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Sustaining business as usual or enabling transformation? A discourse analysis of climate change mitigation policy in Swedish municipalities

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Abstract

This article explores how discourses may influence the potential for success in mitigating climate change in Swedish municipalities. We identify dominant discourses in climate change mitigation policy in three Swedish municipalities using argumentative discourse analysis, based on policy documents and interviews as empirical material. Political leadership and adequate organizational preconditions are necessary for working with climate change mitigation in municipalities, but the role of discourse is also significant. Policy discourse constructs preconditions for certain scenarios while rendering others less likely. Previous studies have shown that the ecological modernization (EM) discourse tends to be dominant, something which this study confirms and investigates further. We find that the dominant discourse is strong EM, which largely considers it possible to decouple economic growth and environmental problems through renewable energy and technology. A focus on collaboration between stakeholders is central and a global climate justice perspective is present to some extent. Potential solutions that are not related to the market or technological innovation risk being rendered invisible when this discourse is dominant, but the inclusion of a diversity of actors and an increased focus on climate justice could potentially minimize this risk. Finally, emerging discourses around transformation and circular economy have potential to enable the forging of new paths. This depends, however, on how these concepts are framed and how they are used.

KEYWORDS
argumentative discourse analysis, circular economy, climate change mitigation policy, ecological modernization, post-politics, transformation

1 | INTRODUCTION

Cities are crucial for mitigating climate change. Globally, cities are responsible for 70% of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), and they have the potential to instigate change, influence lifestyles, and spur technological innovation (Mi et al., 2018). Previous studies have shown that technological innovations and market mechanisms are dominant when it comes to the discourse surrounding solutions to climate change, while other solutions tend to be obscured, including comprehensive justice perspectives (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Brodén Gyberg & Lövbrand, 2022; Dryzek, 2013; Isenhour, 2016; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Lidskog & Rabe, 2022; Machin, 2019;

Saldert, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2010). Sweden is often mentioned as a frontrunner in climate change mitigation with a strong local government, making it a good example for studying municipal climate change policy (Granberg & Elander, 2007; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Saldert, 2017). Studies of Swedish local climate politics have shown that successful work with climate change is dependent on factors like political leadership, ambition level of municipal officials, organizational structure, geographic setting, stakeholder involvement, budget, transparency about selection of targets, long-term strategies, evaluation, and financial support and direction from the national government (Fenton et al., 2015; Ghaderi & Johansson, 2013; Storbjörk et al., 2017; Uggla & Elander, 2009). How sustainability is governed is also influenced by how problems and solutions to environmental or climate issues are understood; therefore, it is important to study municipal discourse (Feindt & Oels, 2005; Lundqvist, 2004; Saldert, 2017). Discourse analyses can analyze how climate change issues are handled politically and how discourses shape political practices. They can also illustrate which norms influence practices, what type of solutions that appear to be preferred, and what potential influence this could have on the possibility to mitigate climate change (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Hajer, 1995; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Saldert, 2017).

This article explores how current discourses may condition mitigation potential through an analysis of Swedish municipal climate policy. The aim is not to evaluate whether a specific discourse will lead to the needed reductions in emissions or not, but to explore how discourses may influence the potential for mitigation success. To identify which discourses are present in the municipalities, we analyze how climate change is framed; what assumptions are made, and which arguments are used to justify solutions. The findings can be useful for identifying and strengthening perspectives that might be missing in climate policy.

2 | BACKGROUND: ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSES IN SWEDEN

Previous studies have shown that ecological modernization (EM) is often the dominant discourse that underpins strategies of sustainable development at the global policy level, as well as in industrialized countries and cities with high environmental targets (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013; Hagbert et al., 2021; Isenhour, 2016; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Machin, 2019; Saldert, 2017; Zannakis, 2013). EM can be seen a part of a sustainable development discourse where economic, ecological, and social aspects should be considered. According to this logic, green growth can be achieved through the decoupling of environmental problems and economic growth. Nature is viewed as a public good that can be managed and commodified, a key premise being that it is profitable to protect the environment; it is more cost-effective to take action to prevent environmental issues before they happen. No major institutional changes are deemed necessary. EM can be divided into "weak" and "strong." The "weak" EM has stronger focus on technological solutions, technocratic policy making, and mainly considers high-income countries, disregarding the situation for low-income countries (Dryzek, 2013). "Strong" EM calls for some modification of existing economic and societal institutions as well as policy structure; market- and technology-oriented solutions need to be combined with more democratic and inclusive policy making (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013; Oels, 2005).

EM has been shown to be the dominant climate change discourse in Swedish politics since the 1990's (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Zannakis, 2013). For example, late in the first decade of the 2000's, under a Liberal-Conservative government, a weak EM could be identified, It was characterized by the promotion of green technology, a strong belief in market mechanisms and growth, and by putting responsibility on individuals to make green consumer choices to encourage cleaner production. Sweden also justified taking strong action on climate change as a way to be a role model for others (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Zannakis, 2013).

Anshelm and Hultman (2015) also identify a strong EM in Swedish politics. Parties in opposition and environmental organizations criticized the Liberal-Conservative government for not taking enough action to combat climate change. In contrast to a weak EM, they did not think that large-scale technology was the solution. Instead, they argued, structural change was needed and patterns of production and consumption needed to transform. Renewable energy, energy efficiency, infrastructural changes like public transport, and building renovations were seen as the way to solve the climate issue without lowering economic growth. If production and consumption were to become more climate friendly, economic benefit would be attained in the form of green technology exports and new jobs (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015). This discourse was also critical of the claim that Sweden had low emissions, since this calculation omitted consumption-based emissions (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Lidskog & Elander, 2012).

EM has also been shown to be a dominant discourse in Swedish municipalities by Saldert (2017) who studied sustainability plans and strategies in Växjö and Stockholm with a focus on ecological sustainability from the introduction of Agenda 21 in the '90s up to about 2013/2014. The early discourse maintained that cities needed to adapt to natural processes, stop polluting, minimize consumption and use resources more efficiently. After 2005, the discourse shifted from considering reduced waste and consumption as a solution, to one where waste was seen as a resource, for example for biogas and heating. According to this logic, sustainable development and economic growth could be mutually reinforcing. Initially, citizens were encouraged to participate in civic dialog and to have an input on strategies. After 2005, however, public-private partnerships increasingly came into focus, and citizens became viewed more as consumers who can take responsibility for the environment through their consumption choices (Saldert, 2017).

