

Uppsala University – Bachelor thesis, HT17

The H&M Group – Enabling the future

An anthropological discourse analysis of The H&M Group
Sustainability Report 2016

Abstract: Initiatives in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) are getting more pronounced than we as a society are used to, and spurs confusion over the perceived dichotomy between corporate ethicising and profitability. H&M is a company engaging in these initiatives, and their manifest of CSR will be analysed for discourse content. Themes such as social institutions, contrasted groups, individuality and collectivism and agency emerge within the pages of the H&M group's sustainability report.

Author: Johanna Eliasson
Cultural Anthropology C, 15hp



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Tutor: Nikolas Århem
Department of Cultural
Anthropology and Ethnology

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
1.1 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	3
1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	4
1.3 RESEARCH METHOD AND MATERIAL.....	6
1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
1.5 OUTLINE AND RESERVATIONS	8
2. THE H&M GROUP – EMPOWERING THE FUTURE.....	10
2.1 AT A GLANCE: THE REPORT.....	10
2.2 WHO THE H&M GROUP THINK THEY ARE	12
2.3 POSITIONING THE WORLD	16
3. DISCUSSING THE DISCOURSE.....	24
LITERATURE AND REFERENCES	26

1. Introduction

The nature of business is a contested phenomenon. A corporation's ultimate purpose is a constant matter of debate, and one of the questions in that discussion is what kind of responsibility towards society a company is obliged to shoulder. None, say some – for example the (in)famous economist Milton Friedman who some 70 years ago claimed that companies' only responsibility is to obey the law (Friedman 1962:102). At that time, the social responsibility of corporations was a relatively new concept that was just taking ground in the business world as an explicit term, but was to rise to prominence as a dominating doctrine (Garsten 2012:408). Today Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a prominent aspect of many large-scale corporations – some even call out these corporate habits to have become orthodox (Dolan Rajak 2011:4). CSR is the tendency to for corporations to act in the fields of corporate citizenship, governance, environment and ethics (Taenja et al 2011:344). It has become the overwhelming standard for multinational corporations, especially with the prospects of a circular economy as the future global standard, where great changes needs to be made (Taenja et al 2011:344, McPherson 2017).

A company's field of operation is becoming less centred around economic, and they seem to be seeing an increase in moral influence. Some claim that in recent times of turbulence in the political sphere, companies at times have taken stronger action for the sake of the public compared to some governments (McPherson 2017). One example is when in 2017, a hurricane hit Puerto Rico and diminished every strain of infrastructure worthy of the name. While the governmental authorities of United States hesitated, the motors and battery corporation Tesla, Inc. instead took command (Sampathkumar 2017). Helping to construct solar panels to regain electric power in children's hospitals and redirecting resources to establish battery production in the country, they interfered with the public sphere in a way that we might expect a welfare state to do. These initiatives show a vastly different approach to responsibility from Friedman's doctrine, and speaks of how the corporations' role has transitioned since. "This is not capitalism as we know it", writes Forbes contributor Chris Ladd, as he is pondering on the winds of change in CSR (2017).

Weaving their way into symbiosis with society, companies are not only influencing their surroundings in a greater extent, they can no longer avoid being influenced by their surroundings. One company that is often in trouble in the media is the fashion retail colossus H&M Group. Acting on a global scale with markets in 64 countries, they are a main

player in the retail industry and an institution reaching out to millions of people (The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016). Compared to other corporations of their size, H&M Group and other retail companies have a connection to people's everyday life since they have a vast group of customers who use their products on a daily basis, as well as they are reaching out to people through commercials in media and in the public. Some examples of how H&M's actions might affect the public opinion can be seen in YouTube videos with titles such as "Everything That Is Wrong With H&M" or "Why I Stopped Shopping at H&M" where the corporation's ethical stance is contested (Brand Sins 2015, Kristen Leo 2017). At one point, the group sparked a media outrage for destroying clothes that were damaged, even though they allegedly were so in a way that would be harmful for the end consumer (e.g Aftonbladet, 2017). Another example of unexpected publicity was the tragic, preventable disaster in Savar Upaliza, Bangladesh, 2013, when a multi-storey garment factory collapsed, which resulted in the deadliest building failure in modern history. The H&M Group could not be linked to the event, but some public voices still proclaimed that H&M could and should take greater responsibility for the damages since they are operating in the country (SvD 2015). The public has moral expectations on H&M as an institution, and they do not hesitate to protest when these expectations are not met.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

If global corporations are taking place in this position in society, still in a formative stage, it is of interest for the rest of society (however vague and ambiguous that term may be) to understand what companies themselves understand of the situation. Because of their blatantly global activities and their abilities to spark an interest in the public, the H&M group will stand as an example of a large-scale corporation that is engaged in CSR activities. Their report on their well-meaning deeds will serve as an illustration for how a multi-national company may perceive their role in a globalized setting. With the institutional frames they are presenting themselves through and through their way of describing their stakeholders, we will gain an insight into the perceived reality that H&M Group is producing – that is, their discourse. Drawing a blueprint of H&M's sense-making, the analysis of their discourse will in return help communities make sense of H&M. How does H&M seem to understand and position themselves and their surroundings through their sustainability report?

Corporate perspectives seem to shift their searchlight toward a liaison with the great masses, at least more profoundly than we are used to. But as we have seen, many are

still highly suspicious to corporate responsibility. This may be explained by the perceived dichotomy between corporate ethics and corporate bottom-line profit-seeking (Garsten 2012:408). By adding anthropological understandings to that conflict, we can work to bridge that divide and to make this seemingly puzzling phenomenon more comprehensible for those touched by it.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.2.1 Discourse

Discourse theory is connecting to humans' tendency to categorize things around us. Categorizing items, people, events et cetera helps us to interpret impressions and paints us an understanding of the world (Douglas 1997). We speak, talk and express ourselves through such categories, and they are thus constitutive of how we perceive our world (Foucault 1981, Börjesson Palmblad 2007:8). Börjesson Palmblad amongst others suggests that a discourse is made up of a certain set of categories that are made more conceivable than other possible categories (Börjesson Palmblad 2007:8). Constructing social categories, discourses add to a perception of contrasting groups, hence the impetus to categorize. They are thus also building a certain understanding in the receiver about their own identity, based on these contrasting aspects (ibid. 2007:8). Shaping our identity and our thoughts, these understandings are also guiding our actions. Media, printed media in this case, that is in dialogue with big audiences therefore have the power to "shape widely shared constructions of reality", and uses techniques to position the reader "to adopt a certain point of view" (Mautner 2008:32,49). As anything social, discourses are fluid and non-essential, but with distinct categorization like these, a process of normalization follow in its trail (ibid 2007:15). Though, as Foucault once said in his lecture *The Order of Discourse*, "if discourse sometimes have some power, nevertheless it is from us and us alone that it gets it" (1981:52). Anthropologists Dolan and Rajak agrees, saying that not only the persons being readers of the discourse, but also the ones performing it (2011:5). H&M has to create the world it explains us.

