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To cite this article: Mikael Karlsson (2021) Sweden's Climate Act – its origin and emergence, Climate Policy, 21:9, 1132-1145, DOI: [10.1080/14693062.2021.1922339](https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2021.1922339)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2021.1922339>



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Published online: 15 May 2021.



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Sweden's Climate Act – its origin and emergence

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ABSTRACT

Sweden's 2017 Climate Act is part of a climate policy framework aiming for net zero domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. The framework was based on a proposal from the All Party Committee on Environmental Objectives (the Committee), in which members from all participating parliamentary parties agreed unanimously. This was despite a contested climate debate running in parallel, notwithstanding strong criticism from business confederations and trade unions. Aiming to draw lessons of value for climate policy-making, this study explores the main factors that influenced the work and outcomes of the Committee, based on a series of in-depth interviews and document review. The research design is linked to policy process theories. The interviews mainly concern underlying motives, the role of knowledge, the influence of impact assessments, and international influence. It is shown that a continuous and comprehensive learning process in the Committee was instrumental for achieving consensus, including addressing concerns among some members regarding policy costs and constitutionality. The Committee was also influenced by policy developments elsewhere, referred to as policy diffusion, notably from the U.K. Climate Change Act and the UNFCCC COP 21 policy process. Over time, a cross-party consensus among Committee members emerged and led to the invention of an original policy proposal. The consensus was instrumental for generating support for the proposal in an otherwise conflictual political landscape. As a result, a governmental bill based on the proposal was eventually enacted into law, renewing Sweden's climate policy with a climate change act coupled to ambitious climate objectives.

Key policy insights:

- Joint learning on factually complex and normatively contested climate issues requires time and comprehensive processes but can lead to policy inventions and ambitious outcomes.
- Policy diffusion between countries may be important for raising ambitions and shaping innovative, new elements of national climate policy.
- Framework climate change acts and specific climate laws can be mutually supportive, i.e. frameworks foster more ambitious sectoral laws and the more precise sectoral laws, the easier it is to agree on stricter overall ambitions.
- Adoption of more stringent climate policies may require precise dismantling of arguments working against action, in particular on policy costs.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 October 2020
Accepted 22 April 2021

KEYWORDS

Climate change act;
framework climate
legislation; climate policy;
policy diffusion; policy
invention

1. Introduction

The number of climate change policies and laws in the world is increasing (Eskander et al., 2020; Iacobuta et al., 2018; Schmidt & Fleig, 2018). All countries in the world have adopted at least one of the over 1900 specific instruments listed in the CCLW database on the *Climate Change Laws of the World*, which spans vague sectoral policies to stringent and focused laws (GRI, 2020). If the list of instruments is broadened to also include

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information, education, research and development and voluntary approaches, it grows to over 3800 items (NCPI, 2020). This policy development trend has led to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, but to date national measures are still far from sufficient in relation to the objectives of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement (Eskander & Fankhauser, 2020; Le Quere et al., 2019; Roelfesma et al., 2020; UNFCCC, 2015), even among progressive states (Anderson et al., 2020).

A particular policy instrument is the ‘Climate Change Act’ (CCA), which has been defined as

framework legislation adopted by parliament that lays down general principles and obligations for climate change policy-making in a nation-state ... with the explicit aim of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in relevant sectors through specific measures to be implemented at a later stage. (Nash & Steurer, 2019, p. 1053)

CCAs have become increasingly common (Eskander et al., 2020) and often promote – with their ‘flagship’ character (Fankhauser et al., 2015) – additional and more specific climate policy instruments, not least by providing legal stability, linkages between international and national levels, and institutions and processes that go beyond general climate policy integration and mitigation strategies (Nash & Steurer, 2019). CCAs are important since international agreements mean little unless they are nationally implemented and, conversely, since CCAs may promote higher international ambitions, as well as stimulating policy development in other nations (Fankhauser et al., 2016; Townshend et al., 2011). The existence of CCAs in the European Union (EU) has also influenced the on-going EU negotiations on a European Climate Law of framework character (Erbach, 2020; European Commission, 2020).

Several studies have described overarching trends in the development of climate change policy and legislation. This includes analyses of policy trends (Averchenkova et al., 2017; Eskander et al., 2020; Iacobuta et al., 2018), the impact of policy on emissions (Eskander & Fankhauser, 2020; Roelfesma et al., 2020), and domestic and international drivers and barriers (Fankhauser et al., 2015, 2016; Lamb & Minx, 2020; Le Quere et al., 2019; Schmidt & Fleig, 2018; Townshend et al., 2011). It is clear from these publications that, for example, political orientation is seldom a decisive factor in the adoption of such laws, and that countries often influence each other. Some studies on climate change legislation have focused on individual cases, from larger emitting regions (Neuweg & Averchenkova, 2017) to smaller states (Torney, 2019), including analyses of individual CCAs (Fankhauser et al., 2018; Torney, 2017, 2019) and comparisons of such instruments (Nash & Steurer, 2019). Still, knowledge gaps are repeatedly identified in calls for further research in the field. Filling these gaps involves the analysis of country-specific policies and outcomes (Iacobuta et al., 2018), mechanisms of policy diffusion (Fankhauser et al., 2016; Schmidt & Fleig, 2018), and the political economy of climate legislation (Fankhauser et al., 2015). The latter includes a need for producing ‘... deep knowledge of individual countries that builds on expert and stakeholder interviews ...’ in order to better understand climate policy constraints (Lamb & Minx, 2020, p. 12).

