(RE)CREATING ECOLOGICAL ACTION SPACE:

Householders’ Activities for Sustainable Development in Sweden

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I dedicate this work to Marie Utter and Birgitta Olai for inspiring me once upon a time.
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1. Introduction

When people make everyday decisions on how to travel to work, what to eat for dinner, and how to arrange their lives, they interact with a myriad of other people and use a range of natural resources and socio-technical systems. In recent decades, individuals have been increasingly expected to consider the environmental consequences of these decisions and activities (Beck 1996). Since private activities affect other human beings, the environment, and animals, they are considered politically relevant. Environmental problems thus connect the local and global levels, since their impact may be felt far from where they were created. This implies that a person need not travel physically in order to affect other parts of the globe, and moreover their choices have ethical implications, since the point of departure is that individuals ought to be accountable for their influence on the life chances of others. This differs from previous interpretations, the focus of which was on how industries caused environmental destruction. The shift in focus of the analysis concerns the responsibility for both causing and solving environmental problems, what has been termed “individualization of responsibility” (Beck 1996).

There has been a historic shift in the approach to solving environmental problems, from governments emphasizing mainly “end-of-pipe” solutions for industries, to individual responsibility to prevent problems (Mol 2003; Corell & Söderberg 2005). This shift in responsibility also represents a response to changed perceptions of environmental problems that cross national borders and have a global reach. Responsibility concerns both the causes of and solutions to environmental problems, as well as the limits to political intervention in the private sphere. When people experience environmental problems of increased complexity, the question of knowledge of the problems and of personal impact becomes important, especially in relation to policy instruments considered legitimate1 to govern individual activities. There is an increased emphasis on policy instruments, as policies promoting more environmentally friendly activities can attempt to change human behavior,  

1 I acknowledge that the concept of legitimacy has a nuanced set of meanings in political theory that range from value correspondence (cf. Matti 2006) to legal interpretations. In the present study, I will use the concept when discussing household activities and policy instruments considered justifiable and reasonable; I do not intend to use it as an analytical concept.
norms and attitudes, and the preconditions (and institutions) for human action.

In many documents that treat sustainable development, the active, enlightened, and reflecting individual citizen is a central ideal (Lidskog & Elander 1999). Other research shows that people need both more information on how to act in more environmentally friendly ways and better understanding of why this information is needed (Barr 2002). People can be motivated to act in less environmentally detrimental ways out of concern for the health and wellbeing of others in distant places. It is also possible to connect people’s behavior with more egotistical concerns and risk perceptions, and with personal experience of the problems. In previous literature, discussion of people’s opportunities to make conscious decisions not only concerns citizenship, but also agency and perceived action space (Ellegård 1999). In studies of how to improve the implementation of policies concerning, for example, sustainable development, researchers aim to understand the relationship between people’s intentions and actions, and why people do not always act according to their intentions.

Interest among social scientists in environmental problems concerns how people perceive their influence on, and interaction with, nature and the environment, and how to change people’s negative behavior so it has a less detrimental impact. There is a central assumption that if people are made aware of environmental problems by providing information or increasing their knowledge, their behavior may change. Changing behavior in order to maintain the environment so as to enable human survival may seem rational, but there are different views on the best ways to promote such change. This implies that there is not just one rationality but various different ones. For example, just because a group of people has a collective interest in securing a certain outcome, each individual in that group will not necessarily have an individual interest in doing what is necessary to achieve it. This implies that there is a tension between individual and collective values as they relate to the environment, just as there is regarding many other societal issues. How one distinguishes between the personal, autonomous, and private sphere and the public, political, and collective sphere depends on what democratic model one applies.

Acting in environmentally friendly ways to support more sustainable development entails knowing what should be done, being ready and willing to do it, and having the proper resources to do so. Environmentally related activities that people do have both a knowledge aspect and an incentive aspect. In addition, it is interesting to investigate the circumstances and incentives that facilitate environmentally friendly practices and the constraints that exist. The latter issue concerns the
Structures individuals act within, and simultaneously recreate. Any attempt to govern what people do vis-à-vis the environment bears the mark of “social engineering” and relates the environmental challenge to political organization at various governmental levels. The norm of individual responsibility for the environmental consequences of individual behavior is expressed in terms of increased participation and democratization through sustainable development (UNCED 1993; Dobson 2003). However, the focus on individual responsibility tends to neglect the circumstances, institutional arrangements, and structures that people need to be able to act in certain “ecological” ways. Because many activities are actually politically relevant, the notion of when a person is an “active” or “passive” citizen has been challenged. The issue of what householders do deliberately and/or “thoughtless” comes to the fore, emphasizing the concept of “decisions” when arranging everyday life, often habitually (Segerberg 2005).

The present study focuses on Swedish householders’ environmental activities, perceived action space, and motives for taking responsibility, as well as their relationships to the expectations from, and preconditions in, four municipalities. The individualization of responsibility makes the household an important unit of analysis, since it is a place that has been considered private and where humans interact and divide labor. The environmental impact of everyday household activities arise at the intersections between what are commonly distinguished as the private–public, micro–macro, and actor–structure spheres (Dobson 2003; Giddens 1989; Beck 1996).

To attain more sustainable development, the daily activity patterns of many Swedes have to change, according to the influential Agenda 21 action plan from the United Nations (UNCED 1993). Sustainable development is an area that has received considerable research and political attention. The fact that there are at least 300 different definitions of sustainable development indicates that it is a complex subject (Dobson 1998). Sustainable development in the everyday life of the household, including all routine activities and how they are interrelated, has not received as much attention. The need to identify the social mechanisms and cultural aspects of household decision making has been emphasized before, for example, in the Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption (2005:1). This indicates that even though many different disciplines have already considered households and householders’ activities, decisions, and resource management, better understanding of household processes is still needed. A range of disciplines has paid attention to households, including: psychology, which has examined individuals’ environmental attitudes and
Research has demonstrated that there is no linear correlation between increased knowledge and changed behavior (Shanahan et al. 2002; Barr 2002; Palojoki 1997). In the context of sustainable development, information is often said to be a key to changing peoples' routines and lifestyles. Information and knowledge are used, implemented, and changed in a household context, becoming part of how household members in cooperation “transfer … facts into practice” (Palojoki 1997:231).

In this transfer process, previous experience is just as important as available resources. The available information has to be considered relevant to behavior and meaningful to the householders (Barr 2002:47; Palojoki 1997:225). When householders are studied in their everyday context, one can establish how participating in environmentally friendly activities or firsthand experience of environmental problems can increase their level of norms and their relationship to behavior (Barr 2002); human ecology and household economics, which has performed life cycle analysis of grocery consumption and household waste (Sontag & Bubolz 1996; Shanahan 2003; Åberg 2000); micro-economics and sociology, which has studied unpaid household work and division of labor (Forssell 2002; Ahne & Roman 1997; Mårtensson & Pettersson 2002); sociology, history of science, and technology studies, which have examined household use and access to technology and socio–technical systems (Shove 2003; Cowan 1983; Silverstone & Hirsch 1992); time geography, which has focused on time use, resources, and restrictions (Ellegård 2001; Nordell 2002); and pedagogy, which has emphasized how households use and “recontextualise” knowledge of practice in everyday life (Palojoki 1997).

While many previous studies have investigated green activists (Michaeli 2000; Shiva 1989; Seager 1993) and those living in communal ecological arrangements (Mårtensson & Pettersson 2002), there is still a need to investigate householders who fall outside these categories. Many studies have focused on specific topics, activities, and attitudes that concern sustainable development, such as choice of mode of transportation, waste management, and purchases of environmentally labeled groceries. These studies often have a narrow approach to isolated phenomena (Spaargaren 2000). One of the initial aims of the present study was to relate the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development at the household level and to interpret how householders give meaning to their everyday activities. A fundamental point of departure is that everyone’s activities are important for resource management from the household level to the municipal, national, and international levels, a perspective that has consequences for sustainable development (Barr 2002:175).
knowledge (Shanahan et al. 2002:2). According to this view, people’s previous experience affects their perceptions, knowledge, and activities today. More knowledge may increase one’s future options or choices, even if one’s behavior does not change immediately after receiving new information. The environmental problems created by individual consumption cannot be governed by the same means as are used to control industrial emissions, namely, permits and control measures. Instead, citizens as consumers should be informed and educated about how they can change their lifestyles and habits to make them more environmentally friendly (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2006).

**From nature to environmental politics**

This section gives a brief historical description of environmental politics and problems, to build understanding of how sustainable development became an international goal expected to be implemented at all levels, including the household. What has become central are the environmental consequences of daily activities, and how people can change their habits and practices to reduce their detrimental impact.

The future course of the world depends on humanity’s ability to provide a high quality of life for a prospective nine billion people without exhausting the Earth’s resources or irreparably damaging its natural systems. (The Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption 2005:1)

The relationship between population growth, human use of natural resources, and our relationship with nature has been debated for centuries and possibly millennia (Worster 1996; Linnér 1999; Leopold 1989; Macnaghten & Urry 1998). However, it was not until the 1960s that the concept of “the environment” began to be publicly debated and became a political field. In 1967, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency was founded—just one sign of the institutionalization of the issue. In the media, the professionalization of environmental journalists implied that articles and documentaries were being produced for a general public (Djerf Pierre 1996). Many researchers further credit Rachel Carson for directing attention to the environment in her now famous *Silent Spring* (1962), in which she convincingly connected the everyday use of chemicals with environmental degradation. Almost a hundred years before Carson, the American ecologist and educator Ellen Swallow highlighted the connection between daily domestic life and the environment, and argued that “science should be placed in the hands of women so that ‘the housekeeper should...
know when to be frightened”’ (cited in Hynes 1989). The work of Swallow has been categorized in the history books as “domestic science,” which can be related to the distinction between the household as private, and the broader political sphere. What Carson managed was to write in a convincing way, legitimized by her scientific background.

In the 1970s, there was a thorough reinterpretation of descriptions of nature. This is interesting, since environmental problems are regarded as created by humans who change nature by their activities, an idea built on a fundamental distinction between humans and nature. The reinterpretation was partly due to the 1973 oil crisis, which pointed out that resources would become scarce as a result of human control and international politics. A year earlier, in 1972, the Club of Rome, which consisted of businessmen and researchers, released the report Limits to Growth (Meadows et al. 1972). Their status made their claim credible, that there was a real environmental crisis in need of a solution. Their report focused on population, resource depletion, and the food crisis, and argued that the unlimited use of natural resources had to be stopped. At that time, the environmental movement envisioned a strong contradiction between economic growth through technical development and environmental preservation, while global solidarity and international justice were at the heart of the analysis. The idea that the industrialized countries’ economic growth was a result of extraction of resources from the oppressed third world and the overexploited global environment was commonly expressed in systems analyses terms (Hornborg 2002; cf. Gunder Frank 1969; Wallerstein 1974). Even though extensive consumption was questioned by the environmental movement, notably, by the 1970s movement inspired by the seminal work, Small is Beautiful (Schumacher 1974), environmental problems were generally considered a matter for governments to treat in retrospect via legislation and the right technology (Hajer 1995:25). What would later become more of a matter of individual everyday life was at this time a governmental and technological question of regulation, focused on production.

The 1980s saw the rise of what has been called “ecological modernization,” with many connections to sustainable development. Ecological modernization emphasizes economic growth and technical solutions to pressing environmental problems. Structural change of the capitalist system is usually not demanded, but rather changes within the system and in cooperation with “green” industry and business. This also implies that environmental concern no longer necessarily means social criticism (Spaargaren 2000). As long as people consume the right green products they help to create economic growth, and reduced consumption
Sustainable development

The “Brundtland Commission” report, *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987), was released in 1987 and established the fundamental importance of environmental politics. The Commission identified the most pressing global environmental problem as the unequal distribution of resources, and launched the concept of “sustainable development.” Environmental concerns, economic issues, and social equality were related in this concept, and individual activities came to the fore. Sustainable development became a way to manage the relationship between the state of the environment and economic growth. The report focuses on the future, and claims that, to attain sustainable development, we need to:

... ensure that it [i.e., development] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (*WCED* 1987:8)

Although this definition is vague, it incorporates intergenerational, international, and intra-generational aspects of development and justice concerning resource distribution and meeting human needs. Poverty was portrayed as causing environmental destruction, as was wealth via over-consumption. New approaches to development were defined with the environment now in focus. Along with the influential United Nations action plan *Agenda 21* (UNCED 1993), an outcome of the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the global dimension of the environment and of resource use remained central, the conclusion being that due to extensive consumption in the rich world, the needs of the global poor cannot be satisfied. Regardless of this critical approach, there is a consensus rhetoric that conceals conflicts over resource distribution, environmental problems being portrayed as if they only concerned practical solutions to shared problems (*Hedrén* 2002:315).

It is common to criticize the concept and definitions of sustainable development for being too vague. At the same time, this very vagueness has helped in uniting people around a common goal (*Wilbanks* 1994). However, it is when sustainable development is to be implemented politically that this vagueness may cause problems, since it leads to...
multiple strategies and ideas regarding implementation. Scientific knowledge and facts in themselves are not enough to reach consensus on what to do: we need to discuss them and then agree (Noorman & Schoot Uiterkamp 1998:19). The concept of development is value-laden and may be interpreted in various ways as well (Pearce et al. 1989; Latouche 1993; Shiva 2000). Sachs argues that sustainable development “calls for the conservation of development, not for the conservation of nature” (Sachs 1993:10). The described problems vary, as do ideas of how to solve them and the goals of mitigation efforts, which means that the responsibility for addressing the problems varies as well (Skill 1999). While some promote a radical shift to reach a sustainable stage of development, others talk about a participatory (deliberative) process in which people jointly determine the goal of sustainable development (Agyeman & Evans 2003:40). Yet even a deliberative process will not necessarily result in more ecologically rational outcomes. The mix of stage and process leads to confusion (Scott & Gough 2002). The sustainability stage can be defined as “the (long-run) ability to maintain or uphold,” while development is a “process of change” (Noorman & Schoot Uiterkamp 1998:12). A sustainable process is expected to define and care for both our economic and social needs by protecting the ecological basis. The importance to humans of protecting/conserving\footnote{The distinction between conservation and preservation has been central to American debate about nature (Worster 1996).} nature and animals, in contrast to protecting them for their intrinsic value, has traditionally been distinguished by the two concepts, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. This distinction has theoretically been applied to sustainable development, for example, by Gibbs et al. (1998). Another distinction has been made between weak and strong sustainability, a distinction that relates to how to reach the goals and what policy instruments are used in doing so. The weak approach has relied on market instruments and economic growth, while the strong has been based on more authoritarian and regulatory policy instruments, such as laws and regulations regarding human behavior (Pearce 1993).

The idea of increased participation in decision-making is central to most political documents on sustainable development, and to the shift towards a more sustainable society. In the present study, the focus remains on interaction and interdependence between individuals, society, and nature and on how actors and structures are co-constructed (Giddens 1989). Some contexts that are important for understanding sustainable development in Sweden are the national Environmental Objectives, made up of 16 quality goals, and the Aarhus Convention, which was ratified in 1998 by the UN Economic Commission for Europe, and entered into force in 2003. The

multiple strategies and ideas regarding implementation. Scientific knowledge and facts in themselves are not enough to reach consensus on what to do: we need to discuss them and then agree (Noorman & Schoot Uiterkamp 1998:19). The concept of development is value-laden and may be interpreted in various ways as well (Pearce et al. 1989; Latouche 1993; Shiva 2000). Sachs argues that sustainable development “calls for the conservation of development, not for the conservation of nature” (Sachs 1993:10). The described problems vary, as do ideas of how to solve them and the goals of mitigation efforts, which means that the responsibility for addressing the problems varies as well (Skill 1999). While some promote a radical shift to reach a sustainable stage of development, others talk about a participatory (deliberative) process in which people jointly determine the goal of sustainable development (Agyeman & Evans 2003:40). Yet even a deliberative process will not necessarily result in more ecologically rational outcomes. The mix of stage and process leads to confusion (Scott & Gough 2002). The sustainability stage can be defined as “the (long-run) ability to maintain or uphold,” while development is a “process of change” (Noorman & Schoot Uiterkamp 1998:12). A sustainable process is expected to define and care for both our economic and social needs by protecting the ecological basis. The importance to humans of protecting/conserving\footnote{The distinction between conservation and preservation has been central to American debate about nature (Worster 1996).} nature and animals, in contrast to protecting them for their intrinsic value, has traditionally been distinguished by the two concepts, anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. This distinction has theoretically been applied to sustainable development, for example, by Gibbs et al. (1998). Another distinction has been made between weak and strong sustainability, a distinction that relates to how to reach the goals and what policy instruments are used in doing so. The weak approach has relied on market instruments and economic growth, while the strong has been based on more authoritarian and regulatory policy instruments, such as laws and regulations regarding human behavior (Pearce 1993).

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Aarhus Convention deals with “Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters.” The convention is based on three pillars: 1) right of access to environmental information, 2) public right to participate in decision-making processes, and 3) ensuring access to justice for the public. These pillars are highly relevant to political participation, and imply that governments are accountable by using transparent processes. The Convention relates to the tenth principle of Agenda 21 (UNCED 1993), which deals with citizen participation, environmental democracy, and human rights. An interesting relationship to democracy:

Environmental Objectives and sustainable development, and about the policy instruments needed in order to achieve the 16 Swedish Environmental Objectives—a common task (Prop. 2004:05:150) and the official report Biffen, bilen, bostaden. Hållbara laster: smartare konsumtion [Meat, the car, and the dwelling. Sustainable vices: smarter consumption] (SOU 2005:51) are instructive, as they present the official view of household responsibility for the environment. The national plan for Agenda 21 was presented in Cabinet Bill 1993/94:111 and SOU 1994:128. The bottom-up approach was clearly being emphasized (Lundqvist 2004:169).

The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency writes as follows about the policy instruments needed in order to achieve the 16 Swedish Environmental Objectives and sustainable development, and about the relationship to democracy:

In a democracy, citizens should preferably act in environmentally friendly ways because they want to, not because they are forced to or convinced. Unfortunately, it is not enough to rely on citizens’ voluntary compliance in environmental efforts, because that would make progress towards environmental goals too slow. Therefore, society has a variety of policy instruments to influence people to change their behavior and lifestyle, and thereby increase the pace of efforts to achieve sustainable development. (The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency 2006; my translation and emphasis)

The Swedish Local Agenda 21 process began within a year after the 1992 Rio Conference, and covered most municipalities in Sweden … An internationally unique activity was launched to engage grassroots citizens and interest organizations in outlining visions and developing programmes for local sustainable development. (Lundqvist 2004:169)

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The global vision of sustainable development has influenced most fields of environmental politics. The expectation that everyone should participate in the shift towards a more sustainable future society is central in documents such as *Agenda 21* (UNCED 1993), and it relies on a broad definition of the political sphere. There is an extensive literature on who the legitimate actors are in environmental politics. The discussion concerns whether animals and nature have intrinsic value regardless of the (economic) value attached to them by humans, which implies that humans have a moral responsibility to them (Dryzek 2000; Barry 2002; Eckersley 2006; Naess 1981). At the same time, the question remains of who should interpret the interests of nature and animals—an involved question that will not be addressed here. From a social perspective, the question of what social groups can participate in sustainable development is important, as it relates current groups to future generations (i.e., intra-generational justice), as expressed in the Brundtland report’s definition of sustainable development. Participation also concerns the stages in the policy process at which different groups should have a say, in formulation and planning, implementation, and/or auditing. The role of scientists in political debates about sustainable development is also central, since most problems are so complex that they have to be interpreted and highlighted by the scientific community (Giddens 1989). This aspect of knowledge obviously influences who can participate.

Swedish municipal efforts to promote sustainable development underwent a metamorphosis from the 1990s to about 2005 (Forsberg 2007). While the 1990s were characterized by disciplinary breadth and attempts to integrate social dimensions, democracy, and citizen participation guided by a perspective from below, the approach that guides the first decade of the twenty-first century is characterized by professional work and low citizen participation. There is simply no longer a general *Agenda 21* movement in Swedish municipalities (Forsberg 2007:7–8; cf. Fudge & Rowe 2001).

The relationship between global conditions and everyday household lives is created by household consumption patterns and how they shape the production chains by demand. Changed patterns of consumption and production also relate to the global dimension of sustainable development. Many environmental problems concern questions of survival and justice, since they relate to risks, problems, and wealth (Hornborg 2003; Beck 1995). Moreover, when sustainable development focuses on social aspects, such as resource distribution, justice, and shared responsibility for the

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5 Giddens talks about the hermeneutic circle between researcher and society. In a similar vein, Hornborg is of the opinion that it is the duty of social sciences to highlight these global connections (Hornborg 2003; cf. Haraway 1988).
As a way to relate the social dimension of sustainable development to individual health, the “human betterment” concept has been suggested (Sonntag & Bubolz 1996). This idea builds on what has been called “voluntary simplicity,” i.e., intentionally decreased physical resource consumption and de-materialization (Sonntag & Bubolz 1996; Schumacher 1974).7 These ideas are echoed in current Swedish documents about sustainable development. For example, Hållbara laster: Konsumtion för en ljusare framtid [Sustainable vices: Consumption for a brighter future] (SOU 2004:119) promotes “welfare-increasing and less environmentally destructive consumption” and “de-materialization” (2004:14). Also, Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans focus on quality of life and justice, and their preliminary definition of sustainable development is “the need to ensure a better quality of life for all, now and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of supporting ecosystems” (2003:78), although it has proven difficult to agree on where the limit is. Various studies demonstrate, however, that our resource consumption is still increasing (Borgstede et al. 2002; Shove 2003). When researching sustainable development, different people may have diverging ideas about what actually constitutes a “good life” or “quality of life,” and they may not necessarily relate it to de-materialization. A fundamental aspect of the social dimension of sustainable development, when focusing on the household, is gender equality, which was promoted in Agenda 21. In chapter 24 of Agenda 21, entitled “Global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development,” every government was encouraged to:

… consider developing and issuing by the year 2000 a strategy of changes necessary to eliminate constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, behavioural, social and economic obstacles to women’s full participation in sustainable development and in public life. (UNCED 1993, Chapter 24)


7 Compare how untouched nature in the countryside is considered part of quality of life (see chapter 6, “Nature as Countryside,” in Macnaghten & Urry 1998).

dvelopment of global consumption, it relates to all countries and all people as interdependent but unequal (Dobson 2003). There remains, however, the involved political question of how to govern our “world household,” to attain the (normative) goal of sustainable development and create a good life for all (Jacobs 1999), while caring for each other and the environment and not depleting natural resources.

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7 Compare how untouched nature in the countryside is considered part of quality of life (see chapter 6, “Nature as Countryside,” in Macnaghten & Urry 1998).
This is an ambitious goal that does not, however, deal with the household directly. Gender is considered a structure that influences who assumes responsibility and who is expected to perform what household activities and be knowledgeable about practices. Culture can also be considered a structure that influences what people do and with what they identify themselves. While win–win situations between the social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development were portrayed in Agenda 21, less attention was paid to situations of conflict. While the ecological dimension relates to how something is consumed or produced, the social dimension focuses on who the actor is in different types of analyses (Wihlborg & Skill 2004).

From this point on, the normative goal of more equal development and less environmentally destructive consumption and use of resources that increases the quality of life is what I will consider sustainable development.

The Swedish context

This section briefly describes the Swedish context. The relevant issues will be dealt with at greater length in chapter 4, which concerns how Swedish municipalities are working towards sustainable development. Sweden usually ranks high relative to other countries when it comes to environmental concern and the institutionalization of environmental policies (Casimir & Dulith 2003; Eckerberg & Brundin 2000; Lundqvist 2005)—this is important in understanding the present study. Sweden hosted the first UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, participated in the negotiations and decisions that resulted in the Agenda 21 action plan at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and, ten years later, participated in the negotiations at the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. At both summits, many ideas were articulated concerning what national governments could do to realize the global visions. In Sweden, the municipalities have been given the responsibility to create the proper conditions to comply with the global and national goals, and households have been mentioned as important actors or micro-institutions in efforts to reach a more sustainable future (Prop. 1990/91:90). Therefore it is important to investigate the relationship between householders and municipal efforts when it comes to suggesting sustainable activities, and to investigate what municipalities consider legitimate means to influence householders. Furthermore, this household–municipality relationship is a situation in which the demarcation between the private and the public/political is (re)created.

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In Sweden, the 1970s saw movement from the city to the
countryside in what was popularly called the “green wave.” This was thoroughly affected by the ideals of local and decentralized democracy, dematerialization, global solidarity, ecological adaptation, and a generally left-leaning ideology. In the 1980s, however, the environmental challenge lost its ideological connotations in Sweden, but these connotations were revived by the inauguration speech of the Social Democratic Prime Minister Göran Persson in 1996, when he formulated an ecologically influenced vision of “the green welfare state” (Regeringsförklaringen 1996; Anshelm 2002:36). Environmental concerns came to be defined and legitimized in business terms, which emphasized the connection between economic growth and care for the environment. It was argued that this could be a means to national economic growth, as Sweden could take the lead in the international arena, exploiting opportunities for an extended “environmental” labor market (Anshelm 2002:41). Faith was placed in improved technology, the market, and the possibilities of constructing a more ecologically sound infrastructure. “Ecological modernization” was thus firmly launched by the Social democrats in the political sphere (Anshelm 2002). It was modern in the sense that the ideal of governing by rational means (i.e., social engineering) was at the centre. Nonetheless, Anshelm (2002) has demonstrated that there were at least three different interpretations of what “modern” implied in Swedish politics in the second half of the 1990s. One was based on political instruments and the regulation of production and was mainly represented by the Social Democrats; a second, represented by the right-wing opposition, placed faith in the market; and a third, represented by environmental organizations, questioned the technocratic approach and the relationship between economic growth and ecological sustainability, and also advocated certain lifestyle changes (Anshelm 2002).

Environmental organizations have played a role in creating environmental awareness. Some organizations have attempted to reach households to make them more ecologically aware. In the 1980s, the Swedish Nature Conservation Fund (SNF), for example, ran the “Act/purchase in an environmentally friendly way” (“Handla miljövänligt”) campaign. The verb “handla” has two different meanings, to act and to purchase, that the Fund played with in their campaign, which related general actions to consumer power, labeling schemes, and boycotts. They also gave many suggestions for how to act in a more environmentally friendly way in the home (Thunberg & Holm 1989). SNF placed faith in

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8 Literary it translates to “the green people’s home”. The “people’s home” was used expressively by the Social Democrat Per Albin Hansson when motivating a welfare state.
the possibility of controlling and solving environmental problems using policy instruments and political means (Anshelm 2002). The campaign exemplifies how the concept of responsibility has come to be focused on consumption choices and on the political role a person plays as consumer, which is why it is justifiable to talk about a “consumer society.”

Most documents on sustainable development state that increased “participation” on the part of individuals and householders is expected. This point of departure places extended responsibilities on individuals. Increased participation targets the role of citizens both in democratic decision-making and in participation in (or rather, compliance with) changes favoring more environmentally friendly activity patterns, practices, and attitudes; it also has implications for how individual activities affect the environment. However, how people act is central to discussions of participation, as participation extends their role as citizens to broader everyday life. This aspect is important in gaining an understanding of how people conceive of their responsibility for the state of the environment and the goal of sustainable development. In this thesis, everyday activities are analyzed as the intersection between the social, economic, and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. Traditionally, responsibility for others has been connected to citizenship in a nation-state. However, with the strong focus on how to act responsibly as a consumer by knowing what to purchase and not purchase, the roles of householders as consumers and as citizens have become intertwined, forming a relationship that merits attention. A study of the National Environmental Objectives Commission (SOU 2000:52) and the Climate Commission (SOU 2000:23) totals 1900 pages, and in these pages, the appellations “customer,” “consumer,” and “individual” were used 467 times in comparison to “citizen,” which was used only 16 times (Lundqvist 2004:166). Given the predilection for deliberation this emphasis is not inadvertent. As Matti (2006) has stated, this emphasis is obvious in Swedish policy documents as well.

Rhetorically, one could ask whether a person who abstains from purchasing anything is still acting as a consumer?

Many descriptive theories of environmental behavior are based on ideals and normative stances concerning how people act, and ought to act, rather than on how people justify their actual practices (Dobson 1998, 2003; Eckersley 2005). Few studies have tried to analyze and capture how all everyday activities are interwoven, although many studies have focused
on specific areas, such as recycling, choice of transportation, or purchases of ecological groceries, or on attitudes towards and willingness to perform environmental activities. Since several Swedish studies and studies of Swedes have indicated that there is indeed an environmental discourse/norm, there was a need to design a study that focused on what people do in their everyday lives (Jamison 2001). When householders live their everyday lives and practice their many activities, society is recreated. The presentation and analysis of the practices of the 28 households that participated in the present study represent a small part of a larger research whole that will shed light on current issues concerning how the “environmental challenge” affects everyday practice. Worries about environmental problems declined among Swedes in the 1990s, as did the willingness to act for environmental reasons, while environmental activities, such as sorting household waste, remained the same or increased (Borgstede et al. 2002:6). According to a study based on a set of surveys, Swedes tend to be most worried about environmental problems to which they do not contribute directly themselves, such as marine oil pollution, while household waste is considered less worrisome (Borgstede et al. 2002:6).

Being able to evaluate and reflect on the environmental impact of individual activities is fundamental. Directly perceiving environmental problems and risks is often considered the main motivation for environmentally friendly behavior, and is assumed to inform how people make decisions (Beck 1996; Fischer 2003). Another matter is the notion that if people perceive problems to be “near,” they are more likely to act, the justification being that they are acting out of self-interest since they may be affected (Eliasoph 1998; Pateman 1970). Risks and threats are connected empirically as well as theoretically with trust, especially trust in experts and others to manage or solve problems and deal with risks, but also to gain knowledge of problems and provide trustworthy descriptions of them. Risk and environmental problems are often interpreted by the scientific community. Carson’s book *Silent Spring* (1962) illustrates how a scientist can manage to “visualize” environmental problems through a pedagogical process and raise public concern (even if there is no hierarchical line of impact) (cf. Palm 2006).

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9 Depending on the limits of the systems analysis, it is equally possible to argue that people contribute to these problems, though indirectly, by their constant use of petrol, plastics, and other products made of oil.
This is one illustration of the environmental problem posed by “some organic compounds,” which Carson used to legitimize claims about the impact of chemicals on the environment, and to raise awareness (Carson 1962:34). Interpretations of the state of the environment are connected to political interests, so these interpretations can be adjusted depending on the particular interests in play. This fact is highlighted by the historical documents from the time when Carson published her book. For example, she was accused by her contemporary, congressman Edwin Diamond, of manipulating “public distrust of scientists” and of timing the release of *Silent Spring* “so as to exploit public fear of new chemicals” (cited in Hynes 1989:121). Carson was further accused by another congressman of not understanding “that human history has always been a struggle against nature to tilt the balance of nature for man’s own well-being and comfort” (Hynes 1989:120). Their discussion hinges on the purpose of nature vis-à-vis humans. Since the 1960s, the focus has broadened and encompassed how decisions in everyday life have global consequences and—the converse—how global phenomena have an impact on people’s everyday lives (Giddens 1994:57–8, 1998; Dobson 2003). The pedagogical challenge still exists, though, especially since the interrelationship between human activities and environmental impact is becoming more and more complex.

**Aim**

Sustainable development emphasizes changing everyday activities towards more sustainable patterns. Householders have therefore been portrayed as important actors in efforts to achieve this, since many choices concerning resource management are made in private households (UNCED 1993; *The Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption* 2005). Sustainable development further implies a justice aspect concerning how we distribute not just resources, but risks and problems in our interconnected world.
This thesis aims to investigate how Swedish householders perceive their role in creating and solving environmental problems, and what actions these householders take in light of this.

