SWEDEN IN THE GLOBAL LEADER’S JERSEY

Constructing Leadership for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Master’s Thesis, 30 ECTS

Author: Linnea Sandell
Supervisor: Josefina Erikson
Department of Government
Uppsala University
Abstract

In September 2015, the leaders of the world agreed to head on a journey towards a socially, environmentally and economically sustainable future at 2030 by the adoption of the 2030 Agenda containing 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Sweden pledged to be the global leader in this transition. This study explores how Sweden constructs this leadership narratively and in which manner it is legitimized, using concepts borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu as an added dimension to the narrative analysis.

The result is that the main narrative of Sweden’s identity in this context is one of being an experienced role-model. The most salient characteristics underpinning this main narrative are being ambitious, a moral power, economically rational, and knowledgeable. Its legitimacy is argued to rest on knowledge, social and good-will capital. Tensions are found between the logic of the field from the Swedish perspective and what is aimed for in the 2030 Agenda in terms of competing in contrast to collaborating, promoting one model of development in contrast to national ownership and assuming market logic versus a logic where sustainability in all three pillars is the superordinate goal.

Key words: 2030 Agenda, Swedish Collective Identity, Narrative analysis, Bourdieu, Structuralist Constructivism

Word count: 19 630
# List of Contents

1  Towards a Transformed World?  
1.1  What Is the Purpose?  
1.2  Why Study This?  
1.3  The Gathered Material  
1.4  Outline of Study  

2  Theoretical Point of Departure: Collective Identity  
2.1  Collective Identity  
2.2  Collective Identity and Role Conceptions  
2.3  State Agency and Identity Delimitation  
2.4  The Social and the International  
2.5  Bourdieu in New Academic Fields  
2.6  Collective Identity with Added Dimension  

3  Identity through the Bourdieuian Prism  
3.1  The Basics of Bourdieu  
3.2  Capital and Symbolic Power  
3.3  Bourdieu in the International  
3.4  Language and Discourse  
3.5  Theory as Think Tool  

4  Methodological Considerations  
4.1  Narrative Analysis  
4.2  Subsequent Discussion Guided by Bourdieu  

5  Swedish Collective Identity in Rewind  
5.1  The Neutral Activist  
5.2  One of the Nordics  
5.3  A Moral Power  
5.4  Taking Stock  

6  Swedish Collective Identity and the 2030 Agenda  
6.1  Narrative Analysis  
6.2  Main Results  
   6.2.1  Thematic Subcategory One: Sweden as Ambitious  
   6.2.2  Thematic Subcategory Two: Sweden as Moral Power  
   6.2.3  Thematic Subcategory Three: Sweden as Economically Rational  
   6.2.4  Thematic Subcategory Four: Sweden as Knowledgeable  
   6.2.5  Main Narrative: Sweden as Experienced Role-Model  
6.3  Overlap of Thematic Categories and Discursive Struggles  
6.4  Bringing in Bourdieu: What Is Talked from  
6.5  Matching the Identity Construction with the Vision of the 2030 Agenda  

7  Conclusion  

8  References  
8.1  Literature  
8.2  Analysed Material  

9  Appendix 1: The Sustainable Development Goals  

Page 2
List of Abbreviations

- AAAA: Addis Ababa Action Agenda
- AU: African Union
- EC: European Community
- EU: European Union
- GNI: Gross National Income
- HLPF: High-Level Political Forum
- ILO: International Labour Organization
- MDG: Millennium Development Goal
- OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PGU: Policy för global utveckling/Policy for Global Development
- PM: Prime Minister
- SDG: Sustainable Development Goal
- SRHR: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- UN: United Nations
- UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
- VNR: Voluntary National Review
1 Towards a Transformed World?

In the fall of 2015 Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all member states at the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Summit in New York. In it, member states have agreed to join a transition of the whole world to sustainable development with the year 2030 as deadline. This agreement, radical in its wording, highly ambitious in its aim, represents a historical opportunity for the states of the world to work together with civil society, the business sector and the people for economic, social and environmental sustainability.

In one way departing from where the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) concluded, the 2030 Agenda is also fundamentally different from the previous eight global goals in how it was inclusively negotiated by more actors and in what it demands from member states (Carant 2017: 27, Bexell & Jönsson 2016: 1). Its emphasis is on a joint effort towards a shared vision of the world at 2030 concretized in 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets\(^1\) implying that every state, no matter level of development, must look to themselves in order to make sure they are pulling their weight in ensuring the planet’s sustainability. Its content is far more ambitious and comprehensive than the MDGs, aiming at integrating the environmental, economic and social pillar of sustainable development, abolishing extreme poverty, reducing global and national inequality and solving the climate crisis (General Assembly Resolution 70/1). Interconnectedness between global and local development is a key feature in the SDGs and it demands more cooperation across sectors and actors in programme delivery (Helgason 2016: 431).

In this sense, the 2030 Agenda could be somewhat of a game-changer for member states’ approach to the international community, urging national ownership, and primarily looking to one’s own development. If the 2030 Agenda shall result in a virtual transformation, this indeed would require of member states a novel self-perception, as the previous MDGs have been criticized for being developed without adequate involvement from all parties and with insufficient adoption to national needs and with too much emphasis on vertical interventions: North being the subject who gives and South being the object who receives (Fehling et al. 2013: 1109).

Sweden has explicitly and on several occasions stated that they will take the global lead in implementing the 2030 Agenda and working towards a world in which “no one is left behind”. With its position, rated as one of the most developed countries in the world,\(^2\) Sweden is eager to preserve status quo, being a leader and an altruistic role-model in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But how is this identity constructed, in which manner is it legitimized, and does it match the overarching vision of the 2030 Agenda? That is what this study aims to explore.

\(^1\) See list of SDGs in Appendix 1.
\(^2\) Sweden is rated the most sustainably developed country in the world on the SDSN SDG Index of 2016 (Sachs et al. 2016).
1.1 What Is the Purpose?

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the spokespersons for the Swedish government construct Sweden’s identity in the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, mainly towards the international community. This because the construction reveals elements about the broader context in which it is constructed and ultimately has implication about the prospects of achieving the SDGs from a Swedish perspective. In order to find this identity construct, especially focusing on the build-up of ‘leadership’ in this specific context, narrative analysis will be utilized on public statements, reports and articles related to events touching upon the 2030 Agenda from September 2015 to September 2017. In addition to this, the Bourdieuian concepts of capital, field and doxa will function as ‘think tools’ to unveil how different kinds of resources are used to reproduce the status quo of Sweden in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda and the logic of the field from a Swedish perspective. Lastly, the findings of the analysis and their further implications will be generally discussed in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Hence, the overarching research question is:

- How is Sweden constructing its collective identity in the political discourse related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

In addition to this, the questions below will be guiding the discussion building on the findings of the above-mentioned overarching research question:

- Given the construction of the collective identity, what capital is Sweden referring to and what appears to be the doxa of the field from the Swedish perspective?
- How does the Swedish constructed collective identity match with the vision put forth in the 2030 Agenda?

By ‘Sweden’ I refer to the spokespersons of the Swedish government, which in this study are ministers speaking, writing or acting in the name of the Swedish state. By ‘think tool’ it is implied that the Bourdieuian terminology will be used as an added dimension to my analysis, and not as translated in verbatim from his own research. By ‘political discourse related to the implementation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development’ I refer to the public statements, reports and official practices made by spokespersons for the Swedish government from the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015 to September 2017. ‘Field’, ‘capital’, and ‘doxa’ are defined in the Bourdieuian sense and will be accounted for in chapter 3. ‘2030 Agenda’ is used short for Transforming Our World: The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1.2 Why Study This?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands of UN member states to change their way of working with development issues, breaking down silo mentality and basing the efforts on national level of sustainable development, keeping national ownership and cross-sectional collaboration in mind. The 2030 Agenda thus constitutes an interesting case to study in terms of the construction of collective identity as its successful implementation will depend
on a less state-centred, more collaborative and encompassing approach from member states (Hajer et al 2015:1652).

However, this study’s ambition is not to conclude in absolute terms whether the 2030 Agenda will be successfully implemented or not, but rather explore Sweden’s identity construction and what logic it is based on, and then shed light on potential problematic or beneficial aspects related to the implementation. Deconstructing the field (or context) itself as well as the actors in the field is relevant because it shows the arbitrariness of existing constructions, and in the case of this study particularly focusing on structural prerequisites. Potential problematics related to constructed identities in this context could be if member states approached the implementation as ‘business as usual’ and not being willing to break old habits, learn from and collaborate with each other, and perhaps most importantly if they would not value long-term sustainability in all three pillars above other short-term goals.

The Swedish government has formulated on many occasions what they believe the role of Sweden is in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and what Sweden’s current position is in terms of level of development. Sweden is an especially interesting actor to study in this sense, as a state who traditionally constructs its identity as a loud voice internationally with strong focus on foreign aid and development (cf. Bergman Rosamond 2016). The analysed material being fresh depictions of what Sweden’s collective identity constitutes of, this study also takes stock of previous conducted research on the Swedish collective identity and role in international relations. Therefore, as for relevance in a broader sense this study will offer an alternative perspective of Sweden’s position in the international community, nuances the image of Sweden as a consciously rational and altruistic agent and shedding light on potential implications of naming yourself leader or even humanitarian superpower. With this study, however, I do not take on the grand task of uncovering the ‘true’ motives of the Swedish government’s foreign policy, nor will I be testing the coherence between the values expressed by the political leaders and the measures taken.

Rather, I hope to explore how the Swedish identity is constructed at this specific moment in time in this specific context, and with the help of Bourdieuan concepts discuss the further implications of this construction in terms of accumulation of different forms of capital, and the effects in terms of action constraint and enabling. Adding this dimension to the analysis is fruitful as it gives the discussion a different focus than narrative analyses only using role theory (which is conventionally used when studying narratives of national collective identities). The added dimension will allow highlighting not only what Sweden is constructing its identity as, but also from. It also allows me to tune in on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a specific field, as the Bourdieuan tools paints a picture of the international as hierarchical and containing a large number of ‘fields’ characterized by different logics and with no clear-cut separation between the domestic and the international level (Leander 2011: 294, 296).

---

Footnote: 3 Former Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt and current Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström have called Sweden a 'humanitarian superpower' (Regeringens utrikesdeklaration 2013, Sveriges Radio 2015).
The contribution of my study is a new focus when studying the construction of the Swedish collective identity, recognizing the linkage between capital accumulation as part of this construction. Regarding the case of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sweden’s self-perception of being the ‘leader’ and the values this reveals in the implementation deserves attention as it has to do with the prospects of achieving the 2030 Agenda in Sweden and abroad. However, it should be underlined that the ambition of this study is not to provide an answer as to whether there will be a successful fulfilment of the global goals, but rather explore influential aspects of the implementation (such as actors’ identity construction and their consequences) which have not previously been studied.

1.3 The Gathered Material

The material used in the analysis is limited to public statements, the voluntary national review (VNR), articles about initiatives and debate articles from the first two years of the implementation, with one debate article from July 2015 (Lövin 2015a) as exception. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda took place in September 2015, and naturally, events happening after September 2017 have not been subject to analysis as this would not be practically possible. The material has been selected based on it either being delivered at a central occasion in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, or because it is directly addressing Sweden’s role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The material has primarily been gathered through the website of the Swedish government. 38 speeches have been read and two debate articles written by spokespersons for the Swedish government about Sweden and the 2030 Agenda are part of the material. Articles with information about measures and initiatives taken on the behalf of the Swedish government have been accessed through the government’s or the UN’s website.