A number of such potential barriers to action were recently presented in a theoretical framework analysing delay in environmental governance (Karlsson & Gilek, 2020). This framework identified an array of potential mechanisms and barriers in the science and policy spheres that impede the achievement of goals. In the field of climate policy-making, two such mechanisms are science denial and decision thresholds. Denial of climate science has been well researched and is a factor that often interferes with policy processes (Edvardsson et al., 2017). Concerning decision thresholds, the common focus on costs of climate measures rather than co-benefits also results in reluctance and in delayed decision-making (Karlsson et al., 2020). While different stakeholders and vested interests may either facilitate or complicate these processes, climate policy diffusion is a factor that can counteract these constraints (Jordan & Huitema, 2014). Exploring how factors such as the understanding of scientific knowledge, perception of economic impact assessments, and influence of external policies on climate policy processes, e.g. the emergence of specific CCAs, may improve understanding of how policy-makers reason, interact and ultimately make up their minds. Such insight is of value to both policymakers and researchers, from both scientific and practical perspectives.

This article concerns the comparatively new CCA in Sweden, a country that has been considered an environmental policy forerunner (Anderson et al., 2020; Lundqvist, 2004). Sweden’s leadership spans the fields of energy policy (IEA, 2019) and climate policy (Burck et al., 2019).¹ For example, Sweden started to phase out fossil fuels in household heating already in the 1970s; it adopted one of the first carbon dioxide taxes in the

world in 1990; and today, it has the highest share of gross energy consumption from renewable sources within the EU (Eurostat, 2020). Against this backdrop, it is of interest to study how the idea of a CCA was considered in Sweden and how different factors influenced the development and adoption of the law, as part of a new climate policy framework (Governmental bill, 2016/17:146; Rskr, 2016/17:320).

The focus of this article is on the critical process leading up to the passing of the CCA in the Swedish Parliament, and specifically on the All Party Committee on Environmental Objectives (the Committee). The Committee was set up by the Swedish Government with the aim of developing policies for reaching environmental goals in particularly complex areas and in ones where broad long-term agreement is crucial (Governmental Directive, 2010:74). Despite operating in a fairly polarized political context (Aylott & Bolin, 2015; Ryan & Reijlan, 2018), the Committee agreed unanimously, across political blocs, to propose the CCA (Miljömålsberedningen, 2016a). By exploring and explaining how the Committee worked and handled the referred delay mechanisms (Karlsson & Gilek, 2020), the aim of the study is to draw lessons of value for climate policymaking, including for development of CCAs.

The article explores a number of key questions. Firstly, which internal and external factors promoted or impeded progress and how did the politicians in the Committee cope with these factors? Emphasis is placed in particular on understanding whether, and if so how, shared knowledge was of importance. Secondly, what types of scientific, economic and legal documentation and policy impact assessments were produced in the development of the CCA and what roles did each play? Finally, how did personal motives, party politics, stakeholders and external processes influence the positions taken and why was it important to achieve consensus?

These questions are explored on basis of document studies and, in particular, a series of in-depth interviews as detailed in section 2 on research methods and material. Section 3 describes the context and process around the development of the CCA, before the interview results are presented in section 4, leading to the discussion in section 5 and the conclusions in section 6.

2. Methods and material

In order to explain the various factors that influenced the agreement in the Committee, it is important to develop a full understanding of the context around the Committee, of the process within the Committee, and of how individual Committee members reasoned and acted, and why they did so. A qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2003) has therefore been chosen, based on two main sources of empirical information. The first and most important is a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews, conducted with eight persons with strong influence over and good insight into the work of the Committee. Most of those who were interviewed were members of both the Committee and of the Swedish Parliament, but a few had other central positions, within or outside the Committee and the Swedish Parliament. The interviewees were selected in order to include people with different initial views, and to achieve an equal number of politicians from each of the two, then existing, political blocs² in the parliament. Further information about the interviewees is not given, due to conditions agreed not to disclose the identity of any interviewee, since that could directly or indirectly reveal or indicate who had participated or given specific comments. The anonymity turned out to be valuable; in a few cases during the interviews, interviewees highlighted and spoke openly about sensitive points, on the understanding that the source of this information would not be disclosed. For example, this allowed interviewees to be critical towards their own political party.

Each interview centred on a dozen semi-structured open questions. These were based on the research questions above and focused on various internal and external factors concerning motives (among members and political parties), knowledge (which information and data were asked for), impact assessment (cost-benefit analysis, etc.), international influences (foremost the UNFCCC COP 21 process and outcome) and the role of stakeholders (e.g. how they influenced the interviewees). Most interviews lasted for about two hours and all but one were recorded. The author of this paper and one research colleague³ carried out the interviews.