The study will investigate how the householders themselves define their role in relation to that of others, and how ecological action space is (re)created through interaction between structures and actors. The unspecific term “others” is used, since the motives for acting in an environmentally sound way can range between considerations of one’s own health, to concern for animals, nature, and other people.

Research questions
The thesis will consider the following general research questions:
- How is ecological action space (re)created through interaction between actors and structures?
- How do the householders reason about nature, environmental problems, and risks?
- What household activities are considered environmentally friendly by municipalities and householders?
- How do the householders conceive of their opportunities to act in environmentally friendly ways and what constraints are there?
- How do householders conceive of responsibilities for the environment, and how do they (attempt to) exert political influence?

Outline of thesis
The thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines some broad areas that need attention to understand the study and the analysis of the empirical material. First, modernization theories will be dealt with, which touch on rationality, responsibility, and the ability to judge the consequences of individual actions. Then I turn to structuration theory. The dichotomy between the private and the public will be given due attention, since it has been challenged from various perspectives. Ecological citizenship is then presented, and discussed critically. Individualization is another central tenet that will receive attention in the chapter. Finally, the different approaches to determining what activities are considered to have a political impact will be discussed, and the notion of “participation” is developed. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study: how theory informed the project planning, the study’s limitations, the data gathering methods, and how the
material was analyzed. The material is also briefly described and the householders are compared in a table. Chapter 4 describes the municipalities and their sustainable development efforts directed towards households. It also explores the private–public dichotomy, and describes some of the municipal suggestions that target households. Chapter 5 analyzes the householders’ perceptions of nature and environmental problems, and how they believe their activities have an impact. The chapter relies on theoretical discussions of modernization, threat, risk, and trust. Guiding and shaping the chapter are the following questions: How do the studied householders discuss the relationship between their everyday practices and their environmental impacts? How do they describe and view nature? How are environmental impacts and problems made visible to them, and how have they become conscious of these problems? Are there any environmental problems and risks that they accept, and are there any they have learned to manage? Chapter 6, deals specifically with the householders’ ecological action space, and their ecological practices and preconditions. The questions that will guide and shape this chapter are: What environmentally friendly practices do householders claim to have? What preconditions do they need to perform these activities? How do they explain their execution of these activities? Who does these activities? What obstacles do they perceive? In chapter 7, I deal with how the householders consider their responsibilities and rights, and whether they can be said to participate as ecological citizens. The questions that will guide this chapter are: To what extent are the householders describing being responsible for causing and solving environmental problems, and is it possible to discern a private sphere? Do the householders express that they participate as consumers and citizens? For whom do they participate and take responsibility, i.e., what is their community? What motivates or forces householders to act in more environmentally friendly ways, i.e., what political means and policy instruments do they suggest are legitimate and efficient? Chapter 8 draws conclusions concerning how ecological action space is (re)created through interaction between actors and structures.
2. Structuration of householders’ ecological action space: participation, citizenship, and modernity

This is a multidisciplinary thesis about the complex field of sustainable development. Its multidisciplinary nature means that I draw on several theoretical schools and traditional lines of thought, which cannot all be developed at depth. This chapter emphasizes how the individual householder should be understood in his or her context, and is far from being an autonomous actor with unlimited capacities and opportunities to carve out his or her ecological action space. What the concept “ecological action space” means will be developed throughout the chapter, but the definition take as its point of departure that the actor can be understood only in relation to the structures in which he or she exists. These structures are simultaneously created and recreated through praxis, which Anthony Giddens (1989) emphasizes in structuration theory. This theory makes up the bulk of the theoretical framework on which this thesis’ analysis builds. Before discussing the contributions of this theory, modernization theories will be addressed, especially the notions of change and progress (Hornborg 2005). Modernization can be considered both as a description of the notion of progress and as a theoretical tool for analysis. Here it is mainly the former that is the focus, since progress is an ideological basis for sustainable development, which builds on the assumption that it is possible to change the world in a desired direction (Seippel 2000:294). A specific version of modernization theory, ecological modernization, is developed in this section as an analytical perspective. After the discussion of modernization theory, citizenship will be treated, in particular, ecological citizenship. Ecological citizenship concerns central expectations of individual responsibility for the environment, and the politicization of everyday doings (Segerberg 2005). This perspective creates an opening for feminist contributions, both to our view of citizenship and as a critical stance towards the popular demarcation between the public and the private. Environmental problems challenge nation-states, since they cross national borders and call into question the traditional (if there is any) view of...
citizenship (Delanty 2000) by confronting belonging and community. Individual responsibility for the environment relates to how we define the political community and who it includes and excludes, and to how we define those for whom we are responsible, i.e., whether we need to be responsible for our “ecological footprints” (Wackernagel & Rees 1996) wherever the ecological consequences arise. Taking Giddens’ structuration theory as a point of departure, households are viewed as intermediate between structures and individual actors (Pennarz & Niehof 1999:212), since household members have to coordinate and organize activities, resources, and interests. After this, our attention turns to households, and the section finishes by providing a working definition of household. The chapter closes with implications for the analysis.

**Modernization processes, change and rationality**

Sustainable development is said to require the change of everyday practices (WCED 1987). Householders exist within and interact with an increasingly complex technological society, where knowledge, risk awareness, and threats may prompt individuals to change their practices and behave in more environmentally friendly ways (Fischer 2003). Yet it is not always environmental risks or threats that motivate green action (Shanahan et al. 2002; Barr 2002:61). Sometimes environmentally friendly behavior is framed in altruistic terms. Investigating private environmental impact is often a complex task; to exert consumer power, for example, householders need to stay informed regarding the environmental effects of different products and how to prioritize among alternatives. Due to the complexity of modern society, everyone is an expert in some field and a layperson in others, and anyone who spends enough time on a subject can become an expert in it (Giddens 1998). Environmental experts are usually considered able to give lay people, such as householders, a general understanding of environmental problems (Weale 1992:6).

Modernization theories have occupied a predominant position in environmental studies. How the relationship between humans and nature is viewed has implications for our understanding of environmental impact (Hynes 1989). The central notion of progress has received attention from scholars critical of modernization (Beck 1992) and comprises the ideological basis and point of departure in other cases (WCED 1987). Studies of modernization process have stressed how the relationship between humans and nature has differed historically and from place to
place (Macnaughten & Urry 1998; Merchant 1980), and how this relationship was altered by the scientific revolution. This revolution implied a disconnect and polarization between humans and nature (Fox Keller 1985). Humans could control nature by getting to know it (Verran 1998). The dominant view of this relationship is said to have been founded by Francis Bacon, who constructed a dichotomy in which man dominates nature (Fox Keller 1985). This domination can be claimed to have been intensified by the development of modern technology. The dichotomy between man and nature has been accompanied by other separations, such as between man and woman, mind and body, and reason and emotion. Just as man gained the dominant position by getting to know passive nature, men came to dominate women by categorizing them as passive. These dichotomies have also formed the basis for postcolonial studies (Verran 1998). However, normative contributions suggest that humanity needs to rethink its relationship with nature, since people and nature in fact are an interconnected whole, although we tend to neglect this dependency (Mellor 1997). The connections between parallel elements of these dichotomies, such as woman–nature–body–private–emotional, have been at the center in many studies of nature, gender, and science. Hynes (1989) has written about Ellen Swallow, who founded the interdisciplinary science of ecology in the second half of the nineteenth century. Her work was delegitimized by the “scientific aristocracy,” who considered it too much “a field of women,” calling it domestic science or home economics (Hynes 1989:5). Gendering has thus permeated the organization of science, as well as household responsibilities and expectations when it comes to taking care of nature. The view of men as knowledgeable actors and women as connected to nature thus has historical roots that merit attention when we look into the present situation in Swedish households and their views of their responsibilities and understanding of nature.

Modernization has been categorized as a permanent revolution in which humans have learned to make every effort to strive for the normative goal of constant change (Berman 1990). It is closely connected to the capitalist system, science, and consumption, which in turn have implications for the environment. Science and technology occupy an ambiguous position vis-à-vis the “environmental challenge.” They play an ambiguous role in environmental studies (Marshall 2003; Seippel 2000), being connected to the technological development that lets humans attempt

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to control nature and detect environmental problems and risks, while simultaneously causing environmental problems.

**Ecological modernization**

As described in chapter 1, the anti-modernity movement was largely replaced by what was termed “ecological modernization” and sustainable development in the mid 1980s, for example, expressed in *Our Common Future* (1987). Ecological modernization is both a normative vision (Weale 1992; Huber 2000) and a theoretical point of departure. In the latter case, it is used to describe the relationship between humans and the environment, and changes in the state and political practices that have taken place in response to environmental problems (Buttel 2000; Joas 2001; Blowers 1997). This makes the concept somewhat difficult to deal with since it is ambiguous and can be used both to describe and analyze.

Ecological modernization stands for a major transformation, an ecological switch of the industrialization process into a direction that takes into account maintaining the sustenance base. Like the concept of sustainable development, ecological modernization indicates the possibility of overcoming the environmental crisis without leaving the path of modernization. (Spaargaren & Mol 1992:334; my emphasis)

One of the main motivational factors identified in previous studies of environmentally friendly behavior is that of people’s awareness of environmental problems, and whether they recognize the environmental risks that come with certain behavior. Environmental risks are now expected to influence how people act, the rationale being that how people perceive the world, and their discourse about it, are assumed to affect how they act in the larger picture. So how environmental problems are defined influences the solutions that will be suggested (Hajer 1995:247).

Similarly, Dryzek states that language is important, since how “we construct, interpret, discuss, and analyze environmental problems has all kinds of consequences” (Dryzek 1997:9).

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Ecological modernization is understood as a shift in discourses, ideologies or belief systems that function as frames of reference; that is, they give direction to thought and action. Hence, ecological modernization is a perspective most closely concerned with social order, that which makes action possible. (Seippel 2000:293; my emphasis)

The concept of ecological modernization will be used to analyze how the studied householders describe and reason about environmental problems, risk, and their own impact. The basic ideas of ecological modernization incorporate the environmental challenge into a traditional modernity model, as indicated by the quotation above. Ecological modernization became a political goal in Sweden when Prime Minister Göran Persson gave his inaugural speech in 1996 (Anshelm 2002). In this speech, and in other political discourse, it was explicitly articulated that the national goal of Sweden was to become a world leader in ecological modernization and a role model for other countries (Anshelm 2002). Ecological modernization does not require structural change of the capitalist system; rather, environmental problems are expected to be solved using technological and institutional “fixes” (Langhelle 2000:314). Ecological modernization often lacks a focus on individuals and instead centers on collective and institutional factors (Joas 2001:249). It does not consider economic growth a threat to the environment, and has an anthropocentric view of the world (Mol & Spaargaren 2000:19–21, 31–33). It offers an alternative to the “pessimistic” considerations of the risk society, and grants more hope (Buttel 2000).

The one-sided focus on production, institutions, and structures in ecological modernization has prompted Spaargaren and Vliet (2000) to demand the inclusion of individual consumers in the concept. This omission can be explained by the consumer group’s being heterogeneous (Seippel 2000:297). Using structuration theory, Spaargaren and Vliet analyze household consumption from the individual’s perspective and how it is influenced by ecological modernization. The process of critical self-awareness concerning human impact on the environment has been termed “reflexive ecological modernization” by Hajer (1995). He places the most emphasis on the need and possibilities for reflection, while emphasizing that ecological modernization is a dominant perspective. The reflexive ecological modernity that Hajer proposes has normative expectations of individuals, through their capacity to reflect on and decide what are better

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and more ecological alternatives. This is part of the politicization of everyday activities, in which reflection is contrasted with routines and to what is taken for granted, since in general, the “many forms of rationality that are considered valid within a modern society are not reflected in the ecological modernization discourse” (Seippel 2000:300). These opportunities and requirements to reflect place demands on individuals, since the environmental impact and the consequences of individual activities are complex and difficult to survey. The process relates to individual ability to “re-contextualize” knowledge, to reformulate knowledge and information relating to environmentally friendly action. On the other hand, one cannot assume that just because humans can survey the consequences of their actions, doing so would automatically lead to changes in action.

In conclusion, environmental problems are no longer an issue solely for “radicals,” but require lifestyle changes from all segments of society. This has not caused any rupture with modernity, since ecological modernization is the dominant model in most spheres of Western industrialized societies (Mol 1996:309). The next section will address the structuration theory that will be used to analyze late modern society.

**Structuration theory and “continuity of praxis”**

This thesis is activity focused, and investigates the behavior and motivations of the studied Swedish householders concerning their
relationship with the environment. A central point of departure for the study and the analysis is that institutional structures both govern and facilitate individual action, so research should focus on the relationship between structures and agency (Giddens 1991; Hajer 1995). With structuration theory, the aim is to analyze the opportunities and constraints householders perceive in their everyday activities in relation to sustainable development. I will focus on the everyday doings that are closely connected to thinking about the environment, making the two difficult to separate. Giddens (1989) emphasizes praxis, which is at the intersection between saying and doing as knowledgeable actors. The theory can be productively applied in analyzing the mapping of household activities and everyday routines and choices. It also lends itself to the analysis of the householders’ knowledge of and reflections on their behavior and to the analysis of how they justify their activities. This is at the intersection of theory and method. The focus on everyday praxis implies that Giddens does not only focus on people’s abstract knowledge, but also on how they are able to act and respond to social circumstances in practice. In daily interaction people are aware of social rules. These are central notions for the analysis of sustainable development in the studied households.

The central theory of structuration (Giddens 1989/1984) has become influential in various ways, and some of its main concepts and lines of reasoning will form the basis of the theoretical framework used here. At the center of the theory is the social interaction between actors and structures, systems and institutions, and the extent to which individual actors have “agency.” Agency refers to doing and Giddens emphasizes convincingly that:

Human societies, or social systems, would plainly not exist without human agency [and their motives and reasons]. But it is not the case that actors create social systems: they reproduce or transform them. Remaking what is already made in the continuity of praxis. (Giddens 1989:171)

This quotation relates to what is called the “co-existence of others,” a concept that will be referred to later. This comment focuses on how people function in everyday practice and how structures and relationships can be stabilized across time and space (Giddens 1989:xxxi). What at first glance may seem to be individual action may actually be related to the broader society and influences the perceived ecological action space. This thesis focuses on how policies promoting sustainable development may be

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15 Compare “distant others” in the ecological citizenship concept with the intergenerational aspect of sustainable development.
considered as structuring or attempting to structure individuals’ activities. The concept of constraint\textsuperscript{16} is used to discuss the factors that limit the available options for action, options that are not unlimited (Giddens 1989:177). The structural properties of social systems create certain opportunities for action at the same time as they restrict others: they are both enabling and constraining (Giddens 1989:162). The structures are both the preconditions for action and the outcome in formal and informal contexts. Therefore policies for sustainable development and their implementation in householders’ lives must be understood in this broader context as one of many influences to which householders are subject. This is where structuration theory can face criticism, since it posits structure as both the cause and effect of phenomena (Sewell 1992; cf. Lundin 2004).

\textbf{Knowledgeable history-makers}

According to structuration theory, actors are considered knowledgeable and having an impact through what they do—humans can “learn knowledgeably to ‘make happen’” (Giddens 1989:xix). The focus on agency relates to being able to act otherwise or to intervene in the world, which relates to the concept of individualization that will be dealt with later. As always, the theory has methodological implications, and:

\begin{quote}
[a]nalyzing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction. (Giddens 1989:25; my emphasis)
\end{quote}

Interaction means that the relationships between the micro and macro, individuals and society, the private and political—three pairings that are not identical (Lundin 2004)—must be acknowledged. When it comes to attempts, for example, by the authorities to create and implement policies concerning what householders do in their homes, the following considerations are fundamental:

\begin{quote}
… in many contexts of social life, there occur processes of selective “information filtering” whereby strategically placed actors seek reflexively to regulate the overall conditions of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Giddens emphasizes that the constraint concept in structural sociology has two senses, constraining and coercion, which implies different levels of “force” on the individuals.
system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them. (Giddens 1989:27; my emphasis)

How “strategically placed actors” attempt to exert influence relates to power and to opportunities to have political impact, an issue Giddens mentions conceptually but does not develop. The location of actors influences the impact of their conduct, and societies are not necessarily “unified collectivities,” a statement that refers to important contributions on how individuals within collectives are different. “Domination” and “power” cannot be thought of only in terms of asymmetries of distribution, Giddens states, highlighting how domination:

… depends upon the mobilization of two distinguishable types of resource. … capabilities – or more accurately, to forms of transformative capacity - generating command over objects, goods or material phenomena. Authoritative resources refer to types of transformative capacity generating command over persons or actors. (Giddens 1989:33; my emphasis)

What individuals do in their everyday lives is based on needs, desires, and habits. These are culturally constructed and relate individuals and resources to the surrounding society. Here I will use the constraint concept, which is taken to mean that some resources are, or are perceived to be, limited or limiting. Access to resources, such as tools, knowledge, or technology, affects the activities humans believe they can do (cf. Nordell 2002:17). Culturally created expectations and obligations may be taken for granted that they are perceived as obstructions to changing behavior (e.g. to incorporate new environmentally friendly activities) or to being creative concerning routines. There may also be a discrepancy between the expectations of the surrounding society and the perceived ability of the individual (Nordell 2002:47). Just as Giddens highlights, constraints can be both enabling and constraining, which implies that the distinction can be an empirical issue since it may differ between individual householders.

Another characteristic tenet of the theory is that time dimensions are emphasized. This is first done from a historical perspective, Giddens claiming that humans are “history makers,” and, second, by claiming that human action occurs in a “continuous flow of conduct” (Giddens 1989:3). Structuration theory concentrates on how the influence of the production and reproduction of day-to-day social encounters on the everyday perspective is just as important as formal activities, such as voting in elections. Most social rules implicated in the production and reproduction of social practices are only tacitly grasped by the actors, who “know how to go on” by means of practical consciousness (Giddens 1989:22). Yet, “the
discursive formulation of a rule is already an interpretation of it” (Giddens 1989:23). *Discursive consciousness* means that a person knows about something based on personal experience (Giddens 1989:91); such knowledge has increased through the media of writing, printing, and electronic communication, which shape and alter the knowledge produced.

In everyday life, humans participate in a continuous flow of action, where far from all intentions result in the intended outcomes. Intentional activities may have unintended consequences, as well as the other way around: “Human history is created by intentional activities but is not an intended project,” Giddens claims (1989:27). An example of this is provided in the following:

The durée of day-to-day life occurs as a flow of intentional action. However, acts have unintended consequences; and … unintended consequences may systematically feed back to be the unacknowledged conditions of further acts. Thus one of the regular consequences of my speaking or writing English in a “correct way” is to contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole. My speaking of English correctly is intentional; the contribution I make to the reproduction of the language is not. (Giddens 1989:8)\(^\text{17}\)

An example of this mode of reasoning is sustainable development, where many individual activities may or may not impinge on the shared, yet abstract, goal. Few people intentionally aim to destroy the environment, but it can be the unintentional consequence of everyday life in which people go about their routines. This unthinking routine behavior is distinguished from activities justified by their being environmentally friendly, since they then become intentional. It is possible to claim that these latter activities are reflected upon and scrutinized. Human agency should not stop at intentionality, according to Giddens, since most of our everyday routines and activities have an impact anyway. These routines have a central place in this thesis, which focuses on everyday life. Agency should refer to people’s “capability of doing those things in the first place”—i.e., praxis (Giddens 1989:9). Few people reflect on the unacknowledged conditions for action, while most “actors”—also routinely and for the most part without fuss—maintain a continuing ‘theoretical understanding’ of the grounds of their activity” (Giddens 1989:5). This is called the rationalization of actions, which means explaining them in

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\(^{17}\) In a philosophical way his example is interesting, since it is through language that we understand many aspects of the world, i.e. language is a structure (see the Safir–Worf hypothesis), where the idea of knowledge situated in language neglects tacit knowledge.
retrospect, which is similar to intentionality. Humans may know or be conscious of the expectations placed on them and be able to justify their actions, without acting in accordance with them; this is the discursive consciousness. The practical consciousness, on the other hand, relates to how “people pay attention to events going on around them and relate their activities to those events, it relates to the reflexive monitoring of conduct by human agents” (Giddens 1989:44).18

In everyday encounters, people rely on “mutual knowledge,” which is not directly accessible to the consciousness of actors; rather, it is practical and allows people to manage their routines (Giddens 1989:4). The practical consciousness is altered by agents’ socialization and learning experiences.19 Socialization implies that we are expected to learn and understand various matters, for example, those connected with gender, race, and class.

Even though the body and mind are engaged “with the material and social world,” it is not possible to relate to everything that is going on around us: we cannot perceive it all (Giddens 1989:47–48). Giddens emphasizes that social rules may “be tacitly followed rather than discursively formulated” (Giddens 1989:89). In many cases, we rely on tacit rather than explicit rules in our interaction with others, the doing rather than the saying.20 A person can give a statement about a “social rule” without understanding it, but one can also understand it without being able to explain it.

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Habits may be purely personal forms of routinization … They are individual routines of one kind or another, which have a certain degree of binding force simply by virtue of regular repetition. (Giddens 1994:101)

There are many similarities between how Giddens (1991) and Beck (1994, 1996) reason about the opportunities for reflection in modern society. Giddens emphasizes the tension between trust (in systems) and reflection, and it is opportunities to exert control—lacking in our complex society—that are replaced by trust and confidence in systems (1991). He...

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Compare this with activity theory, for example, that of Engeström (1990).19 The work of Goffman has influenced Giddens’ work, especially the concept that a person can stop communicating verbally and start communicating through body language. What Giddens does is add the macro approach to the micro sociology of Goffman.

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concludes that skepticism and rejection coexist with conditions that are taken for granted; however, reflexivity undermines the possibility of achieving objective knowledge.

Institutions can both pre-exist and outlive individuals. Since others have participated in the production of social systems, it is possible to talk about the “co-presence” of others, physically absent others with which we have relationships. These are concepts where Giddens relies on Ervin Goffman. Relationships with absent others are loosely connected to the concept of ecological citizenship, as elaborated on by Dobson (2003). A useful concept emanating from Goffman is that of “civil inattention,” which implies that people register what others do without talking to them about it (Giddens 1989:75). Individuals are affected by people who are not present (i.e., who existed in other places and times) who have affected the structures in which people live and that they may reproduce through their actions. The theories of Giddens and Goffman have been elaborated on in an inspiring way by Eliasoph (1998), in sociological research into politics. She writes that our interest or lack of interest in “politics” is created in the communication of meaning in social interaction, which requires cultural work and socialization. How people lead their everyday lives and how technology, scientific facts, and habits interact, or “co-evolve,” is developed by Shove in her important book, Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience (2003). Shove questions the strong focus on the explicit, visible, and dramatic present in many studies of risk and in environmental studies. She instead directs our focus towards inconspicuous consumption and materiality, and “the intangible, immaterial and invisible services they make possible” (Shove 2003:2). Giddens considers structures to be more similar to culture than to material conditions (Porpora 1998, cited in Lundin 2004:48). This observation is central to this thesis, since it deals with the material consequences of immaterial structures. Concerning Giddens’ lack of attention to materiality of structures, Giddens himself remarks that he relies on Durkheim who has concentrated on social constraints (Giddens 1989). However, “fundamental constraints upon action are associated with the casual influences of the body and the material world /…/ these are regarded as of essential importance in structuration theory” (Giddens 1989:172). In this context, Giddens relies on contributions from time-geography - which was considered as an alternative theoretical framework for this thesis. However, due to the emphasis on materiality rather than social experiences of materiality, I chose to use structuration theory instead of time-geography. The materiality is involved in the analytical concept of ecological action space that will be developed at greater depth below.

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Now it is time to move from the general level of structuration theory to the present empirical study. Since there are many activities that are subject to household decision-making, it is important to understand which ones householders decide to do and what may hinder them in doing so, which illuminates the relationship between rhetoric and action. Living everyday life without routines would be impossible, according to Giddens, which limits the alternatives that can be considered. He asks: How can people be aware of the immense environmental risks created by contemporary modern society, risks that are beyond the control of individuals, without paralyzing everyday life (1996:127). His answer is ontological security, which implies that anxiety is subdued when individuals focus on destiny or fortune. There are often alternatives that can be chosen among the everyday activities people carry out. To be able to understand how householders can reduce their individual impacts on the environment, it is important to understand what makes up their action space among all the alternatives that exist.

Ecological action space in everyday life

The relationship between actors and structures concerns whether individuals are governed by the structures, or whether individuals can contribute to and actively change their conditions of life. The routines, actions, and possible actions that individuals have at their disposal are at the center of structuration theory, the whole aim of which is to bridge the gap between structures and actors (Giddens 1989). Here I will develop the concept of ecological action space, which is used as an analytical tool in this thesis. Theories of human action in consumer society, and the environmental impact of this action, have as their starting point various assumptions of how people decide how to act. In rational choice theory, for example, individuals are expected to make systematic choices from among similar alternatives, and to consider the consequences of the different alternatives (Berglund & Matti 2007; Holler 1983). This is in line with the expectations of ecological citizenship theory, which will be developed further in the following section. Others have questioned the possibility of actually gaining an overview of environmental influences, for example, concerning production chains and consumption, since society is so complex (Hedrén 2002:301). Individual choices of how to act are not made in isolation, but are closely interrelated with other everyday activities in the environment, it is important to understand what makes up their action space among all the alternatives that exist.

21 These concepts refer to the ethnographic concepts *emic and etic*, implying what informants say that they do and what the anthropologist can observe (Harris 1990), which shifts the focus towards what we can study sociologically.

Now it is time to move from the general level of structuration theory to the present empirical study. Since there are many activities that are subject to household decision-making, it is important to understand which ones householders decide to do and what may hinder them in doing so, which illuminates the relationship between rhetoric and action. Living everyday life without routines would be impossible, according to Giddens, which limits the alternatives that can be considered. He asks: How can people be aware of the immense environmental risks created by contemporary modern society, risks that are beyond the control of individuals, without paralyzing everyday life (1996:127). His answer is ontological security, which implies that anxiety is subdued when individuals focus on destiny or fortune. There are often alternatives that can be chosen among the everyday activities people carry out. To be able to understand how householders can reduce their individual impacts on the environment, it is important to understand what makes up their action space among all the alternatives that exist.

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household context (Palojoki 1997:155, 213). The choices and activities of our everyday lives may also be influenced and/or restricted by perceptions that limit the opportunities open to humans (Giddens 1996). This relates to what has been conceptualized as ecological action space. It is possible to believe that the Swedish welfare state has helped supply individuals with more options and opportunities, though it is equally possible to argue that it is specific action spaces that have been created that limit other possible action spaces. When it comes to the specific field of consumption, Spaargaren, in line with Giddens, argues that individuals do not choose what products to consume in isolation, but rather within “social arrangements” (Spaargaren 2000:58). How actors and structures co-construct each other in the household is further elaborated on in the following quotation, which focuses specifically on ecological activities:

The ecological modernisation of the home appears to have been composed of millions of individual decisions freely made by environmentally conscious households: the Jones’s down the block are considering a solar energy roof and the Smith’s around the corner did away with their car and their dish-washing machine. But the matter is not as simple as that. The Jones’ and Smiths’ individual choices would not have done them a bit of good if the town leaders had not decided on sustainable building programs and call-a-car projects several years earlier, and if the electricity and water companies had not got around to connecting local solar systems to the central grid and running grey- and rainwater pipes into the neighbourhood. (Spaargaren & Vliet 2000:74)

This quotation relies on structuration theory, which emphasizes the “embeddedness of social action in socio–technical networks” (Spaargaren 2000:328).

Taking structuration theory as a point of departure, the ecological action space is considered the context in which an individual acts and exerts an impact on the environment and other humans, the actual action space being both created and recreated by the individual in interaction with surroundings. It has a time dimension, in that what is done here and now is based on previous experiences and actions, and simultaneously influences future opportunities for action. As stated earlier, constraints actually create

...
certain opportunities for action at the same time as they restrict others (Giddens 1989).

**Individualization: autonomy and responsibility**

We have to make our lives in a more active way than was true of previous generations, and we need more actively to accept responsibilities for the consequences of what we do and the lifestyle habits we adopt. (Giddens 1998:37)

This has largely come to be true for activities that influence the environment. Individualization has influenced most areas of contemporary society (Beck 1995; Giddens 1991; Bjereld et al. 2005). However, there are different aspects of the phenomena; some researchers focus on the increased autonomy of individuals and their increased control of their life histories and independence from large collectives (Oscarsson 2005:60; Bjereld et al. 2005), while others emphasize increased individual responsibility and accountability (Beck 1995, Beck & Beck-Gersheim 2002; Giddens 1998; MacGregor 2005). Individualization is a central concept in this thesis due to the focus on individual responsibility for the environment (Dobson 2003; Giddens 1998), the limits of the political sphere, and, finally, the theories of modernity (Beck 1996; Berman 1990). The view of individualization as autonomy conceals all the social relationships and systems on which individuals are dependent through unpaid life-sustaining work in the private sphere, such as domestic production, reproduction, caring, and family relationships (MacGregor 2006; Dobson 2003; Plumwood 1993; Yuval-Davis 1997). The increased individualization of responsibility should be understood in relation to different opinions of what must change in order to deal with the environmental challenge. Placing the responsibility for change on individuals as consumers diverts attention from structural aspects, such as governments, society, and institutions (Joas 2001; MacGregor 2006).

Individualization can be coupled with ideals of a good life and self-realization (Oscarsson 2005:70). Like modernization, it can be both an ideological ideal and a description of a change. I would argue that, to satisfy the quest for pleasure and self-realization in modern society (Oscarsson 2005:74), people often need monetary and material security. The search to be “unique” usually results in consumption (Heath & Potter 2006). Both Beck and Giddens argue that individuals have no choice but to choose how to act in our current society without any solid direction from
external authorities or collectives (Giddens 1994; Beck 1996:135). All possibilities are not simultaneously evident, some remaining concealed. In this light, individualization also means that individuals have an obligation to justify their decisions, as does a person who works for a company that is causing environmental destruction (Beck 1996:172). In the article, “Cosmopolitan manifesto” (1998), Beck writes convincingly about the new individualism, which requires the individualization of individuals:

... is not Thatcherism, not market individualism, not atomisation. On the contrary, it means “institutionalized individualism.” Most of the rights and entitlements of the welfare state, for example, are designed for individuals rather than for families. In many cases they presuppose employment. Employment in turn implies education and both of these presuppose mobility. By all these requirements people are invited to constitute themselves as individuals: to plan, understand, design themselves as individuals. (Beck 1998)

It is of fundamental importance to notice that he talks about “institutionalized individualism” and relates it to the family context; he is not talking about individuals being atomized. He also discusses how society is changing in order to incorporate this new individual and how to handle risks. Beck has also made important contributions to the study of environmental problems through focusing on the risk society concept (1992). This concept incorporates a global justice approach, in that Beck states that, due to conflicts of responsibility, there is no fair distribution of responsibilities and effects, of “goods” and “bads” (Beck 1992). This implies that he urges researchers to ask who is actually subject to the risks posed by environmental hazards. However, case studies have demonstrated that risk perceptions are not as present as Beck claims, calling into question the main argument for the existence of a risk society (Caplan 2000). Even if the existence of a risk society has been deconstructed empirically, interesting contributions to the study of risk have emanated from Beck’s work. He states convincingly that risks are impossible to detect with our senses, or to determine scientifically (Beck 1996:35), so risks are social constructs (Beck 1996:81, 169). Beck further claims that people deny and repress dangers. Risk can be based on different rationalities concerning probability, whether scientific, emotional, justice based, or economic. Threat is based on subjective factors (Gyberg 2003:215), and the external authorities or collectives (Giddens 1994; Beck 1996:135). All possibilities are not simultaneously evident, some remaining concealed. In this light, individualization also means that individuals have an obligation to justify their decisions, as does a person who works for a company that is causing environmental destruction (Beck 1996:172). In the article, “Cosmopolitan manifesto” (1998), Beck writes convincingly about the new individualism, which requires the individualization of individuals:

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23 Thatcherism implies that individuals care for themselves without support from the state (Giddens 1998:35).
perception and experiences of threat may be dismissed as ignorance, in relation to measurable and objective risks.