The VNR presented at the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July 2017 is a key document in the analysis and was made accessible through UN’s website on the 2030 Agenda. The review answers the question of how far Sweden has come in the process towards sustainable development, with accounts of challenges and progress related to all of the 17 SDGs, as well as exposition of prerequisites for the continued work and visions of the way ahead. Considering its thorough and rather holistic treatment of what the government perceives as the point of departure for Sweden and what this implies about the self-depiction and constructed identity, this report has been a central document in the analysis. The report was written with the aim of keeping it ‘as factual as possible’, according to Sweden’s ambassador to the 2030 Agenda Kajsa Olofsgård, which makes it especially interesting to analyse (Sweden Foreign Policy News 2017).

The gathered material is representative of the political discourse related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as it covers the most significant events, speeches, articles and initiatives taken on the Swedish behalf or because they are specific about Sweden’s identity in this field. Put together it gives a comprehensive picture of Sweden’s constructed identity in this context. The analysed material is listed in Section 8.2.
1.4 Outline of Study

This thesis sets off with an account of and discussion about the theoretical concept of collective identity and its use in this study. Thereafter, the central Bourdieuan concepts relevant to the study will be described. In order to enhance transparency concerning the study’s analytical proceedings, methodological considerations will be elaborated before heading over to an overview of previous findings on the Swedish collective identity. Then, the two-part analysis starts with a narrative analysis of the gathered material and finishes with adding the Bourdieuan concepts to the findings of the former. Lastly, a general discussion is provided relating to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda along with a brief conclusion addressing the initial research questions.
2 Theoretical Point of Departure: Collective Identity

This section will give an account of the theoretical point of departure in this study, namely the study of collective national identity. This theoretical concept will be discussed in relation to role theory, the ontology of the international, and the Bourdieuian assumptions.

2.1 Collective Identity

The theoretical starting point of this study is the concept of collective identity. The collective identity of a state is how the common political being is imagined and constructed by, for example, policy-makers and the state’s representatives. As a self-perception, the collective identity helps make sense of issues such as who ‘we’ are as a state, how ‘we’ should act and what ‘we’ need and want from the world around us. As a consequence, the collective identity enables and legitimizes certain practices and courses of action (Ljungkvist 2014: 59). In other words, how the collective identity is constructed will have consequences for which actions are seen and experienced as legitimate and which are not. Tilly defines identity as “an actor’s experience of a category, tie, role, network, group or organization, coupled with a public representation of that experience, which often takes the form of a shared story, a narrative” (Tilly 1996: 7) and accordingly, in this study the state’s own representatives’ narratives about the Swedish state is put in the spotlight.

Alexander Wendt took the study of collective identities into the mainstream of the international relations academic field (Neumann 1996: 163, Wendt 1992: 424). In line with Tilly’s definition, his advice is to look for historical narratives in order to discover how a state’s identity is constructed (Wendt 1999: 219). These narratives are found in identity-infused political discourse and therefore national collective identity should be understood as a social construct with the assumptions that follows, e.g. assuming a socially produced model of power and not regarding the construct as given nor static (Ljungkvist 2014: 60). Furthermore, the collective ‘we’ must be understood in relation to the ‘other’. In order to understand collective identities as a multifaceted phenomenon, Neumann suggests that delineation towards all kinds of actors, not just for example other states, should be taken into consideration (Neumann 1996: 167). This study does not use othering as part of the analytical framework, but addresses the limits of what is included and excluded in the Swedish collective identity and thereby made possible or impossible in the narrative.

2.2 Collective Identity and Role Conceptions

An often-used theory in the study of collective identity of states as actors is the theory of national role conceptions. A national role conception is the policymakers’ own definitions of the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules, and actions suitable to their state and which function their state should serve in the international system. The theory has been widely used since it was first introduced in the field by Holsti, originally being developed in the sociological field (Holsti 1970: 245). Role theory answers the question of what role states believe themselves to have and how this in turn explains their behaviour. Studies of role
conception is often closely intertwined with the concept of identity, however, there is rarely a clear distinction in the use of the two concepts provided. As a consequence, role theory has been criticized for fuzziness in the use of its central concepts (Harnisch et al 2011: 8-9).

Moreover, if role theory is about identity turned into a role turned into a specific course of action depending on the international context and the disposable resources (Breuning 2011: 26), then resources are understood as separate from the constructed identity and not as a constitutive element of the identity. This is quite different from the Bourdieuian understanding which will be used in this study, where the construction of identity both depends on access to different kinds of capital as well as supposing that the construction can create and reproduce resources (Bourdieu 1985: 46). However, the theoretical underpinning of this thesis does not fundamentally oppose role theory, especially since role theory is widely used to the extent that its central concepts have been given various different definitions. Instead this study rests on the same assumption about identity, or role, as being explanatory in how it enables or constrains courses of action, only with less belief in its direct effect on behaviour and more focus on its structural prerequisites. The added value of using Bourdieu in this context and broadening the perspective is therefore its constant consideration of the production of power structures and its different effects on agents in a social field, even if this study only focuses on the Swedish case. Instead of using ‘role’ and ‘identity’ interchangeably, the notion ‘identity’ will be used throughout this study as it fits better with the Bourdieuian terminology.

2.3 State Agency and Identity Delimitation
Alexander Wendt claims that it is essential for anyone studying the international to think about its ontology and metaphysical assumptions, as this conditions how we explain the international system (Wendt 1999: 370). In his view, the state is defined as an actor, which gives it an ontological status beyond the sum of the government’s actions and what we can observe. By considering the state as something real and existing he argues that it is easier to make sense of the phenomenon and essential if one wishes to explain the behaviour of a state. Individuals within the state, especially those acting or speaking on behalf of the state, play a crucial role in state action. However, the corporate agency of the state cannot be reduced to these individuals’ actions, as they act as authorized by the state and do not act merely as their private selves (Wendt 1999: 216, 218, 221).

Wendt’s state-centrism and willingness to exclusively give the state a ‘self’ on the international arena has been criticized (Neumann 1996: 165, Wendt 1992). Furthermore, his emphasis on interdependence and belief in closer acquaintance between states as a way to reduce delimitation between them has been proved empirically wrong by many anthropologists. Neumann writes that even though the global community might experience a homogenizing trend, this does not imply that states have a harder time delineating their identity in relation to other actors. Instead delineation of the states’ self is still an ongoing and active part of identity formation (Neumann 1996: 166). Neumann’s critique is in line with this study, whose assumption is that the state as an actor still delineates itself from other actors, both internationally and domestically and that this differentiation is part of the identity construction, creating boundaries of the identity in what is excluded. As this study’s unit of
analysis is Sweden, it does however also resonate with Wendt’s special focus on states as main actors in the international. Nevertheless, other actors are not neglected as part of the international social system, even if they are not subject to analysis in this study.

2.4 The Social and the International

Another assumption in this study is that states are part of social systems, much like other actors. Wendt would argue that thinking about a social system in collective identity formation is crucial, as the course of action an actor chooses depends on how they define the situation they are in. In turn, this definition will depend on how the actor views her own identity and what her interests are, as well as what she expects other actors to do (Wendt 1999: 186). As previously mentioned, the Bourdieuan perspective puts less belief in and emphasis on an actor’s reflective insight and understanding about the situation and her identity, however, assuming the international is sharing characteristics with the social is fundamental for this study. And in this sense the study is in line with Wendt’s view of the international as a social system.

Arguably, prediction of other actors’ behaviour differs between a social system consisting of individual actors and a system consisting of corporate actors. Holsti states that the difference between the international and the social is that the norms and sanctions are relatively weaker in the former, possibly making the use of social position less relevant when thinking in ‘international’ terms (1970: 244). To study the roles of states, he instead uses the term status. (However, as previously mentioned, this concept has later also been understood as social position in studies using role theory, referring back to the critique role theory has received due to its ambiguous use of central concepts). This is because he regards the expectation of other actors’ behaviour hard to predict in the international social system, especially in the case of a conflict, and thus less influential on actors’ choice of action (Holsti 1970: 243-244).

Nevertheless, if the international is understood as relations between actors, state and non-state ones, then this also implies that these relations produce and reinforce a shared understanding and expectations of behaviour of other actors (Bially Mattern 2004: 22). The implementation of the 2030 Agenda has a relational approach between states and other actors, as the implementation is to be regarded as a joint project. The specific context in which work is carried out in the international concerning the 2030 Agenda is therefore arguably a context where shared understanding between states and other actors is produced and reproduced when they are engaging with one another.

Accordingly, the Bourdieuan dimension used in this study also rests on Wendt’s assumption that states are parts of social systems. Assuming that knowledge is shared in a social field, Bourdieu stresses that it affects agents differently depending on one’s hierarchical position. As Epstein puts it “Bourdieu’s understanding of power takes the study of identity and norms into a new direction: structure, structure, structure” (Epstein 2013: 175). Studies of roles, norms, and the logic of appropriate behaviour often lack the critical assessment of power relations and domination which Bourdieu takes into account (Epstein 2013: 166). He does not view actors as equal from the start which is the assumption of many socialization theories, neither does he believe in one actor’s ability of being a ‘norm entrepreneur’ with the power to
change norms simply because this actor has better arguments. In his view, not all actors are in a position to reformulate norms (Epstein 2013: 168). In this manner Bourdieu is a step away from pure constructivism, always adding a structural dimension to it, naming what he does ‘structuralist constructivism’ (Bourdieu 1990: 23).

2.5 Bourdieu in New Academic Fields
The above discussion about agency and structure in the social versus the international is relevant to my study, as I will use a dimension in the analysis originally used on individual level. Nevertheless, this study is not by far the first to apply Bourdieu’s theories in a field far from his own or on another level of agency. There are numerous examples of the Bourdieuan terminology having travelled from sociological studies with the individual in focus to new academic fields. As an example, Oyvind Ihlen proposes the use of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory when studying public relations of organizations. Using organizations as the unit of analysis brings new use to Bourdieu’s concepts as well as new insights about public relations. Ihlen claims that organizations act in a social space or, to use Bourdieu’s terminology, field where struggle of position of power is present and that the use of sociological concepts therefore is fruitful (2007: 269-270).

In the international, Bourdieu-inspired studies have contributed by high-lighting new forms of power in international relations (Villumsen Berling 2012: 457). Guilhot studies the field of human rights, the related network of actors, and finds democratization as a new process of domination (2005:17). He claims that idealist discourses and moral commitments have become a sort of main idiom within international politics, and a novel way of ruling. He stresses the hierarchy found within the field of human rights, and claims that the social production of international expertise on human rights and democracy fuels the production of global norms (Guilhot 2005: 23). Another example is the study on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and its role in the struggle of symbolic power within the transnational field of climate politics by Hannah Hughes (2015). Through a historical study of the organization of IPCC and the continuous struggle over the objects of interest between central actors she finds that IPCC has the symbolic power to formulate what is the meaning of ‘climate change’ as the organization’s activities are part of the essential objects of struggle (Hughes 2015: 85, 89).

Furthermore, in their study of the construction of the Austrian national identity the authors de Cillia et al conceptualize the national collective identity as a sort of habitus (I will come back to the concept of habitus in section 3.1) as in a complex of common ideas, concepts or perception schemes of shared emotional attitudes shared with a group, similar behavioural dispositions that are internalized through so called national socialization (de Cillia et al 1999: 5), bridging the difference and creating a continuum between individual and corporate agency. Recognizing that it is a long and complex discussion to sort out whether states can be treated as actors with a habitus, Leander argues that the writings of Bourdieu are ambiguous and that he sometimes treated institutions and states as actors which had positions and dispositions within a field. As long as one is aware of the fact that an institutional actor, such as a state, do not have a psyche nor a bodily hexus and the further implication of this, there is
in her view therefore no reason not to treat these actors as Bourdieu himself sometimes did (Leander 2011: 299).