Additional informative background discussions were also held with stakeholder representatives in the Committee, with staff in the Committee secretariat, as well as with politicians outside the Committee. All of these informants were important to the Committee's function and process. These informal background talks were not

specifically documented and are not referred to in the text, but they were important for the set-up of the article and the formulation of the interview questions. Since the interviewers participated in most Committee meetings in the capacity of independent experts in the field, appointed by the chair of the Committee, they had good opportunities to carry out these informal talks. It should be said that the position as expert in the Committee hypothetically could have influenced the answers that interviewees gave. However, few topics concerned the normative aspects of the proposal and the general risk of receiving accommodating answers was balanced by the added ability to observe interviewee roles within Committee meetings. Nevertheless, it cannot be ruled out that the expert role could have influenced the interviewees during the interviews. On the other hand, without being present during the Committee meetings it would have been far more difficult to corroborate statements made by interviewees.

The second main empirical source of data and information is a number of formal and informal documents from the Committee. These documents concern a number of aspects of climate change and climate policy, most often produced by the secretariat, but sometimes by external experts. Since the interviewers participated in the meetings, various observations were also made directly, and the observer position gave the interviewers access to background material and draft proposals that were not otherwise public. Even some documents produced only for Committee members were accessed, although to respect anonymity no explicit references to such documents are given here. Finally, the research benefited from study of a number of scientific publications on climate policy and legislation.

Interviews took place in 2017, around the same time as when the parliament agreed on the CCA proposed by the Committee (Rskr, 2016/17:320). The act entered into force in 2018. The writing of this article took place once it was confirmed that the climate policy framework was safeguarded,⁴ after a contested and prolonged formation of a new Swedish Government in January 2019 following the 2018 election.

3. The Swedish Climate Act – background, process and outcome

Sweden's Climate Act (SFS 2017:720) entered into force in January 2018 as part of a national climate policy framework. The policy framework also specifies the objective to achieve net zero emissions of greenhouse gases in Sweden by 2045, followed by net negative emissions the decades thereafter, and is linked to a national Climate Policy Council. The act was adopted by the Swedish Parliament in 2017, based on a unanimous proposal from the Committee, in which seven of the eight parties in the parliament collaborated (Miljömålsberedningen, 2016a).⁵

To describe the background in more detail, Sweden's climate objectives are part of an Environmental Quality Objectives System (EQOS), set up by the parliament more than twenty years ago in order to replace an array of disparate targets (Governmental Bill, 1997/98:145). The system is based on 16 overall objectives, with specifications and interim targets, and has two main elements: evaluation of progress and development of policy proposals. Evaluation of progress consists of recurring expert-based assessments, investigating whether goals are being met, and reasons for any gaps between political goals and the state of the environment. Several governmental agencies in collaboration with an inter-agency Environmental Objectives Council⁶ (EOC), are responsible for this task and produce annual reports and, less frequently, in-depth evaluations.⁷ The second element of Sweden's EQOS – development of policy proposals – aims at bridging the said gaps between political goals and the state of the environment. It is here that the Committee, set up by the government in 2010 (Governmental Directive, 2010:74) within the framework of the Swedish Public Inquiry System,⁸ plays a central role by elaborating on strategies and proposing environmental policy instruments as requested by governmental directives. In addition, the EOC and associated agencies develop policy proposals based on the in-depth evaluations.

The environmental quality objective 'Reduced Climate Impact' was part of the EQOS from the outset twenty years ago. The overarching definition of the goal, decided by the Swedish parliament, states since then that the '... concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere must be stabilized at a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' (Governmental Bill, 1997/98:145). Each evaluation so far has concluded that the objective will not be reached 'with currently decided or planned policy instruments' (SEPA, 2019). The 1998 specification to the objective, to stabilize atmospheric carbon dioxide

levels below 550 ppm, was replaced in 2009 by a maximum of 400 ppm greenhouse gas concentration and of 2° C temperature increase (Governmental Bill 2008/09:162). Achieving this goal was stated to depend on other countries working for the same goal. An associated milestone target required 40% reductions of greenhouse gas emission in 1990–2020. In addition, a ‘vision’ was expressed that there would be ‘no net emissions of greenhouse gases’ in Sweden by 2050.

Following the parliament’s decision, the then conservative-liberal four party government instructed the Environmental Protection Agency in 2011 to present, by 2012, a basic analysis of how to realize the 2050 net zero vision (SEPA, 2012). It subsequently charged a special investigator to present a strategy and a road map leading towards this vision (Governmental Directive, 2014:53). However, this inquiry was set up just a few months before the Swedish parliamentary election in October 2014, when a Social Democratic and Green Party government came to power. In December 2014, the new government closed down the special inquiry (Governmental Directive, 2014:166) and transferred the tasks concerning climate change policy analysis to the Committee (Governmental Directive, 2014:165). In addition, the Committee was instructed to present a broader climate policy framework, in order for Sweden to continue playing a leading international role. Another task was to explore, and if deemed feasible, propose, a framework climate act, as a new instrument in Swedish environmental policy.