The difference between threats and risks is that the distinction between reality and possibility is not made concerning threats. There is no probability to calculate in the case of threats; rather, it is a perception that cannot be transformed to probability. Threat is based on a different set of rationalities from the technical–scientific rationality from which the definition of risk emanates. (Gyberg 2003:212; my translation)

Environmental crises carry the potential to be the uniting force that replaces the “unifying enemy” lacking after the end of the cold war (Beck 1996). Simultaneously, the global nature of environmental problems and “the possibility of an involuntary collective suicide is historically new” (Beck 1996:79). The central issue of the state of the environment is that individual actions contribute at an aggregate level, which implies that it is very difficult to investigate how individual actions affect others directly and actually to demand individual accountability from a juridical perspective; it is easy to free-ride. The need to shield oneself from risks and problems, to wall oneself off, increases as the opportunities to do so decrease (Beck 1996:109). What was considered as apolitical becomes political: “You are not in a car line, you *are* the car line” Beck concludes (1996:149). From a different perspective, offered by feminists among others, it is possible to argue that richer segments of the population have the option of buying their freedom, by using their economic assets to move to safer or less risk-prone places or to purchase less hazardous products (Seager 1993). This shifts the focus towards a differentiated and embodied humanity, as several feminist scholars of citizenship have demanded.

Illustration of interconnectedness.
To develop the notions of the **expectations** and **opportunities** to participate, I will turn to citizenship and how it is practiced (Lister 2003). Central documents on sustainable development, such as *Agenda 21* (UNCED 1993) and the Aarhus Convention (1998), stress the need\(^{24}\) for **participation** by all citizens in the change towards a more sustainable future society. To understand what the vague goal of “increased participation” means, it must be related to different theories of democracy and citizenship. Citizenship exists at the interface between individual actors and systems such as the nation-state (Lister et al. 2007). Different theories of participation put different degrees of emphasis on rights and responsibilities for citizens and states, and on the conditions under which they can be materialized. Lister concludes that citizenship is both a status and a practice that requires time (Lister 2003:200; cf. MacGregor 2006). According to Dobson (2003), ecological citizenship, to be dealt with in a moment, incorporates both liberal and republican citizenship. Liberal citizenship is connected to citizen rights, individualism and freedom of choice, and individual ownership and capitalism. It is further connected to the nation-state being neutral to individual life plans or pre-set grand theories of the common good, such as sustainable development (Dobson & Bell 2006; Jagers 2004; Matti 2006). It has a narrower political arena than does the republican model. Citizen responsibilities have republican connotations, focusing on civic virtue and obligations to others, collectivism and working for the common good of the community (Dobson 2003). These two citizenship models thus have different conceptualizations of how the good citizen should behave.

The ideal of **voluntarism** is central to many green theories, as are expectations of harmonious cooperation for the common good (e.g., an improved environment) and reliance on a high level of shared values and commitment (Heath & Potter 2006:339). However,

\[\text{the fact is, an enormous number of people don’t care about the environmental consequences of their actions, and they’re not going to be talked into caring anytime soon. We cannot expect them to voluntarily adopt eco-friendly practices. (Heath & Potter 2006:333)}\]

\(^{24}\) Participation can thus be considered both a right and a responsibility for individual citizens.
In a similar pessimistic vein, it has been suggested that we need an eco–authoritarian state to deal with the environmental challenge, and that rights-based liberal democracy is inadequate, since it lets us consume as much as we please (Ophuls 1977, cited in Lundmark 1998). In this proposed eco-authoritarian model, if people do not fulfill their extensive political obligations, the authorities can reprimand them; the private sphere would be minimal. The tension between voluntarism and force emphasizes the question of how to make citizens change their behavior, adopting more environmentally friendly practices within democratic models—to the extent it concerns what are considered to be efficient means to make people comply, and what are legitimate means (Matti 2006). Matti writes that it is unlikely that democratically elected governments would risk their popularity by introducing environmental protection policy instruments that lack public support (Matti 2006:7).

Citizenship theory has been challenged on several counts: first, because citizenship was initially constructed to exclude women (and other groups), due to the distinction between the gendered private and the public sphere (Lister 2003), and second, because of the environmental challenge and the fact that the consequences of human actions transgress national borders and affect people who have not been included in the decision-making. A broader global citizenship is therefore demanded that includes rights and responsibilities previously connected to the nation-state (Lister 2003; Dobson 2003). A third challenge to citizenship theory concerns how the citizens participate politically: at what stage, and through what activities are they considered to exert an impact. Who should participate, when and how, will be dealt with in the next section. Open-ended, public, and political conversation among ordinary citizens is said to be the font of democracy (Eliasoph 1998), which is why apathy and non-participation are viewed as such a serious threat (Norén 2005). This ideal of open conversation informs green politics as well. Analysts such as Iris Marion Young argue for a political model in which political action:

... involves joining in a public discourse where we try to persuade one another about courses of collective action that will contribute to social change. (Young 2003:42, cited in Luque 2005:216)

How people join in public discourse is open to interpretation, and there are various strategies “tied to broader patterns of political culture and perceptions of individual and collective responsibilities, and of one’s own role in politics” (Brand 1997:211; cf. Eliasoph 1998). I argue that not only activities for social change, but also activities for status quo have to be
considered as political. Sometimes increased participation becomes a goal in itself, as it is expected to lead to more “educated, public citizens” (Pateman 1970:110). Some argue that citizenship should not be limited to voting every three or four years in popular elections, since many of our everyday activities have political implications (Spaargaren 2000; Dobson 2003). This is in line with the central notion of the politicization of everyday doings (Segerberg 2005). There are also assumptions that the average citizen is more interested in decisions made nearer home rather than at national levels (Pateman 1970:110; cf. Eliasoph 1998; Ostrom 2000:8). That, however, is a question of the impact the decision has on the individual’s course of life.

In the 1990s, green theories took a deliberative turn, with a heavy focus on participation in verbal communication to solve shared environmental problems (Barber & Bartlett 2005; Fischer 1993; Dryzek 1996; Dryzek 2000). Deliberative democracy builds on the notion that increased democratic participation will engage citizens, helping them to arrive at “mutually acceptable reasons” (Bohman 1999:180) or consensus (Norén 2005). It is assumed that people will readily accept policies that they have participated in creating. I would argue, however, that people are just as likely to participate in deliberative processes and agree on less green ideas, or act in contradiction to ecological aims, if they participate at all. There is no empirical evidence that deliberative democracy is more ecologically rational (Gupte & Bartlett 2005).

Many norms and ideals have informed the framework of this thesis. One is the central ideal of participation in public discourse in theories of environmental politics and in visions of participation for sustainable development (UNCED 1993). In line with Lundmark (1998), political and/or civic participation is here considered to have a broad definition. While there are indeed non-verbal forms of communication in an environmental–political context (such as consumer power), analysts usually

25 The predilection for solidarity is mirrored in the fundamental work, Our Common Future (WCED 1987).

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emphasize verbal forms, such as discussion and discourse. It is reasonable to believe that while some may attempt to defend the environment as “eco-warriors,” others may not (Luque 2005:218). People are simply different. It is important to emphasize that political participation is multidimensional and that citizens play various roles (Norén 2005:111). In short, political participation is about voicing an opinion or standpoint using available means and strategies. Another expression of the norm is that of ecological citizenship, which will be dealt with in the next section.

**Ecological citizenship**

Theoretically, it is impossible for ecological citizens to be passive, since they need to take responsibility for all the environmental consequences of their actions (Dobson 2003). Using a similar, though not identical, challenge to the private–public dichotomy as that posed by feminists, Dobson argues for the need to “politicize the private sphere” (Dobson 2003:53). One of Dobson’s main arguments is that citizens are already expected to “undertake responsibilities of citizenship in both the public and the private realms”, and many public policies rely on responsible personal lifestyles (Prokhovnik 1998:84, cited in Dobson 2003:53). Dobson (2003) suggests four principal characteristics of ecological28 citizenship, permeated by the ideal of individuals who do not act out of self-interest for monetary or material benefits. It deals with non-reciprocal responsibility and expands the width of citizen duties; citizens cannot necessarily expect anything in return for acting in environmentally friendly ways. It has a non-state understanding of political space, the “ecological footprint” through the “action at a distance” (Dobson 2003:105). The concept argues that the private arena of household activities is as much a sphere for citizenship as the public arena, and thereby expands citizenship. Finally it focuses on citizenship virtue to meet the ecological citizenship obligations (Dobson 2003).

The right to a healthy environment is absent from the model, which neglects the notion that everyone could benefit from a good environment. Citizens influence others in the private realm as well through the principle

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28 Dobson (2003) has argued for a distinction between environmental and ecological citizenship. He relates environmental citizenship to liberal and republican models of democracy/citizenship, while ecological citizenship is distinct from these two models. A common distinction between the ecological and environmental has been to view ecological movements as wanting to reform the modern industrial society, and environmental movements as wanting simply to mitigate the negative impacts of industrial society (Bennulf 1994:64).
of post-cosmopolitanism. Dobson explains post-cosmopolitanism in these terms, saying that it:

... offers a thickly material account of the ties that bind ... by the material production and reproduction of daily life in an unequal and asymmetrically globalizing world. In this conception, the political space of obligation is not fixed as taking the form of the state, or the nation, or the European Union, or the globe, but is rather "produced" by the activities of individuals and groups with the capacity to spread and impose themselves in geographical, diachronic, and ... ecological space. (Dobson 2003:30)

According to Dobson, we need to recognize that "the actions of some affect the life chances of distant strangers ... the globalizing nations are always already acting on others" (Dobson 2003:49). This echoes the connection to what Giddens (1989) calls "absent others." And yet, Dobson runs the risk of getting trapped in his own critique, by focusing on membership in specific nation-states as the operative level of responsibility (Hayward 2006). Ecological citizenship has received valid criticism on several counts. It places too much emphasis on individual responsibility while neglecting the preconditions of individual action (MacGregor 2006; Barry 2005; Hayward 2006). One expectation as to what individuals and householders should do as ecological citizens concerns "the burdensome task of seeking, classifying, verifying, and updating" knowledge on what is ecologically sound or risky (Luque 2005:213). Since people are dependent on experts to describe and interpret environmental problems (Fischer 2003), they need to trust these "translators." Another criticism is that the model relies too much on "optimistic voluntarism" (Hayward 2006:445; Barry 2006). By applying the concept of ecological action space in the analysis, I will attempt to come to grips with this second criticism.

The principles of ecological citizenship have consequences for how we define political participation, since the ecological challenge demands "constant" participation in everyday life (cf. Naess 1989)—it is impossible to be passive. A starting point is that environmental citizenship takes time and relies on extensive personal contributions in the practical everyday lives of householders. Barry goes as far as claiming that "being an environmental citizen is ... a part-time occupation" (Barry 2006:22). MacGregor (2006) has made fundamental and valid criticism of the "male-centeredness" of ecological citizenship. Policies that are gender blind may simply mean more work for mothers (MacGregor 2006; see Cowan 1983). At the risk of over-generalizing, women have traditionally been socialized to perform work that benefits others both the immediate family and others, of post-cosmopolitanism. Dobson explains post-cosmopolitanism in these terms, saying that it:

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such as future generations (Benhabib 1992). Scholars need to problematize and politicize mainstream eco-political thoughts that have tended to rely on privatized and feminized caring (MacGregor 2006:120). As MacGregor emphasizes, we have to look at the time needed to perform the green, unpaid household activities that are suggested, and how that will interact with the increased participation and time spent in the public domain as an ecological citizen or in deliberative democratic activities. This relates to a general trend in neo-liberal efforts to download public services to the private, unpaid sphere dominated by women (MacGregor 2006:113). Ecological citizenship has to be considered as a normative ideal that has not been demonstrated empirically (Dobson 2003:211). It needs to be analyzed from a household perspective, taking account of the interactions and negotiations between members and others, and the everyday activities and how we recreate (uns)ustainable practices through ordinary and routinized practices that are taken for granted (MacGregor 2006; Szerszynski 2006; Shove 2003). Citizenship studies further gain from “a multi-tiered analysis, which pays attention to the spaces and places in which lived citizenship is practiced” (Lister et al. 2007). Citizenship studies must not “take for granted what politics itself means or where it happens,” for the researcher to be open to “empirical surprises” (Luque 2005:212, 214). To identify ecological citizens in the making, the researcher needs to focus on identifying situations portrayed as harmful to a collective, and on the action suggested to compensate for the harm (Luque 2005).

Through everyday activities, people exert an influence on others through complex webs of relationships. However, even if a person is not a member of a political community, such as a nation-state or municipality, he or she may nevertheless have a political impact on the decisions and policies of that community. There are differences in the degree of responsibility for and benefits from the exploitation of nature (Beck 1992; Dobson 2003). This is a relationship that ecofeminists have specifically developed. In the quest to elaborate on the social dimension of sustainable development, while focusing on gender equality, ecofeminist theories can be helpful. When policies favoring sustainable development and ecology require that individuals take responsibility for the environment, it is important to investigate who precisely undertakes this responsibility, and who is accountable and affected. Mellor, who focuses specifically on women in the global South, claims that “having ceased to be seen as victims, women are coming to be seen as the solution” (Mellor 1997:35). In the concern to represent women as knowledgeable about the environment and to demand that they be represented in environmental politics, there is a risk of giving them excessive responsibility for solving the problems such as future generations (Benhabib 1992). Scholars need to problematize and politicize mainstream eco-political thoughts that have tended to rely on privatized and feminized caring (MacGregor 2006:120). As MacGregor emphasizes, we have to look at the time needed to perform the green, unpaid household activities that are suggested, and how that will interact with the increased participation and time spent in the public domain as an ecological citizen or in deliberative democratic activities. This relates to a general trend in neo-liberal efforts to download public services to the private, unpaid sphere dominated by women (MacGregor 2006:113). Ecological citizenship has to be considered as a normative ideal that has not been demonstrated empirically (Dobson 2003:211). It needs to be analyzed from a household perspective, taking account of the interactions and negotiations between members and others, and the everyday activities and how we recreate (uns)ustainable practices through ordinary and routinized practices that are taken for granted (MacGregor 2006; Szerszynski 2006; Shove 2003). Citizenship studies further gain from “a multi-tiered analysis, which pays attention to the spaces and places in which lived citizenship is practiced” (Lister et al. 2007). Citizenship studies must not “take for granted what politics itself means or where it happens,” for the researcher to be open to “empirical surprises” (Luque 2005:212, 214). To identify ecological citizens in the making, the researcher needs to focus on identifying situations portrayed as harmful to a collective, and on the action suggested to compensate for the harm (Luque 2005).

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(Wihlborg & Skill 2004). Women have generally been responsible for the household and the private sphere, and it is in this light that Seager understands what she considers the “blaming of women for poor consumer choices” that runs through the green consumer movement (Seager 1993:258).

The current green consumer movement uncannily resembles an earlier consumer-based, home-based movement—the British and American “home healthy” drive of the 1910s and 1920s … a domestic orthodoxy that required a full-time housewife in every home to safeguard family health by meeting hystically high standards of hygiene. (Seager 1993:255)

This movement promoted the privatization and professionalization of women’s work in the home (Seager 1993:256). However, the ecological footprints of men are larger than those of women (Johnsson-Latham 2007), since men tend to eat more meat, travel longer distances, and purchase products that require more natural resources. Knowledge and concern for the environment, as well as risk perception, have been gendered, not just in households, but in other contexts as well (Seager 1993; Mellor 1997; Hynes 1989; Davidson & Freudenburg 1996; Plumwood 1993). Human actors are always embodied and embedded (Mellor 1997). In this light, ecofeminists question individualism and the gender-blind view of the equal opportunities of individuals, questions that relate to their ecological action space.

Women from more privileged communities may be able to insulate themselves from environmental hazards (Seager 1993), providing an example of how gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality can intersect, i.e. “intersectionality” (Reyes & Mulinari 2005). “Local NIMBY … campaigning by better-off communities may not lead to NIABY (not in anybody’s backyard) but a displacement of dangerous activities into poorer areas” (Mellor 1997:24). Seager is concerned that better-off women may redirect their concern to green consumerism, leading to a new divide

29 “In the early 1990s, several mainstream environmental groups waged a high-publicity campaign against the disposable diaper, highlighting it as a major contributor to the garbage problem, and turning disposable diapers into a symbol of all that is wrong with our throw-away society” (Seager 1993:259). In fact, these diapers make up only 2% of America’s garbage.

30 See Lövgren (1993) Hemarbete som politik [Work in the home as politics] for a Swedish example; this work concerns how the Swedish Home Research Institute was established, and how Elin Wägner and Alva Myrdal argued. See also Björk (1999), who argues that shopping malls were constructed largely for women.
Recycling alone: a collapse of community?

When promoting increased participation in Agenda 21 (UNCED 1993) it is valuable to discuss when and how people are expected get involved, and what makes up a community. Historically, the content of citizen responsibility implied that participation beyond elections was deemed unnecessary and even a threat to the stability of the state (Pateman 1970). Citizens participate by paying taxes and receiving governmental services (Norén 2005:110; Moore 1994). Previous studies and models in which only certain activities were considered political acts, such as voting, demonstrating, working on local issues, contacting politicians, or being a member of a political party (Putnam 2000), need to be questioned (Eliasoph 1998). This matter relates to methodology in the sense that “defining the categories ‘objectively,’ beforehand, renders much political activity invisible” (Eliasoph 1998:278; Luque 2005). For example, making a racist joke may be considered discussing politics, since it has political importance or implications, or “campaigning for recycling centers is citizenship, but composting in one’s own garden is not” (Dobson 2003:136; cf. Segerberg 2005). A central issue in the literature on environmental politics is altruism, which is contrasted to social dilemmas such as free riding (Hardin 1968; Ostrom 2000). Solidarity in a global world implies considering six billion people when making everyday decisions. For example, Krantz Lindgren points out that many Swedes examined in her study defended their car driving by saying that their individual use had a negligible impact on the overall environment, which she relates to “the social dilemma defense” (2001) or what may be considered a collective action problem. She concludes that even if many “green” car drivers believed they should drive less, due to the negative impact on the environment, they would still rationalize their driving by emphasizing that the car is necessary to access specific places or that the car is the best transportation alternative. As I interpret her conclusions, they point towards the relationship between rhetoric and action. This relationship has been investigated by Micheletti, when discussing political consumption.

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... good citizens must be emotionally engaged with the polity and its principles. [In the public virtue case,] political consumers represent a well-accepted view of good citizens as enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, solidaristic, public-spirited and who willingly subordinate their personal interests and private desires for the good of the public. Its roots are civic republicanism and communitarian democratic theories. (Micheletti 2003:20)

The second view of political engagement to which Micheletti refers is the private virtue tradition, in which engagement is based on the realization of self-interest. Here consumers purchase some products over others to solve private problems. Her example is family interest, such as finding a soap “that does not cause their child who is prone to allergies to scratch wildly after a bath” (Micheletti 2003:20). The right to a healthy environment is often neglected, when the focus is on altruism (Micheletti 2003).

Concerning how to participate, citizens can get involved at different stages of the policy process. Citizens may participate in decision-making regarding new paths towards sustainable development before a policy is determined or implemented (Spaargaren 2000), or in the legitimization and implementation of existing policies through their everyday activities and lifestyles. The latter implies that citizens can act in accordance with or in contradiction to sustainable development policies (Matti 2006). Since people have seldom been invited to participate in political processes, but only to accept predefined definitions of environmentally friendly living, the process has been hampered (Hedrén 2002:326). Independently interpreting what constitutes environmentally sound lifestyles is restricted for citizens, and other choices than the predetermined ones are considered “uninformed” (Matti 2006:125).

Concerning how to participate, a central tenet in environmental studies of “participation” has been the connection to different forms of participation and the predilection for social protest through civil society, for example, demonstrations (Shiva 2000), political consumption, boycotting, and boycotting (Micheletti et al. 2003), culture jamming (Peretti & Micheletti 2006), civil disobedience, and monkey-wrenching (Somma 2006), where the capitalist system is often at the centre of the criticism, based on the analysis that it is the main cause of environmental destruction. These forms of activism have been considered as different from traditional

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32 Between 1987 and 1997, the number of Swedes who boycotted products almost doubled (Norén 2005:127).
parliamentary democratic participation through voting and legislative change. Specific political actions for the environment that many have cited are the global citizenship activities carried out at demonstrations in Seattle, Prague, and Gothenburg, among others (Shiva 2000; Thörn 2005; Dobson 2003). Dobson concludes that these are “the tip of an iceberg of global citizenship activity” (Dobson 2003:75). Now participation has reached beyond traditional political arenas and reshaped both the actual political playing field and political theory (Norén 2005). Political participation, however, is only part of how we influence how society is created and recreated, which is why a focus on people’s everyday activities is important. In Eliasoph’s study, the grassroots argued about what was realistic or “doable” in terms of what was close to home, small, local, and un-political (1998:12–13).

Clearly, these Buffalo members [of a country-western club] did engage in political debate … but the point of their conversation was always to convince each other that they were smart enough to know that they could not do anything about the problems. (Eliasoph 1998:154)

They said that they wanted to care about others, but not about politics per se. With this example, she highlights how people can be regarded as participating in politics, but in ways that their preconceived notions of what constitutes “politics” would not be defined as political. In this context, it is productive to recall the remark in structuration theory that not all intentions result in intended outcomes (Giddens 1989). When investigating the ideal of increased individual participation (in groups or at different times), the central concerns are citizens’ self-perceived ability to participate and whether they believe that what they do matters, sometimes called “political efficacy” (Lundmark 1998:15; Baber & Bartlett 2005:167). Various scholars have focused on and analyzed decreased interest in party politics (Putnam 2000; Beck 1996). In Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (2000), Putnam emphasizes what he considers signs of the collapse of democracy. People sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet, know their neighbors less, and socialize less with friends and family. He refers to an ideal of collective mobilization that is distinct from individualized action. This ideal results in individual activities, such as recycling waste or purchasing ecological

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33 This predilection can probably be connected to the media attention paid to the “theatrical” dimension of these forms of participation/activism (see Castells 1997 who focuses on the Zapatista movement); it is less interesting to take a picture of someone emptying containers at a recycling station—unless they are acting illegally of course.
products, not being considered collective action even if a great many people perform it. The central position of political consumption practices will be dealt with in the following section.

Illustrations of different means to exert political influence.

Consumers as political agents

The interchangeable use of the concepts householder, citizen, and consumer is central. The implications of focusing on consumers as political agents are important. The vision of “Small is Beautiful” is considered to create opportunities to act in the role of (non-)consumer, since the central issue is whether we emphasize choosing the right products or the amounts of goods consumed, the latter alternative implying that a person may abstain from consuming. Yet,

one of the great fallacies of the green consumer movement—
that, after all, green or not, this is a consumer movement, and the purpose of green companies is to promote more, not less, overall consumption. (Seager 1993:261)

Micheletti sets out from a somewhat different point of view in relation to Seager when she writes that:

… women have historically been excluded from institutions of the public sphere and their issues seen as non-political, they have been forced to create other sites to express their political worries and work for their political interests. Consumer choice was … a site for women to participate in politics, a site for them to legitimize their interests, and a site for their struggle for public recognition. Active political consumerism empowered women as citizens. (Micheletti 2003:18)
While some academic disciplines view consumer power as a form of political action, others consider it controversial to claim that consumption choices are examples of civic engagement (Giddens 1998; Joas 2001; Micheletti 2003; Norén 2005:111, 126).

... politically conscious consumer choices are... the little individual’s opportunity to make her/his voice heard, and to feel solidarity, but without having to get engaged in formal organizations or spend time in lengthy meetings. (Norén 2005:126)

Consumerism is often portrayed as the major reason for many environmental problems, and framed as a serious impediment to creating a more sustainable future (see The Oslo Declaration on Sustainable Consumption 2005). By means of changed consumption patterns through active choice, consumers are expected to contribute to more sustainable production practices in the ecological and social dimension. What we consume has consequences for others through our ecological space/footprint, so consumption is political (Dobson 2003; Wackernagel & Rees 1996). Being able to purchase whatever one wishes in “consumer culture” is based on the norm of convenience and quality of life, while refraining from shopping is considered a sacrifice. This notion is influenced by critical theory, which emphasizes that we have lost our ability to control our lives due to the domination of the market and technology. Purchases of environmentally labeled goods are considered a weak policy instrument, due to their inability to produce structural change (Macnaghten & Urry 1998; Hedrén 2002). This is of course related to how the problem is described and to the particular ideological stance. Naess has argued that vital human needs can generally be satisfied without causing serious harm to nature, while desires created by industrialized societies cannot be universally met (Naess 1989). What constitutes human needs is an important issue meriting debate.

A topic that has received attention is the relationship between consumer choice and its political role as part of citizenship (Micheletti 2003; Sörbom 2003). Political consumption is usually co-constructed with the media, since companies are wary of attracting negative publicity (Sörbom 2003; Glans & Nerbrand 2003). Here production and consumption are considered to be inextricably connected, which implies...
that household consumption and industrial production are inseparable (Spaargaren & Vliet 2000; Giddens 1989). However central the view of consumption as the main cause of environmental problems, reducing citizen activity to the role of consumer is questionable. Reducing citizenship to consumer action ignores the possibilities to work through government and traditional political processes (Heath & Potter 2006; MacGregor 2006). This is a criticism of the perceived individualization of political activities and responsibilities. I consider political consumption to be just one of a range of ways in which the householder can act politically, i.e., exert an influence. The role of consumer is only part of citizenship and of the householders’ ecological action space.

When talking about consumption, it is easy to neglect how using socio-technical systems is also a form of consumption. Technological systems are social since they are created, used, and interpreted by humans in a “seamless web” (Bijker et al. 1989:3). Since attention will turn towards “use” as such, it is important to emphasize that consumption should be understood in a broad sense, as referring to a wide range of activities, including use, reuse, decisions not to purchase products, reliance on socio-technical systems, and recycling, and not only the moment of purchase, as sometimes is the case (cf. Ellegård 2003). When applying an everyday household perspective, it is possible to notice that:

> Every time we tap some water or switch on the lights, we are making use of the services that are provided by expert-systems. At the very same moment we contribute to their ongoing reproduction. These expert-systems constitute what Otnes calls “the collective underpinnings of private life … In all these cases the taken-for-granted character is replaced by a serious questioning of the existing modes of organising the social practices that constitute our daily actions.” (Spaargaren & Vliet 2000:64)

Structuration theory shines through. Household consumption has to be understood in the social context in which it takes place, and it has to be understood from a broad perspective that includes social practices concerning care and reproduction (Spaargaren & Vliet 2000:60). Household practices are influenced by historical factors related to standards.

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34 The fact that consumers are tied to systems made Otnes (1988) talk about “captive consumers” who cannot just change systems without losing resources, which restricts them from moving freely between systems.

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of comfort, cleanliness and convenience (Shove 2003; cf. Aune 2007). Even if we perceive that what is considered normal when it comes to cleanliness is individual, this standard is usually shared with others and is something we learn. Consumption clearly has a symbolic and cultural dimension, not dependent only on the price of a product. People consume based on past experience and information conveyed via advertising, word of mouth, consumer education, cultural awareness, and identity communication (Brembeck 1999), and often based on a desire to be “cool” (Heath & Potter 2006).

It is easy to confirm the gendered expectations. Rosenberg writes that an individual mother is encouraged to accept personal responsibility for the environmental problems she is said to be able to alleviate through private practices in her own household (Rosenberg 1990). This implies that there are culturally defined expectations of women. Similarly, MacGregor has argued, concerning the feminized care implied in “green consumption,” that:

… advertisers also know to whom they ought to target their ostensibly green products (e.g., unbleached cotton diapers, nontoxic and biodegradable cleaning supplies, organic produce). Here, the focus on individual choice confuses the meanings of citizen and consumer. Either way, when the future for their children (and of course their children’s children) is used as the reason for being ecologically responsible, women are apt to feel guilty; their compulsory feminine altruism is thereby exploited for the public (and increasingly corporate) good. (MacGregor 2006:117)

Gender connects the social dimension of sustainable development to the private sphere of the household and the environment. Gender is a specific structure in relation to which individual women and men position themselves; thereby it is considered part of their ecological action space.

**Private and political: or the kitchen window**

Since many environmental theories start out from a broad understanding of the political sphere, it is relevant to focus on the demarcation between the private and the public. This distinction has historical roots. Aristotle is said to have emphasized that “the realm of oeconomia—the household realm in which the material necessities of daily life were reproduced—was a lesser realm than the public” (Ignatieff 1995:56 cited in Dobson 2003:51). The
distinction between the public and the private has been based on their respective linguistic roots of *polis* (the political) and *oikos* (the household economy), and that makes the household an important unit for investigation. Traditionally, the distinction has separated formal institutional contexts, such as paid work and school, from informal contexts that were not financed and/or controlled by the state and thereby beyond the political reach (Yuval-Davis 1997:79). Feminists challenged this demarcation in the 1960s and 1970s and demanded, for example, that spousal and child abuse in the home were political matters that needed to be regulated (Wendt Höjer & Åse 2001). This challenge has now been extended to other matters, such as sorting household waste and choice of mode of transportation. Through these connections, the household is included in the political sphere and is not considered solely a private domain. It is along a similar line of reasoning about the interrelationship of the private and political spheres that ecological citizenship has been called for (Dobson 2003). Similarly, it has been shown how the private and public co-construct each other in social systems and political life (Holzman 1999:45). How different householders experience different definitions and demarcations of the political and private spheres, and the legitimate boundaries of political intervention, also need attention. The borderline between private and political is culturally dependent, so that what is considered a private domain by some may be a matter of democratic concern and political participation by others. Depending on how we define the political sphere, the role of participation will be different, such as the role of the citizen and her rights and responsibilities, and legitimate policy instruments. Segerberg has emphasized that the political can be defined according to when an activity is carried out (the “doing” itself), and not always in spatial terms (where) (2005:164). This schema has been applied in examining the relationship between the private and the public when it comes to households. In the following section, households will be discussed in greater depth.

### Households in webs of systems and structures

Today almost half of Swedish households have only one member (Bladh 2005), so many people do not have anyone to interact with in the household. This does not, however, mean that they are isolated. The problematic aspects of defining “household” are the customary emphasis on negotiations, division of labor, and organization, which are difficult to apply to people living on their own. In this regard it might be possible to apply to people living on their own. In this regard it might be possible to
apply the “absent other” concept (Giddens 1989), in order to interpret how our individual activities are influenced by many others not present in time and space. A household’s internal structures and workings both create and are recreated by larger-scale cultural, economic, and political processes (Moore 1994:86). The interaction between the economic system and individuals takes place through taxation, welfare policies/programs, pension funds, etc., and through cultural factors such as gender, consumer culture, and political structures bound in a “system of redistribution” (Moore 1994:101–106; cf. Pennarz & Niehof 1999:5). With this concept, households with one member are included. By paying taxes, people share burdens and responsibilities. However, Moore pays little attention to the materiality of everyday life, which Shove manages to deal with through her focus on our use of energy and natural resources (Shove 2003).