Anthropologist Christina Garsten also writes about discourses, especially with CSR in mind. She gives emphasis to the flexible nature of CSR discourse from management's side – with a contemporary capitalism that quickly adapts to critiques of its nature. Its abstractness and perceived neutrality makes it favourable to use as a corporate tool to shift focus from less favourable sides of a corporation (2012:413f). The discourses serves to form

the corporation's role in the world as well as the structuring of its own actions. Garsten describes CSR discourses as performative, since discourses are taken into daily practice through actions. She presents some ways of supporting and substantiating a corporate discourse; through evaluation, rewards and sanctions, which we will see evident in the report (2012:414).

1.2.2 The Corporation as a Social Institution

Corporations can sometimes be portrayed as monolithic entities, but one mustn't forget that in the end, all of these are constituted of individuals. The social- and philosophical scientist Jon Elster underlines this when he ponders on the function of social institutions in society, defining it as a rule-enforcing mechanism with formal social sanctions as its tool (1989:154). Institutions of different sorts functions like glue for society, sticking it together. Corporations may be seen as a private institution along with other organizations like universities, trade unions and religious organizations, Elster offers (1989:147).

Since a corporation consists of a vast body of individuals, it must rely on institutional design for execution and to eliminate the risk of individuals acting out of self-interest (ibid. 147, 157). Their main mean of enforcing mechanism is sanctioning the individuals in their governed groups – the most negative sanction often is expulsion from the group and some positive such can be “ranging from a wage or a degree or expulsion of sins” (1989:147). Elster means that a prominent aspect of institutions are their influence to make people behave as wished, through encouragement or discouragement of certain behaviour. The choices and actions made by the individuals are working in favour of the wellbeing of the institution, and are streamlined to also being the best choice for the individual (ibid.147f). The costs and prices of certain actions mean that the cooperators of the institution will get an advantage over non-cooperators, meaning that the institution can create ripples even without their bordered groups of governance. We shall see how this also applies to the H&M group.

1.2.3 What is CSR? Definition of Terms

CSR is bestowed with numerous different definitions, possibly due to there being no external enforcement of these initiatives. It is more or less up to the company to interpret what should and could be done within the framework of CSR. International standards like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and ISO 26000 give guidance to what is expected

from the company, but there is no regulation except from law (UN SDG 2015, ISO 26000 2010).

The answer to what CSR is will also be greatly dependent on who you ask – a business mogul will surely give you an answer more operationalized than that of an anthropologist. The latter's definition is much more useful for making sense of the social phenomenon though. One definition comes from anthropologist Christina Garsten and ethnographically inspired CSR-researcher Anne K. Roepstorff – they both offer that the contemporary CSR-wave is a struggle by the companies to find some form of harmony between the perceived dichotomies of managing bottom-line figures (their net income), and providing their stakeholders with an ethical stance (Garsten 2012:408, Roepstorff 2010:125). This seem to be the same issue that the public is puzzled by. According to Garsten, CSR can be a “form of voluntary regulation whereby corporations monitor and ensure their adherence to law, international conventions, and ethical standards” (2012:408). It is tinted by a proactive stance, where the initiatives corresponds to stakeholder expectations (2012: 408). Adding to this definition, Roepstorff lays out the idea of CSR as any activity concerned with the relation between the corporation and the society at large (2010:14).

Companies are not only undertaking these kind of efforts in response to stakeholder pressure, though. CSR also acts as ways of ensuring that resources and supply chains will be available in the future, for the company's use and continued existence. It also functions as sources of marketing content, paving the way for lobbying and attracting new human resources through bettered reputation, and it is also working to strengthen the morals of existing staff (see e.g. Harioto 2017). H&M is no exception to this, and they mention multiple times in the report how their CSR-efforts are undertaken in order to have a future for their industry.

1.3 Research Method and Material

A sustainability report differs from other forms of external communication coming from a corporation. Here, the H&M group is posing not as traditional commercial entity communicating to potential or actual customers, but instead present themselves as corporate citizens in the global community, holding a dialogue about their being as responsible organizations. Here they are addressing their stakeholders, the groups who have an interest in H&M group's actions for diverse reasons. H&M themselves define these to be constituted of

customers, communities, colleagues, suppliers, supply chain employees and their representatives, industry peers, policy-makers, academia and science (HMGSR 2016:118).

To systematically search the report's content, a method inspired of qualitative content analysis, as outlined by researchers Hsieh and Shannon, has been implemented (2005). The conventional content analysis they describe is one where the researcher initially search through their material to get a holistic view of the content. Thereafter codes or categories are formed from the material – from this inductive perspective, ideally the material is shaping its own categories and no specific preconceptions of the material or the outcome of the research is imposed on the text (2005:1279). Initially avoiding a theoretical approach, the content can speak for itself in a greater extent than if the researcher would have moulded the text with their own categories.

Some might suggest that the analysis of print media is less valid than material collected by a researcher, since there is no interaction between the researcher and their field. But, a text is always existing for and expecting a reader, a receiver and a perceiver. It is therefore dialogic in its nature (Bakhtin 1981). It is also generally believed that not running the risk of interfering with one's raw material will make it less likely for the researcher to subconsciously lead the material toward confirming certain preconceptions or hypotheses (cf. Hsieh Shannon 2005:1270f, Börjesson Palmblad 2007:17, Mautner 2008:32). The material would be existing under the same circumstances no matter whether the research is taking place or not, and is therefore more potent in describing a discourse (Börjesson Palmblad 2007:17).