It was primarily the Green Party, and its new Environment Minister, who advocated investigating a Swedish CCA.⁹ A new Committee chair was appointed and seven representatives for seven of the eight parties in the parliament became Committee members,¹⁰ appointed by their respective political party, each of which was entitled to substitute representatives as well. All had a political background in the field of environmental policy and most were also members of the Environment Committee in the parliament. Initially, the political opposition criticized the government for shutting down the previous inquiry, and the idea of a climate policy framework and a CCA was considered problematic by some (Parliamentary Motion, 2014/15:2981; Swedish Parliament, 2015a; 2015b). Nevertheless, the work in the Committee took off in 2015, in line with the governmental directive.

From the outset, much time in the Committee was devoted to enhancing knowledge levels among members, since few members had detailed understanding of climate change issues. Input was continuously produced by the professional secretariat of the Committee. A number of government-appointed stakeholders provided input but they participated without voting rights, including representatives of business confederations, trade unions and environmental organizations. Additionally, independent experts were requested by the Committee chair to participate throughout the process, and others were invited to single meetings to give briefings on specific topics. The activities of the Committee also included travel to the U.K. to study the U.K. 2008 Climate Change Act.

With time, more policy specific issues were brought up in the Committee and eventually negotiated. Nearly a year after the Committee’s work had started, the UNFCCC Paris Conference (the 21st Conference of the Parties, COP 21) took place in November–December 2015, and the Committee’s members attended COP 21 along with some of its stakeholders and experts. Two Committee members, those from the largest political parties (i.e. the Social Democrats and the Moderate party), were observers in Sweden’s governmental delegation. Considering the potential importance of COP 21, a debate had taken place some months earlier in which the government was advised, and duly agreed, to prolong the Committee’s working period over COP 21 (Governmental Directive, 2015:101).

The Committee thereafter presented its first report, with a proposal on a climate policy framework including a CCA, in March 2016 (Miljömålsberedningen, 2016a). In June 2016, the Committee delivered its final report on climate and air quality policies, focusing on implementation strategy and instruments, including interim targets (Miljömålsberedningen, 2016b). The final report was comprehensive but contained few concrete suggestions for policy instruments.

The research in this article focuses on the Committee’s first report, and in particular on the CCA, which was unanimously agreed upon by the eight person Committee. This consensus differs from previous experience in the Committee, when members who have been in a minority position in the Committee have often declared dissenting or special opinions, even in cases when overall agreement was achieved (see e.g. Miljömålsberedningen, 2013).

The climate policy proposal from the Committee consisted of three pillars – a set of climate objectives, a climate act, and a climate policy council. The main proposal within these climate objectives was that Sweden by 2045 at the latest ‘must have no net emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and thereafter must achieve negative emissions’ (Miljömålsberedningen, 2016a). The net zero-objective was described to mean that greenhouse gas emissions from activities in Sweden must be at least 85% lower in 2045 than in 1990, without describing in detail how the 15% gap will be filled. It was also stated that additional near-term targets were to be presented in the Committee’s final proposal, which became the case, including milestone targets for the non-trading sector by 2030 (–69% compared to 1990) and 2040 (–75% compared to 1990), and a domestic transportation objective (–70% in 2010-2030). The Committee did not present a new formulation of the parliament’s environmental quality objective ‘Reduced Climate Impact’, but stated that it took the temperature target from the Paris Agreement as a point of departure.

The proposed and eventually adopted CCA stipulated a series of requirements for the government, with a focus on climate change mitigation (Section 2). It is explicitly stated that this work shall be based on the overarching climate objective set by the parliament (Section 3). In this way, the CCA will continuously reflect parliamentary climate goals without the act itself specifying them. This was discussed in the Committee and on the one hand, the law is less precise without the objectives included directly, but on the other, it is easier for the parliament to amend an objective that is not enshrined in law. Not explicitly stipulating environmental objectives in law is typical within the EQOS framework, so in that respect the Committee followed a traditional policy approach. Moreover, the overall climate objectives have proven to be stable over time. The act also charges the government with presenting an annual climate report (Section 4), in which emission trends, policy decisions and remaining gaps are to be outlined. Every fourth year (i.e. once per term of office), the government is obliged to develop a climate policy action plan, to be presented to the parliament, in which further planned measures to bridge the gaps between the goals and the state of the environment are to be described (Section 5). The formulation implies that a governmental communication would be sufficient to make this presentation, rather than having to submit a bill proposing concrete instruments. This is especially the case in examples where the government can take measures on its own, without additional parliamentary support.

The final element of the Committee’s proposal was a climate policy council, tasked with evaluating if the policies in place contribute to or counteract the aforementioned climate objectives, reviewing the effects of existing and planned policies, and identifying additional measures to realize climate objectives. It was also suggested to mandate that the council itself appoint new, replacement members over time, in order to render it at least partially independent of the government.

Based on these proposals from the Committee, the government subsequently submitted a bill to the parliament (Governmental bill, 2016/17:146). The environmental quality objective ‘Reduced Climate Impact’ was considered to still be adequate, but a new specification was proposed and adopted:

The increase in global average temperature is to be limited to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, and efforts are to be pursued to limit the increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. Sweden will press internationally for global efforts to be directed towards achieving this target.