According to Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2019), Green governmentality (GG) is another discourse that is central in global climate politics. According to Dryzek (2013), this discourse has been present to different extents in most high-income countries. The GG discourse entails a strong belief in the modern administrative state, science and big corporations. According to this logic, the environment should be regulated through governmental control in the public's best interest.

Global legally binding frameworks are the solution, experts can produce science that correctly explains the relationship between humans and nature—including environmental risk—and nature can be protected through stewardship and resource management. Through scientific and technological infrastructure, natural processes can be monitored and managed. Solutions that are in line with discourse include geoengineering and carbon capture and storage. This discourse is considered elitist and as undermining of other ways of describing natural systems as well as local and indigenous knowledge (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019; Dryzek, 2013; Oels, 2005).

Zannakis (2013) also sees the influence of civic environmentalism in Sweden, which is a discourse defined by a focus on participation as a means to solve complex problems. Everyone who is affected by, or has a stake in, environmental problems should be a part of forming solutions—not least marginalized groups. According to this logic, there should be increased participation by civil society in existing institutions, and public-private partnerships between NGOs, businesses and government, similar to strong EM. This assumes that the market alone cannot solve environmental problems, but there is no overt questioning of capitalist structures (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013). In Sweden, this discourse was for example demonstrated by the will to take moral responsibility as a rich country and lower its own per capita emissions without carbon sinks to meet the Kyoto protocol. There was not political unity surrounding this, however, meaning that this discourse was fragile compared to the EM discourse, which had more extensive support. Aspects relating to justice were downplayed further when the center-right government allowed for carbon sinks, emissions trading and other flexible mechanisms (Zannakis, 2013).

Climate justice and other radical green discourses have also been present in Sweden. These discourses have tended to be mostly visible outside the established political arena, but they have still been able to find support in politics, not least when it comes to portraying climate change as a global and urgent justice issue (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015). Although there are different strands of these discourses, they share the view that there is a need for systemic change. Technology and neoliberal ideas about the free market do not constitute solutions according to this logic. Instead, the economic system has to fundamentally change. One main argument is that it has become impossible to criticize economic growth as the way to solve environmental problems, resulting in limited political action. In this view, patriarchal power structures, sovereignty and capitalism are the root causes of climate and environmental issues. The short-term thinking that underpins the capitalist logic clashes with the long-term thinking that is deemed necessary for solving climate change issues. The strategy of these discourses is that unequal power relations should be questioned and contested, and that the idea of stakeholder participation explained above often masks these power structures (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019; Dryzek, 2013; Zannakis, 2013). Furthermore, the notion that nature is a resource that can be managed needs to shift to one where nature has intrinsic value (Dryzek, 2013). In this sense, these discourses often emphasize that our worldviews and values need to change. Direct action and activism are also considered ways to change structures (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015).

3 | THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Most discourse analysis somehow builds on the work done by Michel Foucault. One important concept for Foucault is power. In his genealogical work, power does not belong to specific actors, but is something that exists in social practices. Power in discourses legitimates certain viewpoints, and invalidates others, making it impossible to make certain arguments and ask certain questions, and limits who can participate in a discourse (Dryzek, 2013; Hajer, 1995). For Hajer (building on Foucault), discourse analysis can be used to understand why a certain definition of an environmental issue becomes the dominant view and seen as the truth, and why other definitions are obscured or invalidated (Hajer, 1995; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). It is not the actual environmental problem that is of central interest in a study, but how it is socially constructed, by municipal officials and policy text in this case.

Drawing on social psychology and social-interactive discourse theory, Hajer (1995) adds an argumentative part to Foucault's discourse theory and argues that subjects have the agency to both produce and transform discourses to a certain extent. Therefore, an argumentative discourse analysis (ADA) of political texts should aim to show how actors try to define a certain problem. ADA combines the view of discourses as constitutive in politics with the view that actors can interpret, create, and reproduce discourses. While all humans have agency to act, the level of agency depends on the social setting which can both limit and empower agency. Policy discourses empower some actors and disregard others. Therefore, social power structures should also be analyzed (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Hajer, 1995; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005).

To combine the view that certain understandings can be fixed, while actors also have some power to change it, Hajer (1995) uses the key concept of *storylines*. Actors can combine the many different discourses that make up an environmental problem by using storylines "… to give meaning to specific physical or social phenomena." (Hajer, 1995, p. 56). Storylines can be used both to reinforce the dominant discourse, while new storylines that combine other discourses can be a way to confront it. Power relations can entail that people do not recognize something as a dominant storyline, instead they see it as the normal way to speak about something. Storylines, like metaphors, can be an effective political tool to overcome conflicts about a phenomenon, and reach discursive closure, which means that a complex issue is simplified and reified in order to reach common ground (Hajer, 1995). The second key concept in ADA is *discourse-coalitions*, which can be defined as the way actors combine practices that before were separated. An example of this is EM, where the previously oppositional areas of environmental regulation and economic growth are combined (Hajer, 1995).

4 | MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The choice of municipalities was based on purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). The selection is based on the notion that municipalities are important parts of forming the climate change discourse and influence which solutions that are brought forward (Patton, 2015). Municipalities with recently adopted climate change mitigation plans (within 3 years from the initial empirical work) were prioritized since the focus is on recent discourse. The choices were based on a Swedish annual city ranking and previous studies (Hållbarhet, 2020; Hult & Larsson, 2016). Although the results are not generalizable, we chose one big city (Gothenburg), one middle sized (Helsingborg), and one small (Lomma).