Since the coding methodology is rather interpretative, there is a risk that the findings have been affected by my preconceptions and initial understanding of the field. I have tried to stay aware of the risk of demand characteristic, which is when the researcher actively search for certain themes or aspects in the text during content analysis (Neuendorf 2002:133). Knowing the language and preconditions of one's field is also crucial for understanding the content (Neuendorf 2002:9). Falling short of understanding the context may harm the results since the key categories may go unnoticed (Hsieh Shannon 2005:1280). One should also be cautious of industry buzzwords, in this context one example is 'transparency' as pointed out by Garsten. These words, although frequently used in the industry, may still hold different meanings in different texts and contexts (2012:413).

The discourse theory takes a stance from the constructionist camp, portraying all knowledge as a social construction (Börjesson Palmblad 2007:9). The discourses shaping us

are frames for our perception. Several different truths can exist about one phenomenon, and the idea of these multiple perspectives are where discourse research lays its interest – one may see it as the researcher’s hypothesis (ibid. 2007:10,12f). The researcher also has a responsibility of representation: Producing knowledge about a certain field or discourse can make the researcher a part of the field. Even if the researcher does not affect the material when they collect it, an analysis takes shape and the discourse is written out – suddenly the researcher is a co-producer of the discourse (Börjesson Palmblad 2007:20).

1.4 Literature review

Anthropological research of CSR often centers around two areas; the one of discourses and the other one of power relations. Garsten and Roepstorff have both undertaken fieldwork in the hunt of managerial CSR practices – Roepstorff with how CSR is thought and performed, Garsten of different trends of CSR-persons discourses (Roepstorff 2010, Garsten 2004). Others have explored power relations following CSR, such as Geert de Neve who have undertaken fieldwork investigating the reception of CSR-initiatives far down in supplier chains and finding tension (2014). Often these are referring to reciprocity a la Marcel Mauss’ and finding post-colonial and imperialistic tendencies (e.g. Khan Lund-Thomsen 2011). Many of these works are from late 00’s, and the business field of CSR-research has been booming since the late noughties, so we will probably see a growing mass of academic CSR-research in the future (Taenja et al 2011).

1.5 Outline and Reservations

The ground initially covered by this text will briefly give an abstract of the content in The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016, chapter by chapter. Following this, some institutional functions that H&M express is discussed, and subsequently a section that delves into the contrasting groups that H&M position around themselves. Finally, a discussion and summative finishing notes and comments will take place.

This text does not set sails with a wish to review the morality of using CSR-strategies. Many other channels thoroughly critique these efforts as eventually purely commercial, but this shall not be granted attention here. Neither is it an attempt to value the initiatives taken by H&M in the first place or what H&M are *actually* doing and achieving out there in the world, but rather how they portray their world to be constituted. The text will

border to it, but it will not cover H&M's existence as a social institution as an issue in itself, but merely as a tool to understand the discourse.

2. The H&M Group – Empowering the Future

2.1 At a glance: the report

The H&M group is a fashion retail group, started in the middle of the 20th century with the fashion brand H&M. The store grew, and today the corporation consists of have several brands catering to different demographics under the names H&M, COS, Monki, Weekday and H&M Home, writes the The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016 (from here on under the abbreviation HMGSR (2016:4). With 64 markets containing 4,352 stores and totalling in 223 billion SEK sales revenue including tax, they are a main player on the global retail scene (HMGSR 2016:4). Through their in-group operations they employ an approximate number of 161 000 people, but they estimate their supplier chain to consist of approximately 1.6 million people (HMGSR 2016:5).

The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016 is a seven-chapter long manifest of the H&M group's CSR efforts, spanning over 124 pages. Sprawled with examples from collaborations, interviews with employees and stakeholders it defines the idea of H&M's sustainability efforts. The entire report is written from the narrative perspective of the entire H&M Group. No explicit author emerges – at most, we meet some interviewees in the report, as well as a couple of auditors and email addresses for further contact. The whole production is appearing as a cohesive frontstage presentation for their wide-ranging sustainability efforts. While implicitly addressing their stakeholders, the expected reader is not defined. Since the stakeholders are ranging from many parts of society, many different readers may be imagined. One can guess that H&M has written this report with regard to the diverse interests of their diverse stakeholders. Available to download complimentary from H&M's webpage, it is also accessible to anyone with a computer and internet access.

After an introduction of the corporation in general, H&M lays out subsequent chapters with separate themes. The first section explains their vision and strategy; in the face of environmental and demographic changes, in order to keep themselves and their industry going with supplying people with affordable clothing, a circular and renewable fashion industry system must materialize. The H&M group intends to lead this change while being a “fair and equal company” (HMGSR 2016:12). This will be implemented through their three areas of sustainability strategy – *100% Leading the Change*, *100% Circular and Renewable* and *100% Fair and Equal*, which are all presented in their own separate chapter (HMGSR

2016:13). These numbers, 100%, are as blunt as they are in order to prove the ambition of the H&M group, they are not definitive (ibid). The group is aiming at becoming a trailblazer, leading the way for a challenged industry into a new era. In the introduction they also cover what they mean with their *value chain* – the sections of H&M’s supply chain and organization where their presence have a direct effect. These nodes of impact stretches from the section of design to raw materials, fabric and yarn production, product manufacturing, transport, sales and eventually to garment use (2016:20f).

The subsequent chapters explain the three 100% strategy areas. First, *100% Leading the Change*. This is their idea of being the trailblazers of a sustainable retail industry. They will do this partly through the plan to ‘promote and scale innovation’, where they identify scientific breakthroughs and start-up companies in order to collaborate and take these innovations into the industry faster than they would have (2016:25). They mention their Global Change Award that exist to encourage sustainable innovations from stakeholders outside of the H&M group (2016:26). Another goal is to ‘drive transparency’. This part is discussing the flow of information going through the organization. H&M wants the flow to be open, for everyone from the customer that wants to shop sustainably to the supply chain factories when dealing with contracts (2016:27ff). This information flow is supported by systematic auditing indexes and industry coalitions to access information, and is encouraged by rewards for sustainable actions (2016:29,30).