On most other issues, the bill tabled the same proposals as the Committee had presented,¹¹ despite criticism from the Council on Legislation (2017), for instance about the brief and vague character of the act. The bill was adopted in 2017 and the law entered into force in 2018, showing the strong impact of the Committee.

4. Results of the interviews

The results of the interviews are outlined in two sections, starting with the main internal factors before moving to the key external factors that influenced the Committee’s process and outcomes.¹²

4.1. Internal factors: motives, knowledge and impact assessments

The motives for supporting the Committee’s proposal varied between interviewees. Some referred to existing party-political positions which they strived to generate support for in the Committee, sometimes in parallel

with a desire to improve these positions. A few interviewees stated that they had worked for higher ambitions than the agreement contained, such as earlier target years. Several saw a value in ambitious and clear long-term targets linked to a law, deeming them instrumental for future policies by way of acting as a point of reference for further legislation, promoting back-casting approaches and shifting the view on mitigation from 'if' to 'how'. Along the same lines, a clear and widely supported climate policy framework was seen to foster 'political accountability' and to pressure governments to perform. A broad political consensus on long-term targets was also deemed to send key signals to businesses about 'long-term transformative investments', and to society at large: 'climate responsibility is a matter of solidarity' and of 'trustworthiness'. Interestingly, broad political consensus was also seen as helping the Committee's proposal to pass through the tight policy filter in the Finance Ministry, as well as some of the larger political parties. It would help to 'depoliticise the topic', in particular if the agreement spanned the political blocs in the parliament. A few interviewees were therefore more focused on just reaching an agreement, rather than the details: the 'year 2045 is just a tool'. Finally, most interviewees referred to their personal commitment to climate issues and saw the 'the need to decrease emissions' as motivating. Some were 'truly proud' of the achievement of the Committee. However, it was also claimed that consensus is far from always desirable in politics, in particular if it risks blocking ambitious policies in future.

Regarding knowledge, most interviewees appreciated that what they considered as substantial and comprehensive information had been presented by the secretariat of the Committee and by external experts. Even though some considered that they knew a lot about climate issues beforehand, and some that the amount of material processed by the Committee was sometimes overwhelming, the interviewees broadly recognized that a common understanding of challenges and opportunities associated with both climate change and climate policy emerged over time within the Committee. This evolution in common understanding was perceived as key in reaching consensus. Key issues included, according to various interviewees: data on emissions, trends, scenarios and policies; the 'devastating impact of climate change'; state-goal gap analyses; how technological and societal transitions can take place; as well as economic and constitutional aspects of the proposals (Alfredsson & Karlsson, 2016; Bremdal, 2015; Klevnäs et al., 2016; Matti, 2016; Miljömålsberedningen, 2016a, 2016b). The collective learning process was said to have increased the knowledge level among members and also promoted trust, which was of fundamental importance for the work in the Committee. It was essential that all had access to the same knowledge base and knew what others knew, e.g. concerning climate impact as well as policy costs and benefits. The Committee's journey to study the U.K. Climate Change Act was mentioned by most interviewees as influential; especially the meetings held with various stakeholders in the U.K.. Similarly, attending COP 21 provided valuable information and experience. The total knowledge input 'drove the Committee onwards', 'something happened in the Committee', and 'a positive spiral' was established, in which 'previously infected issues were resolved', enabling the otherwise 'locked-down bloc politics' to be opened. Some also valued the special meetings arranged for only Committee members, without stakeholders and experts being present, since it then was easier to ask 'silly questions', without risking subsequent media reporting. Moreover, the knowledge presented in documents and by experts was claimed to have been useful in internal party politics, when members wanted to establish support for negotiating positions. However, while the factual knowledge build-up in the Committee was central, some interviewees said that disagreements usually concerned normative issues. It was also mentioned by a few that the considerable time invested in the work, and the willingness to engage in political dialogue and to search for consensus, were parameters as decisive for the outcome as any specific documents on facts.

Which issues and impact assessment documents interviewees considered critical differed. Some referred to 'climate responsibility' being of foremost importance and were less concerned with the cost and benefits of the various proposals, noting 'the moral dimensions cannot be contradicted with plain economic argumentation'. Among these members, scientific evidence on climate change impact and documentation on technical opportunities were crucial, whereas assessments on policy costs meant little as these would nearly always be minuscule compared to the costs for unmitigated climate change. Related to this, some interviewees stated that long-term cost-benefit analysis is associated with such uncertainty that details hardly matter while some reflected that 'there are no other areas where we can say exactly what a policy will cost in twenty years from now'. For a few though, data and knowledge on the economic impact of different proposals, including on long-term economic growth, were more or less indispensable, not least for being able to generate support back home, in their parties.