The empirical material for this study consists of climate policy documents and interviews. Only documents related to climate change mitigation were included (see Table 1), strategic documents that provide a description of the problems as the municipalities see them as well as priorities and potential solutions—which in turn guide decision-making (Saldert, 2017). For two of the municipalities the studied documents are the climate and energy plan, and for one it is the environmental and climate plan. This is because municipalities in Sweden can choose to work with climate change issues in different ways (Uggla & Elander, 2009) and therefore the plans are not structured exactly the same way. Still, differences and similarities between the municipalities can be studied since all of the plans are strategic and outline how the municipality should work with climate change mitigation. The documents were available on the municipalities' websites. The environmental and climate program in Gothenburg was completed in 2021, and it is the steering document for the municipality's strategic work with ecological sustainability. It contains information about what should be done, by whom, and how. The climate and energy plan in Helsingborg was completed in 2018, and it contains concrete measures to be taken, a timeline, and responsibilities. Helsingborg has 8 strategic goals, one being "Helsingborg is a leader in environmental and climate issues" and the plan is related to this goal. The climate and energy plan, is a plan under the overarching Life Quality program with the focus on creating conditions for a good living environment in Helsingborg municipality. The energy and climate plan in Lomma was completed in 2020. The plan includes goals and measures that are steering for the municipality's work with securing energy provisions, and decreasing their climate impact. For Helsingborg and Lomma, we also analyzed the programs related to other environmental policy areas, since this was already included in the Gothenburg program. The parts relating to climate change mitigation have been studied in the most detail. Additional policy documents were also analyzed when deemed relevant due to the references in the main documents, such as those relating to circular economy (CE) and traffic strategies. These were not studied in the same detail, but the analysis of them did not result in any completely different discourses being found. These documents were not referred to in the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews with one municipality official from each municipality were also conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). Given that the interviewees also represent and reproduce certain discourses, the analysis of the policy document analysis combined with the interviews enabled a more comprehensive overview of the discourses (Saldert, 2017). People with comprehensive knowledge about the topic (key persons) were selected for the interviews; officials who have expertise about the municipality and its work with climate change issues, as well as knowledge about the documents (Patton, 2015). The interviewees were employed in the municipal organization, worked strategically and had all worked with the development of the environment and climate related plans. The interviews were conducted during spring 2021. They were about 1 h

TABLE 1 List of documents used as empirical data.

Municipality	Gothenburg	Helsingborg	Lomma
Main document	Gothenburg city's environmental and climate program 2021–2030 (Göteborgs Stads miljö- och klimatprogram 2021–2030). Adopted in 2021	Climate and energy plan for Helsingborg, 2018–2014 (Klimat-och energiplan för Helsingborg, 2018–2024). Adopted in 2018	Energy and climate plan for Lomma municipality, 2021–2025 (Energi och klimatplanför Lomma kommun, 2021–2025) Including Appendix 1: In depth explanation of measures (Bilaga 1: Fördjupning av åtgärder). Adopted in 2020
Complementary material	Collaboration for a circular Gothenburg 2030 (Samarbete för ett cirkulärt Göteborg 2030). Report from 2021 Gothenburg 2035 traffic strategy for a close city (Göteborg 2035 trafikstrategi för en nära storstad). Adopted in 2014	Green structure program for Helsingborg, 2014 (Grönstrukturprogram för Helsingborg, 2014). Adopted in 2014 Action plan to support a sharing economy and circular economy in Helsingborg, 2020–2024 (Handlingsplan för att främja delningsekonomi och cirkulär ekonomi i Helsingborg, 2020–2024). Developed during 2018–2019 Traffic program for Helsingborg, 2014 (Trafikprogram För Helsingborg, 2014). Adopted in 2014	Environmental program for Lomma municipality, 2018–2025 (Naturmiljöprogram för Lomma kommun, 2018–2025). Adopted in 2018

long, conducted in Swedish and online due to the safety precautions required because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consent for storing of personal information and recording was obtained before the interviews, and the interviewees were informed beforehand about the general purpose of the study including the possibility to withdraw at any time. They also approved quotes used. The interviews were video-recorded and transcribed. In the text, the interviewees have been de-identified; only their role and municipality are used.

The empirical material was analyzed with the help of a discursive framework based on a combination of previous research findings, and our interpretation of Hajer's (1995) definition of ADA inspired by how Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2019) developed their methodological framework. As a first step, the policy documents and the transcriptions of the interviews were read through with the purpose of getting an overview of the material. The documents and interview transcripts were analyzed several times, highlighting sections according to the questions in the discursive framework, see Table 2. The framework aided an analysis of how climate change is framed, what solutions are presented, how solutions are justified, and which stakeholders are involved. The highlighted sections were then placed in the discursive framework. The complementary material was analyzed with the same framework, although less rigorously.

After this analysis, the findings were linked to different discourses by looking at the storylines and discourse coalitions that appeared. At this stage, we were aided by looking at how the problem was defined, and what concepts, arguments and categories were used to frame climate change mitigation and support strategies. This was then related to previous research and how discourses are described there. See Table 3 for a description of different discourses. Findings that did not fit into previously identified discourses were categorized as emerging discourses.

In section 5, the results of the document and interview analysis are presented and discussed. Different framings, solutions and arguments are presented and linked to different discourses. In section 6, the discourses found are problematized in order to analyze the potential implications for mitigation policy.

5 | DOMINANT AND EMERGING DISCOURSES IN THE MUNICIPALITIES

5.1 | Technological solutions, efficiency, and behavioral changes

All three of the municipalities frame climate change in a similar way; as being caused by humans and constituting one of the biggest

TABLE 2 Discursive framework to identify discourses.

Analytical questions	Gothenburg	Helsingborg	Lomma
How is climate change framed and understood?			
What solutions are promoted?			
How are viewpoints and solutions justified? What type of arguments are used to legitimize actions and strategies?			
Which stakeholders are included and how?			