There is no indication that households with similar socioeconomic conditions act in similar ways (Pipping Ekström & Shanahan 1999:149), apart from evidence that indicates that increased economic resources are correlated with increased energy consumption (Noorman & Schoot Uiterkamp 1998:80). The boundaries of the household are fluid rather than solid (Pennarz & Niehof 1999:3).

The household is at the intersection of cultural beliefs and economic systems … It is a place where people come together in the continuous reproduction of social life, where they face social change and contest meaning. It is also a setting around and within which individuals prepare for the future. (Cohen 1999:25–26)

Households both are created by and create society.

Ideology, culture, habits, and practices enter family households, are transformed when passing through and exert a certain influence on the larger society in turn. (Pennartz & Niehof 1999:5)

To economize resources is one of the most central definitions of a household, and can be connected to the physical building (i.e., the house) and the material and energy-related resources used in it, such as electricity, water, and fuel. When more and more people tend to live on their own, it implies increasing numbers of households and dwellings. The increase in numbers of households has been connected to increases in the use of material and energy consumption, and to:

… a steadily rising number of goods and services provided by physical networks, such as drinking water and sewerage...
systems, electricity cables and gas pipelines, telephone lines and other information networks. (Noorman & Schoot Uiterkamp 1998:27)

The house is a context in which people, depending on the type of housing arrangement (e.g., small house or apartment, subletting or ownership), can have an impact on and create conditions for acting in environmentally friendly ways. Through their ways of living, people may also display/communicate identity. One example is the recent trend to remodel the house and kitchen simultaneously, as less time is now spent cooking at home (see Freeman 2004).

It is also important to pay attention to the household as part of particular socio–technological systems. Today’s society is constructed on a multitude of integrated systems for electricity, telecommunication, transportation on roads, in the air, and on the seas, etc., which taken together form the conditions within which humans act. Regarding these systems, householders are both their users and recreators (Giddens 1989).

Households: connecting the private and the structural

The ideas of family and household have varied historically, and have sometimes even been used interchangeably (Sontag & Bubolz 1996:12). Although more people now live on their own, the role of the family is still important (Ahrne & Roman 1997). However, the nuclear family household is a western cultural ideal with normative implications (Yanagisako 1979), for example, expressed through the couple norm and heteronormativity. In recent decades, attention has been paid to internal household processes (Wilk 1989), with a focus on negotiations about and division of resources and activities as affected by culture, ideologies, and gender, where decision-making expresses power. Humans who live together do not necessarily share resources and/or experiences. Household members may, however, have moral understandings of reciprocity towards each other as family members that affect decisions and individual choices. Long-term and close interaction in a relationship can lead to both explicit and implicit negotiation (Ahrne & Roman 1997). Implicit negotiations imply that household members have found ways to communicate with each other through other means than open discussions. Naess vividly describes our interrelationship with others in the following quotation:
The private household is often placed in contradistinction to the public sphere of industry and business in environmental studies, where production has received most attention. Households have received less attention as they are small organizations (Ahrne & Roman 1997:3). Despite their small individual size, households collectively account for half of the environmental destruction in Sweden (Shanahan et al. 2002), and much environmental pollution is causally linked to modern household technology (Mies & Shiva 1993:7). This calculation is based on the distinction between the private and public spheres, a debatable distinction, since it is equally possible to argue that without households, no one would produce industrial goods or consume industrial output. In household reproduction, decision-making and negotiation about resources and consumption take place, with consequences for sustainable development, the environment, and others living in the “global household” (Linnér 1998). Socialization and emotional relationships are maintained when the household has more than one member (Pennarz & Niehof 1999).36

A focus on individual consumers or citizens is too limited … Most people live within households that function as gatekeepers to the outside world. A household is the site where norms and values are formed, and it is also the institution that—at least for part of our life—provides daily care. (Casimir & Dutilh 2003:322)

This quotation directs our attention to the important yet distinct concepts of householder, citizen, and consumer.

35 The quotation continues thus: “If I use a clipped tea leaf, some sugar, and some boiling water, and I drink the product, I am supporting tea and sugar prices and more indirectly I interfere in the work and capital conditions of the tea and sugar plantations of the developing countries. In order to heat the water, I may have used wood or electricity or some other kind of energy. And then I take part in the great controversy concerning energy use. I may use water from a private source or a public source, and in either case I participate in a myriad of politically burning questions of water supply.”

36 From an American feminist perspective, bell hooks argues that the home/household may mean violence, threat, and beating, rather than being a place of recovery (hooks 1994:28; see also Yuval-Davis 1997:79).
The arguments put forth thus far indicate that households differ from each other and over time. Furthermore, household activities are negotiated, often along gendered lines. Cultural expectations and obligations affect the division of labor, certain values being considered male and others female. Household work can acquire a symbolic meaning and predict or confirm gender identity (Fenstermaker Berk 1985), and certain household tasks are more gendered than others (Ahrne & Roman 1997:51). Experienced division of knowledge also affects the division of labor: women are often less motivated to perform male “coded” activities, and vice versa. There has been a similar distinction between paid and unpaid activities. Unpaid household work is often invisible, even if, when measured in hours, it takes as much time as paid work (Forssell 2002). It is somewhat difficult to measure and limit what constitutes “household activities.” One simplistic and tautological definition would be that they are activities carried out at home, but then activities such as grocery shopping or traveling by public transportation would be missed. Another approach would be to define them as the activities that concern unpaid work and reproductive issues. For lack of any other better definition, household activities are here taken to be all activities that are not paid labor. This implies that activities such as repairing one’s own car or using one’s own time and knowledge to cook a dinner—activities that can be purchased from others—are considered household activities. Using this definition draws a multitude of activities into the purview of this study. Central issues when discussing the choice of more environmental household activities over others are time and knowledge and the perceived sacrifices householders will have to make when living their everyday lives.

The everyday life of a household is greatly affected by the composition of its members. For example, becoming a parent is connected with new household activities and the reorganization of everyday life (Holmberg 1993), which affect living conditions, experience, and knowledge (Ahrne & Roman 1997). Expectations differ drastically between men and women when they become parents, especially in relation to employment, men not usually being as influenced as women.

**A definition of the household and householder**

Since this study examines household activities in general, a broader scope than that of many previous studies that have paid attention only to individual household activities or individuals, a definition would be useful. Researchers in human ecology serve as a source of inspiration. They focus on the interaction between humans and environment and how the

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environment is transformed by humans using technologies (Hook & Paolucci 1970; Bubolz & Sontag 1993). Furthermore, they highlight adaptation, learning, and ability to reflect on the relationship with the environment (Sontag & Bubolz 1996). Åberg, building on Hook and Paolucci, focuses on the intentionality of households and their activities. Different householders may, however, have different goals (Ahrne 1994), which is why it is important to use the term *householder* or household member rather than to refer only to “household.” Building on these influences, the definition of household used in this study relates to negotiation and the division of activities, as follows:

The human(s) who live in a dwelling and organize, produce, reproduce, consume, and interact with the surroundings using different resources. If more than one person lives together in the dwelling, negotiations and the distribution of resources and activities become part of the definition, influenced by socialization.

This definition does not apply to institutional arrangements, such as homes for the aged.

Before concluding this chapter I will clarify the relationship between the different roles and identities householders have in different situations. Various epithets can be given to an individual, and the context influences when they are applied and stressed, both for the individual and in academic studies. In line with feminist scholars who have stressed that individuals are embedded and embodied (cf. Mellor 1997), it is important to avoid gender blindness in concepts such as householder, citizen, or consumer. An individual takes the experiences and perceived expectations from different roles into new situations, and different identities intersect (Reyes & Mulinari 2005). In line with structuration theory, identities are constructed and reconstructed through socialization that connects individual actors to the structures within which they exist.

### Analyzing the ecological action space

This chapter has aimed to develop the theoretical framework that will be used in the analytical sections of this thesis. The framework is mainly built on structuration theory, but I have argued that to understand the complex issue of sustainable development, one must draw on several theoretical traditions. Many previous studies of sustainable development build on a narrow view of the context in which individuals act, obviously for the environment is transformed by humans using technologies (Hook & Paolucci 1970; Bubolz & Sontag 1993). Furthermore, they highlight adaptation, learning, and ability to reflect on the relationship with the environment (Sontag & Bubolz 1996). Åberg, building on Hook and Paolucci, focuses on the intentionality of households and their activities. Different householders may, however, have different goals (Ahrne 1994), which is why it is important to use the term *householder* or household member rather than to refer only to “household.” Building on these influences, the definition of household used in this study relates to negotiation and the division of activities, as follows:

The human(s) who live in a dwelling and organize, produce, reproduce, consume, and interact with the surroundings using different resources. If more than one person lives together in the dwelling, negotiations and the distribution of resources and activities become part of the definition, influenced by socialization.

This definition does not apply to institutional arrangements, such as homes for the aged.

Before concluding this chapter I will clarify the relationship between the different roles and identities householders have in different situations. Various epithets can be given to an individual, and the context influences when they are applied and stressed, both for the individual and in academic studies. In line with feminist scholars who have stressed that individuals are embedded and embodied (cf. Mellor 1997), it is important to avoid gender blindness in concepts such as householder, citizen, or consumer. An individual takes the experiences and perceived expectations from different roles into new situations, and different identities intersect (Reyes & Mulinari 2005). In line with structuration theory, identities are constructed and reconstructed through socialization that connects individual actors to the structures within which they exist.
pragmatic purpose of making the studied subjects researchable. This thesis considers everyday life, which is why structuration theory was chosen. This theory implies that attention can be paid to how individual activities and actions interact with collective systems and structures. By applying the analytical concept of ecological action space based on structuration theory, I believe that I will be able to capture the everyday aspects and routines householders use in order to go on. Ecological action space has been related to modernization theories, individualization, ecological citizenship, and gendering. Building on structuration theory, ecological action space is the context in which individual actors and structures encounter and mutually create and recreate perceptions of responsibility and of what environmentally friendly activities can be performed. Ecological action space has a time dimension, in the sense that what is done here and now is based on previous experiences and actions, and simultaneously influences further activities. One’s ecological action space communicates with all other roles an individual may have, such as citizen, consumer, employee, householder, activist, and parent. There may be different rationales and motives for acting in the different roles, which the individual has to manage when living her or his everyday life and choosing among alternatives for how to act. The householder has to be understood as situated.

This is a multi-disciplinary thesis. The fact that I have drawn on several theoretical contributions and schools in this thesis requires that I delve into the relationship between them, especially since theory can imply various things in a research process, mainly depending on different ontological and epistemological approaches. Giddens states that he takes theory to be conceptualizations, and: “conceptual schemes that order and inform processes of inquiry into social life are in large part what ‘theory’ is and what it is for” (Giddens 1989: preface). This is how structuration theory will be used in this thesis – to conceptualize and analyze observed human behavior. It is distinct from the way I will use the explicitly normative theory of ecological citizenship (Dobson 2003) for example, which concerns how citizens ought to act - which I relate to more as a point of reference concerning how previous studies have placed expectations on householders. Nevertheless, it does not mean that I do not consider that structuration theory has normative implications as well. Concerning ecological modernity, as has been mentioned, it can be both a normative theory as well as an analytical tool to analyze the current society, and it is in the latter sense that it will be used here. The feminist contributions that I have used have played the role of highlighting possible differences between humans depending on gender, concerning expectations, and who is doing what.
The questions posed in the first chapter were:

- How is ecological action space (re)created through interaction between actors and structures?
- How do householders reason about nature, environmental problems, and risks?
- What household activities are considered environmentally friendly by municipalities and householders?
- How do householders conceive of responsibilities for the environment, and how do they (attempt to) exert political influence?
- How do the householders conceive of their opportunities to act in environmentally friendly ways, and what constraints are there?

These questions will be dealt with in chapters 4–7. Since ecological action space concerns the environment and opportunities for environmentally friendly behavior as a householder, the municipality is a central system, which will be discussed in chapter 4. As mentioned above, modernization processes often distinguish between humans and nature, and human activities are believed to contribute to environmental problems and destruction in nature. It follows that if humans change their practices, these problems can be alleviated. This is the reason why chapter 5 focuses on how the studied householders perceive nature, while also providing descriptions of environmental problems and of the environmental effects of human activities. This relates to the theoretical discussions in this chapter concerning modernization, trust, and risk. Through daily interaction with others, individual actors may come to trust certain others or even whole systems, while distrusting others and developing risk awareness. In chapter 6, the focus shifts to everyday household activities, and how activities perceived to be environmentally friendly fit in. This concerns the theoretical discussions presented in this chapter, concerning the politicization of everyday doings and the perceived preconditions for and constraints on environmentally friendly acts undertaken by householders. Through the mutual influence between actors and structures, individuals actively contribute to their own ecological action space through agency, while the structures influence actors by imposing constraints. The politicization of everyday doings connects everyday life with political participation. As mentioned earlier, participation is a central theme in documents on sustainable development, which is why chapter 7 is devoted to different forms of participation. Participation relates to the theoretical discussions of ecological citizenship, distinctions between acting as a citizen and as a consumer, the traditional dichotomy between private and
public, and for whom householders believe they have responsibilities in this interconnected world.

Before delving into the empirical material in chapters 4–7, I will go through the methodological decisions that were made for this thesis in chapter 3.
3. Methods and material for reflection on everyday activities

Sustainable development is complex. For the reader to be able to evaluate this study, I will review the methodology applied and outline the reasoning underlying my process of researching this multifaceted issue. The chapter is structured as follows. First, I describe the general points of departure and how theory and ethical perspectives influenced the study. Then I move on to how I selected the studied municipalities and households, how I chose the methods, and performed the study. Finally, I describe how I analyzed this material to arrive at the results.

Method has been described as theoretically informed practice, which directs one’s attention to the interaction between theory and the planning and performance of a research study. It is important to apply a reflexive approach, to problematize how the methods used to describe the world also contribute to how reality is represented (Atkinson & Coffey 2001:807; cf. Giddens 1989). Theory, method, and the presentation of findings and conclusions are thus intimately connected. Furthermore, this project is multidisciplinary, incorporating various influences from fields such as political science concerning policies, responsibility, the limitations of policies and politics, and the distinction between private and public—this last matter also being highlighted in feminist theory. My undergraduate studies in anthropology contributed an awareness of culture and the exoticizing of everyday practices, while time geography influenced the initial methodological approach.

Points of departure

Starting from the view that most everyday activities affect our resource management, certain methods are more suitable than others to capture what people do in their everyday lives. The aim of visualizing what is taken for granted may be attained by exoticizing the mundane. This is an important aspect of the current study, which deals with Swedish householders’ habits and activities. Structuration theory—also drawn on here—has major ontological and therefore methodological implications. Giddens claims that social science can have a transformative impact on subjects (Giddens 1989: 71).
The theory connects what may be captured and studied and how social theories are embedded in the society and reality we are studying.

The theories and findings of the social sciences cannot be kept wholly separate from the universe of meaning and action which they are about. (Giddens 1989:xxxii)

However, this “double hermeneutic” can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, which implies that social theories have practical and political consequences (Giddens 1989:xxxv; cf. Haraway 1988; Lister 2003). Sustainable development and environmental concern are often portrayed as areas about which people want to be politically correct. Giddens claims that to be able to name something correctly is to be able to talk about it correctly, and he continues:

The durée of daily life, or of activity can be bracketed by a reflexive moment when someone is asked by another to supply a reason of certain features of her activity. (Giddens 1989:73)

I take this point to be important for the interview situation.

The details of everyday life

Literary genres have emphasized the details of everyday life and the multitude of activities carried out during the course of a day, the thoughts that arise, the smells, the experiences thought of and lived, the people met, the opinions provoked in different situations, and the resources used or maintained. In a similar way, these are the matters social science deals with. How is it possible for a researcher to grasp the multitude of details that together make up our everyday lives, or to master the methodological tools needed to do this? This study builds on an attempt to map all the activities carried out by 64 household members in four different Swedish municipalities, namely, Gothenburg, Huddinge, Växjö, and Piteå. To ask the householders to constantly record their actions and describe them as thoroughly as possible was one way to approach this task. Although I have attempted to circumvent some of the difficulties, I assume that some of their habits and activities have been hidden or considered unimportant by the householders in completing the time diaries and in interviews. The

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results will probably differ depending on whether we focus on individuals or on how they negotiate. When the household members organize their everyday lives together, individual intentions can be subsumed. This is important when people live together, using and creating shared resources.

For this study, interviews and time diaries were chosen as methods for highlighting human everyday practices. I performed an initial interview in each household, and all household members above the age of 12 who agreed to keep time diaries for 2–7 days; in most cases I performed a follow-up interview as well. The first aim was to map and visualize the relationship between the activities described and the resources used for them, and to reveal the underlying intentions and motives for the same activities. Interviews were performed to gather the householders’ own descriptions, interpretations, and explanations of how they organized their everyday activities and of where the sustainable activities fit into this organization. Through their descriptions, I attempted to develop an interpretation of the context and meaning of sustainable development. Together with the householders, I created the empirical basis of what should be reported and analyzed. The time diaries were partly analyzed during the follow-up interview with the householders, in which they were asked about additional opportunities for sustainable activities they could have taken advantage of, and how these additional activities would have affected their resource management and the environment. Of course, the interviewees will not reflect on everything. I take as my departure point Atkinson and Coffey’s statement:

We need … to appreciate that interviews are occasions in which are enacted particular kinds of narratives and in which “informants” construct themselves and others as particular kinds of moral agents. (Atkinson & Coffey 2001:808)

Since many sustainable activities and participating as an ecological citizen demand reflection, it has been vital to investigate what aspects the householders take for granted, what they feel they have influence over and responsibility for, and what resources they use. A methodological dilemma in research into private aspects concerns how to grasp the taken-for-granted parts and what is not articulated (Giddens 1989).

The initial interview concentrated on the interviewees’ backgrounds and preconditions in terms of resources, available technical appliances, occupations, dwelling places, spare time activities, and memberships in any associations. This relates to the point of departure that “having is important for doing” (Shove 2003; Freeman 2004). During the initial interview, the time diaries were handed out and the instructions given, along with a

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postage-paid envelope. I brought dinner to most interviews as a form of compensation for the time spent writing the diaries. The diaries were followed up in the second interview, in which they served as a basis for discussion. I recorded the interviews unless the householders requested this not be done. In a few cases, however, the tape recorder malfunctioned and the interviews were not recorded anyway. The recorded interviews were transcribed, and in the cases of the unrecorded interviews, I relied on the notes taken during the interviews. Since the analysis focuses on what was said rather than how, relying on notes does not entail any major problems, although it would have been better had all sessions been recorded (see p. 98 for an overview of the complete material).

The methodological approach used here was inspired by time geography, which explores “factors that limit or that create opportunities for human beings’ actions in their physical environment” (Westermark 1997:12). Depending on the perspective, a person’s possibilities and constraints are analyzed in relation to his or her “total space of possibilities” or “perceived space of possibilities” (Ellegård 1999). Householders’ activities may be both conscious and intentional, or less so. A particular activity may signify different things to different people in different contexts. Ascribed meaning may also differ based on who carries out what activities on what grounds, and what alternatives are expressed as reasonable. With a holistic approach, householders’ roles in different situations, such as consumer, parent, child, employee, and apartment owner, are highlighted and incorporated (Ellegård & Nordell 1997:24; Casimir & Dulith 2003:322).

When attempting to capture the context of different everyday activities, it is valuable to focus on their interrelation. Different activities are linked to each other, in the sense that one activity may have to be carried out in order to do something else. An example would be taking the car to go to the movies, or taking the bus to the grocery store to buy food for the family. The fact that an activity takes time does not necessarily mean that it is important in itself to the householder, but that other activities have been pushed aside or facilitated by it. Certain activities can be carried out simultaneously, such as listening to the radio while doing the dishes or baby sitting. Others can only be performed sequentially, such as starting the washing machine and letting it run before hanging out the clean laundry to dry (Spaargaren 2000; Ellegård 2001). By the same token, ecological and sustainable activities can be prioritized or prevented by other activities, but also by the householders’ perceived responsibilities, division of labor, or life goals, all of which are influenced by cultural norms and material conditions. Thereby, the contexts of individual
activities are important if we are to understand the householders’ sustainable actions. According to Spaargaren and Vliet (2000), household members purchase technical household appliances to reorganize and streamline household tasks. This streamlining is expected to result in greater opportunities to perform other activities. An assumption on which they base their analysis is that people want to free themselves of “high-frequency-low-esteem” duties, that “it is about the freeing of domestic agents from fixed time-space slots in everyday life” (Douglas & Isherwood 1996, cited in Spaargaren & Vliet 2000:67). However, there is another set of appliances that I would argue are as related to “showing off” as to convenience (e.g., espresso machines and complex juice presses), which in turn are connected to being able to enjoy a pleasurable life. To understand ecological actions in the studied householders’ everyday lives, our attention should be on the meaning of the consumption and purchase of many of these appliances: to do that we need “thick” descriptions of their everyday lives. Shove (2003; cf. Aune 2007) has focused successfully on the importance of understanding the subtle projects of everyday life, such as keeping the home cozy and creating comfort. However, capturing these aspects of the analysis can be a challenge connected to what householders claim that they want to, can, and actually do. As mentioned, I start from the idea that many activities take place within the interviewees’ homes as part of a socio-technical system.

Illustration of the materiality of a pleasurable everyday life (Illustration Espressomaskiner 2008).

The goal and intention of environmentally friendly behavior is thus challenged by the everyday goal of creating coziness and comfort. The relationship between people’s expressed intentions and media coverage of environmental problems has been highlighted, indicating that many people may have learned to talk about the environment without having changed their commitment to initial patterns of behavior (Scott & Willits 1994:255; cf. Jamison 2001). Since many green activities take place behind the closed doors of the household, it is also difficult to control whether the interviewees’ intentions indeed correlate with their actions.

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Methods

**Thick descriptions: of what?**

Ethnography is a descriptive practice focusing on creating data rather than theory, even if theoretical assumptions and frameworks influence the process of data collection (Björklund & Hannerz 1983). To perform an ethnographic study, however, details that are usually neglected in everyday life have to be systematized (Agrosino 2005). Through thick descriptions (Geertz 1973), researchers as authors/writers are expected to visualize humans, situations, and places to analyze what is said and done more thoroughly, and for the reader to follow the arguments properly. This is closely related to an understanding of analysis as the interpretation of people’s everyday lives as they live them (Agrosino 2005:vi). This still leaves the question, however, of what a researcher should focus on in these thick descriptions, especially since everyday life is so complex. For example, it is important to note possible explanations that are not stated, as well as those that are explicitly articulated.

In the study, I focused on municipal policy instruments aimed at influencing household activities, since it is the Swedish municipalities who are responsible for implementing the political goals of sustainable development. The Local Government Act (SFS 1991:900) gives the municipalities autonomy, which means that they can largely develop the content of the policies themselves. The municipalities take part in constructing the conditions within which the inhabitants live and act.

Municipal policies and policy instruments interact with householders’ everyday practice: the key question is where the householders experience and encounter municipal intentions, and what aspects of this are important for analysis. I have chosen to focus on the descriptions that responsible municipal officials shared with me in informal interviews, since they highlight the strategies used to reach and influence householders and their activities. The formal documents the municipalities produced are also important. For this study, I chose local Agenda 21 documents and/or municipal environmental policies, municipal websites, and certain informational folders picked up at information centers—just as the inhabitants would be able to.

Municipal websites have come to be important to municipalities in their efforts to disseminate information to and communicate with their citizens. They are central to policy work, and most documents that govern municipal work and activities are published on them. Various declarations
of intention are found on them as well. Although these websites may not have received attention from the interviewed householders, I consider them to be the official space where the municipalities communicate their messages and strategies to their citizens, and publicize the prioritized issues. I have searched websites for suggestions, directed towards households, concerning sustainable activities and environmental measures and for the arguments justifying them. Then, I have attempted to analyze the policy instruments set forth on the websites. The analysis of the municipal websites should not be considered as a complete examination of all documents, since I have searched specifically for those related to sustainable development; in other words, there may well be more documents. An interesting relationship exists between municipal visions as expressed in policy documents and how these are put into practice and implemented through waste collection fees, available services, transportation conditions, etc. These aspects will receive limited attention here, but are assumed to be important for how the householders interpret and encounter policies for sustainable development. Even if sustainable development were to be mainstreamed in all municipal policy areas, it is reasonable to assume that some policy areas would contradict the vision.

**Interviews: discussions in different directions**

Interviewing was the main research method used in this study. In the interviews, I have applied the understanding that even if someone’s conviction is proved to be empirically wrong, it is still part of his or her social reality and has implications for their actions (Kvale 1997:201). What can be regarded as exaggerated or inaccurate statements can still, from the interviewee’s point of view, be interpreted as expressing their life situation. An interviewee may therefore provide empirically false (in the positivist sense) information, but simultaneously yield valuable knowledge of the production and consequences of the invalid knowledge (Kvale 1997:192). By letting people convey their opinions about their everyday lives (these are always created in particular social and cultural contexts, which is why it may be inaccurate to call them their own), they may highlight the motives and reasons underlying certain activities. This places the focus on how the subjects themselves experience their opportunities to act and on the resources needed and the constraints faced. There is a risk, however, in studies based on interviews and time diaries, that the researcher may display “socially wishful thinking” effects (Nordell 2002:58; my translation), in which the interviewees either over- or underreport or neglect to report certain activities or make cosmetic adjustments to others.
When it comes to environmentally friendly behavior, it is possible that this “effect” will be prevalent, but only relating to what interviewees consider important social norms.

The goal of qualitative interviews is to stimulate a process of reflection. The interview is considered a communicative event in which something new is created and to which both the interviewer and the interviewee contribute (Gubrium & Holstein 2001:12–13; Kvale 1997). During the interview, the participants are constructing subjectivity, or expressing their identity, which is why it is never possible to distill the “authentic” or true opinion of the interviewee. I base my view of the process on the following statement of Witkin’s:

To invite someone to answer questions about what they do and how they do it is … above all to provide a reasonable account of them, to justify them or explain them. Such accounts have a very important contribution to make in the research process. For one thing they provide information about the subject’s own “theories” concerning action, and his or her “ideological” stances on a variety of issues. (Witkin 1994:268)

Witkin emphasizes the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewees, casting it in a good light, and the information the interview contributes. The interview is also a learning experience between the interviewer and the interviewee and between interviewees themselves, if several are interviewed at once (cf. Palojoki 1997:168; Moore 1994). The interviewees who participated in this study had, or seemed to have, a need for confirmation that they were talking about “the right things” when it came to the information they shared. The interview is also characterized by power relationships, where the possibilities to control the re-contextualization of what is said are central (Briggs 1986), a matter that depends on who interviews whom, where, when, and about what (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2003). The interviews can be enriched by confronting the interviewees with alternative opinions and action, allowing different meanings to be clarified through contrasts (Ehn & Löfgren 2001). Methodologically, in the present study this would relate to how the householders are described and represented in the thesis, which resembles the approach used by Miner (1956) in his article about the Nacirema, in which he exoticized the bathroom habits of Americans in the same way as “others” were represented in anthropological literature at the same time.

To build understanding of the strategies the municipalities use to reach and communicate with householders, municipal representatives of the
SHARP research program were interviewed. We discussed the strategies they use to influence householders’ activities for sustainable development, the difficulties experienced in reaching householders, and the current campaigns.

I chose to perform semi-structured interviews, and the strategy was to begin with concrete questions about the householders’ backgrounds, and move towards more abstract questions concerning the environment and development. The interviews usually lasted 45–90 minutes, but some (especially the early ones) lasted 2–3 hours. Since I assumed that many were not familiar with the concept of sustainable development (Barr 2002; Åberg 2004), I had to find appropriate ways to ask questions about it. I chose to focus on “resource management” and “a good life” to enable me to examine sustainable development, and asked what those concepts meant to them. I also asked about who they believed was responsible for environmental problems and societal development, and what opportunities they felt they had to act to reduce negative environmental impact through their household activities.

While writing the interview questions, I was influenced by the attention paid in anthropology to the distinction and relationship between *saying* something and *doing* something, a distinction usually noted in participatory observations. This led me to contrast answers to the questions “When do you do XX?” and “Describe a situation when you cannot do it.” In this way, I attempted to grasp how they described the activities they did and believed they ought to do, as well as the motives or constraints that impinged on these activities.

*Time diaries: to record and articulate the details of everyday life*

Many studies of sustainable development have investigated expressed willingness to perform various sustainable activities rather than focusing on what people do and why (or why not). By using both time diaries and interviews, I aimed to bridge the gap between choices and actions. The method is activity oriented and has been developed by Ellegård and Nordell (1997) to visualize, describe, and analyze everyday life. However, situations in which people feel that they do or do not have a choice are hidden, and these are asked for in the interviews. In the time diaries, the householders were asked to keep track of all activities in columns for time, place, activity, who they performed the activity with, whether they used resources or technology, and comments. Completing the diaries became a self-reporting activity. Activities that may not make it into the diary are those not considered socially acceptable. A previous study demonstrated
that activities considered sustainable, such as sorting waste, are thoroughly integrated with other activities and difficult to isolate (Mannberg et al. 2004). As previously mentioned, theory and methods are intimately connected. Giddens (1989:111) criticizes the view that humans have a limited capacity to participate in more than one task at once even if they take the time. He contradicts the view of Hägerstrand, the founder of time geography, by claiming that:

Agents are regarded as purposive beings in the sense that their activities are guided by “projects” which they pursue.

(Giddens 1989:116)

Giddens also claims that all types of constraint can also be types of opportunity for action (Giddens 1989), and hence must be empirically derived.

In qualitative studies, it is the extent of observed activities rather than the number of people interviewed that give the study validity, according to Kvale (1997). Time diaries highlight activity patterns, movements, and social interaction (if they are completed thoroughly). In the current study, time diaries were primarily used as a basis for the follow-up interview in which the householders reflected on why they behaved as they did, and whether they could have behaved differently. The diary could recap routines and habits that are integrated in the everyday activities, giving a more profound understanding of choices in the interviews. “Diaries reveal how decisions in daily life come about in a particular physical environment with specific social and cultural characteristics,” states Westermark (1997:3). The diary may also be viewed as “closely approximating the everyday practical activities” (Palojoki 1997:217), although writing down everything is impossible. However, by using both time diaries and interviews, descriptions of the householders’ everyday lives are created that build our understanding of how they use, create, and manage resources. Additional dimensions are the division of labor and the gendered characteristics of activities, discernable at an aggregated level or when the time diaries of householders who live together are compared (Ellegård 2003:19).

Researchers who have used time diaries in their studies have noted that women generally include more activities in them or complete them more thoroughly than men do. It is possible to view keeping a time diary as a way women can be noticed and recognized for what they do, which may result in more activities being written down, though it is also possible that women have more complex and discontinuous activity patterns. Time
diaries may be considered a form of narrative material, in the present case, conveying how the householders talk about their everyday lives. As already emphasized, it is clearly important not only to investigate what activities people claim they perform and with what resources and technology, but also to understand how they perform them. If a person writes that she is grocery shopping, it is equally significant to know what store she decides to visit, how she gets there, what products she purchases, and, of course, how much. She can choose a vegetarian menu over a meat-based menu, fair-trade products, ecologically certified products, or healthy products. She may even consider how the animals have been treated and where the products have been produced. None of the time diaries was this specific or particular, and that is why interviews were useful. Even though some time diaries were very detailed and specific, the participants tended to focus on certain areas in which they expected me to be interested, such as using elevators. The diaries may contain reflections on resource use, though this does not necessarily mean that these reflections affect their activities—something that is impossible to determine in this study.

