, however, is also debated, but one considered purpose is to act as a watchdog and monitor people, businesses and institutions in power. For this purpose, climate journalists can also be considered to be advocates for the vulnerable of climate change's effects (Rhaman, 2012, p.146), not unlike the purpose of most environmental NGOs. One journalist reflected on the similarities with NGOs and that organizations and journalists both have a critical approach towards for instance politicians' promises, and that therefore there might be viewers or readers who assume journalists to "take the side of the environmental movement" because their approach towards the climate issue coincide (Respondent A). The respondent further argued:

But that's also one of the purposes of journalism, to monitor injustices and issues - which is often what organizations' also emphasize. (Respondent A)

Also the purpose to convey public information can be linked to that of NGOs as another respondent discussed when answering what can be challenging when they used NGOs as a source in their work:

I guess it's that they kind of have their agenda, or what you call it. But then we also have a sort of similar goal as a news medium to report climate- and environmental issues, to highlight these issues and attract attention and interest for them. (Respondent D)

This is similar to the argument of an NGO representative who considered media coverage and attention to climate change issues to be an important part of their advocacy strategies:

One of our main tools and ideas about how change happen is that the media is an important part and that these issues have to be debated and discussed and covered in the media. (Informant 2)

Moreover, there are definitely a few collaborative tendencies mentioned in some of the interviews. For instance that journalists can call NGOs as a preparation before climate summits to hear what they think is important and interesting to keep track of. One respondent said that this kind of interaction perhaps would not be visible in the final news products in the same way as contact for comments would (Respondent C). This also means that NGOs can be assisting journalists in their role as watchdogs. Another example is that journalists mentioned that NGOs would make them aware of issues or political decisions or other potential news stories:

Then I think they sometimes contribute with keeping you up to date with relevant issues, that they get in touch about "next week this will reach a decision" or "now there's an investigation about this." They help you keep track a little on what's going on. (Respondent A)

This investigative assistance can likely be an asset when journalists work under time and resource constraints. Moreover, another element to this is the role environmental NGOs usually play in a segment or article, which is to be the critical party. This was especially mentioned by the same respondent as above, but echoed in most interviews.

To create a story with conflict you usually need a critic and that's often the environmental movement. They rarely occupy the other role, that they're questioned and criticized. Which perhaps is a little bit of a problem ... Even if you ask critical questions and have a critical attitude towards

them, essentially they still contribute as the role of the critic in the segment or article. (Respondent A)

To use critical voices is a common method as an element of conflict can be a way to organize a news story, however it is also possible that when journalists cannot explicitly be the critics NGOs can fill this void through the space given in the article or segment (Rhaman, 2012, p.148). This still fulfills journalistic values of balance and neutrality, but may create a news frame that have elements of advocacy for a particular cause. The journalist also points out that it is rare that NGOs themselves are critically monitored, differentiating them from other actors and institutions in society and rather positioning them closer to journalism. However, there is a reluctance here too since the journalist views this as problematic.

Moreover, the journalists who reflected about the different similarities with NGOs were also inclined to point out the differences, such as that journalists do not push any agenda or advocate particular action.

6.5. Agenda-driven powerful players

Lastly, all journalists stated at least once in their interviews that NGOs have a particular agenda and advocate purpose, which always needs to be considered and positioned against the information provided. Although it appeared to be a routine answer, one respondent especially viewed this to limit the usefulness of information materials from NGOs:

If [NGOs] aren't directly involved in the news story then they're not anyone we'd contact because we don't view them as an independent expert. We view them as having an agenda they pursue and that's important to remember. If we're looking for independent experts then there's researchers or maybe experts at ministries. You can absolutely interview someone from Greenpeace or Naturskyddsforeningen, but it has to be clear where this person comes from, and that it's an organization which advocates certain issues and pursue lobbying and have a lot of contact with politicians. (Respondent B)

These arguments are more on the line to expulsion, as boundaries are being drawn and NGOs and their information material are excluded from the professional realm of journalism since they do not live up to its values and norms, such as neutrality and independence (Carlsson, 2015). Activities can be considered to be PR and then journalists decline to use the information provided (Respondent A). Related is also that NGOs are viewed as having a simplified approach to the issues and during COPs.