TABLE 3 Climate change discourses.[a]

Weak EM	Strong EM	Green governmentality	Civic environmentalism	Climate justice and other radical green discourses
Decoupling of environmental problems and economic growth	Less focus on large-scale technology while technological innovation is still important	The administrative state	Participation	System change
		Science and facts	Inclusion of marginalized groups	Market mechanisms not the solution
		Big corporations	Public-private partnerships	Economic system has to fundamentally change
Green growth and market mechanisms		Rules and regulations	More than market mechanisms are needed to solve environmental problems	Patriarchal power structures, sovereignty and capitalism are the root causes of climate and environmental issues
	Green growth still the aim	Stewardship and resource management		
	Patterns of production and consumption need to change			Worldviews and values need to change
Technological solutions		Technological infrastructure		
	Some structural change is needed			
	Inclusion of consumption-based emissions			
	Collaboration between stakeholders			

[a]Based on previous research by Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019; Dryzek, 2013; Hagbert et al., 2021; Isenhour, 2016; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Saldert, 2017; Zannakis, 2013.

challenges society faces. Changes such as sea level rise, increased number of extreme heat events and changed precipitation patterns are already under way. The expressed ambitions are to reduce emissions in line with the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030. Emissions reductions are described as occurring through renewable energy, technological solutions, energy efficiency, and behavioral changes (Gothenburg, 2021a; Helsingborg, 2018; Lomma, 2020).

Win-win arguments relating to environment and economy can be identified in all the plans as well as the interviews, as exemplified in Helsingborg's plan:

> Through the climate transition, we are helping to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, which is economically beneficial compared to the costs of dealing with the effects of climate change if we do not reduce emissions enough. It will be more expensive to implement measures, the longer we wait (Helsingborg, 2018, Appendix 8, p. 1).

In addition to these envisioned benefits, a climate transition is seen as also creating more jobs and strengthening the market. Reducing energy consumption will reduce both environmental impact and costs (Helsingborg, 2018; Lomma, 2020; Lomma interview). Getting employees to travel less by car and following green building standards are also examples of things that are both environmentally friendly and cost effective. Market driven climate action was mentioned as one success factor given that energy transitions entail huge costs; "How do we create business models that make it reasonable for businesses to make these investments?" (Gothenburg Interview). References are often made to economic benefits in order to justify the undertaking of strong measures, but the idea that the market itself has to change also exists (Helsingborg, 2018). The above framing and arguments reflect a strong EM characterized by belief in technological solution and the notion that a climate transition will strengthen the market, while the need to change the market and behavior to some extent is also visible (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Hagbert et al., 2021) Taking environmental action that is simultaneously cost effective is not automatically indicative of an EM discourse, but we argue that when actions are justified with economic arguments—EM risks being perpetuated, ignoring societal or ecological trade-offs (Leipold, 2021).

5.2 | Solutions: Acting as a role model, facilitating, and regulating

Municipalities appear to simultaneously apply measures to facilitate climate friendly behavior, as well as rules and regulations that make it harder to use environmentally detrimental alternatives. The focus, however, is on facilitative measures and information. Furthermore, all the municipalities state that it is important to be a frontrunner and leader in climate change mitigation, inspiring others to take action by for instance lowering emissions faster than the global or national rate (Gothenburg, 2021a, p. 8; Helsingborg, 2018, p. 4; Lomma, 2020, p. 4).

The mix of approaches can, for example, be illustrated by increasing opportunities for biking, car-pooling, using electric cars, and taking public transportation while at the same time making it more expensive to park your car in the city. Having waste taxation can also remind and inspire organizations, schools and businesses to reduce their climate impact and change their behavior (Gothenburg, 2021a; Helsingborg, 2018; Lomma, 2020). Facilitating measures, consultation and education for citizens are seen as important ways to influence lifestyle changes and changes in consumption patterns (Gothenburg, 2021a). Moreover, all the interviewees emphasized that the municipality cannot force people to do certain things or change their behavior, rather the focus should be on making it easy to choose sustainably. At the same time, the interviewees all believed that stricter rules might be necessary since changes in behavior so far have not been substantial:

> Emissions reductions are going way too slowly. We do not stop using cars. Over half of all journeys in Helsingborg are still made by car. …We have worked quite a lot with trying to make it easier for those who bike and take public transport, but we haven't really made it harder for those who travel by car. We work with carrots and not sticks. In the end both are perhaps needed to reach the emissions goal for transportation. For example, if we would close the city center for car traffic, what would happen then?
>
> (Helsingborg Interview)

Although stronger policy instruments are becoming more common (Gothenburg interview), citizen behavior is considered a politically sensitive question. Plans mostly focus on how the municipal organization itself can become more climate friendly and be a true role model, in turn inspiring citizens and other actors to become more climate friendly. This focus on facilitating environmentally friendly consumer behavior and acting as a role model is indicative of an EM discourse (Hagbert et al., 2021; Saldert, 2017).

All municipalities anchor their plan or program in both national and international agreements and goals, including the SDG's and the Paris agreement. Having measurable goals based on models is considered important. The way to measure whether goals are reached or not is by calculating emissions in a standardized way. New regulations and policy instruments at the national level are often considered necessary (Gothenburg, 2021a; Helsingborg, 2018; Lomma, 2020). This focus on laws and measurable goals shows the influence of a GG discourse, as well as the need for stronger policy instruments where the municipality should steer by setting rules and regulations (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006).

5.3 | Involvement of stakeholders: Collaboration and knowledge production

Collaboration—not least with business and academia—is considered important in order to find solutions and facilitate implementation.

Such actors were also partially involved in the making of the plans (Helsingborg Interview; Gothenburg Interview). Broad collaboration within the municipality was also highlighted, as well as with other municipalities through networks like the "Climate Municipalities" (Klimatkommunerna). When referring to the municipal waste plan, Lomma states that citizens, businesses, organizations and municipal departments and companies have to be involved. Their environmental policy states that the municipality should "cooperate and have an open dialogue with citizens, businesses, and organizations to improve the environment" (Lomma, 2020 p. 69, Appendix). Similar formulations can be found in the Helsingborg policies:

> Through co-creation with citizens and departments, the municipality can offer and develop tools, education, and activities that can increase knowledge in order to decrease consumption-based emissions. (Helsingborg, 2018, Appendix 8, p. 13)

Citizens tend to be seen more as receivers of knowledge and information than collaborators, lowering their agency as producers of knowledge. Sometimes, however, citizens are referred to as co-creators of knowledge. In Gothenburg, for example "external actors from business, civil society, and academia, can and should be invited to the strategies when necessary." (Gothenburg, 2021a, p. 33). Helsingborg also explicitly mention citizens, including children:

> We have recently launched a local climate agreement, directed at businesses, organizations, citizens, and children. The plan is to create a platform where we can exchange experiences, network and showcase good examples, and where the municipality can support the transition
>
> (Helsingborg Interview)

This can also be seen as a discourse where business, organizations and citizens have more agency to come up with their own solutions and contribute to knowledge production. It is a sign of a strong EM where inclusive and collaborative governance is seen as important and agency is given to many actors (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013; Oels, 2005). This can also be seen as a sign of a civic environmentalism discourse since it sees stakeholder participation as important to find solutions (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013). However, unlike civic environmentalism, there is no focus on including marginalized groups. Citizens are mainly represented as recipients of information and knowledge in efforts to encourage lifestyle changes and to improve policy adherence and regulation acceptance, as exemplified in Helsingborg policy:

> Informational actions directed at citizens can contribute to creating a norm around sustainable lifestyles and also increase the chance of acceptance for regulations. (Helsingborg, 2018, Appendix 8, p. 10)

5.4 | Some signs of climate justice arguments

All of the municipalities have goals to reduce consumption-based emissions. In Helsingborg this is underlined with reference to the fact that consumption-based emissions are not included at the national level even though Sweden's ecological footprint is one of the highest in the world. Municipalities should therefore step up (Helsingborg Interview).

> In order to lower GHG emissions and the ecological footprint, changed lifestyles with less air travel, greener food consumption, and different consumption patterns, are needed. Earlier, technological innovations were seen as the solution, now there is a higher recognition that we need to change our lifestyles. (Helsingborg, 2018, Appendix 5, p. 3)

Gothenburg and Lomma policies argue similarly:

> The Paris Agreement says that sustainable lifestyles and sustainable consumption and production patterns play an important role in tackling climate change, and that developed countries should take a leading role in working with these questions. Therefore, we include both geographic (territorial) emissions and consumption-based emissions, in order for Gothenburg's goals to follow the Paris Agreement. (Gothenburg, 2021a, Appendix 1, p. 12)
>
> Total GHG emissions from consumption are higher than those from territorial production of goods and services" (Lomma, 2020, Appendix, p. 14).

This is part of the strong EM discourse, since it recognizes that richer countries need to take responsibility for their emissions in other countries (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013; Oels, 2005). As Zannakis (2013) argues with the case of Swedish policy, this also reflects an influence of a climate justice discourse, acknowledging that consumption patterns require radical change.

However, there are few statements acknowledging that consumption patterns vary between groups of people within Sweden: citizens tend to be referred to as a universal category. Exceptions include Helsingborg's policy, which states that a person's economic situation might decide whether or not you a buy a more environmentally friendly car or not (Helsingborg, 2018). In the case of Lomma, it is only when referring to biking that it is argued that biking should be available for a variety of users (Lomma, 2020). The clearest recognition of differences between groups of people was in the interview with Gothenburg where the interviewee pointed out that actions taken to spur behavior change can affect people differently, and that this should be kept in mind when implementing plans: "I think it is vital to have a just climate transition in order to not have a backlash in the form of citizen protests" (Gothenburg interview).

Helsingborg argues that compensating measures for climate change in other countries could have negative effects on social aspects or other environmental issues, and that these types of measures have to be locally anchored and externally monitored. In Lomma, a similar perspective was also shown in the interview, regarding electric cars and the production and recycling of batteries:

> It is related both to other environmental and ethical aspects in the mineral extraction. Often the solution for this is saying that the batteries can be recycled, and that there is a method for this, but at the moment this method does not work on a large scale and it is not cost effective enough to be employed.
>
> (Lomma Interview)

This acknowledges that our resource use could have negative effects for people and the environment in other countries, indicating a climate justice discourse. In Helsingborg, Naturskyddsföreningen (Swedish Society for Nature Conservation) and Amnesty are provided as sources for this argument, suggesting the justice narrative is likely influenced by organizations that are more commonly associated with this type of discourse (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019; Dryzek, 2013). The capitalist economic system, patriarchy, or unequal power relations are never openly questioned. The justice perspective is mostly that Sweden should take responsibility for its higher emissions as a developed country.

5.5 | Emerging transformation and CE storylines

A transition or transformation discourse can be identified throughout the plans of Helsingborg and Gothenburg—being used 27 and 44 times respectively. According to Linnér and Wibeck (2020), transformation is an ambiguous term which is understood very differently in different settings In Swedish, the word "omställning" can be used to mean either transition or transformation, therefore both words are used here, and will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

In Helsingborg, transitions are to be made toward sustainable energy solutions, sustainable consumption and sustainable transportation systems for example (Helsingborg, 2018, Appendix 5, p. 1–3). In Gothenburg, the term is used more to refer to a transformation of society in general, highlighting that this change has to be faster (Gothenburg, 2021a). The benefits of using the concepts, according to the Gothenburg interview, is that it "signals that this is not something that can be done in the blink of an eye. This is not something that just requires small adjustments. If we are actually going to reach these goals it means transformation." (Gothenburg Interview).

This reflects a certain level of a radical green discourse since it demands systemic change and long-term thinking (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019; Dryzek, 2013). In Lomma, transition is less visible and mainly associated with energy systems.

Actions are also justified by invoking a CE perspective, though this is more prominent in Helsingborg and Gothenburg than in Lomma. CE in this context envisions resources circulating in loops, lowering environmental impact while at the same time increasing economic value (Gothenburg, 2021a; Helsingborg, 2018):

> Through a sharing economy the material welfare can remain, while consumption decreases. (Helsingborg, 2018, Appendix 8, p. 10).

> Resource efficient, non-toxic, and innovative purchasing and procurements, more reuse and more sharing of products, do not only lower resource usage, and environmental and climate impact, but also the city's costs (Gothenburg, 2021a, p. 37).