I had to adapt the time diary method, since what renders an activity environmentally friendly is sometimes how you perform it, such as how you use water, how you wash your car, or what groceries you purchase. The addition of a “how question” did not, however, prompt much broader descriptions (I had told the householders that this question was only relevant in some cases). The form of the time diaries with small boxes compelled the householders to record specific activities in sequence. From the activities recorded, it is sometimes possible to deduce the resources on which the activities relied, for example, when Catherine wrote that she took the train to work in the “What I do” box. It was thus impossible to be strict when reading the contents of the boxes: two “interpreters” are involved, in one case the householder and in the other the researcher. Yet, in retrospect I believe that I had some implicit expectation that the contents of the boxes would convey more, and in light of the results I had to reconsider these expectations. The variation between householders in how they completed the diaries was major. An ideal of reflection is implicit in the act of keeping the diaries as well, based on the notion that first we visualize and then change a behavior. The householders do not seem to have been selectively “showing off”; irregularities or omissions in the diaries are more connected with what activities the householders considered worth recording. Notably, it does not seem that they over-recorded many environmentally friendly activities.
The follow-up interviews, unlike the first interview, started by asking about the activities recorded in the time diaries, followed by additional questions about the interviewees’ choices and opportunities to change their activity patterns. I asked whether they had noticed any patterns in their diaries, and whether in retrospect they had recalled anything that they had not recorded. The latter question gave me valuable input that influenced how the form was subsequently developed, while yielding information on activities that had been intentionally left out or forgotten. I also asked whether writing the diary had affected their behavior during the course of the day. With the help of the diaries as a basis for reflection, I also asked whether there were any situations in which they could reduce their resource consumption or change their practices. Through this set of questions, I implicitly referred to the notion that their everyday habits had to change. Unlike Ellegård and Nordell (1997), who used the diaries to change individuals’ life situations in their study Att byta vanmakt mot egenmakt [Exchanging powerlessness for power over your situation], the subjects of this study did not participate primarily to change their habits and routines. However, the aspect of change needs attention because the time diary was used to help the householders reflect on their everyday lives and on the potentially sustainable alternatives there were for the recorded activities.

In the interviews, the household members’ opinions, statements, and descriptions are related to what is culturally imaginable, remarkable, and suitable (Atkinson & Coffey 2001:810; Billing 1990; Hobbs & Agar 1982). People learn, consciously and unconsciously, what are more or less culturally accepted ways to express themselves (DeVault 1990:100). What they say always has to be interpreted in relation to their social surroundings and previous experiences. As well, our understanding of phenomena in the world is influenced, though not entirely determined, by language. This theoretical point of departure has methodological implications for interviews, which are

… always grounded in and dependent upon culturally shared
and often tacit assumptions about how to express and
understand feelings, beliefs and intentions, what to notice or
attend to and how to evaluate experience. (Witkin 1994:266)

These considerations of course relate to socialization, culture, and discourse. During the interviews, the householders were able to express themselves and represent groups to which they belonged, for example, when they stated “we immigrants” or “we as environmental nerds.” To come to grips with sustainable development it is valuable to grasp people’s
whole life situations. To understand the context shaping the interviewees’ opinions and activity patterns, it was valuable to ask them to talk about their lives and experiences. The importance of placing individuals in their contexts, especially their family histories, is described by Miller as follows:

> Even though most people live most of their lives in families, mainstream social research works under the illusion that humans are isolated individuals anchored only within large aggregate collectivities. (Miller 2000:x)

Miller emphasizes the importance of placing individuals in social as well as historical contexts, in which both past and present merit attention. A common question when it comes to studies of sustainable development and the environment concerns normativity and whether interviewees attempt to present themselves as “better” people in an area about which many people believe it is important to be “politically correct” (Beck 1996). This question concerns authenticity, or whether people really tell the truth about their activities and opinions. How I dealt with this in the present study was to assume that the interviewees told me a mixture of what they did and what they wanted to do. This in turn relates to the identity work that took place during the interviews; for example, 22-year-old Desiree described herself as follows:

> Desiree: The environment to me—I wouldn’t say that I am the kind of a person who exaggerates about sorting paper or buying the right kind of milk. But I am somewhat conscious of it, and I do sort paper and glass containers. But it is not like I make compost.

In describing herself, Desiree refers to the activities that she finds it reasonable to perform. Taking as a reference point that “all of us, women and men, give selective, strategically crafted accounts of our lives and actions” (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2003:65) during interviews, it becomes less important, in a way, whether interviewees portray themselves as more environmentally friendly or more politically correct. Instead, I will pay attention to how they describe situations in which they cannot live up to the norms they espouse due to constraints. For example, note how the householders may start to defend themselves against an imagined “other,” and how they express implicit values against which they position themselves. To deal with a normative topic during an interview, it is possible to redirect the moral responsibility from the interviewee to a third person (Hydén personal communication 05.03.15). Through the stories of others, or how others behave, it is possible to distil a norm. Here it is possible to redirect the moral responsibility from the interviewee to a third person (Hydén personal communication 05.03.15). Through the stories of others, or how others behave, it is possible to distil a norm. Here it is
important for the researcher to allow the householders to define themselves, and not to place them in predefined niches, and to interpret the householders’ reality as they construct it. In studies of environmental attitudes and behavior, it is important to ask “why” questions, though this practice is questioned by some researchers, since it may generate pre-interpreted descriptions. This need may be related to a common ideal in much of environmental studies of the active, reflective, and knowledgeable citizen (Lidskog & Elander 1999).

The interview situation and the interaction between participants

When I entered Gunnar and Greta’s apartment I was met with the smell of pine trees. Greta excused the smell and said that they had had fish for dinner the previous night, so she had attempted to hide the bad smell with air freshener. She wanted to get rid of the smell for my visit.

This is an excerpt from my notes on the first interview with Gunnar and Greta, one of the studied households in Gothenburg. All interviews, except one, took place at the householders’ homes. The aim was to situate and Greta, one of the studied households in Gothenburg. All interviews, except one, took place at the householders’ homes. The aim was to situate the householders’ reality as they construct it. In studies of environmental attitudes and behavior, it is important to ask “why” questions, though this practice is questioned by some researchers, since it may generate pre-interpreted descriptions. This need may be related to a common ideal in much of environmental studies of the active, reflective, and knowledgeable citizen (Lidskog & Elander 1999).

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If more than one household member was present in the interview, their interaction and negotiation with each other were observed. A general analysis of group interviews focuses on who answers what question and who expresses or wants to express competence (knowledge claims). It is impossible, however, to assume that the interaction observed during the interview is the very same as the interaction that occurs at other times. The goal of interviewing all the household members at the same time was to uncover negotiations and common opinions. Agreeing to participate in an interview study is equivalent to handing over some power, Schwalbe and Wolkomir state (2003:58). Letting all household members participate in an interview may give them a way to support each other and manage any power asymmetries that may arise between the interviewer and the interviewees (Personal communication Friberg 05.03.03). Simultaneously, their participation in the study should indicate that they have valuable knowledge to share. In analyzing and interpreting what was said, it is the researcher’s responsibility to give as profound an understanding as possible.
of the interviewees’ perspectives, so they can recognize themselves in the description.

In conclusion, the interview situation is dynamic. It is not only householders who are expected to answer questions, but the interviewer as well, as the interviewees find new arguments and new ways to articulate their thoughts. According to this perspective, the interviewer is not a “can opener” who opens up a sealed can (the interviewee) and empties it (Kvale 1997). The interview is considered a shared knowledge production process, open to negotiation, exercise of power, and socialization.

**Material and a short description of the municipalities**

The main focus of sustainable development efforts in the four municipalities was the householders’ everyday habits and practices. However, in three of the municipalities I added a specific local focus, i.e., radon, walking school buses, and stormwater, derived during the research process due to my increased understanding of field conditions. During the study period, all four municipalities had Social Democrat majorities on their municipal councils, though working in cooperation with the Left Party and/or the Green Party.

The aim of the case study in Gothenburg was to gain as broad an overview as possible of municipal sustainable development policies and interpretations of these in the households. I concentrated on the activities the household members said that they performed, wanted to perform, or were unable to perform due to various constraints. In Gothenburg, many households were recruited from a single city district, since I wanted a sample that was subject to everyday municipal conditions that were as uniform as possible concerning exposure to policies and campaigns, which city districts have the freedom to create. The overall aim of the recruitment was for the sampled households to have different numbers of members of different ages and genders and to have different living situations (i.e., house versus apartment). The households were contacted in various ways, for example, through personal networks, through employees in the environmental departments of the municipalities, and through letters sent to 25 households in two different streets in Lundby city district where two households were recruited. I posted an advertisement at two libraries, which recruited one household. The aim of the letter was to find households that only knew about my study from the information in the letter, which focused on habits, activities, and resources (see Attachment
interpreted and dealt with, health, trust, and risk perceptions. How the
concerns areas such as information dissemination, how information is
Objectives and the Public Health Goals mention radon. This matter also
national and local policies, since both the Swedish Environmental
the radon levels in their dwellings measured. The aim was to integrate

A total of 29 interviews were performed in Gothenburg from November
2004 to June 2005. In Huddinge, I chose to focus specifically on transportation, in
particular on the “walking school bus” campaign. This meant that I
searched for households with children of preschool and school age. I
delivered 48 invitations to participate to postboxes in a housing area in
central Huddinge called Solgårds; one of these contacted households replied
that it was willing to participate. Just as in the other municipalities, I got
valuable help from the contact person for the research program, who gave
me a list of households that had participated in the walking school bus
campaign; one household from this list agreed to participate. The contact
person negotiated with another household, which also agreed to participate.
I recruited a fourth household by handing out requests and informing
parents who left their children at a school that was involved in the
campaign, in the morning. In Huddinge, 14 householders from four
households were interviewed and 1 municipal employee, for a total of 15
people. 4 people kept time diaries and 1 follow-up interview was
performed. During the interview with the fourth household, I let the
household members complete the time diary for the day of the interview as
a basis for further questions. Two households withdrew from participation
after the initial interview, and we never managed to arrange a follow-up
interview with the third household within a reasonable time. In Huddinge, a
total of 6 interviews were performed from September 2005 to February
2006.

In Piteå municipality, I decided to recruit households that had had
the radon levels in their dwellings measured. The aim was to integrate
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who helped me recruit, they tended to describe my project as an
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being interested. In Gothenburg, I performed initial interviews with 14
households containing a total of 23 people. Of these 14 households, 11
submitted 19 time diaries, and it was the subjects who completed these
whom I met in follow-up interviews. Nine of these live in Lundby city
district. I interviewed 28 people in total in Gothenburg, comprising 23
household representatives, 38 one politician, and four municipal employees.

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householders whose houses contained elevated radon levels decided to deal with this finding was also considered interesting (whether they remodeled their houses, moved, etc.). Piteå municipality maintained lists of the addresses of households where radon levels were measured and where elevated levels were found; these are public documents and were used for the recruitment. There were 118 addresses on the lists, and most were detached houses. In an apartment building in which high radon levels had been measured, the municipal employee suggested that I contact people in person. The recruitment material used here did not focus on radon, but contained the same information as in the other municipalities—i.e., it mentioned activities, habits, and resources. I contacted several households in which most of the householders were elderly, one of which agreed to participate. After having sent 25 letters to households on the radon investigation list without receiving any positive replies, I tried a new approach. I sent another 25 invitation letters to 25 new households containing the same information, apart from stating that I would call them after which I contacted the recipients by phone and asked whether they wanted to participate. All but one household gave me a negative reply (most of those contacted were elderly). Since I needed more households, I tried a third approach in which I sent 23 invitation letters, to another 23 households containing the same information, after which I contacted the recipients in person at their homes. I talked to all the householders who were at home, and was able to recruit one more household. A fourth household was contacted after contact with the municipal employee responsible for radon in the municipality. In Piteå, a total of 14 people were interviewed in eight interviews, and 12 householders kept time diaries in January and April 2006. Three follow-up interviews were performed. We never managed to arrange a follow-up interview with the fourth household within a reasonable time.

I chose to focus specifically on stormwater in Växjö, since this relates to one of the research areas in the research program. I undertook directed recruitment in the town of Växjö and in the nearby countryside. In the countryside, I delivered 30 invitation letters containing information to mailboxes along a road approximately 10 kilometers outside Växjö, which resulted in two households agreeing to participate. I also posted some advertisements in student residences at the university campus, at a grocery store, and at the main library; these did not result in any replies. Through personal contacts, I found two more households that agreed to participate and the municipal civil servant recruited two more households on my behalf. In Växjö, a total of 14 people were interviewed in 11 interviews,
and 10 time diaries were submitted. The interviews were performed in May and August 2006.

In all municipalities, many householders who were contacted declined to participate. When I talked to them on the phone or in person at their homes, most of them stated that they did not have time, that they had nothing to contribute, or that they had participated in previous projects. I lack information as to why those I contacted by letter declined to participate, but assume that they had similar reasons. There were some similarities and differences among the households that agreed to participate. All of them represent a Swedish context, although the specific municipal conditions differ. When I have focused on a specific area - stormwater, radon, or walking school buses, these matters were in addition to the overall focus on everyday activities with implications for sustainable development. The case study in Gothenburg was the first and largest of the four studies. The first case study did not have a specific additional focus as to the overall focus on everyday activities with implications for sustainable development. The first case study did not have a specific additional focus as the later ones did, but had a more open approach to various aspects of sustainable development, which provided useful baseline information when I moved on to the later case studies.

**Limitations, recruitment, and choice of households**

A basic assumption when recruiting householders was that everyone’s everyday life is worthy of study when it comes to sustainable development, and that everyone has something to contribute (Ellegård & Wihlborg 2001:25). The fact that different social groups may have different attitudes to resources and perform different environmentally friendly activities has been considered before (Pipping Ekström & Shanahan 1999:149; Barr 2002). Since I have attempted to obtain a diverse sample of householders, I will be able to highlight a range of possible ways to deal with and interpret responsibilities for sustainable development and for the environment, as well as how the similarities between activities transcend the differences between municipalities. This does not, however, mean that I will find any “saturation” in the quantitative sense, when it comes to how to interpret policies and environmental activities.

The context in which the everyday life of the householders takes place is given form by social and physical structures, and permeated by policies and political regulations. The municipal context is one example of this. The municipality is considered a political unit with geographical boundaries that can facilitate access to certain resources, while concurrently obstructing householders from acting in environmentally friendly ways. The four Swedish municipalities where the households were
recruited for this study—Gothenburg, Huddinge, Växjö, and Piteå—were chosen jointly by the researchers in the research program “Sustainable Households: Attitudes, Research, Policies” (SHARP), of which this study is part. The criteria on which this choice was based were that we needed four municipalities that exemplified different household conditions in different geographical circumstances, such as countryside versus city, inland versus coastal areas, and the number of municipal environmental campaigns and measures launched. Municipal size was considered important for the statistical components of the program, which meant that small municipalities were not considered. In many municipalities in northern Sweden, consumers pay less tax on electricity, so the electricity tax in Piteå is lower than in Huddinge, for example. Piteå municipality was chosen to meet the requirements of a related project in the program examining “green” electricity consumption. Such factors that affected choice of studied municipalities were beyond my control.

In Gothenburg, the chairperson of the environmental board and an energy advisor were interviewed, to increase our understanding of how they reasoned about householders’ opportunities and responsibilities to act in support of sustainable development and of the means they felt could be used to influence householders. Since all household interviews in Gothenburg came to be related to waste management and recycling, I made a study visit to the Gothenburg waste management company, Renova. For half a day I accompanied a waste management worker who emptied the containers for recyclable newspaper; I was able to observe the 15 different recycling stations we visited and talk to him about his experiences. These interviews were mainly used to increase the understanding of the municipal context and in turn improve the interview questions for the householders.

When recruiting the households, I could have chosen to focus on whether the householders wanted to change their resource management, since this is an important aspect of sustainable development. I instead chose to focus on the existing habits and routines, in order to extract their attitudes to change. This approach had implications for the recruitment process, since most people found the explicit aim of the project to be vague. Obviously, people’s reasons for participating have implications for their contributions and how they reflect on their diaries, for example. Those who participated mainly did so for two reasons, either because they wanted to be kind or because they were curious. These reasons for participating differed from those stated in some previous studies, for example, that performed by Nordell (2002) examining women living with constant pain, who gained something personally from participating and writing time diaries. The informants in the present study had a preconceived idea of
what would interest the researcher. In general, informants should feel that their contributions actually make a difference (Kvale 1997), and there was a risk in the present case that the participants may not have shared my interest in their everyday lives, which they may not have deemed relevant to research.

It is both impossible and unethical to force people to participate in a research study. Recruiting householders who were willing to participate in the study required extensive time and effort, especially since there were many who did not want to participate. The following criteria and different methods directed this process. In all cases, the contact people for the research program in the municipalities were of great help in suggesting areas and networks with possible participants. In all four municipalities, I performed a directed selection of households, and one of the criteria was that all members of a given household should be willing to participate. In some cases in which the children did not want to participate, I asked the parents to participate anyway.
Table 1. The householders

The symbol X¤ in the interview boxes indicates that the interview was not recorded. The numbers in the time diary boxes indicate how many activities were noted/how many days the diaries covered. BR in the dwelling box indicates that the householders owned their own apartment. The names have been changed for reasons of confidentiality, according to standard procedure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household members</th>
<th>Municipality/Area</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Dwelling (Apartment or Detached House)</th>
<th>Sex Female = F, Male = M</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Intro. Interview</th>
<th>Follow-up Interview</th>
<th>Time diary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AG Gothenburg</td>
<td>Angus V. Frölunda</td>
<td>Middle aged</td>
<td>Apart.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>Middle aged</td>
<td>Apart.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>On sick leave</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Apart.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>BG Gothenburg</td>
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<td>Middle aged</td>
<td>House</td>
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<td>Administrator</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X¤ 194/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>BG Gothenburg</td>
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<td>Middle aged</td>
<td>House</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X¤ 130/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>CH Huddinge</td>
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<td>House</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>House</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Apart.</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Care giver</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>174/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>EG</td>
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<td>Economist</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Iris Lundby</td>
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<td>House F</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>131/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna Lundby</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Apart. F</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karl Lundby</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Apart. M</td>
<td>Guard/Engineer</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>312/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karolina Central</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Apart. F</td>
<td>Teacher &amp; student</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>270/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim Central</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Apart. M</td>
<td>In daycare</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillemor Majorna</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Apart. F</td>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>204/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Maria Solberg</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>Parental leave</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Solberg</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Care giver</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya Solberg</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>In daycare</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minna Solberg</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oscar Södra Pitholm</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Military</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>242/7</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia Södra Pitholm</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>233/7</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ola Södra Pitholm</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olle Södra Pitholm</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pia Norra Pitholm</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>142/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Norra Pitholm</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Occupational therapist</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>142/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrik Norra Pitholm</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>110/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Per Norra Pitholm</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>65/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petronella Norra Pitholm</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>69/7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pia Pitca</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>142/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peter Norra Pitholm</td>
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<td>House M</td>
<td>Occupational therapist</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>142/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrik Norra Pitholm</td>
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<td>House M</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>110/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Per Norra Pitholm</td>
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<td>Student</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>69/7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>House F</td>
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<td>142/7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>X X</td>
<td>110/7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Per Norra Pitholm</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>House M</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>65/7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Petronella Norra Pitholm</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>House F</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>X X</td>
<td>69/7</td>
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</table>
Gothenburg: how the focus shifted to the consequences of consumption

Gothenburg is the second-largest municipality and city in Sweden with 484,942 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden 2005). Located on the west coast, its archipelago contains populated islands and it has a major port with ferry service to Denmark, Norway, and Germany. The trolley network that serves the city is a local feature. Gothenburg has a major university and a technical college that serve as centers of learning and employment. Volvo is another major employer. The major daily newspapers are Göteborgs Posten (GP), Göteborgs Tidningar (GT), and Metro, which have covered recycling and transportation issues (cf. GP 05.03.31).

Various companies are contracted by Gothenburg municipality to manage energy supply, waste disposal, housing, and water treatment. Renova handles waste disposal and recycling. As of spring 2005, there were 450 recycling stations in various locations around the city, and they had become an accepted and integral part of the urban environment. A simple calculation indicates that there was approximately one recycling station for every 1000 inhabitants. The packaging and newspaper collection company, Förpacknings- och tidningsinsamlingen AB, replaced the previous packaging collection company, Förpackningsinsamlingen, in 2005, and is responsible for “combating littering at the recycling stations” (Ftiab 2006). The responsibility for the recycling stations is thus shared by different actors. Gothenburg householders can recycle biological waste for composting, putting it out for collection in specific brown paper bags. Householders living in detached houses can choose between having their waste collected once a week, twice a month, or once a month. The last option was only available for people with particular reasons, and who could demonstrate that they made compost. Hazardous waste is collected at particular depots, called either environmental stations or recycling centers (explained in GP 06.04.04). Environmental stations for hazardous waste are located at approximately 20 different gas stations, while there are four recycling centers (Så här sorterar du ditt avfall Nov 2004). This organization means that people are expected to take the hazardous waste fractions to these depots by car.

According to the Renova website (www.renova.se), there were 430 recycling stations in 2006, which implies that the number has decreased since 2005.
**Huddinge municipality: taking the kids to school and walking school buses**

Huddinge is geographically vast, and is the second largest municipality after Stockholm in Stockholm’s county. It is located south of the capital, on which it borders. According to Statistics Sweden, 88,750 people lived in Huddinge in 2005 (Statistics Sweden 2005). In the city center, people live in family houses and high rises, and in the rural part of the municipality there are many summer houses. Huddinge is characterized by the many transportation routes that traverse the municipality, such as the commuter train, Swedish Railways, and roads for cars. All this traffic means a lot of noise, which is an intractable situation since transportation services should be located near where people live (Interview Pettersson 05.09.16). However, noise does not seem to be a problem that concerns or mobilizes most of the population (ibid.).

School bags, scarves, bicycle helmets, and papers that are supposed to be handed in to the teacher. In front of the Ängsnäs school there is a lot of activity going on. The school is situated at approximately 10–15 minutes walking distance from the center of Huddinge, next to a little forest and a road. It is a quarter to eight in the morning. Next to the school is a kindergarten. On one side of the school area is an industrial area, and heavy traffic passes by, to and from this area. The parents take their kids to school by car, bicycle, or walking, while some kids get off the bus at the bus stop. Some kids show up on their own, others come in groups. One kid is screaming and refuses to get up from the ground where he sits firmly, while his mother tries her best to get him over to the kindergarten. It is cold for the first time in the autumn, and there is frost in the shadows where the sun’s rays don’t reach. I am standing at the entrance of the school, handing out information about my study to the stressed-out parents, attempting to find participants. Most parents hurry by, trying to keep track of all the things their kids need for school. There are as many men as women. Someone hurries back to his car, and head to the nearby recycling station before he gets to work. One parent refuses my invitation to participate in the study about “walking school buses,” claiming to live near the school and not to need to get organized with other parents, someone else by stating that they always take the kids by car to school. My approach and reply is that I want to recruit both parents who are participating in the activity and those who are not, since I want to find arguments for both. While one of
As is obvious from my field notes describing the events going on in front of the school in the morning, taking the kids to school requires that parents get involved in transportation. Having children often means a reorganization of everyday life, according to Ahrne and Roman (1997). Taking the kids to and from school is part of this reorganization. In line with the focus on “walking school buses” in this case study, I chose households with children to participate. Of the four families interviewed, two had participated in the campaign and two were recruited, since they had children of school age or who went to kindergarten. This meant that, unlike in Gothenburg, there was a location-specific focus in the Huddinge case study, which was also why I did not recruit as many households. The interest in general everyday life and activities was still present, however, in addition to the specific focus.

**Piteå municipality: focusing on radon**

Piteå is located by the Baltic Sea in northern Sweden. According to Statistics Sweden, 40,873 inhabitants lived there in 2005 (Statistics Sweden 2005). Although the city designated its first car-free street in 1961 in central Piteå, many inhabitants travel by car in the municipality (Interview Wikman 05.09.07). A freight-only railway line passes through the western parts of the municipality. To travel by train to Stockholm, for example, entails going to Älvsbyn, where the closest station is located, while Kallax airport in Luleå is the nearest airport. The smell from the Kappa Kraftliner pulp mill sometimes affects the city, and the mill’s smoky chimneys are depicted on the front page of the tourist map.

High radon levels in water and buildings are a prioritized public health problem that has received considerable attention in Piteå. The municipality has drawn maps showing the areas with high radon levels. The municipality has bought the apparatus needed to measure radon levels, and offers the citizens measurements for free. This is why radon was chosen as a location-specific focus of this case study, and why I selected householders living in areas or houses with elevated radon levels. Radon is a prioritized area in both the National Environmental Objectives and the...
municipal public health goals. Whether the householders trust the municipal civil servants, whether they think the information they receive is sufficient, and how they have decided to manage the radon in their houses are other issues. The municipal website discusses radon under the public health heading.

Radon is an invisible, odorless radioactive gas. If people breathe air containing radon indoors, the risk of getting lung cancer increases (Piteå 2006e). Radon in the house can come from the ground, water, and construction materials. In Piteå, there are several major areas where radon levels are high. For existing houses, the acceptable limit for radon is 400 Becquerels per square meter. Measurements of radon are made in the winter in stagnant indoor air. Two of the households had measured levels just around the limit of 400 Becquerels per square meter, while two had elevated levels and had to adjust their living arrangements.

Växjö: using water indoors and outdoors
Växjö municipality is in southern Sweden. According to Statistics Sweden, 77,363 people lived there in 2005 (Statistics Sweden 2005). Of the inhabitants, nearly 55,000 live in the city of Växjö, which is surrounded by lakes and farmland. The forest in the area was severely damaged during the storm Gudrun in January 2005. Växjö is the location of Smaland Airport.

In Växjö municipality, the location-specific focus was on stormwater handling from a household perspective. Stormwater becomes polluted from various sources, such as air pollution and traffic emissions. Traffic is the major source of air pollution, from tailpipe emissions, particulate matter from tire wear, and fumes. When people wash their cars, oily substances, metals, and other environmentally hazardous substances are released into the stormwater (Växjö 2006g). Pollution comes both from the chemicals used to wash cars and from what is washed from cars. In response, the local council for environment and public health [Miljö- och hälsoskyddsämnden] has drafted a policy for car washing (Växjö 2006g). Car drivers are encouraged to wash their cars only at special plants, on lawns, or on pebbled streets, but not on asphalt, since the water runs directly into the stormwater sewer, which usually discharges without treatment into nearby lakes and waters. If the car is washed on a lawn or pebbled surface, the water seeps into the ground. Car owners are further encouraged to use mild chemicals and to avoid degreasers (Växjö 2006g).

Stormwater quality has thus been linked to household activities taking place outdoors, although indoor activities using water also have outdoor effects. Water use relates directly to perceptions of private and public, municipal public health goals. Whether the householders trust the municipal civil servants, whether they think the information they receive is sufficient, and how they have decided to manage the radon in their houses are other issues. The municipal website discusses radon under the public health heading.

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through distinctions such as municipal versus “private” water, and through the types of chemicals people use (e.g., shampoo, detergent, washing powder, healthcare products, cleaning materials, and paint) in the household but dispose of in the communal water system through the drains. Six households were recruited, some from within the city and some from the countryside. As well as the location-specific focus on stormwater, the general interest in everyday life and activities remained. The householders were asked to keep time diaries for four days, although some kept them for only two days due to miscommunication.

Municipal sustainable development policies were of interest since they interact with assumptions about how households function and the legitimate ways to attempt to influence household activities. The case studies were based on document analysis of municipal websites, formal environmental policies, and informational folders as well as on interviews with representatives of the four municipal governments.

To analyze the municipal context, I interviewed representatives of the four municipal governments. I also searched through the local Agenda 21 documents and the municipal websites. Even if the municipalities were initially chosen because of their differences from each other, it became apparent they have very similar aims and policies. However, there are certain geographical differences between the municipalities, variations in how the municipalities are organized, and demographic variations (e.g., in the number of inhabitants), which in turn affect services such as transportation systems. Although the representatives expressed the impossibility of actually directly affecting what householders do, they do have the capacity to indirectly influence and structure activities through the location of services, fees, information provision, etc. They can seldom, however, force people to act in certain ways.
### Table 2. Amount of material

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITY</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
<th>No. of people interviewed&lt;sup&gt;40&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>No. of time diary days</th>
<th>No. of activities recorded (average per day)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gothenburg</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23 + 5 = 28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huddinge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14 + 1 = 15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piteå</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13 + 1 = 14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Växjö</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14 + 1 = 15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The difference between the numbers of activities the householders recorded is high. While some of them recorded up to 60–70 activities per day, others noted just a few. The householders were asked to start keeping diaries after the first interview, to continue for 4–7 days in a row, and for the same days if more than one lived together; these instructions were not followed completely. The keeping of time diaries was spread over the year, on all days of the week, describing what is called everyday life.

### Analysis

The aim that guided the analysis was to search for patterns in the material involving both what was common and what was not common. I searched for general tendencies, and attempted to perform a symmetric analysis in the sense that I wanted to notice both opportunities for and constraints on acting in support of sustainable development. The fact that people who had a general interest in environmental issues were recruited makes it interesting to note the constraints faced even by those who are “convinced.” In the following section I will review the specific steps of the analysis.

<sup>40</sup> The age limit for keeping time diaries was 12 years, but often even younger children participated in the interviews.
“Coding is analysis,” states Punch (1998:204); it also concerns, in the present case, the categorization of householder activities. Once again, it should be emphasized that certain activities that are considered sustainable are often incorporated into others, and may not be explicitly expressed in the time diaries (Mannberg et al. 2004). Transcribing the interviews is also part of the analysis and represents “a constructed interpretation of a constructed event” (Lapadat 2000:214). The following describes the choices made when transcribing. Immediately after an interview, it is usual to highlight aspects and themes of the interview material that differ fundamentally from those of other interviews; it is also illuminating to compare these preliminary reactions with later readings of the same material. I made a note of the concepts, themes, and categories I found interesting directly after the interview on a separate paper, in a process called “memoing” (Punch 1998). Then I transcribed the complete interview. “Complete” must be defined, of course. I wrote down all the words that were said and taped, and noted whether the person laughed, left the interview, or picked up something to show me. When I expressed support in some way, or expressed a questioning approach, I noted that as well. Although any transcription never completely represents the interview, this method was sufficient for the analysis performed, and gave an indication of the context in which the interview was performed. When I quote the householders in this thesis, I have removed repetitions and rewritten the sentences in grammatically correct form in order to represent the interviewees as competent people. Translating conversational Swedish into English proved tricky at certain points, when the interviewees used colloquial words or sayings that lack a proper literal translation. I have attempted to translate so as to capture the sense. The goal is to make the analytical process as transparent as possible, to be able to determine whether the conclusions are reasonable (Punch 1998:200). Of course this transparency is also important when comparing the various interviews with each other. The interviews were analyzed concurrently with, and informed by, the reading of theoretical literature. Initially, I searched for shared terms and expressions describing resources for and constraints on acting sustainably; later, I conducted a more “open” search for other categories. I would describe this methodological approach as “abductive” (Kirkeby 1990). I believe this is in line with the idea of theoretically absent others in relation to which a study is developed, and the intertwining of deductive and inductive processes to reach logical interpretations.
The individual interviews and time diaries were initially compared based in terms, for example, of how the householders negotiated if there were several of them, how they expressed themselves about municipal conditions, and the sustainable activities they said they performed, how they said they made decisions, and how they justified their actions. Then the material was compared to that of other households. The categories to which I paid attention at this stage were responsibility and action space (for which the municipal conditions and policy instruments were important), negotiations about resource management, and constraints on and opportunities for realizing visions of sustainable development through everyday activities. As well as analyzing the activity patterns displayed in the time diaries, I also performed content analysis, counting the different activities recorded in the diaries and focusing specifically on what was written, and on the resources and technologies noted as used to perform the different activities. The whole content of the interview was analyzed, concerning, for example, the unanswered questions, and who answered what questions. The aims were to identify routine ways used to answer or describe certain situations, matters that are raised spontaneously, and implicit norms to which the interviewees relate.