The environmental movement is always unhappy and frustrated at these places, for them everything

is always moving too slow and everything's just bad. That's their fundamental attitude. (Respondent A)

This is also something which separates them from journalists, since journalists are required to cover all different views and perspectives on an issue:

Environmental NGOs direct very harsh criticism against businesses or politicians or individuals or whatever it may be. And it's important to not just buy into it uncritically but seek [the opinion of] all involved ... Because most often the picture is, unfortunately, more complicated than what environmental organizations, businesses or politicians have an interest in sharing. And it's our job to also complicate the picture. (Respondent B)

The journalist is therefore more of a neutral and independent conveyer of information that include all sides in the climate debate, while NGOs occupy one of these sides and usually in a critical manner (almost considered to a default in these last two quotes). However, this does not negate NGOs status in the political landscape, as they are rather considered to be a powerful player, just like "multinational corporations or renowned policymakers" (Respondent B), and also have to be treated accordingly:

Journalism has to give as true a picture as possible so the public knows if they should trust their politicians on this issue or not - and the environmental NGOs too. They're also big players in climate- and environmental contexts, and I have to have a critical approach to them as well. That's important for me to cultivate trust with the audience. (Respondent E)

However, the emphasis on NGOs as non-objective and agenda-driven does separate and differentiate them from journalists, which demonstrate arguments of expulsion (Carlsson, 2015, pp.11-12).

7. Results

The journalists in this study demonstrate different conceptions of the roles NGOs can play for climate journalism. These roles are described in the four themes outlined in this thesis, namely: *dependency*; *established source*; *partnering watchdog*; and *agenda-driven player*. The first two are the most practically oriented, as NGOs provide services and information at COPs and in general which can be useful for journalists. Although dependency can suggest that NGOs have the upper hand in the relationship, this is not the case as organizations were as dependent on journalists and the media for parts of their advocacy work and often tailored their information to be more accessible for journalists, such as arranging events and provide

new investigations. It was also not the case that journalists had to rely on the information from NGOs press briefings or contacts with negotiators during COPs, but it was considered a practical tool. Moreover, NGOs' insight into the proceedings at COPs, their status in international politics and expertise in the climate issue appear to have helped establish them as a valuable and sometimes newsworthy source, but they are still seconded to official voices in climate news. Even among NGOs the larger, professionalized and global organizations were preferred. Albeit these global organizations consist of and participate in transnational networks that may reach the grassroots, it is still the NGOs furthest from the looser activist structures that are considered to have the most credibility (despite the success of 'Fridays for future'). This follows a media or journalistic logic rather than challenge it, just like many researchers have concluded before (Fenton, 2010; Waisbord, 2011; Powers, 2015a). Additionally, although journalists could be critical towards NGOs interpretations of the summit and their criticism towards various actors, their attitude was mostly one of practicality; that NGOs were a knowledgeable and professional source in these contexts and therefore could be useful for both comments and for attaining information.

This practical view (inherent in both the roles of *dependency* and *established source*) was the most commonly expressed by journalists, however, the other two roles of *partnering watchdog* and *agenda-driven player* are still recurring in the interviews and fairly interesting because they border more on either collaboration with or rejection of NGOs – and hence, expansion or expulsion in terms of Carlsson's matrix on boundary work (Carlsson, 2015, p.10). Nevertheless, the third role of *partnering watchdog* was the least explicit one and the least mentioned. There were pieces of it in most interviews, such as having a dialogue with NGOs and receiving suggestions and information on political processes and things going on surrounding the climate issue. However, only two journalists discussed shared purposes between climate journalism and environmental NGOs – namely to monitor politics and people in power to unveil injustices and inform the public on climate change issues. These arguments certainly pose journalists and NGOs in close relation to one another and as institutions in society. It further suggests NGOs to be important participants in the journalistic process (especially for journalism as a watchdog), deconstructing institutional boundaries. However this can be positioned against the fourth and final role of NGOs which was the agenda-driven lobbyist, where journalists are rather marking clear lines between themselves and organizations in terms of purposes and practices. This distinction was clearly important for journalists to make because it was always present to different degrees in the interviews – and