Similar to the above, CE taps into the EM discourse of mutual benefits between economic gains and environmental protection, and nature is seen as a resource. Economic models, production, and consumption, however, are considered to be in need of change in order to accommodate ecological aspects, and avoid over-consumption of natural resources. This is indicative of a strong EM (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015). A CE storyline could also be seen as partially breaking with the EM discourse, since linear market solutions are questioned to some degree.

6 | PROBLEMATIZING THE MUNICIPAL DISCOURSES

Strong EM is the most dominant discourse in Gothenburg, Helsingborg and Lomma, while other discourses also show up occasionally. In this section, the discourses will be problematized with the aim of discussing their potential for mitigation.

6.1 | The EM and GG potential to reduce emissions, and the post-political argument

Traditionally, municipalities are foremost responsible for education and healthcare, meaning that resources need to be focused on this. In light of this, the EM discourse can be appealing to local politicians since the combination of climate change mitigation and economic development can make it easier to get climate higher on the agenda (cf. Uggla & Elander, 2009). It can also be indicative of the municipalities reflecting political discourse on national and global levels. Even though Swedish municipalities are self-governed, it is traditional to follow the direction of the national government. Furthermore, the government sets certain regulations and only offers financial support for certain actions, which influences the range of solutions (Granberg & Elander, 2007; Uggla & Elander, 2009). Since Swedish national policy presents an EM discourse (Lidskog & Elander, 2012), this can explain why Gothenburg, Helsingborg and Lomma partly do this as well.

Globally, the GG discourse has been present for a long time in environmental policy and can be exemplified by the Kyoto Protocol. It was downplayed after the Copenhagen summit when this type of climate governance was questioned, since it had not led to the expected results. This summit was seen as a failure by many. Since then, a mix between GG and EM can be seen internationally, where the role of the administrative state in international agreements and to monitor progress is still important (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019). This could explain why there are also signs of a GG discourse in the municipalities. As pointed out by Hajer (1995), we often do not recognize something as a discourse or storyline because it is seen as common-sense and it sounds right, and since EM and GG are, and have been, dominant discourses both globally and nationally for a long time, it is not surprising that the municipalities use the same type of language and arguments. It is likely seen as the legitimate way to talk about climate change mitigation within politics.

GG has increasingly emphasized participation, though mostly to increase the possibility of problem-solving - the state is still seen as the authority. This could undermine the need for integrating justice perspectives, which many consider necessary in order to solve the climate crisis (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019). The potential for this discourse to reduce emissions remains unclear, while the Kyoto Protocol was successful to some extent (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019).

There is some evidence that increased economic growth and technological efficiency is related to lower emissions (Isenhour, 2016). However, this seems to only be true for countries where industries are located externally, most often in low-income countries with lower environmental regulations (Gómez-Baggethun, 2020). In other words, emissions from these industries are not included in calculations of emissions reductions. For example, emissions within Swedish borders have been reduced by 29% since 1990, between 2018 and 2019 the reduction was 2.4%. In order to reach the current Swedish goal of net zero emissions by 2045, however, the reduction pace should be between 6% and 10% per year. Consumption-based emissions are not included in this goal, even though these emissions amounted to 82 million tons in 2018, while territorial emissions were around 52 million tons (Naturvårdsverket, 2020). Efficiency, however, is not growing as fast as economies and resource use are, which means that the decoupling promoted by EM is not happening (Gómez-Baggethun, 2020; Isenhour, 2016). Energy efficiency often results in additional investments in new production and consumption, leading to a rebound effect, and consumption-based emissions remain a major problem (Isenhour, 2016). Green growth appears promising, but there is a lack of empirical evidence on how economic growth can be decoupled from resource use and emissions to the extent that is needed at the global scale. Even with strict policies, it is not clear how this could happen in the future either (Gómez-Baggethun, 2020; Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Parrique et al., 2019).

In the municipalities included in this study, however, the signs of civic environmentalism and climate justice discourses could potentially improve climate mitigation. Consumption-based emissions are included and goals are not only about efficiency, which could indicate that there is a higher potential for actually reducing emissions. The inclusion of consumption-based emissions also emphasizes a climate justice discourse since it takes into account the effects of local consumption in total global emissions, and it is a way to start questioning our lifestyles and current power relations (Hult & Larsson, 2016). All of these municipalities emphasize that they want to take a leading role in mitigating climate change, and take even stronger measures than the national government, or lower emissions faster than the global rate, which can explain the inclusion of consumption-based targets. The focus on collaboration and co-creation present in the municipalities, could also potentially increase the chance of reduction in emissions, since these types of efforts are often seen as necessary for climate change mitigation to work (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019; Dryzek, 2013). Finally, Hult and Larsson (2016) point out that a focus on consumption risks putting the responsibility on individual consumers to act responsibly by getting more information—without other societal changes to support it. This emphasis on individual responsibility does not reflect the fact that climate change is a societal, political, and structural issue, which also require focus on collective and institutional changes (Tunström & Bradley, 2014).

One of the main points in radical green discourses is the argument that other discourses like EM or GG focus on technology, economic growth and consensus, which obscures disagreements and invalidates other potential solutions (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2006; Dryzek, 2013; Hajer, 1995; Isenhour, 2016; Lidskog & Elander, 2012; Machin, 2019; Oels, 2005; Saldert, 2017; Zannakis, 2013). This can be sees as a sign of a post-political discourse where technology and economic growth are presented as neutral (Hagbert et al., 2021; Hällmark, 2023; Kenis & Lievens, 2017; Swyngedouw, 2010). While climate change is seen as being caused by modern industrialized and capitalist society, it is not considered an integral part of capitalism. The problem is viewed as being universal and people are seen as a homogenous group, eliminating any consideration for differences and antagonisms between classes, social groups, and views of nature (Swyngedouw, 2010). Moreover, the problem tends to be portrayed as one thing, namely reversing CO_2 to acceptable levels and limiting temperature increase. The problem is not considered as part of a system where injustices are unequally distributed - the system itself is not criticized. This risks reducing the complexity of the issue (Blühdorn, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2010). Consequently, this post-political setting renders the market and technology as the common-sense options, potentially downplaying competing viewpoints (Swyngedouw, 2010). Similarly, Blühdorn (2011), discusses the politics of unsustainability, which entail a strong consensus that radical action is needed to mitigate climate change at the same time as the will to implement such change is lacking. EM discourses of technological innovation and market mechanisms have made consumer capitalism into a part of the solution, rather than a part of the problem. This undermines the need for societal transformation, in turn rendering climate change depoliticized (Blühdorn, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2010). Machin (2019) points out that questioning EM's potential to reach environmental goals is very difficult when

everything is presented as a win-win. In a study by Hagbert et al. (2021), different actors working with sustainability, in municipalities and elsewhere, stated that the mainstream eco-modern discourse made it difficult to problematize growth, or even talk about alternatives. Essentially, in these cases, this discourse had become common sense and reached discursive closure (Hajer, 1995). However, Hagbert et al. (2021) also point out that new narratives can challenge the current paradigm and aid in highlighting its shortcomings.