The specific method for coding time diaries developed by Ellegård and Nordell, in which individual paths are depicted using a computer program, was not used here. Such illustrations were not considered likely to enrich the specific analysis, as for my purposes how an activity was performed was as important as the fact that it was performed. The fact that such illustrations were not used does not hinder comparison of individual householders, or reflections on the activities they chose to record.

All interviews were conducted and time diaries were written in Swedish. When translating the interviews and the notes in the diaries, I have attempted to capture the tone of the householder rather than make a literal translation. Of course, translation is a challenge, since many words convey more than just their literal meanings, and such nuances are lost in translation. When I describe the illustrations from the interviews that were not translated I note that these accounts are based on interview notes.

**Interpreting the feeling: researchers’ right of interpretation**

The question of whether it is possible to reveal what the householders actually mean “only results in an endless search for an indefinite and fictive unit” (Kvale 1997:203; my translation). Rather, we should focus on who has the right to the expressions and to determine the “real” meaning they convey—the interviewer or the interviewee. In this, I take as my departure
point the view that environmental problems are perceived as real by humans, but as a researcher, I could also regard them as socially constructed. By this I mean that we could have focused on other problems or neglected the area completely; the very act of interpreting environmental problems makes people respond to them in certain ways. I have focused on what the householders think about these problems, what they regard as problems, and how they act in relation to them. That is why both diaries and interviews have been used. What the householders record and describe doing in the diaries is related to the motives they give for their behavior, and these stated motives enrich our understanding of why the householders act as they do. In the analysis, it is also interesting to search for contradictions between the stated ideals and actual practice.

An analysis needs to be systematic, and my analytical criteria are as follows. The analysis has been “brought forward in the interplay between reflection and thought, between empirical material and theory” (Ehn & Löfgren 2001:154; my translation). The analysis was performed using a cultural analysis approach (Ehn & Löfgren 2001). There are, however, no definite descriptions of how to perform cultural analysis. Writing is central, however, “and it is through the text that the interpretation is made possible” (Ehn & Löfgren 2001:165; my translation). To analyze lived experiences, Ehn and Löfgren suggest some strategies: create perspective, contrastation, and dramatization; experiment with different senses; and wait. Creating perspective is about reading off the apparently trivial routines of everyday life and questioning the obvious by attempting to be a stranger to the material. Perspective can be created by thinking of similarities and by moving from abstractions to the concrete, or by labeling the familiar with new names. Contrastation is about clarifying the meaning of concepts by finding their opposites. Dramatization is a way to challenge what is considered uneventful but that nevertheless contributes to the historical development (Giddens 1989, Beck 1996).

(Re)presenting the material as analysis
Research is a political act that contributes to the (re)creation of society, for example, by how the participants in a study are represented. The ecofeminists Mies and Shiva (1993) write and use the terms “history-makers” (also Giddens 1989:3) and “life-shapers” to describe women; they also talk about “invisible politics.” The naming relates to the agency that individuals are given or depicted as possessing; it would be false, however, to cite such agency if the respondents themselves did not say they believed they had a chance to exert influence, i.e., if their action space were limited.

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Research is a political act that contributes to the (re)creation of society, for example, by how the participants in a study are represented. The ecofeminists Mies and Shiva (1993) write and use the terms “history-makers” (also Giddens 1989:3) and “life-shapers” to describe women; they also talk about “invisible politics.” The naming relates to the agency that individuals are given or depicted as possessing; it would be false, however, to cite such agency if the respondents themselves did not say they believed they had a chance to exert influence, i.e., if their action space were limited.
By using terms such as “the violence of the Green revolution,” Shiva (2000) emphasizes her view of the fatal nature of the new agricultural practices. Metaphoric language and figures of speech can be used to mirror assumptions and in analyzing an empirical study (Ehn & Löfgren 2001). There are, for example, a few figures of speech describing political participation, such as “voting with your feet” or “voting with your wallet,” that emphasize how individuals participate politically.

Another important contribution of cultural analysis is to juxtapose phenomena that at first glance may seem incompatible. This method can highlight the norm against which phenomena are measured. Yin (2003), who has made important contributions to case study methodology, also emphasizes that writing about and describing the material is an important first step in performing more in-depth analysis. This case study method is especially suited for studies of complex contexts (Yin 2003), which the householders’ everyday lives could be considered to represent. Unlike Ehn and Löfgren (2001) who search for interpretations, Yin (2003) talks about explanations. He advocates that analysis should take account of all the evidence connected with the aim of a study, and that the researcher should deal with alternative and rival explanations. In the present study the latter will be done, but with an emphasis on rival interpretations. In conclusion, the present study is based on the mapping and subsequent analysis of activities that the households have reported in interviews and time diaries, and on thematic issues that arose spontaneously in the interviews and during the analysis as performed according to the previous description. This form of cultural analysis lends itself to investigating the distinction between what is considered political and what is considered private, in the present context, what politicians can and cannot attempt to govern.

Apart from how the householders categorize their activities, I will focus on the activities they talk about but that they do not specifically mention as being environmentally friendly. These activities will later be connected to the studied municipal policies. An overarching issue is the importance of what the respondents did on the days when they kept the time diaries and whether or not these activities were fun, which seemed to attract more attention than the environmental aspects. The respondents also seemed to uphold the norm that it was positive to be active and perform

41 “Voting with your feet” means showing that you do not support something, especially an organization or a product, by not using or not buying it any more; for example, “Parents are voting with their feet and moving their children to schools where there is better discipline” (Free Dictionary 2008).
constructive activities; accordingly, watching TV was not considered a positive activity.

Using time diaries as a basis for reflection indicates that keeping the diaries for just a few days yields a sufficient amount of relevant information and is not too tiresome for the respondents. Between the two first case studies and the third, I reduced the number of days for which I asked the householders to keep the diaries from seven to four. Notably, in the households with multiple members, each household member seemed to record a similar number of activities per day (apart from the children, who recorded fewer). Along with their reflections on what they recorded, I concluded that they cooperated to certain degrees in keeping the diaries. Obviously, it takes quite a lot of time to keep the diaries. Some participants had previous experience of keeping a diary and knew more or less what was expected of them; one householder said that he would never again participate in a study that was so time consuming. In the latter case, the householder was especially meticulous when it came to recording everything he did and in the appropriate columns. An important but difficult question was that many respondents found the research area to be vague. They were not completely sure of what was expected of them when I asked them to record everything they did, and told them I was interested in the coherence of their everyday lives and the resources they used to perform their activities. Part of the follow-up interview was dedicated to discussing their diary writing; this revealed their diary-keeping strategies and the activities that they chose not to record. For example, some said that they did not bother recording “minor” activities, or stated: “I assume you understand that I eat three times a day and that I visit the bathroom.” Accordingly, in this study I cannot claim to discuss everything the householders did or all the resources they used, but only on what they themselves reported.

The interviews were coded both descriptively and theoretically to conceptualize the empirical material. In practical terms, this was done by writing comments in the margins of the excerpts of the transcribed interviews. The comments were then interpreted to form concepts and related to theories. In coding, I distinguished between the activities the householders said they performed, and their avowed motives for performing them. For example, I distinguished between interviewees’ saying that they recycled their garbage, their reasons why they felt it was important to recycle, and their descriptions of situations in which they did not recycle.

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The time diary notations were compared in different ways: by counting them, analyzing what the householders wrote (since they wrote at
very different levels), and analyzing the numbers of different activities, especially sustainable activities, recorded. What the householders wrote was also compared with what they said in interview. What became evident was that few situations of making choices were recorded or discussed (e.g., “I am thinking about whether to take the bus or the car”). I focused on what they said and wrote that they did, in line with the activity focus of the study.

In the time diaries, most recorded activities signify something else. When a respondent records that they have eaten, an environmentally centered study would highlight what they consumed, where the products were from, and what it meant to eat these things. There is a risk of specific activities losing their contexts, in relation both to other small activities and to the overall meaning they help form. When the householders told me that they did not record eating meals, explaining that “every human being eats, so I didn’t write that down,” it signifies both what they believed interested me as a researcher and what they took for granted.

**Summing up experiences of the methodology**

Obviously, one learns during the course of an interview study, and one’s interviewing technique changes and develops with time and accumulating experience. As a researcher, one has time to reflect between interviews. The last interview is never completely similar to the first one, since it was enriched by the experience gleaned from previous ones. A major issue concerns the fact that many of those invited to participate in the study either did not respond or explicitly declined to participate. This has been interpreted to imply that the householders who did participate likely found environmental issues interesting and/or found it interesting to participate in a rather time-consuming study.

Depending on the participants’ backgrounds, for example, on whether or not they had studied at university, they sometimes questioned, among other matters, how I would analyze the material. Such questions were primarily based on assumptions as to what research entails and how it should be performed. During the group interviews in which children participated, I found it difficult to ask the children relevant questions. Simultaneously, the group dynamics operative between different household members were noteworthy; this sometimes contributed to transcription problems, since when several respondents talked at the same time, it was difficult to hear who actually said what. Here, I will relate the situation...
when householders described how new opportunities to carry out activities were accepted by one household member, who then negotiated with and attempted to influence other members. I will distinguish between what they said they did, and the beliefs and reasons they articulated for these behaviors. It is also valuable to deal with activities that the respondents do not mention, which indicate what I consider learnt attitudes or socialization. The methods the householders used to report their experiences and activities did not give a complete map of everything they did. I started from the assumption that the respondents shared only a selection of their activities in the interviews and time diaries. If, however, one attempts to grasp the coherence of the activities in toto, it becomes possible to highlight how some activities may be enabled or obstructed by previous activities that may be economically, ecologically, and/or socially sustainable. Methodology and theory are closely related.

In the methodological “triangulation” applied, the material from the interviews was emphasized, the time diaries mainly, but not only, being used to enrich the interview material. The observations have been used partly to deepen our understanding of the sustainable development field, and partly to develop the interview questions for the householders. After having reviewed the points of departure of this study, the methods chosen, and how the research process developed, I hope that the interpretations and conclusions will seem reasonable.
4. Through the kitchen window

This chapter investigates the legitimate means the four municipalities have at their disposal with which to influence householder behavior. The investigation was done by examining municipal environmental policies and suggestions for individual activities appearing mainly on municipal websites and by interviewing officials who work on sustainable development. The chapter provides a baseline description for purposes of international comparison, an analysis of legitimate ways to influence householder behavior, and suggestions for how to influence what has traditionally been considered a private sphere beyond political control. The aim is not to determine whether the householders follow any of the suggestions, but to create a basis from which the householders’ activities and perceptions of their opportunities and responsibilities can be understood and to identify any problematic issues. This is partly a matter of describing the responsibility the municipalities give to the householders. Municipalities play an important role, since it is the political level closest to the citizens (Eckerberg & Brundin 2000; SOU 1994:128).

It is not only the decisions regarding how to act in environmentally friendly ways that are complex; the political systems and where they can exert influence are complex as well. It has become difficult for citizens to monitor where decisions are made and where the responsible actors are (Norén 2005:111). This has proven to be a problem for the Agenda 21 efforts in Sweden, which have largely come to be driven by experts (Fudge & Rowe 2001). While Agenda 21 is an extensive document containing various suggestions for how to change society in a more sustainable direction, it is possible for municipalities to interpret the policy and adapt it to local circumstances (Eckerberg & Brundin 2000). In particular, this chapter will consider the policy instruments municipalities have at their disposal, what is optional for municipalities and householders, and what can be legislated.

42 I want to reiterate that I acknowledge that legitimacy is a multifaceted concept in political theory.
The municipality looking in

Households are not isolated, but are interdependent and interconnected in natural and social systems, the municipality being one. The historical distinction between the private and the public is highlighted here using the metaphor of a kitchen window. A window is transparent in the sense that people can look out through it, but we can also look into the kitchen through it (Luxton 1990). Looking in is not always considered legitimate, so the window can also be perceived as a physical boundary of the political sphere, marking what is beyond the influence of policy instruments concerning, for example, environmentally friendly and sustainable activities. This chapter investigates how municipalities contribute to the structuring of the ecological action space for householders, and what responsibilities they ascribe to householders. Attention is directed towards the four studied municipalities and how they attempt to reach their citizens and affect their household behavior when it comes to sustainable development, what policy instruments they regard as legitimate for influencing householders (in the private sphere), and what strategies the officials use to reach them. Finally, I provide some examples of the suggested ecological activities. The chapter is organized as follows: first, the role of municipalities is dealt with; second, political visions for sustainable development are treated and how householders are considered responsible for sustainable development; third, municipal representatives and their strategies and opportunities to influence householders are discussed; and fourth, suggestions for householders on how to act sustainably are presented.

Municipalities are not the only actors that influence and interact with the ecological action space of the householders. However, they plan services and create various factors that influence the householders’ opportunities to act in environmentally friendly ways. Municipalities try to be attractive places for their inhabitants and citizens and work actively on marketing. For householders who want to participate, it is not just willingness that is required, but also an understanding of how the political system works. A challenge for both researchers and citizens is that activities that aim to influence the environmental politics are performed on a parallel basis in various local, national, and international arenas by actors such as individuals, networks, companies, lobbyists, political parties, and organizations (Norén 2005; Micheletti 1996). The actors in the environmental politics are myriad, including households, environmental organizations, and NGOs. By being members of these organizations,
individual citizens can multiply their voices and their opportunities to participate (Norén 2005:128).

**Political responsibility and legal liability**

Municipal autonomy has historical roots in the Municipal Decree of 1862 (Gustavsson 1999:11). Municipal autonomy goes hand in hand with municipal democracy, and is a founding pillar of the public sector (Gustavsson 1999:11; cf. Local Government Act 1990:900). The defining characters of a Swedish municipality are that it is territorially demarcated, is considered a juridical person, has independent power to levy taxes, and has obligatory membership (Gustavsson 1999; Montin 2004). It is both a place and an organization. Local governments have not only been passive recipients and implementers of national plans; historically, they have also been active initiators in developing many social welfare practices (Rose & Ståhlberg 2005).

Political responsibility concerns what the politicians in a municipality have the right to do, in line with their autonomy, while juridical liability concerns what they are required to do, for example, the responsibility for supervision according to the Environmental protection directive (Högberg 1991). In the previous case, there is no possibility of imposing penalties or fines. The officials who work in these two areas therefore have different opportunities and action spaces to design their efforts. An official who works in the supervision of environmental and health protection does so within a strictly legal framework, while an Agenda 21 coordinator has more options to choose from among the policy instruments. These distinctions influence how an Agenda 21 coordinator versus an environmental health officer will perceive the available means to influence householder behavior.

The municipality is responsible for environmental and health protection in the municipality, and for central aspects of sustainable development efforts. This is evident in the Environmental Code (1998:808, 812), which replaced the law of waste management, the law of health protection, the law of natural resources, and the law of environmental protection as of 1 January 1999 (Gustavsson 1999:30). According to the Code, there has to be at least one council for environmental and health protection in each municipality, with the tasks of preventing the emergence of and eliminating threats to human health and preventing illnesses

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(Gustavsson 1999). This implies that the municipality has both a legal responsibility to be a supervising authority, and a more informal responsibility to implement the vision of sustainable development. In Sweden, all political fields should be permeated by sustainable development (Skr. 2003/04:129). The municipality thus has both political responsibility/liability and legal liability (Högberg 1991).

**Division of responsibility**

The municipality is responsible for planning the land use in its territory. This means that the municipality constructs infrastructure and services, the location of which will influence how its residents can move around. For a fee, the municipality distributes water, gas, and electricity to the householders living in it, and is also responsible for stormwater and sanitary sewers, and sewage treatment (Gustavsson 1999:32). Together with the county councils, municipalities are responsible for local and regional public transportation in the counties in which they are located (Gustavsson 1999:32). In reality, according to Montin (2004), the autonomy of the municipalities implies that they discharge governmental commissions with a local flavor. For example, half of Swedish municipalities created long-term local Agenda 21 policies at the request of the central government after the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Gustavsson 1999:31). The municipal role in supplying resource-based services to householders justifies focusing on how municipalities help structure the ecological action space of the householders. Through this structuring, the householders are both users and customers in the municipality (Montin 2004). Over the past decade, the municipality has assumed increased responsibility for energy supply and conservation. The municipality usually does not supply these services to earn profit, but rather for the good of its residents (Gustavsson 1999:32). However, since 1 January 1996, municipal electricity production and sale, gas distribution, and district heating can be done according to a business logic governed by the Joint Stock Company Law [Aktiebolagslagen SFS 2005:551]. With the rise of new private entrepreneurs, the opportunities for public control by the citizens have diminished (Montin 2004:202). The state and the market are becoming more intertwined in attempting to take control of environmental politics (Norén 2005:130). How a municipality organizes

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43 Since 1 July 1989, municipalities have been responsible for the supervision of environmentally hazardous activities and emissions from smaller companies and agriculture (Gustavsson 1999:30).
services that relate to sustainable development influences how the householders can act, and thus their ecological action space.

Most municipalities have sought to establish public–private partnerships. A trend in this deregulation movement has been the establishment of a purchaser–provider model (Rose & Ståhlberg 2005:94–95). Spaargaren (2003), in line with Otnes (1988), talks about liberalization of the captive consumers, which is a response to the introduction of companies and different options for services in municipalities. Now there is more to choose from, but also more to consider, when there are several companies that supply energy, for example (cf. Rose & Ståhlberg 2005). This further implies that householders are sometimes billed separately since one company provides the network for energy while another supplies and bills for the electricity and the amount used.

Waste management is an important municipal issue. The responsibility is divided depending on the type of waste. For example, packages are the responsibility of the producers according to the Regulation on producer responsibility for packaging (SFS 1997:185), while other types of waste is the responsibility of the municipality. In some municipalities, waste collection has been transferred to private-sector companies. The responsibility is then divided between the administrative unit of the municipality and a company. The municipalities are responsible for planning the waste collection systems, and for sharing information on these with households, while the company Förpacknings och Tidningsinsamlingen (Ftiab) are responsible for collecting discarded packaging and newspapers and keeping the collection points tidy (Ftiab 2006). This business is a result of the governmental regulation concerning producer responsibility, and the company is run without profit. Household members are considered important actors in waste management, as
exemplified in the Swedish governmental proposition *Ett samhälle med giftfria och resursnåla kretslopp* [A toxin-free society with closed material cycles] (Prop. 2002/03:117). This proposition exemplifies how reasoning about sustainable development can be given a concrete form. The proposition *En god livsmiljö* [A Good Living Environment] (Prop 1990/91:90) focuses on householders’ efforts.

It will become ever more important that everyone sort their waste, keep the speed limits, travel more by collective means of transportation, and does not waste energy or litter. The efforts to secure a safe living environment for ourselves and coming generations thereby demands new consumer patterns and a redirection of lifestyles. (Prop. 1990/91:90, p. 17, my translation)44

There is further a “hierarchy of waste” in which the importance of reducing the amount of waste, through changed consumption and production patterns and/or changed lifestyles, are at the top of the list. Paragraph 8 of the Regulation on producer responsibility for packaging (SFS 2006: 1273) says that:

> Householders and other users should sort out packages and other waste from the household garbage, and leave them at collection depots that the producers or the municipality supply for such waste. (SFS 2006:1273)

From the 1st of January 2006 a new act came into force. It concerns the return system for containers for drinks in metal cans or plastic bottles, where it became illegal to sell containers that are not part of a recognized recycling and return system. Cans that have been produced in other countries are not part of the Swedish return system.

Researchers in Sweden and elsewhere have demonstrated that few people know about the content of sustainable development and *Agenda 21* policies (Barr 2002; Åberg 2004). However, people do not necessarily have to be aware of the content of the policy to participate in the policy process. A policy is the underlying idea of a program that is implemented through specific policy instruments, such as taxation, information provision, laws, and urban planning (Palm 2004; Hill 1993). Policies and policy instruments are thus closely related. It is beyond the scope of the present research to perform a complete analysis of all municipal policies that are relevant to sustainable development and householders. Therefore, I have taken as starting points the strategies the interviewed officials shared with me, and

44 All the following quotations from Swedish municipal documents are my translations.
the specific Agenda 21 documents and environmental policies of the studied municipalities. As already described, the kitchen window is used as a metaphor for the relationship between the household and the public/political spheres, to emphasize that the distinction between the two spheres may be fluid and contextual, and can be defined in different ways.

Visions in local Agenda 21 and environmental policies

As this thesis aims to investigate the studied households’ ecological action space, I decided to analyze the municipal policies and aims regarding reaching out to householders. This relates to the structuring of individual actions, but also to ideas about the distinction between private and political/public. It is not the aim to study the extent to which the householders have read or accepted the policies, but rather the extent to which they are expected to participate in sustainable development politics. Agenda 21 has a fundamental position when it comes to assigning householders and municipalities responsibilities connected with implementing the goal of sustainable development (UNCED 1993). The documents focusing on municipal aims were analyzed to discern what means the municipalities regard as legitimate in seeking to influence household behavior. These documents focus on participation, as does Agenda 21, which is their point of departure. The purpose of participation varies, as mentioned in chapter 2: it can aim at vitalizing local democracy and/or be a strategy to direct more responsibility to individuals (cf. Corell & Söderberg 2005).

Different municipalities are organized differently, as allowed by municipal autonomy, which is why comparable documents and policies have been drafted by different departments. However, the sustainability efforts share many similarities in the four municipalities, as will be shown. According to the interviewed officials, all four municipalities have staff whose full-time task is to implement the policies devised by the politicians. Sustainable development has been prioritized in all four municipalities. Furthermore, the interviews with the officials revealed that there has been political unity concerning the importance of the goal of sustainable development. This is interesting in relation to the study performed by Eckerberg and Brundin (2000). At the other hand, the possibility to agree at the general level about the visions, while having diverging suggestions for how to implement these visions in concrete issues, was stressed in chapter 1.
One sign of commitment to a goal—in this case, sustainable development—is if a municipal council budgets time and money to support officials employed to work on the goal, something all four of the officials mentioned. Another sign of commitment to work with and implement the goals of sustainable development is when the municipalities sign conventions and treaties, and participate in national and international campaigns. Such efforts can also be an indication that municipalities are attempting to market themselves. The Aarhus Convention has been signed by the municipalities of Gothenburg and Växjö. This implies that their citizens, i.e., the householders, should participate in work to build a more sustainable society. Huddinge is a so-called eco-municipality, which among several things implies that they promise not to use more resources than they can recreate, and they affirm that the world’s resources should be shared equally by all people and countries (Huddinge 2006d). Every year, the municipality publishes data on 12 key issues, such as the amount of recycled goods and hazardous waste (Ekokommunernas nyckeltal [Key Issues for Eco-municipalities] 2005). This is an example of how Swedish municipalities can compare their environmental performance, and create part of the ecological action space for householders. In their political visions and policies, municipalities convey their expectations concerning citizens’ and householders’ rights and responsibilities. These expectations and everyday efforts, however, also concern creating suitable conditions for householder action.

Växjö municipality is nationally and internationally renowned for its work on climate-related issues. The politicians in Växjö municipal council set high goals, deciding that they should reduce CO2 emissions by half between 1993 and 2010. The municipal council further decided unanimously in 1996 that Växjö would become a fossil fuel-free municipality (Interview with Kim-Hellström 06.05.22). Växjö is now one of the Swedish “Climate Municipalities.” When asked whether Växjö would reach its goal of a 50 percent decrease in CO2 emissions, Kim-Hellström answered that it was an ambitious goal but that developments at the national and international levels supported their work, and would probably make it feasible. Three developments that support their attempts are the national decision that all gas stations have to offer a renewable fuel alternative, the development of ethanol, and the expanding market for eco-cars. These are circumstances that Växjö municipality cannot govern, but that will facilitate their efforts to reach their goals. The municipality of Växjö has successfully applied for funds for environmental projects from the Swedish government and the European Union, to reinforce local
sustainable development efforts (compare Små och stora steg för en hållbar utveckling 2004).

The environmental policy of Gothenburg emphasizes that everyone should be informed about and get involved in environmental efforts. It further mentions dialogue and local democracy as means to improve quality of life, making participation a goal in itself. While politicians should create suitable conditions for environmental work, the citizens are expected to become informed and to participate in environmental initiatives, as a civic responsibility. This is very similar to the approaches of other municipalities, which have emphasized the social aspects of sustainability. Similarly, in 1996 the municipality of Piteå started a process in which they joined with the citizens in a dialogue to articulate a vision of sustainable development. Our Future Piteå: Vision for 2010 [Vårt framtida Piteå—Vision till 2010]. As a result of the process 1 200 suggestions for the Vision was handed in by a total of 4 000 of the residents, which is a large share of the population (Piteå 2006i). This work, which took Agenda 21 as its starting point, says that:

... people living in Piteå have influence and actively take responsibility both for private and work-related issues. Together we create a community where many are involved in the decisions. (Our Future Piteå: Vision for 2010, 2006)

The vision includes active work to create “a living environment in ecological balance, where people live in good health” and “an everyday life that is safe and secure” (Our Future Piteå: Vision for 2010, 2006). The document states that knowledge and working life are connected. Concerning work on ecological cycles, it is emphasized that city and countryside are co-dependent, and the goals of reusing and recycling in the municipality is mentioned, as is the goal of achieving high self-sufficiency. The vision for personal and material transportation is to make it more efficient and environmentally sound.

“Agenda 21 Gothenburg” is a section of Gothenburg’s environmental office with the task of supporting and inspiring sustainable development initiatives in the different city districts. They write as follows:

... it is fundamental that the citizens feel that they have the opportunity to participate and that they are encouraged to take responsibility for development. (Agenda 21 Gothenburg, 2006)

Here they acknowledge that to take responsibility, citizens need to have the opportunity. As already mentioned, the case study of Gothenburg sustainable development efforts (compare Små och stora steg för en hållbar utveckling 2004).

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was the first and largest. To deepen the interview questions to the householders and to help in analyzing the responses, a politician was interviewed, Jöran Fagerlund, head of the local environmental council and representing the Left Party. He stated that there were few possibilities for the politicians to demand that people in their private homes carry out specific activities (Interview Fagerlund 05.05.18). Sustainable development efforts are particularly complex, which is true in all municipalities. As individuals, people have responsibilities to others, Fagerlund said, concerning, for example, not ruining their ability to live healthy lives. Concerning the opportunities for municipal politicians to influence what householders do, he cited the free magazine that the municipality distributes to the inhabitants, Vårt Göteborg [Our Gothenburg], as an example of an information policy instrument. Fagerlund had several suggestions for what people can do as householders: recycle their household waste, reassess their consumption habits, and consider where and how to go on vacation. Sustainable transportation in the city is difficult, since the city was built for people with cars, he said; this places a double burden on households. It is not necessarily that households make poor transportation choices, but rather that the transportation system is poorly constructed. In this way, responsibility is placed at common levels, for example, city departments, the municipality, or the nation. However, he said it was up to the householders to use the accessible resources to live as sustainably as possible. His placement of responsibility at the common level, at the level of the services and opportunities the municipality provides, rather than at the individual level, could be considered an ideological position. His point of departure was the municipal environmental policy of Gothenburg, which concludes as follows:

This environmental policy and Fagerlund’s comments echo the other interviewed officials, who emphasized what have been regarded here as administrative policy instruments, which in turn has implications for the ecological action space. In attempting to mainstream its sustainable development efforts, Gothenburg included various issues in its 2005 budget, including initiatives to reduce energy use, use more organic vegetables in food at schools, and persuade more people to travel by public transportation. Municipal government and schools, for example, are public
institutions that direct their efforts to public rather than private circumstances. Considering that approximately 20 percent of the Swedish workforce is employed in public/municipal organizations, of which 80 percent are women, this strategy is understandable (Montin 2004:36).45

In the pamphlet Göteborg och miljön [Gothenburg and the environment] (undated) published by Gothenburg municipal Miljökontor [Environmental Office], sustainable development is described as complex and is said to concern ecological, social, and economic issues. The pamphlet presents some ideas for how to steer development “in a proper direction,” and the introduction quotes the director of the Environmental Council, Bo Svensson, who:

... hopes that we will manage to create a sustainable city jointly, where all the citizens of Gothenburg have their needs satisfied without damaging the ability of future generations to create a good life. (Göteborg och miljön [Gothenburg and the environment] undated)

When analyzing this statement, note the echo of the Brundtland Commission’s words and the ambitious, grand vision that is articulated.

The municipal council of Huddinge adopted their local environmental policy in 2002, and it came into force in May 2005.46 This policy incorporates the 15 National Environmental Objectives47 that existed at the time. This policy mediates between the national, municipal, and householder levels and emphasizes that the municipality bears a major responsibility in achieving the national objectives. The major vision set forth in the policy is: “Huddinge will be a long-term sustainable, “closed-loop society” and pleasant society” for everyone who works, lives, and studies in or travels and visits Huddinge municipality (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:3). The document concludes, however, that in reality:

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45 The study by Heselius (2002) shows that women tend to be working on Agenda 21 initiative, while men are more likely to be energy advisors and work with environmental technology. Corell and Söderberg (2005) further comment that many Agenda 21 coordinators were employed using temporary government funding; most of these were young women who were marginalized in decision-making since their activities were external to ordinary work.

46 This policy is not on the Huddinge municipal website, so I decided to focus instead on their policy, Local Agenda 21: vision, goals and suggestions for measures [Lokal Agenda 21: Vision, mål och förslag till åtgärder] (2005).

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No one can force individuals, companies, organizations, or associations to follow the local Agenda. It is up to each and everyone in his or her everyday actions and planning to take guidance from the agenda. To move towards environmental improvement, however, everyone must do his or her share to reduce the negative impact on the environment. (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:7)

This statement is of central significance for Huddinge’s sustainable development and the possibility of reaching its environmental goals.

The environmental program of Växjö municipality was approved in May 2006. This program is a document without legal force. The program is to inform all decisions made and activities undertaken by municipal employees and elected representatives, and to “give companies, organizations, authorities, and inhabitants inspiration and guidance” (Växjö 2006c; my emphasis). Its formulations are similar to those of Huddinge. By being informed and drawn into dialogue, authorities, companies, organizations, and citizens are expected to participate in the development of a more sustainable society, and reduce their negative environmental impact. One vision of the program is that consumption and production will become resource efficient and non-toxic.