100% Circular & Renewable is instead focusing on the material aspect of their sustainability, and mention issued such as production materials, production processes, sustainability of design as well as climate effects as key areas. Throughout their value chain, they aim to become circular in the use of materials – what comes out is what comes in. Science is their friend in this chapter, where they easily prove their points with numbers, tables and stakeholder interviews. Renewable energy, water responsibility and CO₂ emissions is what is on the topic.

The last strategy, *100% Fair and Equal*, is the one regarding all the people governed by H&M in one way or another. This section is concerned with fair jobs as well as diversity and inclusiveness (2016:68f). A distinction is made between jobs within the H&M group and the ones in the supply chain – since H&M doesn’t own most of their factories, the people in the value chain sections of raw materials, fabric and yarn production, product manufacturing and transport are not considered to be a direct part of H&M group. We shall see the results of this further ahead. There is an ambiguity from the H&M group about their

perceived responsibility for these people. In some parts they denounce their responsibility, while addressing grass-root concerns in the other.

The last two chapters are more summative in their nature. *Standards & Policies* discusses their stance on human rights, code of conduct, sustainability commitments, animal welfare, chemical restrictions and social politics, while *How We Report* is mainly covering matrixes and auditing practices.

2.2 Who the H&M group think they are

“Our shared values run like ‘a red thread’ through our company. They reflect the heart and soul of the H&M group and define what we stand for and how we act,” The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016 states early on in its introduction (2016:5). Without any further explanation they lay out seven points for their values, the so-called *H&M way*: ‘we are one team’, ‘we believe in people’, ‘entrepreneurial spirit’, ‘constant improvement’, ‘cost-conscious’, ‘straightforward and open-minded’ as well as ‘keep it simple’. These seven standpoints are not further explained, but throughout the report H&M refer back to their shared values and mean that they are “a part of who we are, what we stand for, and how we act” (2016:72). They continue,

We promote a values-driven way of working and expect all employees to be ambassadors for these values in their work. Our shared values (outlined in the H&M way*) are the starting point for how we do business and how we interact with the world around us.
(HMGRS 2016:72)

The H&M group has expectations on their employees on how they are to behave. They are to follow the *H&M way*, even though that it is a fairly vague guideline. Even though they do not explicitly state it or explicitly explain their values much except from the unilluminating H&M way, they make it clear that these values are to be ‘shared’ by everyone in their value chain. The very notion of the entire organization and supply chain being called the *value chain* serves as evidence that these expected ideals are not limited to employees. Thus, the H&M group are trying to shape millions of people’s behaviour in a certain way, which Jon Elster would agree to be one of the manifestations of a social institution.

H&M means that their values are permeating their entire business. They also admit to influencing and impacting a vast amount of people in numerous ways, even beyond

their own direct operations (2016: 20, 82). Even the people beyond H&M's organizational limits are to be affected by H&M's ways. Speaking about their 100% Fair and Equal initiative, they write:

We want to use our influence to advance respect for human rights, be a force for *positive change in the communities* we touch and have a positive impact on *people's lives* across our industry. (emphasis added, HMGRS 2016:71)

And, in another section, regarding their initiatives as a whole;

Our new vision sets a high bar. Ultimately, it will help us create sustained and balanced growth that meets demand, while also helping to *improve* our environments and *society*. (emphasis added, HMGRS 2016:13)

Looking at quotes like these, it seems like H&M is opting for more than just a coherent workplace philosophy. They are looking to change people's lives, to improve *communities* and *society*. The words chosen to present these ambitions are worth noticing – they want to create a *positive change* and *improve* things. These sentences above are charged with the implication that what H&M has to offer these communities is of benefit to them, and that the company is having better options than what is already in place. An offer of benefits in order to align this group of people under the institutional borders of the H&M group, or an act of philanthropy in the wake of CSR's orthodoxy? The value that is charged in these words shows that the H&M group is looking to do good, but 'good' is not neutral – it is charged with moral values. Christina Garsten mentions this when she discusses the discourses of CSR. CSR is presented as neutral, but holds a more to it under the surface, when the constituting aspects of discourse comes into the picture (2012:412f).

Another example of how H&M are spreading their ideals is through their Code of Ethics. The document, containing basic ethical stances, reaches every business partner and every employee in the H&M group. It has the same content in every country, and may be accompanied with training. Compliance is monitored and controlled, and control is something that is grasping H&M's attention in general. With an incredibly vast scope of impact nodes, the borders of their groups are at times hard to determine. The theme of control is palpable in numerous places in the text, especially when discussing the supply chain. Animal welfare is to be controlled, water responsibility is to be controlled, suppliers in high-risk countries are to be 'managed' and these factories' recruitment policies are to be governed, and it goes on (HMGRS 2016:14, 46, 50, 84, 101). Compliance (their own choice of words) is continuously monitored through auditing and other forms of reporting (2016:80). They are making sure that their subjects are behaving in the desired way.

Jon Elster talks about sanctions as a function of social institutions, and Christina Garsten fills in with the rewards and sanctions. Making sure that desired behaviour is acknowledged, H&M uses incentives as a method for aligning people with their ideals and to move society around them. These systems are created to integrate with peoples' every-day decision making to align their desires with H&M's. Reward systems vary depending on the recipient (HMGSR 2016:31). One reward system addressing their institutional environment of innovators and industry, is The Global Change Award. It is a prize that encourages industry innovations, with the expected result to help spur the planned industry change (2016:26). Factories are incentivised to create desired labour-related systems, customers are rewarded for recycling, and employees are benefited by business achievements (2016:76, 16, 31). One form of sanctions that are not explicitly stated, are the negative sanctions. They are not openly addressed, but H&M seem to hint to it at one point when they mean to describe rewards in the supply chain; "We will reward partners who maintain a good sustainability performance and aspire to further improve it with more orders, training opportunities and more long-term contracts". This seems to suggest that if one does not conform, partnership may be terminated or of lower quality (or H&M's idea of quality at least).