Nevertheless, most interviewees claimed that while economic issues were important in the Committee, they ultimately did not receive the potential deal-breaking status that they had in the beginning of the process, in part due to being gradually ‘dismantled’ by expert statements and reports (e.g. Alfredsson & Karlsson, 2016; Klevnäs et al., 2016).¹³ Another concern that a CCA formulated to legally charge the government with promoting specific policies would not be in line with the Swedish constitution or would at least be an odd feature in Swedish environmental politics, was similarly dismantled (Bremdal, 2015; Matti, 2016). Consequently, the views on economic and legal issues converged over time, albeit not to the same extent as for scientific and technical topics.

4.2. External factors: the COP 21 process and stakeholder pressure

Regarding the influence of COP 21 on the Committee’s various proposals, the views among interviewees were mixed. A few stated that the outcome of the conference, in terms of emerging with a concrete deal, was decisive for the Committee’s work, whereas a few argued that it had nearly no influence. The main explanations mentioned in support of the latter view were that several parties in Sweden already had high climate policy ambitions, and that the Paris Agreement was vague, e.g. concerning emission reduction requirements. In between these views, most interviewees claimed that COP 21 gave them leverage to agree on a more ambitious Committee proposal, without being ultimately decisive for a deal of some kind. Some said that the ‘Paris effect’ occurred already during the COP 21 preparatory process, in autumn 2015, when the Committee started formulate its final proposals. Others, however, claimed that it was the positive atmosphere during COP 21, and the positive global reception of its outcome, that were instrumental to the consensus in the Committee. COP 21 also influenced the political atmosphere on the climate issue, including within the parties in Sweden, which some interviewees felt was advantageous for the work of the Committee: ‘if the world managed to agree, we should be able to do the same’. Several interviewees also underlined the significance of more businesses being supportive to climate policy than ever before, and that the Paris Agreement brought together countries that previously had been strong opponents on climate policy, notably the EU, China and the U.S.A.

Concerning the CCA most interviewees saw that it would have been agreed to ‘without Paris’: ‘it was clear before Paris that there would be an act and a framework, but it was not clear what substance it would express’. However, all interviewees who commented agreed that the Paris Agreement did indeed influence the positions in the report of the Committee in two crucial ways. The first concerned the need to replace the temperature specification of the Swedish climate objective, with the Paris targets, i.e. to limit the temperature increase to well below 2 °C and to pursue efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C. This was seen by most as a no-brainer and anything else was considered ‘politically impossible’, but for some, the vague implications of such an amendment made it easier to digest. The Paris target was nevertheless expressed as a point of departure for the Committee, even though no concrete proposal was given. The second point concerned the Committee’s proposal of net zero emissions by 2045, instead of by 2050. Some members had initially aimed for 2040, others for 2050. Some of those supporting the latter position were challenged by COP 21, but also welcomed that a door had opened for positions to change: ‘Paris generated a wave of policy amendments, including in the EU, and we could ride on that wave’. Concerning the target year, stakeholders from environmental organizations and a group of corporate forerunners, had advocated around 2030 as suitable for ‘emissions close to zero’, whereas business confederations and trade unions had pointed towards the end of the century as sufficiently ambitious (Jonsson et al., 2015). The latter group was, according to several interviewees, perceived to make ‘vague but extreme cost exaggerations’, and to have low climate policy ambitions, which rendered the group somewhat marginalized. Nevertheless, most interviewees stated that the outcome of COP 21 eventually tilted the agreement in the Committee to 2045. Finally, the COP 21 outcome was claimed by one interviewee to have put an end to a debate in the Committee about whether to express the proposed target as ‘net zero’ or to specify a figure (e.g. –80%) for emission reductions.

5. Discussion

Considering the results from the interviews, it is difficult to say whether or not the Committee learning process in itself would have enabled the final proposals to emerge without input from COP 21. However, it seems

evident that the Paris process and agreement left strong marks on the conclusions of the Committee. Even if a CCA would have still been proposed without external influence, the interviewees generally stated that changing the target year from 2050 to 2045, and choosing a 'net zero' objective were direct consequences of COP 21, that UN negotiations taking place in parallel with Committee negotiations indeed generated a 'Paris effect'. A similar type of decisive influence came from the Committee's study of the U.K. Climate Change Act. Hearing from political counterparts in the UK that much of the concern about costs and competitiveness was generally unfounded, influenced the members. That the finally proposed CCA was less comprehensive than the U.K. Climate Change Act has less to do with economic concerns than with the view that the parliament should not bind the government on normative issues, which is one reason why the 2045 objective is not included in the Swedish Climate Act as such.

When considering these results in relation to previous research, the shared understanding and normative consensus that emerged in the Committee helped its members to stand united against pressure from businesses confederations and labour unions on one front, and environmental organizations on the other, differing to similar processes elsewhere, e.g. the process in Ireland (Torney, 2017). The unity also gave sufficient leverage for the proposal to pass through the bottlenecks in the governmental offices and the parliament, when the bill with the Climate Act was adopted. This outcome may ultimately be due to the 'emotional energy', i.e. the Committee member's individual willingness and energy to act upon what they considered right from a societal point of view, which complemented the 'normative learning', i.e. the change in values, in the Committee (Nachmany, 2017).