By changing our way of living, we can reduce our environmental impact while strengthening our personal health and household economy. (Miljöprogram för Växjö kommun [Environmental program for Växjö Municipality] 2006)

The environmental, social, and economic dimensions are all incorporated in the vision. To achieve this vision, the municipality of Växjö is aiming to “increase awareness of and action for sustainable production and consumption” (Environmental program for Växjö municipality 2006) and to reduce the creation of waste. The program further states that:

Växjö city and nearby villages are surrounded by cultivated land, forests, lakes, and water. This particular natural environment has to be managed for present and future generations. (Miljöprogram för Växjö kommun 2006)

Again the Agenda 21 message is recognizable. To create a fossil fuel-free municipality, Växjö has committed itself to supporting its citizens by offering energy advice, and when planning for traffic and streets, it will prioritize measures that make it convenient to walk, bicycle, and take

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public transportation all year round. This corresponds to the goal of sustainable transportation in Huddinge, which states that:

… it should be equally reliable and fast to travel by public transportation and bicycle to everyday places. This means improved access and more choices for the citizens.
(Huddinge 2006e)

Once more, the fundamental role of creating good conditions for citizens, rather than forcing them, is emphasized. Sustainable transportation places the “walking school bus” campaign at the centre. The central idea of walking school buses is that parents take turns accompanying their children to school by walking or bicycling instead of driving them by car. The aim is to influence areas that are closely related in sustainable development, for example, reducing traffic or improving the urban environment and health, by using an anthropocentric approach. When fewer parents drive their children to school by car, security in front of the school improves, as does air quality, and both children and parents get exercise. Concerning traffic and communication, the overall goal is not to have a larger impact than nature can cope with (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:45). The question of who should determine just how much nature can cope with is not specified. The campaign in Huddinge is run jointly with the schools and the municipality, and is directed towards private households via the schools as a public institution. The local Agenda 21 of Huddinge further notes:

Whatever we purchase, how we travel, the indoor temperature and the amounts of electricity that our computers, lamps and household appliances require, matter.
(Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:40)

So, even if it is impossible to force individuals to change their behavior, it is possible to try to encourage individual responsibility by highlighting that small and everyday choices matter. Through the suggestions provided, it is obvious that the municipality is aiming to create opportunities for householders, as citizens, to act in more environmentally friendly ways, rather than blaming them for making poor choices. Measures such as constructing regional bicycle routes, expanding the public transportation system, starting car pools for households and companies, promoting the “walking school bus” program, and improving safety along roads that lead to schools, should increase the opportunities for individuals to make environmentally friendly choices.
In attempting to influence what householders do, politicians and officials also have the task of making comprehensible the complexity of the environment and of environmental problems, a matter that concerns communication (cf. Palm 2006). One strategy for doing this is to focus on the local aspects of environmental problems. The pamphlet outlining Agenda 21 work in Växjö municipality, _Små och stora steg för en hållbar utveckling_ (Small and large steps towards sustainable development) (2004), says that the “alarm clock for Växjö [concerning environmental problems] was the contamination of lakes and waters in the 1960s” (_Små och stora steg för en hållbar utveckling_ 2004). The municipality’s vision of a sustainable Växjö is one in which:

… within a few generations we will have moved towards a sustainable development in which we use the resources of the Earth so that everyone has the opportunity to lead a good life today and tomorrow. We will have removed environmental threats and health risks and our energy and resource use will have become 10 times more efficient. (Växjö 2006c)

When analyzing this grand vision, it is possible to recognize the main points of _Agenda 21_. Implicit in this vision is that the people of Växjö will have the opportunity to deal with environmental threats and health risks through proper resource management and by becoming more “efficient” in resource use. The causes of environmental threats and health risks are not mentioned, nor are the means by which the goal of efficiency will be achieved.

The current chairperson of the municipal executive board in Växjö, Carl-Olof Bengtsson, representing the Social Democrats, wrote that to achieve the environmental objectives of the municipality, it is not enough:

… if the municipal committees and companies decrease their environmental impact; what really matters is individual citizens’ personal engagement. I believe that the everyday lesser decisions are just as important as the major environmental projects, such as choosing environmentally labeled groceries when they only cost a few crowns more, taking the electric bicycle instead of the car, or driving the car on ethanol. (Miljöredovisning [Environmental Account] 2003; my emphasis)

The pamphlet reminds the reader that “everything you purchase and consume will sooner or later become waste that has to be managed” (Miljöredovisning [Environmental Account] Växjö 2003). This emphasizes the importance of consumption as well as how to reduce it. In the pamphlet

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På fyra ben: Göteborgsmodellen för kommunal konsumentrådgivning [On four legs: the Gothenburg model of municipal consumer advice] (2005:7), the office of Konsument Göteborg [Gothenburg consumers] says that their aim is to provide “easily accessible service that is free of charge that aims to solve everyday problems and strengthen the role of consumers in the long run.” The major aim of Gothenburg Consumers is to contribute to a more sustainable city, and the pamphlet concludes:

Knowledgeable consumers comprise an important part of the forces of change towards a more sustainable society. (På fyra ben: Göteborgsmodellen... 2005:8)

As will be shown later, this quotation is a prime example of how the end stage of consumption and making “good choices” are emphasized rather than decreased consumption. The suggestions for energy conservation made by the Gothenburg Consumers energy advisors are an exception to this pattern. One interviewed energy advisor mentioned that it was difficult to decide how complex to make the information he provides to consumers (Interview Lundberg 05.05.17). For example, if someone has installed a heat pump, which he considered a better choice than many other technologies, should he then provide the consumer with advice on what source of electricity would be preferable, and how it is produced, for running the pump? This emphasizes how to make environmental complexity comprehensible and how such complexity should be communicated.

There are different policy instruments that the municipalities can use to influence householders in attempting to get them to participate. The municipalities cannot force the householders to alter their behavior, so information is provided to encourage them to change. On the other hand, municipalities can create conducive circumstances and use administrative policy instruments (Palm 2006) to create ecological action space for their citizens and householders. Through these instruments, the politicians and officials structure the everyday lives of the householders and help structure their ecological action space. Some of these policies regard individuals as exercising responsibility, and treat everyday activities as mattering. Furthermore, the policies convey an ideal of creating dialogue and participation. As will be shown in the following, these ideals are challenged in the practical work by the officials at the municipalities.
Municipal structuration of citizens’ opportunities to act

As noted above, the four municipalities have devoted considerable time to sustainable development policy making, and have budgeted for officials to work full time on implementing these policies. Quite aside from the specific content of these visionary documents and policies, *Agenda 21* efforts in general embody an ideal of broad participation. The interviewed municipal officials have said that they find it difficult to reach the householders and promote such participation; accordingly, this section will describe and discuss the strategies the officials use to influence the householders. These strategies are relevant, since they can be considered to help create and define the public/political and private spheres.

In a study of local *Agenda 21* efforts in Swedish municipalities, Eckerberg and Brundin (2000) focus on the obstacles municipalities face perceive in their work. According to a 1998 survey, the main obstacles Swedish municipalities perceived were lack of resources, lack of knowledge, lack of engagement, short-sighted political decisions, structural obstacles, and deficient support from the national level (Eckerberg & Brundin 2000:16). These obstacles are interesting, as they mirror the answers and concerns articulated by the four officials interviewed in the present research. Engaged officials are crucial for the implementation of sustainable development efforts in the municipalities (Eckerberg 2000; Micheletti 1996). Such officials, though convinced, must act within a political system that does not always prioritize the formal goal of sustainable development.

Citizens receive information on sustainable development in many situations, not just from the municipality. Although it is impossible to examine all such situations, some will be described here. For example, the trolleys in Gothenburg are not only used for transportation; in addition, the municipality uses the sides of the cars to spread public service information. The waste management company Renova advertised district heating on the sides of the trolleys, and emphasized that the waste of Gothenburgers could become heat by means of incineration (Observation 05.01.13). The municipality also connects the household with national level efforts, and national level decisions can reinforce work at the local level. Furthermore, the officials believe that general interest in environmental matters in society plays a role in promoting more sustainable development. Among the officials there was also an aim to integrate the three different

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dimensions of sustainable development, namely, the health, environmental, and economic dimensions.

The municipalities communicate the message of sustainable development in ways they expect will be accessible to people. The pamphlet *Taxa för renhållning 2006* [Fees for waste management 2006] in Växjö states that the amount of waste keeps increasing and that every household member in Växjö produces approximately 450 kilos of waste every year. This waste is incinerated, producing district heating, at a plant in Ljungby. In Piteå, a local green consumption initiative started in 1999 with a network of farmers who farm organically and sell their produce on the local market; the municipality initially supported this network. The farmers now have a label that means “grown in the Piteå valley.” In Piteå, there is strong support among the citizens for small local shops and locally produced goods (Interview Wikman 05.09.07).

The officials who work on implementing sustainable development have the task of making this complex issue comprehensible to the general public, using existing and legitimate means. They further must navigate between various political visions, aims, and ideals concerning citizen participation. Sustainable development is a wide-ranging and complicated subject (Interview Friberg 04.09.13). It is fundamental for people to understand that they are part of something larger, and to motivate them to take individual responsibility (Interview Pettersson 05.09.16). The interviewed officials attempted to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, by explaining cause and effect to justify certain behaviors and by highlighting anthropogenic impacts that can be changed by altering everyday behaviors. Another attempt is to mainstream the sustainable development efforts being made in all policy areas (Interview Rohdin 04.09.13). This includes a process of gaining approval for an approach, which requires time (Interview Rohdin 04.09.13).

There are different means and policy instruments that officials can use when attempting to influence how the householders behave, including information, administrative measures (e.g., bicycle lanes, location of supermarkets and services, and size of garbage bins), economic (e.g., fees and subsidies), and legal instruments. Information and what the officials called “soft policy instruments” had a central position. All municipalities distribute a magazine to all the households. This is usually called “Our” followed by the name of the municipality or city district, for example, Our Huddinge or Our Lundby. In these magazines, the municipality decides what to communicate to the citizens and the officials can direct their attention towards the environment.

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General interest in environmental issues, for example, as expressed in media, is important for the officials who work on sustainable development, and it has a bearing on the policy instruments they use. Three of the interviewed officials said that general interest in the environment has decreased, and people now tend to be bored by environmental issues. In reaction, officials now regard economic policy instruments as a viable means to affect what people do (Interview Rohdin 04.09.13). Wikman stated that the municipality has strategically used “soft” policy instruments, such as offering information and advice to householders, rather than regulations (Interview Wikman 05.09.07). A public information campaign in Piteå has provided the citizens with an almanac containing information about recyclable goods and the hours of operation of the recycling depots. It also contained information about a specific campaign, when a truck passed through the different areas of the municipality to collect larger waste items to take them to the recycling depots, a service the citizens appreciated. Wikman stated that it was difficult to reach and inform the householders, and the attempts she described indicate that doing so requires creativity.

One successful campaign carried out in Piteå was the production of toilet paper the sheets of which presented information about what materials were harmful to flush down the toilet, such as cigarette butts, tampons, and pet litter. Every household received one roll (Interview Wikman 05.09.07).

An information policy instrument from Piteå, a toilet roll containing information on what materials are harmful to flush down the toilet. The upper sheet says “Thanks for contributing to the ecological cycle,” the middle sheet says, “Don’t flush us down,” while the bottom sheet says “We do not want to see cigarette butts in the pipes.”
Another way to raise household awareness is to arrange events where environmental issues are at the centre—yet another type of informational policy instrument. Lundby city district in the municipality of Gothenburg held an exhibition about the local environmental vision. Environmental festivals have also been arranged, at which information about environmentally related issues from the environmental council, the public transportation company (Västrafik), the recycling company (Renova), and various municipal departments was distributed. Since 2003, it has been possible for citizens to make complaints and suggestions at the “citizens’ office” in Lundby, in an attempt to initiate dialogue. These suggestions and complaints are followed up in order to increase the opportunities for citizens to participate in the development of the local region.

Similarly, “In the city without my car” is a public event in Växjö in which the Agenda 21 office participates. Kim-Hellström commented that waste management has received a lot of attention in environmental work. It is erroneous, however, to believe that all this attention means that no more work is needed on the issue. All over Gothenburg, the city has implemented the “New transportation habits” campaign, the goal of which was to reduce car travel in favor of cycling or walking. The following poster from that campaign attempts to promote discussion of alternative means of transportation, thereby informing householders of options for voluntary activities that benefit the environment.

In the following example of an economic policy instrument from the Vision Lundby program, which promotes “smarter and more environmentally sound transportation,” citizens can exchange their old cars (if they are older than the 1988 model year and lack a catalytic converter)
for a one-year public transportation pass or membership in a car sharing program.

All four interviewed officials stated that the outcomes of previous attempts at citizen outreach via open meetings were poor, so they instead attempted to reach them via existing organizations and groups. This challenged the vision of civic participation: the officials described a discrepancy between the political ideal, articulated in policy, of broad participation and the ability to get people to take part in dialogue. They believe that they have few means to encourage householders to participate in public meetings, which was common in the 1990s (cf. Forsberg 2007). Lundby has encouraged local football clubs to purchase Fair Trade-labeled footballs, which embody both social and ecological dimensions (Göteborgs Eko no. 7, 2004). This is an example of a way to reach householders indirectly through existing organizations and public contexts. All four municipalities employed the strategy of reaching out to their own employees in implementing the goals of sustainable development, for example, encouraging school kitchen chefs to cook using ecological products. Thus much municipal effort is directed towards promoting sustainable development in the public, municipal sphere rather than in households, partly because the officials found it difficult to evaluate attempts to reach households and to devise follow-up projects targeting them.

Transportation has received considerable attention in attempts to change the habits of municipal residents in favor of more sustainable ones. To encourage citizens to leave their cars in favor of cycling or walking, municipalities have created bicycle maps and organized campaigns to encourage people to exercise more and use the car less. The officials have to be creative when spreading the message and when attempting to influence householders. Along with the council for public health, Piteå municipality published a book, På egna ben i Piteå [Using your own legs in Piteå] (2005), which emphasizes the importance of exercise and contains maps of the bicycle lanes in Piteå. Apart from these campaigns, the relationship between health and environment is rarely connected (Interview Wikman 05.09.07). During official informational campaigns in the city of Växjö, the municipality has attempted to promote “smarter” means of transportation, for example, by showing appreciation for people who cycle, or illustrating how much chocolate you can eat when you cycle, or comparing the time required to reach different destinations by car, bicycle, or walking. Developing bicycle lanes is a way to improve the conditions for cyclists. Växjö municipality has initiated a municipal car sharing program with eco-cars that municipal employees can use, a car sharing program for
citizens, and a bicycle promotion campaign among municipal employees (Fossilbränslefritt Växjö [Fossil fuel free Växjö], no year). This last campaign is an example of an effort directed towards employees rather than householders.

The officials have highlighted that even if it is difficult to reach householders directly, the municipality can influence them through municipal planning, for example, concerning how houses are constructed, where services and supermarkets are located, and how the public transportation system is laid out. Another example of how municipalities can direct householder behavior is that of Piteå, where waste management is arranged so that people with their own waste bins have one for incineration and a second for compostable household wastes. This is not something that the inhabitants in Piteå who live in detached houses can choose; they have no choice but to accept it. In this way, the municipality has constructed a particular situation within which the householders must act. In conclusion, it is difficult to reach households or persuade them to participate in open meetings, for example, though political decisions can result in administrative policy instruments that influence what householders do by creating suitable conditions to act in sustainable ways.

It seems as though most municipal policy instruments concern information dissemination, accomplished in ways ranging from monthly magazines handed out to all householders, to posters, public events, websites, and competitions. Such information can be about suggestions for voluntary activities, or about laws and regulations. The officials can be creative in communicating the message for both of these areas, though there is more freedom in how to design information concerning voluntary activities.

When it comes to legal policy instruments concerning sustainable development applying to householders, these mainly depend on the kind of housing arrangement in which the householders live. For a household who lives in a rented apartment with communal water, sewer services, heating, and electricity and who uses public transportation, there are few

49 The introduction to the Environmental Code, chapter 29, section 1 is as follows: “Any person who deliberately: 1. pollutes land, water or air in a manner which involves or is liable to involve risks for human health or detriment to flora and fauna that are not inconsiderable or other significant detriment to the environment” (Ds 2000:61). In section 2 it says that any person who commits an offence referred to in section 1 “through negligence shall be liable to a fine or a term of imprisonment not exceeding two years for the offence of causing environmental disturbance ” (Ds 2000:61; emphasis in original). The Environmental Code has been criticized, since it contains no absolute prohibition of environmental destruction, and for not penalizing increased environmental destruction (SOU 1996:103, p. 526).
regulatory means to influence their behavior as long as they pay their fees and bills. Regulations that apply to home owners rather than renters concern the following: the installation of urine-separating WCs and sewers, which requires a permit; the storage of petrol, oil, tar products, solvent, or salt, which requires a permit; the burning of household waste, plastics, or painted wood, which is prohibited; and the regular sweeping of the chimneys of wood-burning fireplaces or stoves. However, it is not specifically ownership that determines the liability, but use (Högberg 1991:33); for example, it does not matter whether or not you own the car, if you are driving it you cannot let it idle for more than one minute (as stipulated in these four municipalities). It is prohibited to leave sorted garbage outside the containers at the recycling station, although it is not illegal to place the fractions in the wrong containers. This is partly related to the fact that something first becomes waste when it is “placed at an intended place” (Corell & Söderberg 2005:54). Corell and Söderberg conclude that as long as you drive around with cans of paint in the car, for example, it is not waste but private property (2005). However, the recycling system is run by Förpacknings- och Tidningsinsamlingen [the Packaging and newspaper collection company], which is only responsible for the containers in which the recycled plastic, metals, corrugated cardboard, and glass are placed. This means that other household items made of these materials are not meant for the recycling system, such as frying pans, toys, or drinking glasses. Toxic and dangerous materials are left at “environmental stations.”

Economic policy instruments are diverse, especially concerning the fees charged for different services. Examples of such instruments that pertain to sustainable development include parking fees and whether people with eco-cars can park free of charge in municipal parking lots, fees for leaving large items of waste at environmental stations, fees for waste disposal, public transportation fees (usually set by the contracted companies), subsidies for improving home heating systems, and exchanging out-of-date cars for a public transportation pass; other relevant services, such as radon measurement, are free of charge. The amounts of fines can also be considered an economic policy instrument.

Administrative policy instruments deal with matters ranging from large infrastructure issues, such as municipal spatial planning concerning public transport and the location of services, to the size of waste bins, which determines how much waste a household can dispose of until it is picked up. Availability of car block heaters and the number of parking lots are examples of specific administrative policy instruments. Householders
who live in their own family houses cannot choose whether or not to have the waste picked up by the municipal waste management service.

Suggestions for sustainable activities for householders

It has already been concluded that there are few ways to force householders how to act, so efforts have instead concentrated on behavior in public situations, and that administrative policy instruments also have their place. Information dissemination is considered a legitimate policy instrument, used in campaigns and on websites. In *Handbok i klimatkommunikation* [Handbook of Climate Communication], Palm (2006) argues that such information dissemination measures can concern what to do, and that they need to be supported by administrative efforts. The four municipalities display many similarities when it comes to how they explain their actions and their suggestions for what householders can do. The interviewed officials consider the municipal websites a good way to reach the general public with environmental suggestions. In some cases, the website information were even written by the interviewed officials themselves. The municipal websites form an important part of the informational dissemination efforts of the municipalities, not only concerning general information about the environmental impact of human and household activities, but also concerning municipal objectives as expressed through policies and concerning, for example, rules, regulations, and fees. “You are needed for a sustainable Växjö!” announces the municipal website, indicating how the municipality is attempting to involve the citizens (Växjö 2006b). It is interesting to note that initial faith in the effectiveness of information technology and the Internet in promoting local democracy has declined, and strong optimism has given way to general pessimism in this regard, according to Montin (2004:153).

Justifying the advice

Since this thesis concerns how householders are motivated to act environmentally friendly, it is important to investigate how the advices that municipalities give are justified. There are often very specific suggestions that require knowledge of the impacts of certain products and chemicals. In other cases, the advice is accompanied by explanations as to why one product should be chosen over another. The Huddinge municipal website features an alphabetical list of information about eco-cars, bicycle lane...
maps, public transportation schedules, car sharing programs, “walking school buses,” and a “challenge” for companies and groups of employees to participate in a competition for walking or bicycling to work (Huddinge 2006b). The strategy of emphasizing public contexts and acts shines through, and the list exemplifies the distinction between private and public initiatives.

Municipal websites also mention alternative fuels for regular cars, such as E85 fuel, which contains 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline, and the location of gas stations selling these fuels.

Here it is possible for regular car drivers to reduce their negative environmental influence by using a low proportion of ethanol. By driving efficiently, for example, by practicing eco-driving, fuel consumption decreases, as do costs and emissions. (Piteå 2006b)

Here both environmental and economic incentives are emphasized. When the air is described on the website of Piteå, it is emphasized that traffic is the major source of air pollution, which has global impact in terms of the greenhouse effect and damage to the ozone layer, and contributes to health problems, such as cancer. Everyday activities are thus connected with global environmental problems and individual health. Huddinge is the only municipality that specifically mentions air travel: website visitors are advised to avoid air travel at high altitudes “if possible” (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:43). The visitors are not forced but advised to act in certain ways.

Regarding householder use of private cars, vehicle maintenance is included under the transportation heading. Concerning water, Huddinge and Växjö suggest that cars should not be washed at places that lack proper sewage treatment. To reduce emissions, the Huddinge website (2006e) suggests: “start walking, choose public transportation instead of driving or flying, travel to work with others, use the block heater for [your car] engine in the winter.” People who have to travel extensively by car are advised to take a course on eco-driving. Car drivers are further encouraged to get rid of their private cars and become members of car sharing programs, purchase Swan-labeled PAH-free50 tires, not to drive a larger car than necessary, purchase a fuel-efficient car when buying a new one, see whether one’s car can use a renewable fuel such as ethanol or biogas, maintain appropriate tire pressure, and take turns with other parents walking the kids to school (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:46–47; cf.

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Växjö 2006b). If a person does not understand what “PAH free” means, she or he can either accept the information and advice uncritically, or investigate why certain kinds of tires should not be purchased. As stated initially, however, there are few means to force people to follow through with the suggestions, so the suggestions may remain simply information. As the suggestion about learning to “eco-drive” indicates, it is recognized that people may have to drive, so reducing the negative impact rather than abstaining from driving is emphasized. As with eco-cars, it is interesting to question what happens when something is given the term “eco”; it seems as though simply branding an activity or product “eco” makes it seem more environmentally friendly.

While most suggestions are directed towards public and formal contexts, households are encouraged through informational policy instruments on the municipal websites to purchase more environmentally friendly products. All municipal websites offer advice about ecological labels, and about how readers can wield their consumer power. In describing what this “consumer power” means, the website highlights how demand influences what the manufacturers produce. A pervasive trait of the municipal websites is that they provide few suggestions for how to reduce consumption; however, Växjö is different in this regard. The municipalities note that interest in ecological production and KRAV labeled products has increased. The Växjö website offers the following suggestions:

- Purchase food that is produced close by in order to reduce transportation.
- Purchase ecologically labeled products in order to support environmentally aware companies.
- Invest your earnings or profits in environmental funds or invest in environmental improvements in the business sector. (Växjö 2006b)

Under the heading “Nature, Environment, and Agenda 21,” the visitor to the Huddinge website can find information about environmental labels; for example:

As a consumer you have great power. By choosing the right products when you do your grocery shopping, we collectively create the demand. This will form the basis for changes in natural resource management, production lines, and transportation systems. It is easy for an individual to think that his or her own contributions do not matter. On the contrary, however, the individual contribution means a lot to the whole. When we do our grocery shopping there are various labels that help us out. There are four symbols that
This quotation relates to various important aspects of the householders’ everyday consumption, such as consumer power, demand, and trust. There is a multitude of labels on the products householders purchase, in a situation that can even be likened to a “jungle” (Piteå 2006d).

Illustration: The “jungle” of labels and certifications from national to international levels. The fourth label in the upper row is the “Green Keyhole,” a label for healthy food, which some of the municipalities mentioned along with the environmental labels. The reason I do not give a list of definitions for all the labels is to emphasize the multitude and variability that consumers need to comprehend.

“Nature” has its own heading on the Piteå website, and issues such as biodiversity, nature experiences, untouched nature, and “values of nature” are mentioned. The texts under most of these headings are dense with facts concerning the cause and effects of environmental problems, but
contain relatively few suggestions as to what householders can actually do, apart from the driving hints. The section under the “Suggestions and advice” heading is typical in this regard, though it also provides directions for how to participate by contacting politicians and municipal officers. The suggestions offered in this section are organized under the following headings: Heating properly with logs, Energy advice, Compost the right way, How to treat food the right way, Caring for the environment through your choice of food, and Finding your way around the environmental label jungle. Environmental labels are discussed as follows:

It has to be easy to purchase environmentally friendly [items], even for those of us who are not experts at interpreting declarations of content. That is why we need a clear environmental labeling scheme, a signal that shows that we can choose a product with a clear conscience. This is something that producers have realized as well. (Piteå 2006d; my emphasis)

Here they relate trust in labels to the importance of consumer power. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that choosing environmentally sound products is said to allow one to shop with a “clear conscience.” The Swan, Good Environmental Choice, and KRAV labels are highlighted, just as on all the other four websites, and there is also a list of lesser-known labels, such as the EU Flower, Fair Trade, DEMETER, and Änglamark. Even the Green Keyhole label is presented, even if it is not an environmental but a health label. To eat in a more environmentally sound way, the visitor to the Piteå website is encouraged to apply the following seven pieces of advice, which go beyond simply purchasing labeled products:

Eat fruit and vegetables that are in season, and eat locally produced products. Eat less meat, and when you eat meat choose meat from local or regional animals. Eat meat from animals that have grazed, such as lamb and beef. Use leftovers so that you don’t have to throw away food. Take care of what is produced in your garden and what nature gives. (Piteå 2006d)

An ideal of self production is reflected in these suggestions. Piteå municipality further concludes that the food-consumption habits of its inhabitants influence the environment (Piteå 2006g). Concerning compost, Piteå writes that:

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... close to half of what you throw away can be composted. If more people made compost, we would reduce the strain on the landfill site and the distance the waste collection truck had to travel. Composting is a good way to help nature take care of the nutrients in the waste. And in return, you get fertile soil with which you can improve your garden. In this way you help close the cycle … (Piteå 2006d)

This last quotation makes it obvious that household activities are connected by cause and effect to environmental impacts; moreover, the importance of transportation in creating environmental problems is highlighted. Personal gains are emphasized alongside environmental gains. The complexity of the relationship between personal action and environmental effect is brought out, as website visitors not only get information about global connections and reasons for acting in a certain way, but also about what they can do to help if they wish to influence the environmental situation.

The suggestions mentioned in the policies often concern one’s influence on a somewhat abstract environment. A few suggestions concern private situations in which individuals interact with and influence others. Huddinge stands out with their suggestion to avoid traveling by public transportation when wearing horseback riding clothes, strong perfumes, etc. (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:16). Through these suggestions, individual responsibility for other citizens is emphasized. Lokal Agenda 21 explains, in cause and effect terms, why the suggestions should be followed and how the major threats to other species comes from human activities (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:18). The general public is encouraged to help protect biodiversity by sponsoring or adopting grazing animals or natural grazing areas. The traditional Swedish right of common access to land51 principle of “not disturbing and not ruining” is emphasized, just as it is on the Växjö website. In Lokal Agenda 21, Huddinge mentions that there are phosphorous and nitrogen in the food we eat and in detergent. This information directs the reader’s attention to the complexity of everyday activities, and how we use chemicals without necessarily understanding their impact.

Adjusting practices in the home concerns another set of suggestions touching on the everyday life of the householders. These suggestions are often directed towards people living in detached houses. Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge informs the reader that householders in Sweden, through heating and transportation, account for nearly 50 percent of Sweden’s emissions of fossil carbon dioxide. The suggestions mentioned in the policy are to let

51 Allemansrätten in Swedish.
SRV, the waste management company, pick up old freezers, not to use spray cans containing freon, and not to purchase old air conditioning systems (Lokal Agenda 21 Huddinge 2005:43), all of which concern setting up and equipping the household. Växjö suggests the following specific measures and activities concerning to adjust the home’s socio-technical systems:

- Lower the temperature indoors. Switch off the lights in unoccupied rooms.
- Purchase and use energy-efficient appliances.
- Purchase a lawn mower that runs on electricity instead of garden machines that require oil or diesel.
- Install a peat burner for heat instead of an oil burner.
- Install solar heat for heat and hot water.
- Get connected to district heating if there is any in your vicinity. It is produced using bio-energy (from the forest). (Växjö 2006b)

In the last case, they support the suggestion by explaining the reasons for it. It is not just the activities indoor that are considered; the Växjö website suggests several outdoor activities “for a greener Växjö” (Växjö 2006b).

- Reduce your use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers in your garden or allotment garden.
- Use organic material for fertilizers instead of chemical products.
- Consider biodiversity and use seeds of plants that are rare or close to extinction.
- Construct a nesting box for birds, bats, or hedgehogs in your garden or at school. (Växjö 2006b)

These suggestions are similar to the one on the Lundby website, which advised householders with gardens to purchase alkylated gasoline for their boats and lawn mowers.

How householders use water is at the boundary between the public and private spheres, since the water eventually reaches sewage treatment plants. The Växjö website gives the following advice for communal water-related activities, where the general goal is to be “considerate”:

- Use environmentally labeled detergents and household chemicals and use the proper amount.
- Use gentle products when bleaching or cleaning.
- "Flush clean": do not flush down solvents, paint, solid garbage, or other hazardous substances.
− Use environmentally labeled car-cleaning materials.
− Paint your boat with gentle paint (which does not contain heavy metals such as lead).
− Reuse and repair old and broken stuff and leave things at second-hand stores instead of throwing them away. Or purchase/sell things at flea markets.
− Sort your garbage, hand in returnable bottles and cans, and compost organic material.
− Get in contact with your environment and public health council to have the radon levels in your house measured. This is done in the winter.
− Commit yourself quality: do not choose poor quality goods that soon need to be disposed of or semi-manufactured articles.
− Commit yourself quality of life: go to the movies and dine out instead of purchasing products. (Växjö 2006b)

This is how complex information the municipality communicates to the citizens. It is obvious that these suggestions concern householders in various ways, being about both consuming the right things and reducing consumption. Environmental labeling is mentioned, but visitors also need to have their own knowledge, for example, regarding “less harmful products for bleaching and cleaning.” Why certain products and activities are better or worse than others is explained in some cases and not in others.

The political visions present in all four municipal policies are most obvious when it comes to specific suggestions for individual action. For example, the website of Växjö municipality suggests the following activities for “democracy and learning for sustainable development”:

− Participate in councils, debates, meetings, and get engaged in your immediate community.
− Get engaged in environmental initiatives at your school or at the school of your children.
− Take responsibility for reducing your own environmental impact.
− Get in touch with your own politicians and write “citizen suggestions” for the municipal council.
− Send us your comments concerning local environmental and Agenda 21 initiatives.
− Sign up for an Agenda 21 forum. (Växjö 2006b)

The last three points indicate that private individuals are considered responsible for influencing government to steer development in a more
sustainable direction, suggesting means by which individuals can exert this influence.

In conclusion, a multitude of activities are suggested by which householders can have an influence. These websites can be considered informational policy instruments to which householders refer voluntarily, since there is no way to require their use or control how they are used.

Conclusions

This chapter has delved into the municipal structuring of householder ecological action space. The municipalities are responsible for many areas concerning resource management, in which the householders can act in more or less sustainable ways. While the policies and political visions emphasize broad participation and individual responsibility, the officials who work on implementing these policies express a mismatch, in the sense that they find it difficult to involve citizens and householders broadly. The officials acknowledge that politicians have administrative policy instruments at their disposal through the way they design the municipality. However, the main policy instrument is information dissemination. To implement the visions of sustainable development, municipal officials further concentrate their efforts on existing networks and on municipal employees, who make up approximately 20 percent of the workforce. This indicates that officials respect the existence of what they consider a private householder sphere that is beyond their ability to influence legitimately. The municipal websites offer a range of suggestions for sustainable activities that householders can choose to perform. In some cases, these suggestions contain explanations as to why these specific activities are environmentally friendly while others are not. The decision of whether or not to offer such explanations relates to matters of trust and the simplification of complexity. The category of suggestions for sustainable behavior concerning home modifications relates to the municipal officials' acknowledgement of how they can use administrative policy instruments to influence householder behavior. This category refers to how houses are constructed and how the municipality is planned, both of which have implications for householder behavior. To some extent, this has implications for the structuration of the ecological action space of the householders.