H&M seem to be aware of their institutional status, and act thereafter. They want to spread their desired behaviour – sustainability – and do execute evaluation, rewards and sanctions, just as Garsten describes. With the corporation's sanctions, the people and other institutions that are co-operators of the company are likely to be more successful, and might therefore rule out non-co-operators and shape the social structure of societies (2012:153).

But how does H&M communicate what is seen as desired behaviour? One way to make people conform to H&M's ways is that the people in the value chain are trained by the employer. The training may concern anything from anti-slavery to knowing the Code of Ethics. Different versions of the words 'train', 'educate', 'raising awareness' appears 112 times in the report. The company claim to have extensive training opportunities, where employees in essence are trained to streamline the H&M way to their every-day decision-making – the H&M ideology is made to be internalized into action. Phrases such as "We know from experience..." and "Our new strategy is built on years of hard work and experiences of both success and setbacks" occur in the report at some places (HMGSR 2016:15,74). Drawing back to the know-how within the company, H&M present themselves as knowledgeable and wise and ready to share their knowledge to those who deserve it.

Partially through notions like these, among other things, they gain authority that gives them the esteem to educate people. It may also feed them some esteem to practice their control.

One way H&M are controlling their subjects is not only with the knowledge and truths they create themselves, but also by knowledge and experience that is acquirable by the company themselves. One theme eagerly addressed in the report is ‘transparency’. This translucence of information concerns the operations in general, but specifically in the supply chain. It intends to make the process and trail of the garments from field to consumer clear, to H&M, stakeholders and end customers (HMGSR 2016:27). Some arguments for increasing transparency are laid out – it is seen as vital for H&M in order to take responsibility for the supply chain, to use for internal strategy and “building trust and credibility along our supply chain and empowering our customers to make more sustainable choices” (2016:25, 27f).

Transparency is a reoccurring theme in the report, and is one of the fields where H&M wants to act as a leader for the industry. First of all, H&M has a will to truth and often turn to science for arguments. They show various proof of their scientific ways. Some examples count for indexes, codes and other systemizations (e.g. 2016:15, 38, 44, 46). They are also producing knowledge more than just through their discourse. Supporting research and innovations, H&M are shaping their surroundings through what information is being supported and promoted. By running their principles through a scientific filter, they make them seem neutral and unbiased. Thus, it is harder for a subject to object to H&Ms initiatives as ideological or biased, but does instead seem natural and legitimate.

H&M seem to realize what powers knowledge can hold. Thus, they want to obtain it and to produce it, explicitly or inexplicitly through rules or through discourse and H&M does want to control action and behaviour for the sake of the dutiful lead they are taking. They want their sustainability troops to share the same values, or discourse, and finds ways to communicate these. H&M is a corporation that is consciously creating a discourse about themselves. Through writing about themselves like this, they create an idea about what the corporation H&M means. Discourse shapes action, and with the tone of legitimacy, authority and neutrality accompanied by sanctions, they make their governed groups behave as they desire, or else face possible expulsion and the possible out ruling of a non-co-operator.

2.3 Positioning the world

Throughout the report, H&M crystallizes three distinct groups of people. These three groups differ greatly in composition and objectives, but they are also addressed with different rhetorical tones and are thereby positioned differently by the H&M Group. The first one is the one that H&M somewhat seem to perceive as their equals – other institutions. This group consists of the stakeholder groups of industry peers, policy-makers, academia and science. The second one is the one portrayed with a whole lot of individual agency (customers and colleagues) while the latter (suppliers, supply chain employees and their representatives) seem to be prescribed with collective agency. One stakeholder group seem to have been left alone in the cold air – communities. H&M seem to have a hard time defining this group, probably since it refers to society at large that is not directly touched by their operations.

2.3.1 Institutions and the future

H&M are aware of their size and power, and make no secret of their sustainability achievements so far. In the chapter of *100% Leading the Change*, the H&M group seem to be addressing their institutional peers, and ask them to follow their lead. They make a point of themselves being one of the largest fashion retail companies in the world and suggest that their impact reflects this. It is as if they mean to say; the H&M group is a force to be reckoned with, and others should follow their lead.

In the introduction to The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016, there is a spread giving the reader some quick numbers, giving a first impression of H&M as a corporation. Along with their revenue and number of stores, we can also see some accomplishments of the company. They are the world's largest user of Better Cotton, they are the one company that uses the greatest amount of responsibly sourced down, and the second biggest company to use recycled polyester (HMGSR 2016:10f). They are a main player on the sustainability field, with perceived authority thereafter. After explaining the state of future prospects of the industry, facing environmental changes and expanding populations, H&M addresses their perceived responsibility:

We believe that our industry needs to increase the pace of change in addressing these global environmental and social issues. The size, scale and global reach of the H&M group mean we have a responsibility – and an opportunity – to create this acceleration and facilitate the right collaborations for success. (HMGSR 2016:12)

H&M are also taking pride in the new systems they have rolled out - new auditing principles, being founding partners of an organic cotton initiative, and being one of the first fashion retailers with a public list of suppliers (HMGSR 2016:15,27f, 45). They size up innovations, help small companies and partners with science for research. H&M positions themselves as proactive and forward-thinking, because they “do know that you have to be bold to make things happen” (HMGSR 2016:16). Initiatives is an important word for H&M in this report. It appears 61 times, but one gets the impression that the word is a moral of the sustainability-story. H&M are looking to adapt to a circular approach in fashion retail, and explicitly wants to be the leader of a change where others follow their lead (HMGSR 2016:9). Sustainability is the future, and H&M can be the industry’s saviour enabling it to live on.

With great power comes great responsibility, as the old saying goes. As this bold, proactive company of their size, H&M has a vast range of nodal points of impact in their chain of operations, and they are presenting themselves as being well aware of them. Many times throughout the report, they seem to be affected by a sense of duty. Leaning on international guidelines (such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals) and scientific reports of a dark future if change does not happen, they frame their sustainability initiatives to be out of duty and necessity (HMGSR 2016:7, 8). This sense of duty is perhaps most palpable in a section where they process their sustainability strategy as a whole: “We are not here to outperform our competitors. [...] Instead, we are using a scientific approach to find out where our planet needs us to be – in terms of environmental and social impact – and then setting goals around that” (HMGSR 2016:15). They frame another aspect of their dutiful acting when they mean that it isn’t always sunny to be trailblazing – increased transparency in their operations leads to increased scrutiny and raised external opinions on their operations (HMGSR 2016:27).