Capitalist structures or power relations are never questioned in the municipalities, and the aim is to fix the market system so that natural limits are taken into consideration while keeping economic growth, for example through a CE. A risk is that business as usual is sustained since climate change is not considered a structural issue (Tunström & Bradley, 2014). There is also a clear focus on CO2 as the problem, which could then miss the complexity of the issue. The interviews indicate that politicians are reluctant to undertake strong measures regarding behavior, and that the municipality cannot force people to change. This is also interesting in regards to Blühdorn's (2011) point that modernity, in terms of mobility, flexibility, individuality, technology, energy, travel, animal protein and cheap consumer goods, cannot be questioned. With the inclusion of consumption-based emissions, however, Western lifestyles and overconsumption are questioned to a certain extent, and the municipalities do set some rules and regulations to change behavior.

Further, some factors in the municipalities are downplaying the civic environmentalism and climate justice discourses. For example, there is a tendency in all of the municipalities to view citizens as a homogenous group, which risks missing other knowledge and contesting viewpoints. There is rarely a discussion of class, ethnicity, gender or other differences, again leaving out the political (Tunström & Bradley, 2014). For example, Bradley (2009) points out that social diversity is often not included in Sweden in relation to environmental problems, while our society is increasingly becoming more diverse. Her study showed that what is considered environmentally friendly is usually based on a Swedish middle-class behavior, though often, this group does many activities that is problematic from a climate perspective, such as owning two homes, air travel and other leisure related activities as well as high consumption. This does not tend to be raised in policy. Kaijser and Kronsell (2014) also point out that it is important to look at how several factors interact in relation to levels of emissions, for example, that higher income often means higher emissions, but gender and age also come into play. Gothenburg and Helsingborg recognized that people might be affected differently by climate change mitigation and have different possibilities to take action. An earlier study of consumption emissions in Gothenburg also showed that having an international justice perspective and including consumption emissions had made the city more aware of local issues of justice (Hult & Larsson, 2016). Gender differences were generally not discussed in the current plans and neither were issues related to a just transition. Involving a more diverse set of actors as holders of knowledge, not just as receivers of information and as consumers, could be a way to question power relations and enable increased agency. In turn, avoiding the post-political discourse.

6.2 | Radical transformation or incremental change?

Lately, the need for transformation has been widely acknowledged by many actors. For example, the Agenda 2030 has the heading "transforming our world" and the IPCC has written that transformational systemic change is needed to limit GHG emissions (Linnér & Wibeck, 2020). Transformation is an ambiguous term, and Linnér and Wibeck (2020) also point out that there is a difference between transition and transformation; "Transition originates from the notion of 'going across' from one state to another, whereas transformation connotes a 'change in form or shape'." (p. 222). The discourse of transformation could possibly be a way to challenge the dominant view, but sometimes these counter-discourses lose their radical edge when they are mainstreamed into policy and practice. A transition mostly refers to technological changes while transformation involves many social practices and knowledge-making. The way transformation is framed has implications for achieving transformational change. When terms are used in policy, they are not always clearly defined—something which may hinder implementation. What is supposed to be transformed, what should it transform into, and who is responsible for making it happen? Can transformation be governed? These questions are often left unanswered (Blythe et al., 2018; Linnér & Wibeck, 2020; Newell et al., 2020). Perhaps most importantly, it is often not stated who gets to decide the above: "Consensus around the need for transformation can mask plural notions about what the problem is exactly, what constitutes relevant evidence, and what, therefore, are considered appropriate solutions" (Blythe et al., 2018, p. 1214). The transformation storyline has the potential to confront the dominant discourse, but if it loses its core meaning of fundamental change, it risks contributing to discursive closure where changes needed for climate change mitigation are simplified, and opposing views silenced (Hajer, 1995).

In Helsingborg, it is a gradual transition of different parts of the system that is referred to, which makes it somewhat clear what it is that should transform. However, this is perhaps more in line with a transition since it is more of a step-by-step change to another state, rather than a fundamental change in form. Also, it is the energy system, transportation, and consumption patterns that should change rather than social or political structures. The transformation discourse in Gothenburg, with wider and rapid transformation of the whole society, is perhaps more likely to spur the radical changes that many say are needed and provide opportunity to imagine something completely different. It is, however, not very clear exactly how this will happen and what the transformed society will look like, which could be a downside as explained above.

6.3 | CE as potential for transformative action?

CE could potentially be a way to challenge the dominant economic growth discourse and confront the status quo (Anshelm & Hultman, 2015; Haas et al., 2020; Leipold, 2021). Through reuse,

remanufacturing and refurbishment, energy usage can be optimized and materials can retain their value as long as possible. The use of renewables would increase, and people would share products to a larger degree. This would reduce environmental impact, create new business opportunities and spur a sense of community and collaboration (Johansson & Henriksson, 2020; Korhonen et al., 2018).