2.6 Collective Identity with Added Dimension

Drawing from the discussion above, this study does not equate Bourdieu’s concept of habitus with the state’s collective identity. It uses the Bourdieuan concepts and readings of the social as inspiration for an added dimension of the conducted narrative analysis of the construction of the collective identity. There are limits to the resemblance between the social on the individual level and the social in the international, and it would thus not be fruitful to read Bourdieu’s (notoriously complex) theory in verbatim and try to apply it. However, his idea of different resources, not only material, as constitutive of one’s sense of place in the world adds a critical dimension taking into account relative positioning when studying identity construction and thinking beyond calculating self-interest and more on tacit, involuntary aspects of how the identity is constructed. A more in-depth account of Bourdieu’s concepts relevant to this study will be provided in the next section.
3 Identity through the Bourdieuan Prism

This section treats Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the social more in depth, with focus on the concepts and assumptions that are relevant to this study. Central concepts are accounted for as well as approaches to the state, language, and discourse.

3.1 The Basics of Bourdieu

To support my empirical analysis, I will use parts of Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of the social. Using Bourdieu in this context might appear an unorthodox choice, and there is the likelihood that he would not have liked the direction in which this study is taking the theory. However, his ideas about dynamics in society being a struggle for acknowledgement between agents and his view of access to different kinds of resources as fundamental in the struggle for this fit well with a study such as this and contributes with an added dimension, taking the findings from the narrative analysis further than otherwise possible. Ultimately, his theory is at its core a theory about domination (Pouliot & F. Mérand 2013: 38) and even if there are challenges related to using it empirically, there are also considerable rewards. In the case of the construction of the Swedish collective identity in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Bourdieu’s theory offers the opportunity to focus on not only what is talked about, but what is talked from, and thereby the construction’s structural prerequisite and its implications.

Bourdieu’s theory is centred on some core concepts (although the concepts mentioned here does not constitute a comprehensive list). These are habitus, field, doxa, and capital. The concepts are linked and form together a practice theory of the social. Briefly put, habitus is the ‘sense of place’ of an agent, which is based on the tacit knowledge an agent has about its access to and past accumulation of different forms of capital. It works as “a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions” (Bourdieu 1977: 82-83). A field is a social space that is structured around three dimensions, namely power relations, objects of struggle, and the rules which are taken for granted within the social field. The struggles and the objects of struggle are different depending on what is acknowledged as valuable in the field. Agents hold unequal dispositions in relation to each other, and this is what constitutes a hierarchy of domination. The doxa is knowledge which is taken for granted: a kind of common sense in a social space. Capital does not only come in the guise of economic or material means in Bourdieu’s understanding, but can also be for example cultural, social or political. When capital is recognized in a specific field it becomes symbolic capital and through it an agent can wield symbolic power (Pouliot and F. Mérand 2013: 30). In other words, the logic of the field decides what is valued capital in a certain context.

Some basic assumptions should be mentioned when looking at the world through the Bourdieuan lens. For example, in contrast to the neorealist account of the international order, Bourdieu would claim that its character is hierarchical rather than anarchical and that world politics is something socially constructed (Nissen 2013: 4). Moreover, the language used in the social must be put in a larger political frame as his sociological view of language is that it
manifests the position of the speaker, rather than just forming the object which is described (Nissen 2013: 6).

3.2 Capital and Symbolic Power

Bourdieu begins his essay *Forms of Capital* (1985) by stating that “The social world is accumulated history.” What is implied is that our disposition in the social world is inherited from the past, and that actors have different amount of different kinds of capital giving them a relative disposition in the social hierarchy. Capital by its nature, be it economic, cultural, or social, constantly reproduces itself, either in identical or in expanded form (Bourdieu 1985: 46). Capital is understood as the resources that are specific to a field and actors strive to accumulate it and draw benefits from it (Pouliot & F. Mérand 2013: 36). The impact of our access to it on our actions and behaviour is nevertheless not mechanical, but rather constitutes a backcloth from which we can improvise (Bourdieu 1977: 73).

At the root of the different forms of capital there is economic capital, because it is from economic capital that the other forms of capital can be derived, for example by affording to invest time in education and buying access to certain social networks (Bourdieu 1986: 54). But Bourdieu does not believe in the reductionist account that everything is determined automatically by economic interests, rather that other forms of capitals have impact as well (Pouliot & F. Mérand 2013: 40). For example, social capital is related to membership of a group, it is a capital that is collectively owned and that backs every member of that collective, being part of a group with status has a multiplier effect on the capital you hold by yourself. An agent with large social capital is an agent that is worth knowing because this will increase your own capital (Bourdieu 1985: 51-52). Capital can come in different guises depending on what is valued in the field and is not restricted to the ones most commonly used by Bourdieu: economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu 1985).

When in a dominating position, an agent is the holder of symbolic capital. Symbolic capital gives the agent the power to define reality itself and impose its vision of the world upon dominated agents. This vision of the world will very much depend on where the agent is dispositioned in the social structure (Pouliot & F. Mérand 2013: 38). Furthermore, any kind of capital can be used as symbolic capital if it is recognized as such within the field (Bourdieu et al. 1994: 9). When an actor conforms to its position in the field, because of the exercise of symbolic power, it is the victim of symbolic violence. The actors in a dominating position have the power to name reality and the dominated actors have to conform to this authority in order to advance their own position in the field (Guzzini 2013: 82-83). In Bourdieu’s understanding power is thus capacity, not force. It is also relations, and not only property (Guzzini 2013: 82-83, 86). Adding capital to the analysis of the constructed identity therefore takes into account the unequal prerequisites of actors in a field, also in the international. Actors enter the field with different accumulated capital from the past which either hinders or helps them to take on certain roles or identities.
3.3 Bourdieu in the International

Bourdieu’s understanding of society opens up opportunities when studying the international, regarding it as characterized by many different fields on which struggles over forms of capital occur. The international does in this sense not exclude non-state actors and does not prescribe the international with only one specific logic, rather every field has its own logic where different kinds of capital can be of different value. Apart from taking accumulated capital into consideration in the analysis, using Bourdieu as an added dimension also opens up the possibility of analysing what the doxa is in this specific field and if the field is isolated from other fields.

3.4 Language and Discourse

It is in language that the symbolic capital is grounded, according to Bourdieu. But when analysing language, one must take into consideration who is the sender and who is the receiver and what their relative dispositions are in the social hierarchy. Looking at language alone is not enough as the authority of language comes from the outside (Bourdieu 1991: 109, 167, Williams 2013: 136). Language is therefore only powerful if the utterer is seen as a legitimate authority and this is what creates power in words (Bourdieu 1990: 170). Discourse is powerful when it is recognized as legitimate, and thus misrecognized as arbitrary (Bourdieu 1991: 170). Language is to Bourdieu a crystallization of past power struggles over knowledge. He views language as being structured by the world, as well as structuring the world. Discourse and its creation of subjectivities are thus not devalued in a Bourdieuan understanding (Leander 2011: 304). As the material in this study is expressions about what the Swedish collective identity is from the Swedish perspective, the question of whether Sweden is recognized as a legitimate authority in the field will have to be left unanswered. A study of a larger scope could also have taken this into consideration, looking closer at the receiving end of the narrative.

This study’s unit of analysis is the Swedish spokespersons’ political discourse related to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. When an individual speaks in the name of the state, as is the case of this study, she or he grabs hold of the state’s legitimacy on the world stage and consequently, this individual is occupying a position in the centre of the national field of power in a reality which is much more complex (Pouliot and Mérand 2013: 37). To exist socially is to be perceived as distinct, and by naming officially what is a shared identity objectification of what is in fact subjective is produced. When an authorized spokesperson speaks on behalf of a group, he has the accumulated symbolic capital of the group backing him and this legitimacy is in turn rooted in the capital which the group has accumulated in the field (Bourdieu 1991: 111, 224). This concerns the tension of viewing the state as an actor versus seeing it as a structure. As this study focuses on a transnational field, the state is considered an agent, however with awareness of it itself being a field of fields and ultimately a social construct.
3.5 Theory as Think Tool

Bigo suggests that the Bourdieuan concepts should be used as a ‘think tool’, as they are not part of a clear theoretical manual and as his theories are characterized by many ambiguities (Bigo 2013: 127, Nissen 2013: 13). I follow his advice, and use the concepts to ask new questions about the Swedish collective identity construction, with the purpose of thinking in terms of social dispositioning as well as showing the arbitrariness of the construction, or, to speak with Bourdieu, the misrecognition of its neutrality. With the help of the Bourdieuan concepts and assumptions, the part of the analysis building on the first research question can start from the premise that how Sweden constructs its identity and ultimately acts internationally is not (only) a result from conscious deliberation or reflection, instead the basis is practical knowledge making courses of action ‘self-evident’ (Pouliot 2008: 258), built on historically accumulated capital which is valued in this field. Not taking the different structural prerequisites of actors in the field into account risk exaggerating the value of words alone, thinking that what is talked about is a clear indicator of the position of the speaker and wrongfully assuming that actors enter a field on equal terms. Bourdieu is in this way used as a perspective to further discuss the findings of my empirical overarching research question, as an added dimension providing more depth to the discussion of the empirical results.
4 Methodological Considerations

This chapter discusses the methodology of narrative analysis and clarifies how Bourdieu’s theory is used in this study.

4.1 Narrative Analysis

Humans make sense of the world and their experience of it through stories, and narrative analysis is based on this insight. It is through stories, or narratives, that continuity and coherence is created to how we understand our past experiences. Moreover, it is through narratives meaning is made about our place in the world. A narrative in its most fundamental definition is simply an account of something that has happened either in real life or in imagination (Robertson 2012: 224-225, 229). In this way, narratives provide access to people’s identity constructions (Lieblich et al 1998: 7). Narratives have been subject to studies in multiple disciplines ranging from linguistics and literary studies to media and communication, medicine, psychology and the social sciences in general. While the linguistic understanding of narrative is rather narrow, focusing on the construction of a text, social sciences have focused more on how the narrative operates as an instrument which is constructing reality (Bruner 1991: 5-6). Narratives are subject to examination in this study as one of the theoretical points of departure is that construction of the collective identity is found in identity-infused political narratives. Instead of looking technically at the linguistic structure of texts, I look at the content and the substantive pattern such as recurring themes, arguments and frequent approaches from Sweden in the studied context.

The understanding of a narrative in this study is that it is equivalent to how the story of Sweden is framed in the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda. This story, or narrative, is located in a broader context, a discourse. The discourse is embedding the narrative and the narrative is embedding the thematic subcategories underpinning it. One possible overarching discourse in the case of my study could be a neoliberal discourse with discursive nodes such as free trade and one universal economic system. Another discourse could be a postcolonial with less developed countries framed as ‘the other’.4 A narrative found in contexts characterized by these possible prevailing discourses must in some way relate to them, however, they are not the unit of analysis in this study, but understood as what the narrative is embedded in legitimizing certain understandings of the past and concealing other aspects. Linking this to the Bourdieuan view, discourse can be understood as what is mediating the field (Guzzini 2013: 83).