it suggests that while using NGOs as information providers can be practical, journalistic methods and norms still require a certain level of distance.

It is further interesting that both these roles that encompass arguments of either expansion or expulsion can overlap one another, but perhaps it demonstrates a fault with the boundary work perspective because there may not always be clear what is considered appropriate participants or practices for journalism nor is it possibly universal, but dependent on the media system and culture. It might even be influenced on such a local level as the routines and structures in a newsroom. Moreover, these contradictions in journalists' conceptions on the value and usefulness of NGOs in climate journalism might also be explained by a potential gap between norms and practices (Hanitzsch et al. 2019a). Additionally, while collaborative tendencies were mostly implicit in interviews, emphasis on distinctions in terms of NGOs being agenda-driven were overly explicit. There is a possibility that in reality practices are more cooperative at COPs than suggested in this study and to uncover this, more ethnographic and observational studies at climate summits are needed (such as for instance Lück et al. 2016, who established and painted a picture of the various coproduction networks at these meetings). Especially since the NGO representatives interviewed were not in Madrid and could only share their organization's general methods and routines and not counter with descriptions of interactions with journalists.

Nevertheless, there are some expansive elements to the most dominant views of *dependency* and *established source* too, because it most often constituted an acceptance of NGOs presence and participation in reporting climate summits and sometimes other climate news. This is somewhat similar to the findings of Powers (2015b), that NGOs have gained legitimacy in climate news because of their political status. Although I would like to add that the general attention and priority given to the climate issue the last couple of years appear to be significant as well. However, as Powers (2015b) further argued, journalists still lead the source-journalist dance and maintain control over their boundaries and what kind of participation is acceptable and when – what information provided by NGOs is newsworthy and what is not, which NGOs are legitimate sources and which are not, and so on.

Additionally, the climate change issue does appear to have an impact for the boundaries between NGOs and journalists, mainly because environmental NGOs are established in climate- and international politics. In that sense the journalists in this study are perhaps mostly responsive to the political situation and arena, however, there were also other examples in how some journalists approach the climate issue, such as using balance in news stories differently (give limited space to climate sceptics) and leaning towards transnationality

as a news value. The latter also has the possibility to set up more collaboration between NGOs and journalists, because previous research has demonstrated NGOs “journalistic roles” in especially international news (see for instance Powers, 2016; or Van Leuven & Joye, 2014) and because NGOs already exemplify transnationalism in their own practices.

Moreover, there are no distinct differences between different news media in the study, possibly because the sample was not large or diverse enough for those comparative elements. However, comparison between different news outlets was not the main goal of this study, but similar studies with a larger sample are, nonetheless, encouraged for future research.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, this smaller qualitative study addressed if climate change journalism shapes professional boundaries between journalists and NGOs as sources and participants in the news making process. This was done through conducting online interviews with five Swedish journalists and two representatives from environmental NGOs based in Sweden. The research questions posed were:

RQ1: What are journalists conceptions of NGOs when covering COP25 and other climate news stories?

RQ2: What role/s do NGOs have in the journalistic practice when covering COP25?

RQ3: What does the NGO-journalist relationship in climate journalism suggest about their professional boundaries?