Throughout the report, H&M are claiming this commitment to a leading role in the transformation. The H&M group are dutifully taking the lead, and they want their peers to follow. When addressing institutions, H&M often label these collaborations as ‘partnering’ or ‘collaborations’, indicating that they are operating on the same level that H&M perceive themselves to be at (cf. 2016:8, 14), something that is not as prominent in the other groups. They work on a governmental level to influence legal framework and labour issues in order to reach satisfying wage regulation and get worker representatives (2016:75,76). Lobbyism or not, they are seeing themselves as capable of changing national laws. “[...] by creating collaborative platforms for innovation – both internally and externally – we will build the

skills and capacity to tackle these challenges as they arise”: they are the ones that together are capable of taking us all into the future (2016:21). They need their peers’ help:

“Underpinning all of this is our ongoing commitment to engage changemakers – the people from across our value chain who turn goals and ambitions into actions and achievements. There is simply no way we will fulfil our vision without their help.” 14

Addressed to all stakeholder groups, this section encourages people to follow lead. Nowhere is that more palpable than when addressing the institutions though, and they truly want to engage them and present their offer as an opportunity that dutifully should be followed. H&M are trailblazers, surrendering themselves to sustainability in order for the industry to keep existing.

H&M position themselves next to governments, science and as a head of their entire industry. They perceive the changes as necessary, so out of duty they are simply taking them as an advantage in the future sustainable industry. With these initiatives, they break a new space for other institutions to follow, an act presented as bold and innovative. With a lingering flavour of activism, H&M wants to start a movement that involves a sustainability revolution, for the sake of fashion and of the industry. The industry are encouraged to *act*, and H&M *enables* these actions. The H&M group has come to save the day.

2.3.2 Discourse drivers – inspiration and individuality

Another distinctly differentiated group are their customers and their employees. From here on I will refer to these two groups as the discourse drivers, since it is the employees that definitely are a part of the H&M institutional framework that author the CSR-discourse in both action and text. What differentiates this group from the others is the way H&M presents their agency. They are presented as a mass of individuals that are to be empowered and inspired. Between the customers and the employees there is a difference, though – an employee can suffer from sanctions and be rewarded with a salary from their workplace, while the customer group are harder to circle. They can come and go from the institutional rules as they please, but do instead, by public notion, hold H&M responsible for their actions. They do not belong to H&M’s group, so expulsion from the group would not be efficient, or rather, impossible. Thus, the two stakeholder groups are institutionally different, but H&M do not address them with a great difference.

In the discourse drivers group, the individuals are presented with individual agency. H&M is working towards “empowering our customers to express their personality

through fashion – wherever they are in the world” since “our customers rightfully expect good quality products and shopping experiences” (2016:9,21). Their perception of fashion as a right is also palpable when they state that they “want to make sustainable, good-quality fashion accessible to as many people as possible” (2016:41). Even though H&M does not have any specific power over the customer that can go and choose another fashion brand, they do want to make an impact on them either way. This following section is discussing how they want to do that:

There are a number of ways we can *influence our customers to act* more sustainably while using and disposing of our products. This includes *providing* information about long-life care, *encouraging* customers to use products for longer, and *empowering* them to reuse and recycle rather than throw away. (HMGSR 2016:53, emphasis added)

Customers are to be ‘inspired’ and ‘empowered’ to act more sustainable and to love their clothes– through garment care and recycling initiatives (2016:21, 27, 31). H&M also have direct access to communicate to these people through commercials and events (e.g. 2016: 53f). The choice is theirs, because H&M cannot sanction them in any way for not doing what they desire. Through, for example, providing them with information about the production process of each garment, H&M means that the customer is empowered to make informed, sustainable decisions (2016:29). Here, the transparency theme comes in, and it is by the control of the supply chain that the end consumer is enabled to a certain behaviour. H&M enables the customer to be sustainable and to not be a burden on the planet, while maintaining their lifestyles.

On the other side of the till, as well as in the offices, there is a similar rhetoric, even though sanctions are a possible reality.

Our *diversity makes us strong*. It creates an inclusive and welcoming workplace in which everyone’s individuality is highly valued. [...] Culture is important to the H&M group. We believe that you can *have fun* while achieving great results. Our shared values bring us together and guide us in our daily work; they are a part of who we are, what we stand for, and how we act. They help create an open, dynamic and down-to-earth company culture where anything is possible. Every H&M group employee is part of leading the change towards the sustainable future of fashion and design. [...] This is a place with endless possibilities to grow and where employees make a conscious choice to stay. (HMGSR 2016:72, emphasis added)

The working environment for a H&M employee is to be inspiring, healthy and attractive (2016:21, 68). An employee is supposed to have a good time and they are to be an ambassador of H&M’s values (2016:68). The time at H&M group should be inspiring, too. Good performance is rewarded, added to decisions in order to adapt behaviour, just as

customers are rewarded for recycling. They make their governed people's interest the same as theirs (cf. 2016:31).

Here, the core of H&M's values seem to be explained – the company culture laid out in this section is not correspondent to the *H&M way*. Here, individualism seem to be the moral of the story, circled by the idea of individualism as the shared value that paradoxically brings the culture together. Individualism is portrayed as a key to openness and dynamics, and not the least for making anything possible. "Our diversity makes us strong" – even though one may stand out, as long as the employee share the same values as the H&M group one is a part of it.

Diversity and individual growth can be seen as key drivers for this theme. The employee is to shine as an individual, grow as an employee and live out some form of inherent, essential individuality that H&M seem to wish upon their shop-floor subjects. "Our vision is to positively influence people and communities by promoting everyone's right to be, and express, who they are", they say and seem to define their H&M way slightly better here than in the actual layout of it (2016:83). The H&M group enables the employee to be the best version of themselves, to be a part of their sustainability work and to have fun. They are encouraged to take part of the institutional bliss.