In this study, as in many other social scientific studies of narratives (Fløttum & Gjerstad 2016: 4), the assumption is that most texts and for example speeches and policies carry a narrative structure. This study does not regard narratives as an optional way of communicating, but as the main mode through which we are experiencing the world.

4 As an example, Aram Ziai writes about the development discourse in the documents of the SDGs and finds that it is in large based on the structures found in a capitalist world order (Ziai 2016: 204).
Accordingly, it is assumed that narratives are likely to underpin a variety of texts relating to the same context, without perhaps being articulated implicitly in any of them (Baker 2006: 5). Therefore, I have looked for intertextuality in the different pieces of material constituting the basis of the analysis in this study, and the narrative is found on a cumulative level – the constructed identity is regarded as threaded through the gathered material. The focus lies on how the contemporary self is understood in relation to the past, creating a narrative about the history with implications for the future. To spell it out, this means that the texts have been read in search of how the ‘story of Sweden’ is articulated by looking for thematic patterns. And to put it in narrative terms, the study is about how Sweden is casting itself in this context, or, on this stage.

The form of narrative subject to this study is a formal narrative by political actors. Bacon defines a public political narrative as a sequential account from political actors where specific developments are selected as to impose a desired order upon them (Bacon 2012: 771). Once again, it is about creating causal links and coherence between the past and the present. The narrator, the speaker, writer or initiator, is orchestrating the story by putting certain events in a certain context (Griffin 1993: 1097). This implies omitting for example historical events and attributes which do not fit in the narrative. The process of narrating is to invoke a sense of stability to the story, as well as a normative conceptualization based on a combination of imagined wholes and known facts (Jenkins 1995: 134-145). A coherent plot is what is tying it all together as a meaningful whole. By its nature, a narrative includes, excludes and emphasizes. As an example, the past is complex and many alternative explanations to why one holds a specific position in the world could be given. One event can be given as a strong explanatory factor, while another event is completely deselected, despite both events actually haven taken place.

In this study, I use an analytical framework provided by Mona Baker (2006) who builds her analytical framework on the definition of the narrative features offered by Somers and Gibson, with the addition of the feature narrative accrual suggested by Bruner (Baker 2005: 8-9, Somers & Gibson 1994: 59-60, Bruner 1991: 18). In this analytical framework, the four defining features of a narrative are: relationality, causal emplotment, selective appropriation and narrative accrual. Relationality means to view no event as isolated, but part of an episode and thus understood in a broader configuration of events. Causal emplotment is addressing why the event has occurred in the narrative, and allows one to understand and interpret the causal link between events. Selective appropriation is about how some elements are included, while others are excluded, to create coherence. Narrative accrual is about the repetitive aspect of a narrative, how repeating elements of a narrative imposes a story that shape how we view our history (Baker 2005: 8-9).

The analytical proceeding of this study started inductively with a scan of the gathered material in order to obtain an overview. The previous research of the Swedish collective identity was taken into account, meaning that the analysis also in some sense was deductive. The speeches, reports, and articles have been approached with the aim of discerning thematic categories and a main narrative, with the help of the analytical framework accounted for above. These thematic subcategories are not necessarily contradictory, but rather mutually reinforcing.
Narratives’ reliability relies on categorical coherence, meaning that the ‘tendencies’ of a character in a narrative should not contradict one another if the character is to be conceived as credible (Baker 2006: 148). And therefore, categories within the same narrative tend to be reinforcing rather than contradictory.

The analysis has been limited to self-depicting utterances about Sweden, its history, its present and its future. Articles giving account of Swedish initiatives have also been part of the analysis as these are argued to also carry narratives about ‘who one is’. Together these found thematic categories form a main narrative about Sweden’s collective identity in this context. The themes have been found by looking at recurring statements about what Sweden is or has been in the gathered material. When a certain ‘Swedish’ characteristic is highlighted on many occasions in the material, it has been singled out as a thematic subcategory. The four presented subcategories are in my interpretation of the material the most repeated ones. The subcategories sometimes overlap, but have been distinguished from one another as they can be relatively easily isolated from each other: e.g. it is possible to be ambitious without being economically rational, or being moral without being knowledgeable.

Narrative research has been subject to criticism, due to its subjective interpretative approach and therefore potential lack of validity (Polkinghorne 2007: 471). To ensure validity of a narrative analysis, Lieblich et al (1998) propose four criteria. These are width, referring to the comprehensiveness of the presented evidence in the analysis, coherence, meaning that the analysis is creating a whole and meaningful picture both internally but also with external regard to previous research, insightfulness, which refers to the originality and innovative aspect of the analysis, and lastly parsimony, meaning the ability to provide a story based on a small number of concepts, presented with elegance and aesthetic appeal (Lieblich et al 1998: 173). These criteria have been taken into consideration during the analysis, for example by taking stock of and contextualizing with previous research on the Swedish collective identity (external coherence), and making effort to exemplify traits found with quotes from the material (width).

4.2 Subsequent Discussion Guided by Bourdieu

Although Bourdieu stressed methodological eclecticism and had everyday practices in focus in his own research (Pouliot 2013: 45), this study takes Bourdieu’s theory in a different direction, using it as an added dimension to the findings from the empirical narrative analysis. As already accounted for, it is Bourdieu’s concepts field, capital and doxa that constitutes the basis for this discussion. To clarify even further, the Bourdieuan sociological theory is not the theoretical framework of this study, but a perspective added to the final discussion, providing the analysis with taking into account what is talked from and not only about. What previous chapter hopefully has rendered evident, Bourdieu enables studying discourse in another way, taking account also of structural prerequisites (Adler-Nissen 2013: 6).

The second part of the analysis is guided by the question what capital is Sweden referring to and what appears to be the doxa of the field from the Swedish perspective? The Bourdieuan concepts of capital, field and doxa are incorporated in the analysis as think tools discussing this question based on the previous narrative findings. Capital is used by discussing which
capital is drawn from in the constructed identity to create legitimacy of being a ‘leader’. *Field* is used as an assumption in that the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda is taking place in a specific transnational field where specific types of capital works as symbolic capital. *Doxa* is used as a way to analyse what seem to be the taken-for-granted rules of the game from the Swedish perspective in the field.

The third part of the analysis is guided by the question *how does the identity construction match with the vision put forth in the 2030 Agenda?* This part is a discussion about the implications about Sweden’s narratively constructed collective identity and its implications for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As this study does not include an in-depth analysis of the 2030 Agenda, the discussion is held at a more general level, only touching upon its overarching vision.
5 Swedish Collective Identity in Rewind

This section provides a brief overview of previous research on the Swedish collective identity in the international and its main characterizing traits.

5.1 The Neutral Activist
The concept of Sweden’s neutrality, which has been one of the main characterizing traits of Sweden in the international, formally came into existence in 1814 (Agius 2013: 61). Since the 1950’s the characteristic of being neutral became under the Social Democratic rule a value-laden concept meaning not only non-alignment, but was also seen as closely intertwined with the wish to export the image and ideals of the Folkhem (People’s home, my translation), characterized by justice, peace and equality (Agius 2013: 207). This self-perception and the centrality of the principle of neutrality has had a strong domestic back-up (Folz, 2011: 154), and even though it was officially abandoned through the entering of Sweden in the then EC (now EU) (or, as some argue, even before that (cf. Agius 2013: 150, Ekenberg & Sundelius 1998: 135)), Sweden has kept playing the part of an activist state holding on to neutrality values within the union, opposing the idea of a common defence and entering the union with the determined ambition to export Swedish norms to the European arena in the issues of poverty, fair trade and development (Folz 2011: 155, Agius 2013: 198).

During the Cold War, Sweden regarded itself as ‘teacher’, or ‘role model’, whose mission was to show the world its concepts of welfare, international solidarity, and security. Sweden constructed its identity as a ‘force for good’, and a third morally superior alternative to the two competing modernization models of the US and the Soviet Union (Folz 2011: 160, Patomäki 2000: 116). As resources are limited for a small country such as Sweden, this power as an agenda setter and the role of a leader became important to stand out in the international community (Folz 2011: 159).

5.2 One of the Nordics
The Swedish Model has also initiated the process of a Nordic identity construction, however with Sweden as the eager ‘teacher of the class’ teaching the other Nordic countries how the model is done (Mouitze 1995: 9). Its characterizing traits are peacefulness, egalitarianism, solidarity with the ‘Third World’ (or Global South), hospitality towards refugees and immigrants and environmentalism (Mouitze 1995: 11). In international organizations, the Nordic countries have often acted in unison, forming a like-minded group (Mouitze 1995:13). Browning has studied the Nordic identity as a brand and found that it is based on the idea of the Nordic countries being different and better than the norm, promoting a model which is supposed to be copied by other countries. Their experience of having resolved conflicts between them makes them construct a common identity as peace-loving and rational societies, characterized by progress, modernization and superiority to other competing models (Browning 2007: 27, 32).
5.3 A Moral Power

Among the Nordics, Sweden stood out most as the country willing to speak on behalf of the ‘Third World’. Sweden regarded itself as the world’s conscience during the Cold War, and carved out an image of itself as a moral actor internationally and a ‘good state’ willing to give generous amounts of international aid to the UN for example (Browning 2007: 34). Indeed, Sweden had the ambition of being a great moral power (Åselius 2005: 26-27). As an aid donor, Sweden is usually framed as an actor driven by altruistic poverty reducing motives, even if the countries to which Sweden directs most of its aid are countries with a historical link to Sweden and not the countries with the highest degree of poverty (Hårmar 2010: 39). More recently, in the UN and the EU, Björkdahl finds through a case study of Sweden that it has taken the role of a ‘norm entrepreneur’, taking it upon itself to promote the norm of preventing violent conflicts in the world for example (Björkdahl 2013: 321).

5.4 Taking Stock

The previous research on the Swedish collective identity shows that it has been constructed as what can be summarized as ‘a force for good’ in the world, and these findings are relevant to my study. The analysis below takes stock of these results since one assumption in this study is that the position in the field of an agent depends on its historical accumulation of capital. As mentioned in Section 4, the analysis has in this way had deductive elements, as the previous research on Swedish collective identity has been taken into account when categorizing the thematic subcategories. Sweden does not enter the field of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development without a past. It enters the field with already accumulated capital, which has impact on the legitimacy of Sweden as an actor and its self-perception. What should be acknowledged is the historical consistency of the identity construct, lasting despite for example changing political colour of governments.
6 Swedish Collective Identity and the 2030 Agenda

This chapter consists of the narrative analysis of Sweden’s collective identity in the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda. Thereafter, the findings are related to Bourdieu’s concepts capital, field and doxa and lastly a general discussion about the findings and the 2030 Agenda is provided.

6.1 Narrative Analysis
The below narrative analysis is guided by the analytical framework constituting the narrative features relationality, causal emplotment, selective appropriation, and narrative accrual accounted for in Section 4.1. Relationality is how some elements are selected as events relating to a larger episode, as if being illustrative examples of the larger story, the quotations given in the analysis exemplify this. Causal emplotment is about how the causality of the story is constructed, what reasons are given for Sweden to have this identity. Selective appropriation is about what is included and what is excluded and it concerns what is made impossible and possible for Sweden, as well as what other actors are understood as in relation to Sweden. The search of narrative accrual is the very foundation of this analysis, as the presented main narrative and thematic subcategories have been chosen based on them being the most repeated themes in the studied political discourse. Therefore, this narrative feature is an assumption underpinning the analysis.