To answer the first two questions, the Swedish journalists in this study have demonstrated different intersecting conceptions of the role of NGOs for climate journalism, varying from a practical attitude to acknowledging similar purposes or keeping a distance and drawing lines between the two. These sometimes contradictory attitudes might reflect gaps between normative journalistic methods and what is practically convenient. Nevertheless, interactions between NGOs and journalists are professional in nature and somewhat more frequent at COPs than for other circumstances, where NGOs especially contributed with their press briefings and as a contact for comments and information on the negotiations. This thesis has also suggested that NGOs are considered to be established in the climate- and international political arena by the journalists interviewed, which is mirrored in NGOs’ legitimacy in climate news with the larger, global and most known organizations being viewed as the most

credible news sources. Moreover, in regards to the third and final RQ, previous literature has referred to the blurring of boundaries between these two actors in international news and at climate summits in terms of for instance overlaps in practices (see for instance Camaj, 2018; Russell, 2013; and Powers, 2015b). There is partly support for this in my findings, with for example some collaborative tendencies among journalists and NGOs – especially with NGOs as a partnering watchdog, but also in the reliance and usefulness of NGOs at COP25 and sometimes for information and expertise regarding the climate issue in general. The blurring of boundaries is not necessarily the same as the expansive boundaries detailed in Carlsson's (2015, p.10) matrix, since expansion requires a level of acceptance and inclusion of participants into the realm of journalism. This is not really present in the attitudes of the journalists in this study since there were also emphasis of expulsion and sometimes protection of autonomy in the interviews. It was also clear that even when NGOs can participate in producing climate related news through the information material they provide, the contacts they have or their knowledge on political processes and the climate issue, it appears that journalists maintain control over the boundaries of (climate) journalism and in the end decide what is news and what is not. However, further research should be dedicated to the topic of participants and sources in climate news, and not only during climate summits. Preferably more ethnographic and observational studies in order to build a better understanding of how journalists' conceptions and practices coincide or differ. It is also encouraged to compare climate journalists with for instance political or business reporters, to further investigate if the climate change issue and beat offer a particular setting for the relations between journalists and NGOs and for blurred or expanded professional boundaries.

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Appendices

Appendix i. Interview guide journalists (translated from Swedish)

Theme 1: Background

Q1a: How long have you worked as a journalist? How long have you worked as an environmental/climate reporter? / How much have you reported about climate change issues?

Q1b: Have you anytime in your life had any personal interest for climate issues?

Theme 2: Practices during COP25

Q2a: Were you on site during the climate summit in Madrid or did you report from a distance?

- Could you describe the summit, what kind of atmosphere were there ...?
- Do you as a journalist get access to all the sub-meetings and people? Are there informal spaces during COP25?

Q2b: How do you approach reporting a climate summit? Where does the story begin?

Q2c: Are there any differences/specifics in reporting a climate summit in comparison to other climate related news?

Q2d: If you try to remember, what sources would you say you mostly used?

Q2e: How did you interact with your sources when covering COP25?

Q2f: Were you in contact with any environmental NGOs for the coverage?

Theme 3: Praxis when using environmental NGOs as sources

Q3a: When/How often would you use environmental NGOs as sources in the climate reporting in general?

- Do you consider that you approach organizations or that they contact you?

Q3b: Would you say that you use environmental NGOs more or less during COP25 than other circumstances?

Q3c: What would you say that NGOs can contribute with in a news story? (ideas, quotes, contacts, info, perspectives).

Q3d: What is challenging with using environmental NGOs as sources?

Q3e: Are there better or worse organizations to use?

Theme 4: Opinions/values

Q4a: What is your general opinion/attitude towards environmental NGOs as sources/contacts?

Q4b: How do you view your own role as a journalist when reporting COP25 and the climate issue?

- How do you approach neutrality when covering climate issues/COP25?
- How do you approach balance?
- How do you view journalism's role in influencing the climate issue/debate?

Concluding question

Q5: According to your own assessment, how knowledgeable would you say that you are of climate change issues?

Appendix ii. Interview guide NGO representatives (translated from Swedish)

Tema 1: Background

Q1: How long have you worked at [NGO]?

- How long have you worked with climate- and environmental issues?