This group is different than the others, because H&M feels like they can meet and communicate with these individuals directly, through sanctions or rewards directed to a specific person. H&M seem to tread a bit lighter around this group, because they are presented with a choice. The customer can freely choose to shop from another brand, and they are free to choose to live sustainably. H&M can only offer positive sanctions, and are trying to change behaviour through these. Employees are also presented with a choice, because H&M want to make sure that an employee makes the "conscious choice to stay" and to be a part of sustainability (2016:72). H&M asks both customers and colleagues to *act*, to choose and be in a certain way, and H&M *enables* them to do so.

2.3.3 *Collective movements and improvements*

When it comes to suppliers, supply chain workers and their representatives, H&M tend to be a bit ambiguous. It is not clear where they are drawing the external borders for the group or what exactly H&M's perceived responsibility for this group is. This is by far the vaguest group for H&M themselves, and they are making conscious efforts to map out its lines and preconditions with their strive for transparency (2016:27). The public outcries often address

this issue, so even if H&M are slightly ambiguous, stakeholders demand H&M's responsibility. With a supply chain numbering up to 1.6 millions of people one can say that H&M's uncertainty may be stemming for the size of the group. But H&M does not seem to be exactly clear on their intentions and relations to this group either. At times, they express the intent for the supply chain to be wholly included in the 'value chain' – for them to take part of H&M's ideals, but in other parts they take some distance from value chain decisions and implications, for example when they mean that their ambitions for water responsibility can only be made possible with their transparency work (2016:49).

As previously mentioned, the H&M group does not explicitly explain any negative sanctions they would use, but hints at some when they explain how they reward compliant factories. Let's look at the quote again; "We will reward partners who maintain a good sustainability performance and aspire to further improve it with more orders, training opportunities and more long-term contracts" (2016:31). The suggestion of termination of contracts and opportunities suggests that the supply chain can be severely sanctioned and expelled from the H&M group if noncompliant to the desired behaviour. This also gives us the cue that the price to pay for not acting sustainably is higher than the reward for doing so – it's a matter of staying in the game on the terms of the H&M group.

Perhaps, due to the difficulty to define the group, H&M present this vast body through a collective filter. Wage management and human rights are issues where H&M happily encourage work to be done (2016:74). Labour-initiatives, democratically elected worker representatives and general improvements of working conditions are some of their concerns, and these work-place standards do not mean the same in the supply chain as for the employees within the H&M group. In the supply chain, employment is not presented as to be inspiring or uplifting or even a conscious choice. Here, issues regard wages being paid at all, labour-movement organization, and to make sure the factories see H&M as a fair business partner (2016:68). Human rights is an issue with a much greater emphasis when referring to the supply chain than in other parts of the report. With an industry history of child labour and incidents like the Savar Upaliza incident in Bangladesh, these are matters to be taken very seriously, but the rhetoric from H&M about having fun at work and individual growth is gone with the wind. Instead, what an individual can do is to join forces to relieve collective issues such as poverty and to feed female empowerment. For example, they write;

In countries where unionisation is restricted by law or where systems are insufficient, we work, for example, to empower workers by raising their awareness about their rights at work, to train our suppliers and to support the establishment of democratic employee representation. In time, these should create the foundations for effective collective bargaining systems. (HMGR 2016:75)

And further down;

“For many women around the world, a job within the garment industry is an important first step to accessing formal employment that provides improved job security, skills and financial independence” (HMGR 2016:82).

Addressing the supply chain, H&M seem to suggest what they perceive to be improvements to their existing structures and collectives. But, even though they have separating nodes between the direct group and some supply chain segments, they still see opportunities to make an impact and to distribute sanctions for desirable actions.

H&M does not want to inspire value chain employees to the same extent as the previously described one, but often want to raise their awareness on issues and change existing structures to the desired ones. Workers and women’s rights are lifted, but also even more salient issues such as slavery and below minimum-age workers. In one section they explain their stance on child labour, and explain their vigilant actions as for the best interest of the child, such as enrolling them in school or contacting local NGOs (2016:80). This suggests that H&M might believe themselves to know what the best interest of a child is. Children are mentioned in one other part of the report, when a head-office employee explain that she wants sustainability for the sake of a safe future for her children. Here, the children of the discourse drivers are presented as individuals needing saving from imminent natural threats, while the children of the supply chain are presented as needing saving from their own conditions. There is too little material on the issue in this report to make any actual conclusions from it, but the detail deserves to be mentioned.

Transparency in the supply chain is not about empowering people nor exist to be inspiring. Here the stated purpose is to build trust and credibility, and their stated benefit from transparency seem to be more respect when bargaining for contracts (2016:27). Here the transparency seem to be connected to control, for H&M to enforce control and for factory dealmakers to bargain for fair deals.

So, the H&M group is suggesting improvements of sorts, as well as delivers sanctions to non-compliants. Through these suggestions, the supply chain could lead better lives according to the H&M groups – trough raising themselves out of poverty with the jobs that H&M does and will offer in the future. H&M acts as an enabling force here too, with

democracy and fair living wages perhaps being without their reach without H&M's support.

It is the supply chain's collective voice that is to be heard, not individuals expressing their personalities, like in the discourse drivers group. The H&M group writes; "Our vision is to positively influence people and communities by promoting everyone's right to be, and express, who they are", but this does not seem to apply in the same way to all groups (2016:83). The ambiguity of the group seem to produce incentives for H&M to exercise harder control over this group, actual such with audit visits, but they also want to make the shared values heard. The imposed improvements to the supply chain workers' lives can perhaps be seen as a relic from ethnocentric ideas thoughts, that one's own culture is superior to others. Because it is a culture that H&M are trying to spread. H&M can end the contract with your factory if it does not comply. H&M can give you an employment and help you rise from poverty and give women their independence. H&M's efforts *enables* you to organize your labour movement, and to get at workers representative so that you can *act* together.

3. Discussing the Discourse

“Our shared values run like ‘a red thread’ through our company. They reflect the heart and soul of the H&M group and define what we stand for and how we act.” (HMGSR 2016:5). Returning to this quote, we can look at it with eyes anew. The shared values are specific such, but explicit, and they seem to differ depending on who is affected by them. H&M seem to be at constant work to produce their truth through addressing necessity, inspire and through raising awareness. H&M is an institution holding on to its own ideology. The corporation is knowledgeable and authoritative, and gain this from the perceived neutrality and neediness of their actions. The world needs us, they seem to say. Their values are to be shared by everyone governed by the H&M group, preferably people outside of it too. Their words are worthy to listen at, and to act at.