What can be expected from a narrative found in public speeches, reports and articles aimed at the international is a self-depiction in positive and even on the verge of selling terms. This is not unique to Sweden and so called ‘nation branding’ is a well-established concept (cf. Anholt 2007). In this context (or field) however, where the strive for sustainability is at the centre and contemporary challenges are supposed to be jointly combatted, where the explicit aim is to transform the world by abolishing poverty, reducing inequality, and solving the climate crisis we could also expect an alternative narrative and positioning, such as building a narrative in which structural change, reduction of inequalities and human rights are valued above the competitive market logic on which nation branding rests (Widler 2007: 146-148).

6.2 Main Results
The dominant narrative found in the gathered material is Sweden as an Experienced Role-Model. This narrative is built on references to a past during which Sweden has gained experience of how to become a developed country. It implies that Sweden should lead other countries by example and be a role-model due to its successful past and because the ‘Swedish Model’ already strongly resonates with the 2030 Agenda. Leading as an Experienced Role-Model is mainly argued for through four characteristics which are highlighted in the studied political discourse. These four characteristics, or thematic subcategories, are Sweden as Ambitious, Sweden as Moral Power, Sweden as Economically Rational and Sweden as Knowledgeable. The characteristic of being ambitious is found in the repeated desire to be first and to be a leader. Being a moral power is possibly the most salient thematic subcategory
and is built on elements of promoting human rights and speaking up for moral values. The trait of being economically rational is found in elements which are reminding the international of past economic successes of Sweden and in appearing well-organized and having a ‘win-win-win’ system put in place which can handle past and contemporary challenges. Being knowledgeable is found in utterances speaking of Sweden as a knowledge and innovation nation whose access to research and technology gives Sweden the opportunity to be a leader.

Table 1. Overview of main narrative and thematic subcategories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories:</th>
<th>Ambitious:</th>
<th>Moral Power:</th>
<th>Economically Rational:</th>
<th>Knowledgeable:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of signifiers in the discourse building narrative accrual:</td>
<td>Being first, leading, initiating</td>
<td>Moral values, solidarity, human rights</td>
<td>Economic growth, ‘win-win’ arguments, reporting, being well-organized</td>
<td>Knowledge, research, innovation, technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of what is excluded due to selective appropriation:</td>
<td>Being a follower, taking others’ advice</td>
<td>Being part of the problem</td>
<td>Having wrong model, sacrificing economic gains for sustainability</td>
<td>Being a ‘student’, letting others be ‘knowledge and innovation nations’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of illustrative elements building relationality:</td>
<td>Sweden will lead other countries by example (Shekarabi 2017b)</td>
<td>Sweden is a voice for freedom, peace, human rights and solidarity (Persson 2016)</td>
<td>Sustainable development will boost Sweden’s economy (Lövin 2015a)</td>
<td>Sweden is combining growth and reduced emissions thanks to technology (Wallström 2017a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples of reasons given for having characteristics, or causal emplotment:</td>
<td>Advantageous starting position due to Sweden’s history</td>
<td>Responsible towards future generations, historic reasons</td>
<td>Knowing from experience the right way forward, and having ‘right’ model</td>
<td>Historic experience from being a pioneering country in research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above exemplifies and illustrates the main results from the conducted narrative analysis building on the analytical framework. I will now give account of the four thematic subcategories before presenting the dominant narrative.

6.2.1 Thematic Subcategory One: Sweden as Ambitious

Since 1975, Sweden’s development cooperation and humanitarian aid has met or exceeded 0.7 per cent of annual GNI. Sweden’s own aid goal is 1 per cent of GNI. Since 2006, development cooperation and humanitarian aid has amounted to about 1 per cent of GNI.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017, p. 41
In the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda many examples are given of ambitious deadlines, with wording such as eliminating inequalities, having ‘zero visions’, and striving for no net emissions. There is frequent repetition of a trait relating to being number one. In contrast to the other three subcategories, this thematic theme rather describes the manner in which Sweden is approaching the international political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda and is therefore overlapping the other subcategories. However, as being ambitious has strong narrative accrual in the analysed material, it has been given its own subcategory.

Being ambitious gives the Swedish collective identity the characterizing trait of being a leader home and abroad, a driving force and at the fore-front in striving for sustainable development (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 46, 48, 77). Sweden is constructed as number one with ambitious and absolute deadlines. Emphasis is indeed put on being first, for example being the first state to meet the 0.7 per cent of gross national income (GNI) goal and being the first to raise the ambition to 1 per cent of GNI since 2006 (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 70), being the first fossil-free nation to have no net emissions in 2045 (Löfven 2015a), being the first to having started working towards sustainable development, and being the first country to have a feminist government (Regnér 2016c), to name a few examples.

Sweden aims to have a fossil-free vehicle fleet by 2030 and, in the long term, to be powered by 100 per cent renewable energy.

Löfven, World Economic Forum, 20 January 2016, Davos

Certainly, leadership is a salient trait in the political discourse and a well-repeated element. Sweden has the ambition of being the leader home and abroad, leading by example other countries’ implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Shekarabi 2017b), being the leader for a free and equitable world trade (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 72), being the leader in achieving SDG 16 (Lövin 2016b), being the leader in order for countries not to fall into the “easy traps of oppression” (Lövin 2016c). When Swedish PM Löfven initiated a high-level group consisting of political leaders from Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, South Africa, Tanzania, Germany, Tunisia, and Timor-Leste with the purpose of contributing to “far-reaching and genuine commitment to implementing the global goals and the 2030 Agenda” (Government Offices of Sweden 2015b) it also touches upon the thematic subcategory of being ambitious and a leader. Undoubtedly, the repetition of the characteristic ‘leader’ in the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda is striking.

It is the Government’s ambition that Sweden will be a leader in implementing the 2030 Agenda – both at home and through contributing to its global implementation.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017, p. 4

Another aspect worth mentioning in this section is that the practice of initiating is regarded as part of this thematic subcategory. Initiating by definition means leading the way by doing something first and/or being the one behind the idea. Consequently, when Sweden is taking initiatives such as starting a high-level political group for implementation, or being the only
country to voluntarily report on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) to the forum *Financing for Development* it is also constructing an identity with the trait of being ambitious.

Regarding *causal emplotment*, the causal reason given for that Sweden should be first is found in the argument of Sweden’s “favourable starting position” due to its history (Löfven 2015b), the fact that it is morally right, economically smart (Löfven 2016c) and that leadership is needed in order for the rest of the world to step up the implementation and take it seriously (Shekarabi 2017b). What is implicit is that leadership is needed in order for change and development to occur. The *selective appropriation* in this argument for being first is the exclusion of the possibility of all countries being equally able and willing to take leadership, and is including the element of Sweden as among the most willing and ambitious in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, being the leader excludes the element of being a follower, taking someone else’s advice and learning from others’ experience.

**6.2.2 Thematic Subcategory Two: Sweden as Moral Power**

These days are special to Swedish Social Democrats. It is almost exactly 30 years ago that our Prime Minister Olof Palme was murdered. Palme held his last speech at the People’s Parliament against apartheid in Stockholm, just a week before he was murdered.

Löfven, AU Annual Summit, 30 January 2016, Addis Ababa

Evoking days past and using examples such as the one above to remind of prior efforts in the struggle for human rights builds a Swedish collective identity as one with long experience of being a neutral activist, or a moral power. Out of the four subcategories, this is probably the most prominent in this context. *Relationality* is created where historic events such as the then Prime Minister Olof Palme speaking up against apartheid is put in a larger episode in which this is a characterizing trait of Sweden in the international. This thematic subcategory entails speaking up for what is morally right and for those who cannot speak for themselves. What is valued is to act in a morally correct manner according to liberal universal values such as freedom, equality and human rights and to act from altruistic good-will motives. The quotes below exemplify where Sweden has the trait of daring to speak up and fight for the right cause:

> Sweden is committed to be a strong, fair and clear voice in the world for freedom, peace, human rights and solidarity.

Persson, UNDP Ministerial Meeting, 8 February 2016, Stockholm

> Our leadership is about standing up for rights, sharing the burden, tackling challenges and working together in building innovative partnerships.

Shekarabi, UN HLPF, 18 July 2017, New York

> It is unacceptable that journalists are killed and threatened when they do their job. We must speak up on behalf of those who have had their own voices silenced, like the Swedish-Eritrean journalist Dawit Isaak.

Fridolin, UNESCO General Conference, 5 November 2015, Paris
We need to constantly remind ourselves what is at stake. The values that once were so crucial in shaping our societies – freedom, human rights, equality and science. I cannot think of anything more important to fight for, than that. So let us fight together!

Bah Kuhnke, UNESCO Multi-Stakeholder Consultation, 29 June 2017, Geneva

One example of how having moral values is constructed as being particularly related to being Swedish is how Swedish state-owned companies are presented as having a duty to be role models of ‘sustainable values’ in so called difficult markets. This example builds on the assumption that being a representative of Sweden equals having values that are different from, and better than, other actor’s values in this context. Accordingly, by being a specifically Swedish company one can point the direction for other actors towards sustainability:

The Government’s basic outlook is that it is positive that Swedish companies are acting in such markets and that this can contribute to influencing societal development in a sustainable direction.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum, 2017, p. 74

Regarding causal emplotment, Sweden is being a moral power because it has been so historically and because we have a moral responsibility towards future generations:

The 2030 Agenda is about transforming our world to the better. A world we can enjoy but also hand over to our children and grandchildren. The Swedish government must work hard and take its full responsibility.

Shekarabi, UN HLPF, 18 July 2017, New York

Furthermore, in more or less every statement in the political discourse relating to the 2030 Agenda the importance of working for gender equality is underlined. The current Swedish government is labelling themselves a feminist one and apart from mentioning this fact explicitly in statements, paragraphs about the importance of gender equality is added to about every public statement related to the 2030 Agenda. Being an advocate for gender equality certainly is an element which taps into the thematic subcategory of being a moral power:

The Swedish Government is and will continue to be a strong advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality and LGBT rights, as integral parts of human rights. We will continue to prioritize these issues even if the times are difficult.

Lövin, All Party Parliamentary Group on SRHR Seminar, 7 April 2016, Stockholm

I am proud to lead the world’s first Feminist Government, guided by the principle of international solidarity.

Löfven, Global Meeting on Gender Equality, 27 September 2015, New York

In June 2017 Sweden, together with Fiji hosted a high-level United Nations Conference named the Ocean Conference, relating to SDG 14. The purpose was for the conference to reverse the decline in the health of the oceans, and was the biggest event Sweden has been co-
hosting in the UN since 1972. The conference adopted by consensus a declaration, a ‘Call for Action’, supporting the implementation of Goal 14 (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b). Assuming responsibility to host the Ocean Conference together with Fiji is also part of this subcategory of being a moral power and speaking up for what is morally right.

Relating to selective appropriation, casting yourself as an activist means being able to stand on the outside and criticize. What is excluded is being part of the criticized situation or system that Sweden is standing outside of. In order to be an activist, you must have superior values and/or methods than others. Speaking up for others means that you can know what the other wishes and be the messenger. This tension is highlighted in a report written by Bexell and Jönsson on Sweden’s responsibility in the 2030 Agenda, in which representatives from Swedish civil society expressed concern of losing their watchdog role vis-à-vis the state as they were included in the Swedish delegation at inter-state negotiations (Bexell & Jönsson 2016: 7). Including civil society in the delegation could also be regarded as part of this thematic subcategory of regarding oneself as an activist, which is blurring the lines between the role of civil society and the politically accountable role of the government representatives.