When it comes to policy innovation, the concept of 'policy invention' illustrates the novel aspects of the Committee's proposal and how the objectives put forward are not only path dependent but also a renewing element across the two decades old Swedish EQOS. The EQOS is unique and aims to give long-term signals to commercial and other actors based on broad political agreement. The Climate Act gives further stability to the system when it comes to climate policy, and thereby strengthens incentive structures.

One illustration of what this policy invention concept can mean in practice is offered by the Swedish steel and iron producers' association 'Jernkontoret'. Through its representative in the Committee, the association continuously criticized, from a competitiveness point of view, the objectives, the act and the council at Committee meetings, including in the 'Special Opinion' written after the members had agreed (Lundberg, 2016). However, soon after the Committee presented its report, the leading Swedish steel company, which is the largest point source emitter of carbon dioxide emissions in Sweden, turned around and launched a pioneering project aiming for carbon free steel production (SSAB, 2016). This and other similar initiatives, backed by the fact that the new climate objectives by then were the most ambitious in the world, allowed the parliament and the government to continue to state that Sweden was a global forerunner. They signalled that ambitious climate policy was compatible with competitive businesses and a prospering economy, already a longstanding central theme in Swedish climate policy.

Whereas the policy invention dimension vis-à-vis other countries mainly consisted of the ambitious objectives, the invention dimension from a domestic point of view was to adopt a CCA, as a complementary instrument in the EQOS. The previous perception of a potential framework climate law as an odd feature in the EQOS may explain why Sweden adopted its CCA comparatively late.

The related notion of 'policy diffusion' helps to capture how the Committee was influenced by policies and processes outside Sweden. Concerning the national context, the U.K. experiences had, according to most interviewees, an especially strong impact on the Committee particularly in overcoming much of the worry about competitiveness. The key learnings from U.K. thus concerned the claimed absence of overall negative economic effects there following ambitious climate action rather than the specific content of the U.K. Climate Change Act as such. However, even if the Swedish CCA is less comprehensive than the U.K. version, it contains most of its key features (Averchenkova et al., 2020), with the exception of the climate objectives. Concerning the international influences, the Committee was strongly affected by the COP 21 process, both in general and on specific aspects of climate policy, e.g. on temperature targets. Complementing the previous research finding that international climate treaties mainly affect countries that have formal obligations (Fankhauser et al., 2016), the comparatively imprecise Paris Agreement had such an effect in the case of Sweden. Policy diffusion was evident in this case with the mechanisms behind it both problem-dependent and problem-

independent (Nachmany, 2017). The former relates to learning with the aim to solve a problem, while the latter is driven by motives external to the substantive issues, for example a quest for legitimacy.

Linking this study to research focusing specifically on climate legislation, this exploration supports the previous finding that left-right political orientation is not always decisive for climate laws (Fankhauser et al., 2015). With one exception, parties from left to right reached consensus on the Committee's proposal and voted for the subsequent bill in the parliament.¹⁴ In contrast to Wagner and Ylä-Anttila (2018), however, economically powerful organizations did not receive much support for their preferences in the Swedish case, e.g. the idea to aim for targets towards the end of the century instead of mid-century targets. When it comes to the recent stocktaking of CCAs by Nash and Steurer (2019), the present study confirms previous results regarding the Swedish case and that a 'living policy process' is ongoing.¹⁵ It is however questionable whether Sweden would move faster towards net zero emissions had specific emission reduction objectives been included in the CCA as proposed by Nash and Steurer (2019); rather, the strength in the Swedish climate policy framework with the CCA lies in the broad political consensus. After all, the objectives in the EQOS have generally been kept or improved over two decades, irrespective of the political colour of governments. That governments prioritize climate policy quite differently depends on other factors.

Finally, previous research also shows that the inclination to pass additional national legislation decreases with the number of laws and increases in the presence of a flagship law (Fankhauser et al., 2015). The Swedish case, however, shows the opposite, with comparatively well-developed climate policy in place before the Climate Act was adopted. This opens the idea that specific climate laws and a CCA can be mutually supportive, i.e. legal frameworks give direction for developing more ambitious sectoral climate laws and the more precise sectoral laws in existence, the easier it is to agree on stricter overall ambitions. Further research is needed to explore this idea, not least research that compares the emergence, implementation and specific impacts of CCAs in different countries.

6. Conclusions

Aiming to draw lessons of value for climate policy-making, this study explores a series of factors that influenced the All Party Committee on Environmental Objectives and the process that led to the unanimous proposal on a climate policy framework, including world-leading climate objectives and a CCA.

A key conclusion is that the continuous learning process within the Committee led to a richer, and largely science-based, understanding of challenges and opportunities in climate policy. The meetings open for only Committee members allowed them to learn from scratch without risking external criticism and to build stronger personal relationships. This process in turn paved the way for reaching consensus, which according to interviewees was conditional for resolving two issues in particular, notably on costs and on the constitution.