However, limits to CE have been identified and the net environmental benefits have to be analyzed in each case. For example, biomaterials and biofuels are promoted in this discourse, although these still face issues, like environmental impact from resource extraction, which are often ignored in the CE narrative (Haas et al., 2020; Navare et al., 2021). Increased economic efficiency in CE could also lead to a rebound effect due to increased consumption. Therefore, changing the current consumption culture is vital for the success of CE (Castro et al., 2022; Haas et al., 2020; Korhonen et al., 2018; Zink & Geyer, 2017). Leipold (2021) points out that in the EU, the CE strategy went from zero waste - with a focus on top-down regulation to overcoming market and governance failures - to a focus on CE as a business opportunity and removing hampering legislation through deregulation. In the new narrative, the focus is not on policies for environmental protection, rather that new technologies and the market will subsequently lead to environmental protection. In this narrative, businesses also become both the target and the implementor of CE, making them the ones to lead the conversation, silencing other voices. In turn, economic growth becomes prioritized over environmental issues, which does not challenge the EM discourse (Leipold, 2021). Further, the win-win logic between the environment and the economy in the EU's CE strategies failed to include potential social and ecological trade-offs, as well as global relationships, showing the potential downfalls of a win-win narrative. The win-win argument also makes it harder to be critical and argue against the CE strategy (Leipold, 2021). This risks promoting economic growth over environmental concerns. Niskanen et al. (2020) show that a broad consensus has developed in Sweden among environmental NGOs, business and national government regarding the implementation of CE as a way to promote economic growth and limit environmental degradation without recognizing the simultaneous conflict between the same actors over natural resource extraction. Proposed measures in line with CE also often mean focusing on ways for consumers to recycle or reuse, energy efficiency, and green technologies, not on resource extraction. The dominant CE discourses do not problematize growth, consumerism, and inherent problems of capitalism like distribution and recurring crises (Niskanen et al., 2020).

The examples above indicate that CE can work to depoliticize environmental issues as described earlier, and CE then falls into the business-as-usual trap of an EM discourse, leading to incremental change rather than the transformational change that is said to be needed (Hobson & Lynch, 2016; Leipold, 2021; Niskanen et al., 2020; Swyngedouw, 2010). Castro et al. (2022); Niskanen et al. (2020), and Hobson and Lynch (2016), recognize the transformative potential of CE if a more radical standpoint is taken, where the local context, diverse sectors and stakeholders, and potential conflicts between them are considered. Haas et al. (2020), emphasize the need for CE to adopt a systems perspective on stocks and flows as well as energy use, sustainable biomass production, and clear goals to reduce non-circular flows. Therefore, the use of CE as a storyline could re-politicize climate change by challenging the dominant EM discourse, and being a driver of transformational change if framed and used in a critical way in the municipalities.

In Helsingborg and Gothenburg, the economic and environmental win-win logic behind CE shown above, could potentially undermine its potential to spur the needed change. However, CE indicates that there is a will to move away from the linear economy. While Helsingborg states that for a CE to work, money saved cannot be spent on other climate negative activities, they do not explain how this can be avoided (Helsingborg, 2018). The Helsingborg CE plan focuses mainly on materials and market reform, and less on social aspects—although collaboration between stakeholders is considered important (Helsingborg, 2020). Gothenburg (2021b) produced a report with civil society, business, and academia, investigating what a CE strategy could entail for Gothenburg. There, they emphasize that production and consumption of new products has to be reduced significantly. They also stress the need for collaboration across sectors in society, and a diversity of actors were consulted in the making of the report. In Lomma, the CE concept is less promoted as a measure or strategy and it is not explained in detail.

7 | CONCLUSION

One dominant discourse in the municipalities was shown to be a strong EM. One strength of this discourse is the potential to combine the economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development, thereby putting climate change mitigation higher up on the agenda. Secondly, the global justice perspective, with the importance of including consumption-based emissions, is one way to curb one of the usual arguments against EM. At the same time, putting too much responsibility on individual consumers to change their behavior can be troublesome and it is also important to take into consideration the possibility of a rebound effect when consumption is lowered in one area. Another strength of the strong EM discourse is the focus on collaboration and stakeholder participation. At the same time, there is a tendency to see businesses and academia as more active collaborators, while citizens are seen as passive receivers of information and knowledge. This could be improved by a higher focus on local justice perspectives, including a more diverse group of citizens, and to involve citizens in more ways than as receivers of information. Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2006) point out the potential of a strong EM discourse where equality and participatory processes are seen as important, especially if different types of knowledge are included. Hajer (1995) also argues that in a true reflexive or strong EM, underlying norms and values should be open for debate.

Other problems with EM that were highlighted in previous research were that the focus on technological and market-based solutions obscures and invalidates other solutions, rendering climate change mitigation depoliticized. Therefore, it is important to recognize the potential

implications of an EM discourse since it might lead to technological solutions like renewable energy and renewable fuels getting more attention than actually reducing energy usage or car usage, for example.

As Hagbert et al. (2021) state, emerging narratives can challenge that which is taken for granted. This study has shown that transformation and CE could potentially work as storylines that contest the dominant discourse. The transformation discourse show that the municipalities recognize that big societal changes are needed and that the economic system at least needs to change to some degree. However, it is important how the transformation discourse is framed, and that social, political, cultural and power dimensions are included. The CE discourse also shows a recognition that market systems need to be reformed to some degree, and this discourse could potentially open up for transformation. However, if CE is framed predominantly as green growth like EM, it risks promoting economic growth over environmental concerns, and fails to challenge norms and power structures (Hobson & Lynch, 2016; Leipold, 2021). Like EM, it often focuses on individual consumer choices rather than on reducing absolute levels of consumption.

This analysis is not exhaustive as it is based on a limited number of interviews and documents from a specific time period. However, it shows that discourses in these municipalities to some extent perpetuate the EM discourse from international, national, and EU-levels. Future research could focus more deeply on the development of transition/transformation and CE discourses in municipalities and what effects they have on climate change mitigation policy. It could also be interesting to study how different actors in municipalities frame these concepts, and how they influence each other.

This article has shown that the way climate change mitigation is framed, and how solutions are justified, can condition the potential to mitigate climate change. There are other factors that also come into play, such as political will, organizational structures, as well as national regulations and support. Nonetheless, discourses can constitute levers for change and the language used by municipalities in policy and practice will promote certain actions and solutions, and potentially obscure and invalidate others. The status-quo risks being reinforced by EM discourses in these municipalities, while influences from civic environmentalism, climate justice, CE and transformation might open up the potential to challenge and modify it.

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