6.2.3 Thematic Subcategory Three: Sweden as Economically Rational

It is my ambition to see Sweden take the lead. And there are two reasons for this. 1. It is morally right. We have a responsibility towards others, and not just ourselves here and now. We have a responsibility towards people all over the world, but also towards future generations. 2. But it is also economically smart. I want Swedish companies to be the ones to develop the new technology and solutions that the world is crying out for to reduce carbon emissions. Our country will benefit from being at the forefront of climate adaptation.

Löfven, Launch of Sweden’s Action Towards the Global Goals, 18 January 2016, Stockholm

Preventing conflicts is not only right, it is also the smart thing to do.

Wallström, UN High Level Dialogue on Sustaining Peace, 24 January 2017, New York

Together we can create a gender-equal society – it is as morally right as it is financially smart.

Löfven, AU Annual Summit, 30 January 2016, Addis Ababa

We should invest in gender equality not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because when women and girls can educate themselves and find a job they like, they bring economic development.

Lövin, All-Party Parliamentary Group on SRHR Seminar, 7 April 2016, Stockholm

Drawing from the above quotes it appears that following moral principles and retaining economic growth are described as being two sides of the same coin from the Swedish perspective in the political discourse relating to the 2030 Agenda. By repeating having also economic justification for striving for sustainable development gives the Swedish collective
identity the trait of being economically rational. Being morally aware and act in accordance with moral principles is framed as something that benefits Sweden economically. Sweden’s role internationally, doing what is right and being a ‘force for good’, is one of the factors given as explanation to the economic success of the country, thus underpinning the main narrative of being an experienced role-model. This in turn constructs the identity as an agent who acts rationally, striving for sustainable development also out of economic self-interest and not only from solidarity. Relating to selective appropriation, being rational excludes the possibility of being irrational and unorganized. The reason given for Sweden’s rationality, apropos causal emplotment, is that Sweden has the insight that doing what is right is also smart, and that they know this from experience.

When Sweden is met with what is framed as global challenges, it can turn these into economic growth:

> The immigration to Sweden has been a key to Sweden's globalization and prosperity, including our strong economic growth and reduction in unemployment.

Johansson, Global Forum for Migration and Development, 11 May 2016, Dhaka

In line with the narrative of being economically rational there is also the construction of the trait being well-organized (this specific adjective is well-used, see for example (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 11, Shekarabi 2017b)). In the discourse formulations such as promoting a “safe, orderly and regular migration” (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 69) or “identify conflicts in order to make informed decisions about rational trade-offs” (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 72) are examples of constructions of an identity as being rational and well-organized. Other important notions in this narrative theme are efficiency, responsibility, follow-up, monitoring, as well as the practices of documenting and reporting (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 11, 86, Regnér 2016c). By being the spokesperson for follow-up and controlling and being able of assuming responsibility, what is excluded is the highlighting of being part of the problematic situation, thinking in terms of selective appropriation.

Sweden was one of the first countries to volunteer for writing a national review to the HLPF. Interestingly, all Nordic countries except Iceland submitted NVRs in 2017 and 2016, with Norway and Finland being two countries out of 22 to pioneer the first year 2016 (United Nations 2017). As there was no fixed format as to how the VNRs should be formulated, being among the firsts in writing one offered the opportunity to champion and set the standard for what the follow-up would focus on henceforth (United Nations General Assembly 2016). This also refers back to the previously mentioned repeated trait of initiating.

> We all bring different perspectives and experiences to the global discussion. Sweden is approaching the global dialogue as a major humanitarian and development donor.

Johansson, Global Forum for Migration and Development, 11 May 2016, Dhaka
As shown in the example above, the Swedish spokespersons almost invariably mention the fact that Sweden is a generous humanitarian and development donor in the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda. Sweden is repeatedly mentioned as the largest, the second largest, or at least one of the top five donors to various UN programs and agencies (Lövin 2017a, Lövin 2016b, Wallström 2017c). By reminding the international community that you are a generous donor, you depict yourself as able and willing to take on responsibility, which is in line with being trust-worthy, a well-organized and committed leader. What is excluded in the emphasis of being a generous donor is being at the receiving end. Moreover, Sweden is an advocate for so called ‘core support’ as the best financial strategy for supporting UN programs and agencies (Lövin 2016b). And this as well is in line with being responsible and an advocate for order:

> On our part, we, as member-states have a responsibility to act coherently, to avoid micro-management and to ensure long-term, stable and adequate financing. More flexible funding is necessary. We firmly believe in core and un-earmarked funding.

Wallström, UN General Assembly, 22 September 2017, New York

Apart from the solidarity reason for giving large donations and in line with the theme of being economically rational, global sustainable development is also portrayed as something that will benefit Sweden economically. The *causal emplotment* in this reasoning is that even if it could be expected that Sweden would lose relatively to poor countries being raised out of poverty, this is not the case as Sweden’s good reputation and openness will make us winners and boost our economy:

> Sweden has everything to gain from developing countries being raised out of poverty. As a small, export-oriented nation, Sweden stands to be one of the big winners when global trade increases. Sweden’s good reputation makes us a popular trade partner (...). Consequently, sustainable global development will also boost the Swedish economy in the future.

Lövin, Dagens Nyheter Debatt, 13 July 2015

6.2.4 Thematic Subcategory Four: Sweden as Knowledgeable

The deepened cooperation between all stakeholders will be needed to implement the 2030 Agenda and reinforces the values and cohesion of Swedish society. This in turn increases Sweden’s competitiveness and attractiveness as a knowledge and innovation nation, which also strengthens Sweden’s capacity to contribute globally.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017, p. 10

Another prominent theme found in the political discourse is the one of being a ‘knowledge and innovation nation’. This characteristic will help Sweden lead the implementation globally, giving the identity a distinctiveness, a unique selling point, compared to other states. Being a ‘knowledge and innovation nation’ is described as a means to achieve competitive advantages globally. The *causal emplotment* in this underpinning component of the narrative is that
Sweden already is a knowledge and innovation nation, and that the 2030 Agenda will make this unique trait even more important which will lead to economic gains as well as help Sweden in contributing to global development. Innovation is indeed seen as one of the most important tools in achieving the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 80), meaning that having this trait is beneficial in the implementation. The quote below illustrates how Sweden is constructed as a technological and modern society:

Now only twenty years later, ICT and the Internet are now a fundamental part of Sweden's society and economy, providing us with nearly half of our nation’s growth!


The long tradition of collecting statistics is highlighted (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 41) throughout the political discourse, as well as mention of Sweden as an international provider of world-class research and cutting-edge expertise (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 47, 63). An example of how Sweden is constructed as a pioneering country in research is the mention of a Swede showing that climate change was man-made in the 1890’s (Government Offices of Sweden 2016b: 63). Using an anecdote such as this in the communication in the international constructs the Swedish history as one lined of research and early technological advancement. This relates to relationality, choosing events from the history which are compatible with the overall narrative and excluding events which are not.

The Government’s ambition is for Sweden to continue making progress in the area of research. The development of cutting-edge expertise contributes to sustainable growth.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017, p. 47

In the discourse relating to the 2030 Agenda this means being the one to formulate how best to tackle for example climate change challenges. Correspondingly, Löfven states at the launch of the global goals that Sweden is at the forefront of climate adaption (Löfven 2016c). Furthermore, Wallström states that the access to advanced technology is enabling Sweden to reduce emissions and yet retain economic growth:

Especially when we see that new technologies offer the opportunity to simultaneously reduce emissions and grow economies. Sweden is already proving this is possible and has set a goal of zero net greenhouse emissions by 2045.

Wallström, UN General Assembly, 22 September 2017, New York

There are many examples of areas in which Sweden offers its expertise. The sector of sustainable public procurement is one where Sweden states they are willing to spread their knowledge about in the UN system (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 49). In March 2016, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a hashtag campaign called #FirstGeneration, which aimed at “creating a workshop for engagement and change” and spreading knowledge among young people and educators (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016c). The initiative #FirstGeneration is also part of this thematic subcategory with its emphasis on spreading
knowledge. In this campaign Sweden is the one to offer a platform for knowledge spread on the SDGs among young and educators, building the component of the Swedish constructed identity as one who values knowledge.

As argued for in this section, Sweden is depicted as a country placed at the top of accumulated knowledge, with access to expertise which can be spread internationally. Being part of the Nordic region, and taking initiatives together with the Nordic PMs strengthens the constructed identity as being an entrepreneur and innovative force. Being a knowledge and innovation nation involves being able and having the legitimacy to formulate solutions to global challenges. Relating this to *selective appropriation*, what is excluded in this narrative is the trait of being a ‘student’ rather than a teacher, where others’ innovations are welcomed and used and others’ lessons and experiences are learnt from. Moreover, saying that knowledge and innovation will give competitive advantages means that these resources will be specific to Sweden implying that other nations in the competition cannot use knowledge and innovation as much to their competitive advantage.

6.2.5 Main Narrative: Sweden as Experienced Role-Model

The accounted for four thematic subcategories underpin one dominant narrative about the Swedish collective identity, which is one of being an experienced role-model. I will now proceed to exemplify and discuss how experience and the past are drawn from throughout the political discourse in order to create legitimacy of an identity as an experienced role-model.

It's a win-win, as the business community knows. Investment in green solutions creates new jobs. Sustainability has become a business case. And in the longer term, the low-carbon growth story is the only growth story on offer. The Swedish example shows that it is possible. Since 1990 we have reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 23 percent. Meanwhile our GDP has grown by 58 percent.

Wallström, ASEM Meeting, 11 May 2017, Alaska

The above quote exemplifies being experienced as it builds on a story of Sweden already having managed to find the solution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and doing so by sacrificing nothing. What others might have thought was impossible, to combine environmental sustainability with economic growth, has been proven possible by Sweden.

Another example of drawing from experience is the often mention of Policy for Global Development (PGU) which has been used since 2003 and is cited as a key instrument in achieving the SDGs globally (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 44, Wallström 2016b). PGU existed prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, and is Sweden’s policy for global development specifying how the different governmental areas should contribute to global sustainable development. Sweden was the first country in the world to create this kind of policy which is based on the understanding that global development can be promoted not only through international development cooperation but is also affected by domestic policy arenas (Government Offices of Sweden 2015a).
The Policy for Global Development was adopted by the Riksdag (Parliament) in 2003 and has been applied with increasing strength since 2014.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017, p. 4

Another example of a mechanism already in place for the implementation, which is repeatedly mentioned in the political discourse, is the national environmental objectives system. This system was put in place 1990 and consists of objectives on which responsible authorities need to report back annually (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 46). Moreover, Swedish municipalities are depicted as already having experience from working with Agenda 21 which is a UN action agenda from 1992 adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 53). Repeatedly emphasizing that similar work was already under way before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda enforces the main narrative of being an experienced role-model, and selecting these policies creates a larger episode of Sweden as experienced as it creates relationality.

I was a foster child. Ten months old I arrived by train to my new parents in the northern part of Sweden. I had the good fortune to be taken into a loving home and to be brought up in a society where the legacy from the past does not prevent a good future, a society where people take responsibility – not only for themselves but also for others. The Agenda 2030 carries that same responsibility.

Stefan Löfven, UN Sustainable Development Summit, 26 September 2015, New York

This personal anecdote from the Swedish Prime Minister (PM) implies relationality as this specific childhood experience is told as illustrative of the Swedish society. It is portrayed as an event in a larger episode with similar events. It is also expressed on the assumption that the Swedish system is founded on the same ideology as the 2030 Agenda and thereby resonating with the main narrative of being an experienced role-model.