The first issue of costs, was due to a few members initially regarding policy costs as a potential deal-breaker. However, over time insight emerged within the Committee that long-term economic impact analyses of policies involve uncertainties and simplifications that easily render the outcome less relevant. This change in view downplayed the role of economic modelling and opened up the possibility for the conclusion that more ambitious objectives would have a comparatively small negative impact on economic growth and could give rise to considerable co-benefits, whereas the costs of 'no action' would be large. This finding was helped by the absence of a dividing line between members from different blocs in parliament. Those within blocks who were worried about costs were opposed primarily in pre-meetings within the blocs, helped by expert analysis. In addition, some Committee members also avoided debating the economic dimension since they regarded a broad agreement to be more instrumental for pursuing their interest. In one case this action was stated as a means to forestall criticism from the Finance Ministry, in another to gain leverage vis-à-vis a larger collaborating party. Interestingly, agreement on the point on costs was reached despite strong economic-based criticism from business confederations and trade unions.

The second issue resolved through learning concerned the compatibility of a CCA with the Swedish constitution and climate policy tradition. Some members at first questioned whether legal requirements on specific policies could be placed on the government, something that in Sweden is normally reserved for the state budget and foreign politics. Here as well, the members settled on the issue over time, according to the

interviewees, based on expert input showing that a CCA indeed would be in line with the constitution, and would potentially strengthen Swedish climate policy. On most other issues, the levels of agreement were high from start in the Committee.

Another point that helped to foster consensus was that the members, who were comparatively environmentally committed, saw that a cross-party and cross-bloc deal could be useful in their future work. The achievement could help them put pressure on governmental ministries, their own parties or political coalition partners. Reaching consensus would, according to several interviewees, help them gain leverage to cope with what was at the time, frequently paralyzing bloc politics. Interestingly, the agreement in the Committee was reached despite a parallel and contested debate on climate policy in Sweden, in which some of the members, and indeed their parties, participated. The strong and opposing roles often taken in the open political debate contrasted sharply with the constructive and respectful deliberations carried out in the Committee.

In summary, the interviewees in this study clearly felt that they needed to improve the climate dimension of the Swedish EQOS both at a system level and on a more climate-specific level, and that a Swedish CCA would help in that endeavour. In doing so, the process of setting up in the All Party Committee on Environmental Objectives paved the way for both factual and normative learning on a number of climate policy relevant issues. Boosted by personal emotional energy and affected by diffusing policies, the process eventually led the otherwise fiercely debating members of the Committee to find consensus and to propose a series of new elements in Swedish climate policy, foremost the Climate Act of Sweden.

Notes

1. Hysing (2014), however, questions whether Sweden still is a forerunner; but after his article, several new policies have been adopted, among them the Climate Act.
2. One block consisted of the Social Democrats and the Green Party in the government in common collaboration in the parliament with the Left Party. Another block consisted of the four parties in the preceding right-wing government, i.e. the Moderate Party, the Liberals, the Center Party, and the Christian Democrats. The eighth party in the parliament, the Swedish Democrats did not belong to any of these two blocks.
3. PhD Eva Alfredsson, at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden, participated in the planning of the study and in the interviews, but did not participate in writing this article.
4. The “January Agreement” (2019) between four parties (Social Democrats, Centre Party, Liberals, Green Party), which was a prerequisite for parliamentary support behind forming the present Social Democrat-Green Party government, states the intention to “... safeguard the climate policy framework” (my translation) and to promote similar legislation in the EU.
5. The far-right populist Sweden Democrats did not participate in the Committee, allegedly since SD was not a parliamentary party when the Committee was set up in July 2010.
6. The Council was set-up in 2002, dismantled in 2010 and re-institutionalised in 2014. The present chair is a County Governor and much of the work is done by the Swedish EPA.
7. These show that only 1 of the 16 objectives will be reached on schedule (SEPA, 2019).
8. This long-standing system is comprehensive and a large number of Committees, led by individual investigators or parliamentary Committees, produces hundreds of proposals to the government annually, often with the ambition to reach broad agreements.
9. The Green Party had raised this idea in parliamentary motions during the preceding mandate period, referring to e.g. the U.K. Climate Change Act (Parliamentary Motion, 2011/12:Fi16).
10. These were the two parties forming the government, the Social Democrats and the Green Party, together with the Left Party, and the previous governmental parties on the right wing-side, the Moderate Party, the Liberals, the Center Party, and the Christian Democrats. The chair was a well-known environmentalist, who had a background in the environmental movement as well as in the Swedish Parliament and the European Parliament. The eighth party in the parliament, the Swedish Democrats, did not participate in the Committee.
11. Concerning the Climate Policy Council, the government subsequently decided that the Council’s members be appointed by the government, albeit after proposals on membership from the council itself (SFS, 2017:1268).
12. Some comments given during the interviews are translated and illustrated within citation marks.
13. Some of these publications are included in the final report of the Committee (Miljömålsberedningen, 2016b), but the argumentation was presented earlier on, before the Committee’s first report was finalized.
14. The exception is the far-right populist ‘Sweden Democrats’, which didn’t participate in the Committee (at the time) and voted against the bill and the climate law.
15. This includes critical but constructive reports from the Climate Policy Council (2020), as well as a number of new proposals from the government, under the mandate of the Climate Act (Governmental Bill, 2020/21:1).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This project was funded by the Swedish Research Council FORMAS under grant number 211-2014-595.

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