Tema 2: Practices during COP25

Q2a: How did [the NGO] work with COP25? (or climate summits in general)

- What were your goals/strategies?

Q2b: How much were you in contact with journalists?

- For what purpose?
- Did you contact journalists or did they contact you?

Tema 3: Relationship with the media

Q3a: How would you describe your relationship with the media and journalists in general?

- How would interactions look like, when are you in contact?
- Are you mostly in contact with the same journalists/media or different ones?

Q3b: Do you have more contact with media during COP25 or other climate summits than during other circumstances?

Q3c: Do you experience the relationship or contacts with the media have changes in any way during the last few years?

Q3d: How important is the contact with media for your work?

- Do you also produce your own communication/information materials?

Appendix iii. Information letter to participants (in Swedish)

Hej, mitt namn är Erica Fahlström och jag är magisterstudent på ett internationellt program i journalistik vid Södertörns högskola. Min uppsats handlar om klimatjournalistik och de intervjuer jag gör kommer endast användas som underlag för studien. Uppsatsen kommer att publiceras offentligt.

Syftet med studien är att undersöka journalisters attityder och syn på deras relation med civilsamhällesorganisationer ("NGOs") för klimatjournalistik, **vilket inkluderar hur journalister och organisationer interagerar och är i kontakt med varandra.**⁶ Stort tack för att du väljer att delta!

Jag hoppas att det går bra att jag spelar in intervjun? Citat kommer att översättas från svenska till engelska eftersom det är arbetsspråket för uppsatsen. Individer kommer vara pseudonymiserade (inga namn kommer användas i uppsatsen eller i transkriptioner), men däremot behöver titlar som t.ex. klimatreporter vara beskrivet och det nyhetsmedium du arbetar på vara namngivet / men däremot behöver organisationen du arbetar på vara namngivet. Deltagandet är helt frivilligt och eventuella personuppgifter samlas in och behandlas med ditt informerade samtycke, vilket när som helst kan återkallas utan att ange orsak. Personuppgifter som namn, epost, telefonnummer, skypeadress etc. används endast för att sätta upp intervjuerna och har inhämtats på de aktuella nyhetsmediernas webbsidor och/eller via kontakt med intervjupersoner. Uppgifter, transkriptioner och inspelat material kommer att förstöras när uppsatsen är godkänd och under uppsatsarbetet lagras det lokalt. Inspelningsverktyg är en app för Mac vid namn "enkel inspelare" och de som kommer ha tillgång till intervjumaterialet är jag själv och eventuellt min handledare.

Enligt EUs dataskyddsförordning har du rätt att gratis få ta del av samtliga uppgifter om dig som hanteras och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade. Du har även rätt att begära radering, begränsning eller att invända mot behandling av personuppgifter.

Södertörns högskola är juridiskt ansvarig för studenternas personuppgiftsbehandlingar och du kan alltid nå högskolan via epost registrator@sh.se eller telefon 08 608 40 00. Har du funderingar eller klagomål kring hur dina personuppgifter behandlas kan du alltid vända dig till Södertörns högskolas dataskyddsombud via dataskydd@sh.se. Dataskyddsombudet är expert på reglerna för personuppgifter och har rätt att granska hur högskolans studenter och personal behandlar personuppgifter. Du har också alltid rätt att lämna klagomål till Datainspektionen. Du når dem via epost: datainspektionen@datainspektionen.se eller telefon 08-657 61 00.

Vid eventuella frågor och funderingar är du alltid välkommen att i första hand kontakta mig eller min handledare:

Kontaktuppgifter student:

Erica Fahlström, [REDACTED] / [REDACTED] (studentmail), tel [REDACTED]

Kontaktuppgifter handledare:

Ester Appelgren, [REDACTED]

⁶ This red highlight was added when later sent to NGO representatives and not included in the letter to journalists, emphasizing the focus to also explore interactions between the actors and not only attitudes of journalists.