Sweden is throughout the political discourse depicted as a country which has travelled a long journey (Shekarabi, July 2017). In a short video showed on the occasion of the annual follow-up of the implementation 2017 this journey is narrated by elderly Swedish persons talking about Swedish history. Although being ‘hard to imagine’, examples from the Swedish past are mentioned such as many people being poor, many being hungry, and women not having the right to vote. In combination with these small speeches the various symbols of the SDGs are shown. Sweden’s Minister for Public Administration Ardalan Shekarabi then appears on the screen, stating that “the Swedish model, with collaboration as foundation, has made Sweden strong”. The video is finished by Swedish adolescents from a made-up future in 2030 talking about present day Sweden as if it was the past, saying for example “I heard some people did not have the internet”, “You couldn’t love whomever you wanted”, and “Some people didn’t understand that our emissions were harming the entire planet!” (Shekarabi 2017b).

This video depicts Sweden as experienced, having had peace since long before the founding of UN and having the right and ideal model put in place which is the cause for its well-advanced development. The showing of the SDGs when talking about Swedish history implies that the goals have already been worked towards since long before the adoption of the
SDGs in 2015. The *causal emplotment* in this video is the link created between the development of Sweden to its ‘model’ and ‘culture of collaboration’, which will also bring Sweden into a sustainable future. What is included, relating to the *selective appropriation*, are examples of Swedish successes and past challenges; now having far-reaching gender equality despite a past in which women could not vote, now having low levels of poverty despite a past in which people more commonly were poor, and now having clean air despite a past of having black hazardous smoke coming from factories for example. What is excluded in this illustrative video are examples of contemporary challenges such as Swedish consumption leading to hazardous smoke from factories in other countries for example.

The ‘Swedish Model’ is mentioned in the political discourse with the assumption that it is a well-known and recognized phenomenon, famous enough not to need much further elaboration in the statements or reports. Its linchpin is described to be a culture of collaboration and cooperation especially fit for the implementation of the SDGs which require a collaborative approach (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 85), and the *causal emplotment* of the Swedish model being the reason for Sweden’s success is recurrent. Moreover, the 2030 Agenda is depicted as a means to further develop the already existing model (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 50) and relating to *selective appropriation*, what this excludes in the narrative is an understanding of Sweden in search and in need of an alternative model which will help Sweden advance sustainably. The Swedish model appears to be in line with the new global goals and not in need of major conversions:

A starting point for Sweden is that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda involves a process of successive transformation and further development of Sweden’s societal model as a modern and sustainable welfare state, nationally and as part of the global system.

Sweden’s Report to the UN High Level Political Forum 2017, p. 4

In September 2016, PM Löfven together with OECD and ILO launched the Global Deal, relating to the SDG 8 on inclusive growth, with the purpose of improving global dialogue between the social partners and countries’ governments in order to improve employment conditions and productivity globally. This was argued to benefit workers, employers and societies and therefore be a ‘win-win-win’ deal (Government Offices of Sweden 2016a). The Global Deal is based on Sweden’s historical and current experience of dialogue and collaboration (Government Offices of Sweden 2017b: 60). While the OECD and ILO are partners in designing the concept, Sweden initially hosts the secretariat and the Swedish PM was the initiator. The Global Deal clearly exemplifies the want to export the Swedish model, and in this way, constructs the identity as a role-model. What is excluded, relating to *selective appropriation*, is Sweden as receivers of other actors’ models, as Sweden is narratively constructed as creator of an exportable society model.

The fact that Sweden is a ‘path-finder country’ in the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children is another clear example of being a role-model. The quote below demonstrates the main narrative of being an experienced role-model by telling the story of Sweden as a near perfect society which is well-developed due to its model including moral values of solidarity and tolerance:
Sweden's strength lies in being an egalitarian and gender equal society, which not despite, but because of its solidarity and tolerance, is rich, modern and a world development leader. This is the Sweden we are striving to build. This is the Sweden we believe in.

Löfven, Launch of Sweden’s Action towards the Global Goals, 18 January 2016, Stockholm

6.3 Overlap of Thematic Categories and Discursive Struggles

As described above, the main narrative through which the Swedish collective identity is constructed is one of being an experienced role-model. This experience and role-modelling is underpinned by different components, or subcategories. These are being ambitious, a moral power, economically rational, and knowledgeable. The subcategories overlap in several senses. As mentioned, being ambitious is a manner to approach the implementation as it is possible to be ambitiously advocating moral values or show ambition by being innovative with knowledge for example. The overlaps rather enforce the main narrative, as stated in section 4.1, as the internal coherence of the characteristics is a sign of validity in the narrative.

Nevertheless, on the discourse level, if there is some sign of discursive struggle it could be between legitimizing leadership based on economic market logic and legitimizing leadership based on moral values and the intrinsic value of sustainability found in our responsibility towards future generations. Moreover, although there is effort to make the two discourses merge, being environmentally sustainable for the sake of moral reasons appears to often be conditioned on striving for economic growth. Examples of this are the mention of green innovations leading to competitive advantages for businesses (the overarching goal is competitive challenges which will lead to profit), investing in research to increase Sweden’s international attractiveness (increased trade is rated above the intrinsic value of knowledge) and the underlining of the ability to reduce emissions and sustain economic growth (reducing emissions at the expense of sustained economic growth would be considered a failure).

Another example is the struggle between stressing to have a ‘culture of collaboration’ and constantly underlining being the leader in a taken for granted international competition. An example is the government bill Collaborating for Knowledge – for Society’s Challenges and Strengthened Competitiveness, which is mentioned in the report (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017b: 64) as an example of collaboration, in line with the ‘culture of collaboration’, taking place between the research community and the surrounding society. It is about collaboration as a prerequisite for being competitive internationally. Having a culture of collaboration is given as a means to strengthen competitiveness, and it seems to be based on the contradictory practices of collaborating and competing, with the latter as ultimate goal which raises the question of where the collaboration ends and where the competition starts. This could also be interpreted as a discursive struggle between the acting according to a logic where sustainability and moral values are the goals and acting according to economic market logic.

The four subcategories are the most recurrent themes in the gathered material, which is why they are understood as the most significant. There are signs in the material of themes that are in one way or another deviant from the subcategories listed above. However, they have been interpreted as less significant as they are less frequent in the political discourse. One example
of an alternative subcategory is that Sweden also recognizes its challenges, mainly in terms of having issues related to discrimination and inequality (not only gender) (Government Offices of Sweden, 2017b: 6), potentially creating a subcategory of being humble. However, these challenges are mentioned with the implicit assumption that Sweden will combat them and has the wish and tools to do so, potentially instead making it part of the moral power subcategory.

6.4 Bringing in Bourdieu: What Is Talked from
Based on the findings in the analysis above I will now use Bourdieu’s concepts as think tools to discuss the result’s implications in terms of accumulation of capital and what appears to be valued capital and doxa in the studied field from the Swedish perspective. What this section will add to the above narrative analysis is a structural dimension, analysing what Sweden is talking from and not only about. The findings from the narrative analysis together form the basis for the analysis, and will be drawn from throughout the discussion.

A generous development assistance policy, an ambitious climate change agenda and long experience of consensus politics make Sweden an important actor that many countries listen to in negotiations.

Lövin, Dagens Nyheter Debatt, 13 July 2015

The above quote touches upon the narrative themes of good-will behaviour, being ambitious, knowledgeable, having experience and a well-functioning and orderly way of governing. It also explicitly states that these traits are part of what legitimizes Sweden as an actor in negotiations. The initial quote capturing all four thematic subcategories (more or less) found in the narrative analysis, I will now use the Bourdieuan concepts as think tools to discuss what forms of capital these highlighted ‘Swedish’ traits are drawing from to advance the self-depictive narrative in a way that is likely to accrue value in the eyes of the other actors in the field. I do this with basis in how the identity is constructed and argued for, as accounted for in previous sections. To reiterate, the assumption is that actors enter social systems with accumulated capital which is inherited from the past, and drawing from this capital is what creates social distinction and status, which in turn would legitimize for example statements about being a leader.

Whether or not Sweden is recognized as a legitimate authority in this field cannot be concluded given the material in this study only focusing on the Swedish perspective on the Swedish collective identity. This notwithstanding, it is in any case hard to account for when an actor is legitimated in a social field (Bourdieu 1992: 190). One indication in the case of this study might be the election to the UNSC. This election, and only referring to groups where a system of alternation has not been established, has been stated to be an indicator of the ‘international pecking-order’ (Pouliot 2011: 557). The wide majority obtained by Sweden in the election 2016 (Sveriges Radio 2016) could thus be a sign of the narrative of Sweden as a leader and a force for good being regarded as legitimate, at least to some extent, in the eyes of the other member states. One indication of the opposite, however, is the very low interest towards joining the Swedish PM’s initiative The Global Deal, promoting the Swedish Model for the labour market in the international (Nordenskiöld 2017). What can be analysed given my material, nevertheless, is what kind of capital Sweden is channelling in their collective
identity construction in this context in the (not conscious) effort to obtain and wield symbolic power, which is one of the Bourdieuan assumptions.

Firstly, both being an experienced role model and a knowledge and innovation nation appears to build on a sort of ‘knowledge capital’. Arguably, Sweden manifests its knowledge capital by constantly claiming to have a system of governance already in line with the development discourse on which the 2030 Agenda is founded. They create credibility by appearing as knowledgeable and informed. A tradition of cooperation and collaboration is stressed and existing mechanisms in line with the new global goals are shown. The insights which can be gathered from the new approach to development of the 2030 Agenda are framed as insights already considered by Sweden since long, in fact constituting the very underpinning of the Swedish model.

Constructing the identity by referring to history and experience draws from this knowledge capital. By having travelled a long journey of development one has access to accumulated knowledge and by emphasizing the current status as a well, or even the furthest, developed country it seems Sweden is in possession of solutions. Being innovative, at the forefront and having access to expertise and high-level research in this way also draws from this knowledge capital. Being ambitious implies being in a knowledgeable position, as the ambitious strives to constantly accumulate knowledge and experience. Having access to knowledge capital creates legitimacy for utterances such as being a path-finder and a role model. Being the master whom apprentices should follow indicates having self-evident competence and influence (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot 2014: 896), and this identity is not open to any actor in the field but relies on having access to accumulated knowledge capital.

Emphasizing orderly, responsible and well-organized traits is also linked to this knowledge capital. Being the one responsible for monitoring and reporting implies having knowledge about which procedure is the most desirable, and having knowledge enough to enable criticizing, standing above and develop current methods. Having this capital implies one is trust-worthy and committed, and an agent who will see to that things are carried out properly and efficiently. Sweden points to its possession of this capital when constructing its identity as economically rational and well-organized, able of sustaining economic growth and simultaneously reduce emissions for example. Being the one to volunteer to write reports and stressing a more efficient funding draws from this capital as well. Having knowledge capital legitimizes formulating how the UN should be reformed for example:

Swedish contributes resources, but we also want to contribute reforms. We want to make the UN more effective, transparent and fit-for-purpose.