H&M is an enabling function. H&M knows what is best for you, and they will help you achieve that. They will lead the way for you to act sustainably, no matter whether you are an institution or an individual. They will enable small start-ups to scale up, they will enable employees to grow, they will enable women to gain financial independence and they will help people rise from poverty. It is a saviour-like picture H&M paints for themselves. H&M is a necessity, for the future industry, for peoples’ empowerment and for individuals’ growth. But, when they have enabled the masses to do as H&M desires, they want them to act. Out of duty, for themselves and for their collectives. It is as if H&M are walking away, into the sunset, with a war-cry lingering in the air; “Into the future, and beyond”.

No matter how much they are trying to portray a holistic, unified value chain, that is not what they are actually saying. The groups are existing on different terms to H&M, they sanction them differently and seem to have different philosophies for them. The institutions are to be pushed in the right direction, the discourse drivers to be fulfilled and inspired, and the supply chains and collectives to be raised from the ashes. They are reproducing the image of the distant factory workers as a collective that need to be helped out of their situation while the persons closer to themselves, the discourse drivers, as individuals that have all the freedom in the world to choose what they like. This is perhaps the strongest contrast that the H&M group draw in their sustainability report.

H&M wants a brighter future, or a future at all for themselves, one might say. Their leadership into a new era is out of perceived duty. Milton Friedman from the 60’s would

probably have raised his eyebrows on the notion of companies taking leaps and load for their stakeholders and communities like H&M do. New times calls for new measures, but H&M are actually producing an image of themselves as activists and saviour taking societies into a new era. A humane capitalism is still far off sight, but the dichotomy of profit-seeking and ethisizing may not be that far apart, after all. Maybe sustainability just happened to align H&M's interests and decision making with its own interest. Maybe, just maybe, this will become capitalism as we know it.

Literature and References

Literature and Articles

- Bakhtin, Mikhail 1981. *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Börjesson, Mats & Eva Palmblad 2007. *Diskursanalys i praktiken*. Malmö: Liber
- Carlsson Tenitskaja, Alexandra. 2017. "H&M bränner tonvis med kläder". Aftonbladet. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/ngRr05/hm-branner-tonvis-med-klader> (retrieved: 2017-12-18).
- de Neve, Geert 2014. "Fordism, flexible specialization and CSR: How Indian garment workers critique neoliberal labour regimes" In: *Ethnography*. 15 (2): 184-207.
- Dolan, Catherine & Dina Rajak 2011. "Introduction: Ethnographies of Corporate Ethicizing". *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*. 2011 (60): 3-8.
- Douglas, Mary 1997. *Renhet och fara. En analys av begreppen orenande och tabu*. Nora: Nya Doxa.
- Elster, Jon 1989. *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Efendić, Negra 2015. "Skarp kritik mot H&M:s agerande i Bangladesh". *Svenska Dagbladet*. <https://www.svd.se/skarp-kritik-mot-hms-agerande-i-bangladesh> (retrieved: 2017-12-18).
- Foucault, Michel. 1981 [1970]. The Order of Discourse. In: Robert Young (red.): *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. Mass: Routledge.
- Friedman, Milton 1982 [1962]. *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Garsten, Christina 2004. "Market Missions: Negotiating Bottom Line and Social Responsibility". In: Christina Garsten och Monica Lindh de Montoya (red.) *Market Matters: Exploring Cultural Processes in the Global Marketplace*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

- Garsten, Christina 2012. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Cultural Practices on Globalizing Markets". In: Ullrich Kockel, Máiréad Nic Craith and Jonas Frykman (red). *A Companion of the Anthropology of Europe*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Harjoto, Marento Agus 2017. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Fraud". In: *Social Responsibility Journal*. 13(4)
- Khan, Farzad & Peter Lund-Thomassen 2011. "CSR As Imperialism; Towards a Phenomenological Approach to CSR In the Development World". In: *Journal of Change Management*. 11(1): 73-90.
- Ladd, Chris 2017. "Commerce Is Replacing Politics at the Centre of Our Democracy". Forbes Magazine. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chrisladd/2017/06/26/commerce-is-replacing-politics-at-the-center-of-our-democracy/#a631e2b5f0e5> (retrieved: 2017-12-11).
- Mautner, Gerlinde 2008. "Analysing Newspapers, Magazines and Other Print Media". In: Ruth Wodak & Michal Kryzanowski (red). *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in The Social Sciences*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McPherson, Susan 2017. "6 CSR Trends to Watch in 2017". *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanmcperson/2017/01/19/6-csr-trends-to-watch-in-2017/#2788ffc7b1cc> (retrieved: 2017-12-18)
- Neuendorf, Kimberly A 2002. *The Content Analysis: Guidebook*. London: Sage Publishing
- Roepstorff, Anne K. 2010. *CSR. Virksomheders Sociale Ansvar som Begreb og Praksis*. Viborg: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Sampathkumar, Mythili 2017. "Tesla restores power at Puerto Rico children's hospital using solar energy". *Independent*. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/tesla-puerto-rico-electricity-childrens-hospital-san-juan-solar-power-restored-elon-musk-project-a8021716.html> (retrieved: 2017-12-18).
- Taenja, Shallini S, Pawan Kumar Taenja & Rajen K. Gupta. "Researches in Corporate Social Responsibility: A Review of Shifting Focus, Paradigms and Methodologies". In: *Journal of Business Ethics*. 2011 (101): 342-364

Tracy, Sarah J 2013. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Reports

The H&M Group. 2017. *The H&M Group Sustainability Report 2016*. Available [online](#).

United Nations, 2015. *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*.

International Organization for Standardization, 2010. ISO 26000.

Other media

Brand Sins 2015. "Everything That Is Wrong With H&M". *YouTube*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wefa5oFXmuo&t=180s> (retrieved: 2017-12-18).

Why I Stopped Shopping at H&M

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAgq74QCWpA&t=267s>