Löfven, UN General Assembly, 30 September 2015, New York

Secondly, constructing an identity as a moral power is to point to a ‘good-will capital’. This capital is related to acting objectively and in accordance with universal moral principles. Most probably it is recognized as valuable in the field as this is in line with the whole underpinning purpose of the United Nations as an organization; to promote peace, respect for human rights
and fundamental freedoms. As the characteristic of being a moral power is the most salient subcategory found in the material, Sweden can be assumed to use this capital to legitimize its leadership. In addition to this, being a top donor adds credibility to this part of the Swedish collective identity. Pointing to a history of having defended good values and speaking up against injustice is to paint a picture of a past in which this capital has been accumulated and thus giving legitimacy to a narrative indicating you are a ‘force for good’ and will continue to be so in the future:

Over the years, we have stood by those fighting for independence and dignity, and against repression, colonialism, apartheid and inequality.

Löfven, UN General Assembly, 30 September 2015, New York

Thirdly, social capital has to do with access to networks and good relations to other actors in the field. Sweden underlines its peaceful history and being a strong voice, willing to criticize, does not so much create enemies as credibility of an agent who does not side with anyone. Furthermore, the constant emphasis put on the Swedish model’s linchpin which is ‘a culture of collaboration’ is to say that the Swedish government is an expert in good relations. Good relations with other countries, with business, with civil society, and perhaps with neighbouring countries especially. Claims such as these could be argued to be founded in a sort of social capital, implying having access to networks and other actors who could help you advance your position in the field. Stressing Nordic cooperation, European membership and that the African continent can count on Sweden’s ‘solidarity, friendship and long-lasting partnership with the peoples of Africa’ (Löfven 2016b) also builds this capital. Pointing to a peaceful history makes the painting of an equally peaceful future credible. The accumulated social capital in this way legitimizes Sweden’s constructed identity as an experienced role-model.

The need of being a leader is argued for, both from an economistic rationale and a moral rationale. The good-will capital, the capital which builds on the narrative on Swedish historic actions being based on speaking up for the weak and for what is right, seems to be somewhat separated from the economistic discourse. However, having this trait and these values are in this context sometimes argued to lead to economic growth, which then puts it within the broader frame of striving for economic gains. Furthermore, knowledge capital and social capital together legitimize Sweden’s claim of being a moral power, as it indicates that Sweden has a solution to a well-developed society and therefore knowledge, and has for example managed to sustain peace for more than 200 years. This is in line with Bourdieu’s statement that not everyone can be a progressive norm entrepreneur, but it depends on what one is talking from in terms of accumulated capital (Epstein 2013: 168). Sweden is constructing its collective identity from a position of accumulated good-will capital, knowledge capital and social capital and thus enters the field with different prerequisites than other actors without the same historic experience. This structural prerequisite enables Sweden to take on the role as a ‘force for good’.

---

5 See Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 1, Article 1.
The constructed Swedish collective identity, or at least some of its defining traits in this context, in this way tells a story that is not accessible to all in the field. Adding the Bourdieuan terminology to the analysis therefore underlines the specific structural prerequisite of the story of Sweden and its legitimacy. Talking from the position of this accumulated capital gives Sweden advantage and credibility as leader. Capital by its nature constantly reproduces itself or expands. As long as the history of the past of Sweden does not change (for example by contemporary events being included in the narrative and redirecting the story), it appears Sweden is likely to keep constructing its identity from this position in this field.

Looking at Sweden’s identity construction and taking into consideration the withdrawal of different forms of capital, the underlying stakes in the field on the one hand appears to be the power to define what sustainable development is and how we should work towards it. This could be argued to be the doxa of the field, the underlying set of ideas and norms. The 2030 Agenda is wide-ranging and open, leaving room for interpretation of how the goals should be achieved, meaning that struggle is likely to occur concerning how it is to be understood and put into practice. As it is a joint project, with actors coming from civil society and the private sector, this definition of sustainable development is likely to diverge greatly depending on which actor makes the definition. When Sweden alternates between striving for sustainability from activist motives or economic motives, these justifications are likely to appeal to different actors in the field, and thereby gain legitimate leadership. Moreover, by conditioning activist motives on economic growth, the potential inherent clash of values is made invisible, depoliticizing the issue in favour of economic market logic.

In addition to the struggle of defining what the way forward is in terms of sustainable development, there seems to be a struggle for prestige and to make a name of yourself on the international arena in the studied field. Expressing the want to assume the identity of a leader shows that this identity is desirable and a stake worth struggling for. This could be sign of an alternative doxa from the Swedish perspective, or a sign of the field of implementing the 2030 Agenda not being isolated, but rather intersecting with another transnational field in which prestige and reputation are the main objects of struggle. Drawing from the conducted narrative analysis, the identity of being the leader as an experienced role-model for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is underpinned by the four subcategories. In the studied material, these traits are often either understood as the reason for Sweden’s economic success or as results from Sweden’s economic success. In either way, the identity construction appears to occur on top of the underlying logic which is to strive for economic gains, where sustained economic growth is the ultimate proof of success and what builds legitimacy for leadership in the field. Indeed, this seems to be another doxa of the field, or possibly a sign of the logics of economic gains from an intersecting field intruding upon the logic of sustainability as prime goal. Even if sustainability is at the centre of attention, it is often related to the superordinate stake which appears to be economic growth. Based on the narrative analysis on the construction of Swedish leadership in the implementation, it appears having the recipe for sustainability is often conditioned on also having the recipe for economic growth.
6.5 Matching the Identity Construction with the Vision of the 2030 Agenda

The material analysed in this study is material relating to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It should therefore be mentioned that the found elements of the constructed identity probably would be different if utterances from a different context were analysed. With reiteration, member state’s identity constructions matter for the implementation as they indicate whether the collaborative and inclusive approach of the 2030 Agenda has been considered and affected their self-perception. Furthermore, what is valued in the field can be put in relation to the overarching goals of the 2030 Agenda.

The previously accounted for accumulated capital channelled in the constructed collective identity of Sweden will now be generally discussed in relation to the vision put forth in the 2030 Agenda. How Sweden is legitimizing its leadership in this field has implications for the implementation in Sweden and abroad, and below I will touch upon some tensions and some opportunities. I have not conducted an in-depth analysis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in this study and will therefore only relate the constructed identity to its over-all main features which are the aim to reduce inequalities, abolish extreme poverty, and solving the climate crisis, and doing so in a collaborative inclusive manner.

To begin with, in the work of implementing the 2030 Agenda, sharing best practices and practicing cross-sectional collaboration is commonly referred to as key to success (General Assembly Resolution 70/1, 2015). Sweden’s narratively constructed history of having practical experience of this is arguably beneficial to the 2030 Agenda’s implementation in Sweden, as the path of cooperation appears well-trodden. However, sharing best practices entails giving and receiving and as Sweden is constructing an identity which is mainly based on giving (innovative knowledge, moral values and exemplifying good governance) and being the subject, the learning from others’ experiences fades and sharing best practices risks rather become dictating best practices. What risks going lost is important lessons learnt by other actors, meaning that the collaborative manner in which sharing is central, is in danger. The approach seems to rest on what Sweden can do for the 2030 Agenda, rather than what the 2030 Agenda can do for Sweden.

Furthermore, this also relates to the clash between competing and collaborating in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Running at full throttle, and being at the progressive forefront towards a sustainable society is arguably positive and shows dedication and commitment on the Swedish behalf. Nevertheless, stressing leadership and competitive advantages by being first makes the implementation of the 2030 Agenda appear a competition, and this contradicts the collaborative approach which is supposed to characterize the implementation. In addition to this, the risk is that Sweden will not take strong enough measures to enable a transition towards sustainability, as the solutions seems to already be put in place. Stressing consistency and further development of a societal model risk underestimating transitional fundamental changes in need of occurring in order to achieve the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda is asking for structural change, and this cannot be achieved by working in already existing structures.
Another issue is how the leadership in this field is built on promoting one path of sustainable development, based on the Swedish historic experience and model. This stands in contrast to the central idea of national ownership in the 2030 Agenda. Constructing a collective identity as experienced role-model and in this way wanting to lead by example could be questioned as the best way to show leadership, as this might sometimes be on the verge of imposing the Swedish model on other countries, when the point of departure in the 2030 Agenda is national ownership, stressing that development is happening in very different ways depending on context. In line with the Bourdieuan part of the analysis, taking leadership in the field is to talk from a dominating disposition, implying that one’s vision of the world is imposed on others. As previously mentioned, Bourdieu’s concepts show that the story of Sweden is resting on certain structural prerequisites, making the story Sweden is telling not accessible to all in the field. Taking the role of an activist norm entrepreneur inevitably presupposes that the actor herself knows what a desirable norm is. Taking leadership in the field is to say that you talk from a superior position with access to best practices and the right knowledge. It in this way appears sustainable development is assumed to be reached within current power relations, with technology and knowledge as key to success, which are resources that are not equally accessible.

Drawing legitimacy from the fact that Sweden has had economic success, is another example of a possible tension between what from a Swedish perspective appears to be ‘doxic practice’ and the aim of the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 Agenda promotes usage of new metrics of prosperity. These metrics should be central in legitimating leadership together with a human rights perspective, rather than arguing from economic market logic of gaining competitive challenges, if the aim is to be coherent with the vision of the 2030 Agenda. What actors in the field should be seeking is sustainable solutions, not economic profit. As touched upon in section 6.4., it appears different logics are found in the studied context. This is not surprising, and as initially stated relating to nation branding. In the international, states tend to promote themselves and work on their brand, however, in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is of uttermost importance to ensure a sustainable future and an identity construction based on striving for economic gains and competitive advantages in the global market economy should be put aside.

In conclusion, the implications of the Swedish constructed collective identity on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda are that there is a risk of stressing experience and having the right model put in place when the implementation is demanding structural change. Moreover, talking from a superior position could imply that best practices are not shared and that other needed perspectives are not taken into account. This challenges the collaborative and inclusive foundation of the 2030 Agenda. The other tension discussed in this section is the taken for granted logic in the field, which at times appears to value human rights and at other times appears to rest on market logic with economic gains as overriding goal.
7 Conclusion

In the political discourse related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sweden is constructing its collective identity through a dominant narrative of being an experienced role-model. This main narrative is underpinned by the traits of being ambitious, a moral power, economically rational and knowledgeable. Furthermore, the narrative construction of the Swedish collective identity is channelling knowledge capital, social capital and good-will capital to build legitimacy for Sweden’s leadership as an experienced role-model. By using concepts borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu, this study has shed light on how referring to accumulated capital in the construction of the Swedish collective identity legitimacy of its different components are created. This suggests that identities also in the international cannot be seized and selected by any actors, but that actors enter fields with unequal access to symbolic capital which affects which role they can take and play out.

Regarding the constructed leadership and the vision put forth in the 2030 Agenda, three main tensions have been discussed. Firstly, the promoting of one way of development stands in contrast to the need of national ownership. Secondly, sustainability in all three pillars stands in contrast to the sometimes taken for granted logic of striving for economic gains instead of focusing on sustainable sources for economic growth, and emphasize human rights over market power. Thirdly, it seems the approach at times is based not so much on what implementing the 2030 Agenda can do for Sweden, but what Sweden can do for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As this study has highlighted, there is a risk of being stuck in the straightjacket of existing structures and habits, when there is urgent need of structural change for the SDGs to be achieved by 2030.

Future studies of collective identities in transnational fields could take into account also material capital, and not only ideational, for example by looking at actual financial flows as a way to build authority in the field. Moreover, an in-depth study of this particular field historicizing its origin and analysing more actors could bring more use to Bourdieu’s theory and more insights about current power relations and their effect on the construction of collective identities.
8 References

8.1 Literature


8.2 Analyzed Material


http://www.government.se/speeches/2016/05/introductory-speech-at-the-international-dialogue-side-event-at-whs/


Appendix 1: The Sustainable Development Goals