The legal policy instruments the municipality can use to influence the householders concern only a few issues. For example, it is illegal to
stop for more than one minute with the car engine running, it is illegal to leave recyclable goods outside the containers at the recycling depot (though it is not illegal to place the wrong fractions in the wrong containers), and householders are required by law to use the municipal waste management service. On the other hand, it is not specifically illegal to throw out batteries in the regular waste, to drive one’s car all day, to consume huge amounts of goods, or to neglect to recycle or buy ecologically labeled goods; these are optional activities.

It was acknowledged that the municipality is not alone in attempting to influence household behavior. The municipal informational policy instruments are coupled with national and international product labeling schemes, advertisements in the media, etc., all of which further influence how householders act. Some information concerns the existing regulations, fees, and how householders can change their impact by modifying their homes. Such information deals with both activities that householders are advised to do voluntarily and activities they are required to do, as well as the reasons why. Rather than prohibiting environmentally unsound activities, the municipalities endeavor to promote more environmentally sound activities.

The municipality supplies interested citizens and visitors to the websites with suggestions for environmentally sound practices and explanations as to why these should be performed. The municipal officials largely focus on informational policy instruments, but recognize that they can also direct what householders do through administrative policy instruments, such as municipal planning and service design. A hypothesis is that they have to rely on advising voluntary action since they cannot legitimately control the private sphere. What knowledge and experience do householders need to interpret and understand the municipal information and policies relating to the environment? It is now time to start looking in “through the kitchen window,” as it were, in the following three chapters, and investigate the householders’ behavior and how they justify and reason about everyday activities that influence sustainable development.
5. Ecological problems, risk, and trust: consequences of everyday household activities

The book *Silent Spring* (1962) by biologist Rachel Carson is widely considered one of the most important works making the general public aware of the effects of chemicals on human health and nature. Her non-technical and descriptive prose made her arguments accessible to a broad range of readers, and can be favorably compared with current attempts at environmental communication (cf. Palm 2006). It also illustrates how a scientist can communicate environmental problems via a pedagogical process and contribute to public awareness and action. Since the 1960s, the focus of the environmental movement has become wider, encompassing how everyday decisions have global consequences and how global phenomena influence the everyday life of individuals (Giddens 1994:57–58, 1998; Dobson 2003).

The underlying rationale of studying environmental problems is that in the literature they are regarded as created by human activities, including household activities. Perceived environmental problems and risks are commonly considered the main motive for environmentally friendly behavior and are assumed to inform how people decide how to act (Beck 1996; Fischer 2003). It is also expected that proximate problems increase people’s willingness to act and change their behavior, since people are assumed to act mainly out of self-interest (Eliasoph 1998; Pateman 1970). Risk and threat are theoretically connected to the discussion of trust and of whose descriptions people trust. This concerns people’s trust in the ability of experts and researchers to gain knowledge of problems, and to manage or even solve problems and deal with the risks. In chapter 2, I distinguished between feeling threatened by environmental problems and expressing awareness of environmental risks (Gyberg 2003).

The aim of the thesis informs this chapter through the following questions: How do the studied householders discuss the relationship between their own everyday practices and environmental effects? How do they describe and view nature? How do they interpret environmental effects and problems? Can environmental problems and risks be regarded as acceptable or manageable?
The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I will describe the householders’ view of nature, since I argue that this contributes to their conception of environmental problems. Then I will describe the householders’ interpretations of environmental problems and how these differ between various types of problems. In the study, I asked the householders about the environmental problems they thought existed; then I followed up by asking whether they believed there was anything they could do in their households to counteract these problems. The quotations from the interviews are taken from both the taped and transcribed interviews and the interview notes, and trust, complexity, and doubt will be the center of attention. The final section sums up the research questions and deals with problems and risks that are considered manageable. This leads into the analysis of ecological action space.

“Natural nature” as unaffected by humans

In most of the literature, environmental problems are regarded as created, and thus alterable, by human behavior, through what are often called lifestyle changes. Such environmental problems are distinct from natural disasters that occur without human impact, although we have learned to predict and manage some of them with the help of technology. It is important to pay attention to how the householders view nature. A scholar can claim that humans are dependent on natural resources for their survival. However, some researchers have pointed out that people often deny their dependence on nature by dividing nature from culture (Plumwood 1993:2). An example of this is provided by the stories of how children claim that milk comes from the store rather than from cows.

Two incidents happened not long before the interviews I performed, in particular, those in Gothenburg, which I believed would be reflected in the householders’ discussions. One was the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia on 26 December 2004, killing hundreds of thousands of people, among them many Swedes on vacation. The media discussed whether it was a natural disaster or an environmental disaster in an anthropocentric sense, to what extent the severe damage was caused by human factors, and how it affected humans in the sense that so many died. However, the expected influence on how the householders reasoned about this incident in the interviews was almost absent. Lillemor was the only householder who spontaneously connected humans and nature to the tsunami disaster.

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Lillemor said that it was important not to grab anything we want from nature. We are often good at disregarding nature, and believe we can do this without getting punished for it. She referred to a philosopher in London who expressed these thoughts in relation to the tsunami in Asia. He had said that we often portray nature as fragile while we humans are strong, while it really is the other way around, and nature is strong. Lillemor stated herself that in Asia nature roared back and we were taken aback. We really should respect nature more. This view was further emphasized when she described how she relied on nature when hiking in the mountains in northern Sweden in the summer. Then she realizes how little she needs from modern society, like the large shopping malls with all the variety. Her partner is really good at interpreting nature by watching the clouds, the wind, and the weather, she said. (Interview notes)

Modern society with its consumer culture and urban environment is here placed in contradistinction to nature. Nature and culture are separated and her vacation gives her a different perspective on life.

The second incident occurred in mid January 2005, when the storm called “Gudrun” hit southern Sweden, where Växjö municipality is located, especially hard. The storm did a lot of damage to the forests, and many households experienced power cuts for days and weeks as a result of trees falling on the power lines. Some of the householders in Växjö related this incident, to which I will refer later in the chapter.

Noticing environmental problems

It may come as no surprise that people who spend time observing nature develop a capacity to notice changes in it; given that this is so, it is especially important to highlight how such people interpret and give meaning to nature. A few householders described how they used their knowledge to interpret nature and environmental changes, just as Lillemor stated that her partner does. Peter and Pia often take boat trips with their children in the summer; then they notice environmental problems.

Interviewer: Do you think there are any environmental problems?
Pia: Yes there are. Many, globally.
Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?
Peter: It is noticeable, the bottom of the sea is like cardboard boxes for eggs, the whole bottom.

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Interviewer: Can you give me some examples?
Peter: It is noticeable, the bottom of the sea is like cardboard boxes for eggs, the whole bottom.
Pia: We never spot any bullheads,\textsuperscript{52} like when I was young. They are very sensitive.

Peter: Apart from that, the wind blows from Kappa [the paper mill], and our neighbor used wet logs in his wood-burning heating system, which caused black smoke, but he has moved now.

How the householders noticed the effects of environmental problems is central here, even if they did not connect them to global problems that may have caused these effects. Pia and Peter did connect global problems to local manifestations, which was rare. As I will show later, most householders said that global environmental problems appeared only in distant places. Interpreting this distinction further, the city is considered human made and as not containing nature apart from the air, while true nature is “natural” and unaffected by humans. Another illustration of how some householders had noticed changes in the environment was given by Oscar:

Oscar has noticed how the environment is deteriorating, especially when driving along the highway between the towns of Piteå and Luleå. The sign that he mentioned noticing was moss growing on buildings. (Interview notes)

Moss was an unusual environmental problem to bring up, but Vilhelm mentioned it as well. The fact that some effects were more commonly talked about than others was taken to indicate that some people had learned how to pay attention to environmental problems. In the case of the moss, I unfortunately did not follow up and ask what they considered it to be an effect of, i.e., what caused the unusual moss growth.

Householders who described how they noticed changes in the environment can be distinguished from householders who mentioned learning about environmental problems rather than noticing them. The first group of householders express that they are not dependent on experts to point out environmental problems. Even so, they have probably learned from someone about bullheads being sensitive to environmental change, for example, since individuals are not isolated, according to my analysis based on the structuration theory. This discussion ties into the distinction between lay knowledge and expert knowledge in risk perception.

A popular dichotomy that various householders expressed was that between rural and urban areas. It is in the urban environment that several of the householders noticed that they were affected by car emissions, for

\textsuperscript{52} Cottidae or Cottus in Latin.
example. Örjan mentioned that he often got a headache from the air pollution in Gothenburg when he returns after periods of working at sea. Cities are thus portrayed as the opposite to nature, as further illustrated by Peter:

Peter: One doesn’t value the environment until it is ruined—
unspoilt nature, to see other views than pure asphalt. The more concrete, the greater the need to get to know nature.

Cities are decoupled from nature, and the modernization process gets attention in his description because it is believed to ruin nature. Urbanization can even be interpreted as an environmental problem in itself, since human activities are concentrated there. This implies that possible efficiency gains, such as short commuting distances, that can be achieved only in cities are neglected. Another illustration of this common view was provided by Ärnst when talking about their summer house on Öland, a large island in the Baltic Sea:

Ärnst: It feels good to go to Öland. I don’t know if the air is cleaner, but it certainly feels better.

Öland is an agricultural region. Since it is important to focus on what is absent from the descriptions, it is noteworthy that large-scale agricultural practices and human cultivation of land, for example, were not discussed in terms of human encroachment on nature. It is possible to consider agriculture just as human made as urban areas (cf. Macnaghten & Urry 1998; Salzman 2001). The countryside, however, is considered closer to nature than the city.

Few of the householders claimed that humans are dependent on nature. This could be an indication of the householders taking nature for granted, or that humans can master it by various means. When asked about his definition of “environment,” Örjan commented:

Örjan: Well, the environment is everything we have around us … one thinks about a lot of things. It is not like I am—I cannot claim to be interested in the environment. But I do realize that we cannot keep consuming resources.

When describing the environment, Örjan connected it spontaneously to human influence through resource extraction, though he did not feel the need to develop this line of thought any further. In the above quotation, he highlights that the environment is complex and vast,
while connecting it to human activities and how our consumption patterns affect it by extracting natural resources.

In conclusion, humans are not considered part of nature by most of the studied householders, who tend to decouple humans and nature (cf. Plumwood 1993). I interpret this as indicating that modernization, urbanization, and consumer culture, with wide supply network created by humans, are considered to be in opposition to nature. As scholars have emphasized (Hynes 1989), humans are portrayed as dominating nature.

When analyzing the householders’ descriptions of the environment and nature using structuration theory, I concluded that the householders had learned how to pay attention to environmental problems and changes in nature. Many of them gave similar accounts of how they understood nature. However, interpretations are not closed, shown by the fact that some of the householders described more unusual changes in nature, such as the changed pattern of moss growth. How do the householders portray the environmental problems and risks to which humans contribute in nature? This will be dealt with in the following section.

Environmental problems and risks that they know of

Perceptions of environmental problems and risk concern assessing possible negative environmental consequences. These consequences may affect one personally or affect others. Environmental problems and risks may be perceived or experienced personally or others may sensitized one to them. Some analysts who focus on human use of natural resources emphasize how individuals make excessive use of shared resources based on self-interest (Hardin 1968). In this section, I will show how the householders learned to see or notice certain environmental problems. Their descriptions can be divided into three dyadic categories: visible versus invisible, local versus global, and finally abstract versus materialized/manifested problems. In certain cases, these categories are equivalent, such as when an environmental problem is visible, local, and materialized, such as litter. Risks can similarly be conceived of in different ways, based on a distinction between near and distant risks depending on who is affected or threatened. Among the studied householders, it was common to distinguish between whether or not they would be personally affected as householders by a particular risk. I will start by presenting a section of the interview with Zoran and Zubeyde, since they mentioned several themes that other householders discussed as well.
Zoran: Of course, there are a whole lot of different environmental problems in the world. Locally I don’t know, but in the world, yes there are.

The above exemplifies the decoupling of global environmental problems from one’s immediate environs and local context. The focus is on the distinction between global and local. Zubeyde continued:

Zubeyde: Well, we just have to look at the industrial area here, and the cesspit.

They continued by talking about the bad smell released when the municipality empties a cesspit close to their house several times a year; then they continued:

Zoran: Then there is all the noise. I don’t think about the contamination.
Zubeyde: But there are auto paint shops!
Zoran: But do you experience any problem with them? Isn’t it more like they exist there? It isn’t like we are …
Zubeyde: Well, I didn’t say I had any problems with them. I just said that they were environmental problems.

She distinguished between being personally affected by and simply knowing of environmental problems. This has strong implications for the discussion of consciousness.

Zoran: Yes, but it depends. I don’t know how they deal with them; perhaps they manage them perfectly well.

Here he brought in a new dimension as well, namely, whether or not the auto repair shops and industries manage the environmental problems they help create.

Zubeyde: Yes, but I don’t think so.

Then they talked a bit more about the industrial area. Zoran repeated that he considered the noise a problem, to which Zubeyde countered:

Zubeyde: But that is not an environmental problem.
Zoran: Well, for me it is.
Zubeyde: And then there is pollution in the lakes.
Their exchange emphasizes opportunities for managing risks and dealing with problems rather than preventing problems from occurring, as the precautionary principle stipulates. This has strong implications for the theoretical discussion of ecological modernization. Directing attention towards industries rather than household demand was a common phenomenon.

One aspect of environmental problems concerned being personally affected, particularly in terms of health (e.g., headaches, allergies, cancer, or simply being worried). These effects can be related to both the problems they have learned about and those they have noticed directly, as described above. Making a theoretical distinction between experiencing, noticing, and perceiving environmental problems is difficult, since people may “experience” or see environmental problems through the media, where problems are depicted in a multitude of ways. For example, the media may depict polar bears, seals, or pandas being threatened, present diagrams of quantified changes in pollution, or show people who get serious sunburn in regions where the ozone layer is thin—all of which are effects of problems. In other cases, someone may have mentioned something in a face-to-face encounter concerning how to interpret environmental changes, which later influenced how a person interpreted something they read about or saw with their own eyes as an environmental problem.

When I asked the general question as to whether there were any environmental problems, the householders often attempted to clarify the question by asking me whether I was interested in global or local problems. Many householders mentioned air pollution as a major environmental problem. Poor air quality was a local environmental problem that various householders said affected them. Air quality is a local and concrete environmental problem regarded as caused by transportation emissions and affecting their own health. One householder who reasoned this way was Yrrol. He claimed that the air was a lot cleaner in Växjö than in Stockholm, where he lived for several years. In Stockholm there are a lot of emissions, he said, a matter that relates to the earlier discussion of urbanization. Yrrol commented as follows:

Yrrol: In our everyday life here in our house I do not experience any tangible environmental problems.

Ylva: No, but then you know that someone is damaging the rainforest by reckless felling, and that thing with the ozone layer, and everything else one learns about.

Ylva’s comments about global environmental problems being something they learn about is interesting, and connects to the fact that few
mentioned that they were personally affected by global environmental problems. Global environmental problems seem by definition to occur in distant places. A further illustration of this was when Eva and Evald responded to the question of whether there were any environmental problems:

Eva: And then there is the forest that they are cutting down.
Evald: And then there is the ozone hole as well.
Eva: Yes, but what is that forest called?
Evald: You mean the rainforest?
Eva: The rainforest that they are cutting down. That is something as well.
Interviewer: Why do you think that is a problem?
Eva: Well, I don’t know, but it feels so because of all the animals.
Evald: And the overfishing of the cod.

The reckless felling is not caused by their household activities, but by undefined others in other parts of the world;53 they do not mention reckless felling of forests in Sweden, for example. The effects of global environmental problems are also materialized in terms of threatened animals, which also exemplify decreased biodiversity as an environmental problem.54 Reckless felling has become a symbol of modern consumer society that ruins natural nature. Eva and Evald focused extensively on animals when describing environmental impact, rather than on being affected themselves or on concern for other humans (cf. Vivanco 2002). Along with many other householders, they justify environmentally friendly activities not by the fact that they are affected themselves, but out of concern for others (i.e., people or animals). This means that it is not necessarily self-interest that motivates their concern, though it is connected to human values attached to animals and nature.

Some of the householders emphasized that environmental problems can be difficult to perceive. One example that illustrates this was given by Vilhelm:

53 A common way to visualize the reckless felling of the rainforest is to describe the affected area in terms of how many soccer fields get cut every minute (cf. Leonard 2008).
54 When highlighting decreasing biodiversity, I cannot help but notice that it is often animals and landscapes that have value for humans that are featured, for example, tigers, pandas, gorillas, beautiful birds, or tasty cod, rather than microbes or fungi. The former have symbolic value in many environmental movements and campaigns, when attempting to mobilize people for change. This indicates that environmental problems often are represented using symbols to which people can relate.
Interviewer: So what are the pros and cons with using the car then?

Vilhelm: The pros are the flexibility, and the cons that it costs a lot. Then of course there are negative environmental effects, but those are not visible. One doesn’t see those problems.

On the other hand, Vilhelm claimed to have noticed, when bird watching in a club, how birds have been negatively affected by brominated flame retardants. Several of the householders commented that many environmental problems are difficult to perceive, and linked that to a lack of motivation to do anything about them. This pedagogical issue is central. One example of this line of reasoning was when Gunnar emphasized the relationship between individual efforts and improvement in the environment:

Gunnar: There is a large distance between taking containers down to the recycling station and noticing any environmental improvements in the air or at sea.

His statement raises the question of whether noticing such improvements will ever be possible, due to where the natural resources are extracted, processed, used, and recycled. This also illustrates the vague notions people have about what environmental problems can be solved by recycling. Noting complexity as an obstacle to knowing how to act in environmentally friendly ways seemed primarily to be a male phenomenon in this study. Complexity can thus be an obstacle to deciding how to act, and to deciding what behaviors are environmentally friendly. Later in this chapter I will discuss how the householders deal with such complexity.

Quite a few of the householders discussed what was needed in order to change everyday behavior, and how environmental problems and disasters could be motivational tools for change. There are several examples of how householders believed that environmental disasters could cause people to change their behavior. “Eye-openers” that made people aware were another way to instigate change. Burt was one who mentioned that an eye-opener was needed for him actually to change practices; he also said that this heightened awareness would not come easily, since he is very well informed through his technology and science work. Finding something spectacular that would have an impact on how he acted was unlikely, he claimed in the interview, further confirming his “knowledge claims.”

Various householders mentioned the “garbage mountain” as an environmental problem. This refers to a visible problem they connect to
their everyday household activities, a problem, however, usually hidden by regular garbage collection. I consider this to belong to the same category of problems as waste, as “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002). However, one can question whether the garbage mountain is a problem in itself, or a symbol of something else, such as consumer society and the capacity to consume a lot of things in the first place. In Växjö, the “garbage mountain” was used as an argument by the municipality when it handed out cloth diapers to parents at the maternity ward. This environmental problem is connected to human and household activities, since their activities create garbage that can be reduced by the use of reusable cloth diapers, for example. In another sense, “the garbage mountain” might be an example of a pedagogical image or tool used to visualize and materialize a complex environmental problem.

Risk and health

Some of the householders noticed environmental problems by paying attention to their materializations. An example of this was when Desiree said the following:

Desiree: I am not the kind of person who considers everything. But sometimes I wake up and think, oh my God, look at all the black stuff between my windowpanes! Am I really inhaling all that?

Air pollution is an environmental problem she considers to be materialized and visible in her everyday life. Her statement can also be connected to her having allergies and her resulting concern about her own health—her allergies have clearly sensitized her to the environment. In relation to headache, these environmental problems affected the householders in a direct, bodily way. Olivia, like Anna, also mentioned that she buys environmentally labeled products, such as shampoo and detergent, because her children have allergies. In cases in which there were allergies in the family, householders were likely to emphasize environmental issues in a specific way, and it is possible to regard them as more receptive since they were personally affected. Similarly, Johanna had suffered from cancer, which made her aware of radiation. Now she seldom uses the microwave oven since she believes it is harmful to her health. There were several householders who talked about their own health considerations. Another example is that of Karolina and Karl, who explained how they fill bottles with water in order not to have to let the water run every time they want cold water, and also because they do not want the water to be contaminated

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with copper from the water pipes. This specific household activity was motivated by their knowledge of what happens to water that sits in copper pipes; it is easy to ascertain that Karolina acquired this knowledge through her work and studies, and “brought it home” to the household context.

Being affected by environmental problems was described from different perspectives. Ulla and Ulrik reasoned thus about environmental problems and whether they are affected by global problems:

Ulla: Of course there are [global environmental problems] … but we are not affected by them. Partly it is the worries about the ozone layer. But I don’t think that it is any news any longer; it is rather the refrigeration effect.
Ulrik: You mean global warming, I take it?
Ulla: Well, yes, but that is the strange thing, there is not only a greenhouse effect, but there is also a refrigeration effect.
Ursula: But then everything will be normal.
Ulla: Yes, they are related.

This is an example of how the interview situation provided a moment of knowledge exchange between household members. When Ulrik attempted to correct her, Ulla developed her insights, and their daughter participated as well. In this illustration, her claim to be worried is interpreted as risk perception and is intertwined with her awareness of environmental problems. However, although Ulla first said that the global environmental problems did not affect her, she later mentioned that the storm Gudrun could be connected to climate change. She also stated that she worried about the ozone layer, so one could argue that it has affected her as well, since she is concerned about it and feels threatened. She moved from claiming that global environmental problems were general problems that she knew of, to describing them as problems with local effects. She later declared that the storm affected all Swedes implicitly, since they had to share the cost of reconstructing what was damaged, thereby connecting environmental disasters to the nation-state. Her line of reasoning, however, was uncommon among the studied householders. Ulrik described in detail how they managed to live without electricity and running water in their household for two weeks during the power outage after the storm, and how he relied on his knowledge of energy systems to solve the problem and create an independent power supply when the collective system did not work. This is an example of what I call a gendered knowledge claim to the electricity and energy area as a male-dominated area of knowledge.

It is possible to discern a tension between environmental problems that the householders considered visible and local, on one hand, and global problems that are far away, sometimes invisible, and thus difficult to
perceive. A characteristic part of Piteå is the paper mill—Kappa—with its smoky chimneys. The mill further exemplifies the imagined distinction between the industrial "production" sphere and the private household consumption sphere, a distinction on which I feel several householders based their descriptions of environmental problems. In the 1960s, the industrial smokestack, earlier in the century a symbol of economic prosperity and progress, came to be the archetypal symbol of environmental problems.

When environmental problems were connected to global problems by the studied household members, they took the question to refer to global warming, the ozone hole, acidification, eutrophication, and desertification. These are problems that they generally do not feel they have experienced themselves but of which they know, often through the media. These environmental problems are mainly considered as global and as affecting distant places.

Local environmental problems that the householders mentioned comprised litter, bad smell from the paper mills, smoke from neighbors’ chimneys, household waste in the wrong place, and noise. The problems mentioned can be put into three categories: those directly experienced (e.g.,
suffering from headache or allergy), symbolic problems (e.g., the reckless felling of the rainforest), and those they noticed directly (e.g., the absence of sensitive fish, dust between the windowpanes, and litter). The central preoccupation with litter as a visible problem will be discussed below.

“Keep Sweden Tidy”

As mentioned above, the local environmental problems were of different types, such as the visible litter and the mostly invisible air quality (which householders experienced but did not necessarily see). Focusing on visible aspects proved to be characteristic of how local environmental problems were described and defined. A visible problem that most of the householders brought up was littering. Littering is here interpreted as a case of threat to order and “matter out of place” (cf. Douglas 2002). The danger posed by litter is that of ruined order, rather than damaged human health, for example. This problem is obviously caused by humans, and especially the perceived “irresponsible others” to whom I will return in chapter 7. An illustration was when Ärnst told about noticing garbage bags in the ditch when he was driving his grandchildren back from school. One day, he decided that he had to go back, pick them up, and take them to an environmental station. He discussed this in a vivid way:

Ärnst: How can people do something like that? They just throw it out in nature, and they’re content as long as they do not have to keep it in their own yard.
Ärla: I just don’t get how people can throw things out like that.

The case Ärnst described, when he took his car and went to pick up the garbage in the ditch near his daughter’s place, was not the first such occasion. When he and Ärla are at their summer house on Öland, he usually takes a walk and picks up cans and paper in the ditch next to the road—yet another example of how being environmentally friendly is connected to recycling and considered as taking care of nature. Almost identical descriptions of careless drivers who littered from their cars were given by both Siv and Simon in Piteå and Fredrik and Fiona in Gothenburg. Several others also displayed concern about littering, especially at recycling stations. Material becomes litter when it is placed outside the designated containers, which is in line with the legal definition discussed in

55 It has to be mentioned that litter and plastics that end up in bodies of water, or get eaten by animals, is an environmental problem. But that is not the way the householders in this study mainly have described it.
From their description it is obvious that caring about the environment is equated with recycling; they mainly focus on the end stage of the consumption cycle and on how the chemicals are treated when not useful any more—not on what happens when they use them. This was very typical. They could equally well have argued that people cared more about nature before when they consumed fewer natural resources or when household waste had a different composition, for example. When it is possible to recycle specific waste materials, they can become valuable products again. This is done by placing them at the designated site, which is inside the recycling containers and not “in nature.” Such material gets renewed value and order is created or restored.

It may be possible to trace this concern about littering back to the national “Keep Sweden Tidy” [Håll Sverige rent] campaign initiated in 1963 by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SNF). When discussing what constitutes an environmental problem, the householders’ concern about litter should be set against the emissions caused by driving their cars, which did not receive attention in this context since they were focusing on how their behavior had improved during their lifetime by recycling.

Recycling is an example of a symbolic activity, quite distinct from what could be measured as the most efficient household activity pattern in terms of ecological footprint, which would be characterized, for example, by reducing car use or consumption levels. Such measurements are distinct from the analytical tool ecological action space, since it concerns the householders’ own descriptions, which can be contradictory, in relation to the mathematical logic on which the other concepts are based.

Chemicals are further perceived as less risky today because there are ways to recycle them after use, rather than simply dumping them on the ground or pouring them down a household drain. The use of chemicals per se was not, however, regarded as implying any inherent risk. Pesticides on fruit and vegetables were the only example of chemicals regarded as

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entailing risk, to both workers’ and children’s health. This relates to the discussion of trust and doubt, which will be dealt with in a later section.

Apart from distinguishing between local and global environmental problems, and visible and invisible ones, the interviewed householders gave examples that can be considered to distinguish the abstract and complex from the materialized and simpler problems. There are many connections between the local and materialized (smell, headache, noise) and between the global and abstract, though they are not completely equivalent.

How to know what is environmentally harmful

DDT is now so universally used that in most minds the product takes on the harmless aspect of the familiar. (Carson 1962:35)

In the previous section that dealt with what constitutes an environmental problem, there were few indications of how the householders directed attention to how they knew that activities and products were environmentally friendly or harmful. Here, I will relate this to the tension between trust and doubt. In this section, both trust and doubt are empirical categories, since they are both motivations the householders have expressed and used themselves, as well as being theoretically derived. I will relate these empirical categories to the theoretical framework.

To carry out activities such as recycling, people need to believe that they are doing the “right” thing, and that the activities will have tangible results and make a difference. As illustrated in the theoretical chapter, the relationship between trust and doubt are prominent in theoretical discussions of the risk society (Beck 1992). We are dependent on experts to describe and interpret environmental problems for us (Fischer 2003), and people need to trust these “translators” (Lundgren 2003). Trust can be a way of dealing with or managing risk and uncertainty in our everyday lives, such as that posed by the “multiplicity of abstract systems” (Giddens 1994:89). As is evident in the lines of reasoning of the householders, it is important to focus on the actors that they trust, for example, the municipality, politicians, or the media, and where they get useful and reliable information. However, it is also important to emphasize that it is probably impossible to ponder the entire environmental impact of each and every activity. This relates to the inherent complexity of the environmental effects of human activities.
There is a close relationship between risk, uncertainty, and trust, as was discussed in theoretical terms in chapter two. Trust can be understood at several different levels. In theoretical debate, trust is considered a way to manage and deal with risks and uncertainties created by our complex modern society. It can also be interpreted as trust in the descriptions and illustrations of the problems provided mostly by experts such as scientists. None of the householders said that there were no environmental problems and only one of them said that he did not care about environmental problems. Rather, discussion concerned what problems were the worst. Most of the householders expressed trust that others would solve the problems or say when something was dangerous or unhealthy. However, it is often difficult to determine what behavior or product is the most environmentally friendly, due to contradictory aspects of the behavior or product.

**Uncertainty**

Determining what is environmentally friendly, or how to act in less environmentally destructive ways, requires a certain level of comprehension and knowledge. This relates to being “aware”. An illustration of how the householders attempted to come to grips with complexity was given by Desiree, when she questioned whether she was on the right track, or whether she could do more:

Desiree: I think that the municipality should tell us more about the goals, because I don’t really know. I take a chance that they think it is good if I sort my milk boxes. But there might be really easy things to do that I don’t have a clue about.

One could claim that she is conscious of the possibility that she is unaware, and that she trusts the recycling system simply because it is materially there. How she expresses herself indicates that it is not only environmental effects but also civic participation that is complex, which will be further analyzed in chapter 7. Her statement indicates that she trusts information from the municipality, although she would like to get more, and that she wants to act as a good citizen as far as she can based on the information she has.

56 In very general terms, the householders described trust in scientists but lack of trust in politicians to deal with the risks and problems (“since politicians don’t act, they just talk,” as some of them said).
It is obvious that many of the householders rely on a complex of interrelated systems in their everyday life. When the householders reflected on the systems on which they rely, they either displayed that they took them for granted or that they were often unsure how they worked. Here is an illustration of the latter:

Iris: We are doing something that we should not do, we are washing our car on the street.
Ingvald: But we only do it twice a year.
Iris: But I don’t think we are allowed to.
Ingvald: But our neighbor is washing his car on the street. Perhaps it will be prohibited next year?
Iris: We do have a [stormwater] drain that separates the grease, but then the question is where it goes…

This quotation involves interaction between the householders, and displays their partial comprehension of how they affect the water system and of the laws and regulations that govern its use. As in the quotation of Desiree, it concerns both the political system and the environment. It further concerns observing how the neighbors act. It is about how perceptions of risk can be used in the justifying policy instruments that concern regulations. Another question the householders were asked in relation to environmental problems was whether there were any environmental problems that made them act in new and different ways. The answer that Vanja and Vilhelm gave is illustrative:

Vanja: Well, all the emissions that affect the animals and the water and the environment. We try to buy detergent and soap with the Swan label.
Vilhelm: But do we know that [it is good]? We checked and the phosphorous in the detergent that was prohibited in Germany was not prohibited in Sweden. And they talked about people who were not connected to a water treatment plant, like us. We should use detergent without phosphorous. And I have no clue about whether or not our detergent contains it. Of course, it is possible to read the label.
Vanja: Yes, it is.
Vilhelm: [I could have checked] all summer, but I have not been that motivated to go down to the basement and check if it is the one or the other.
Vanja: No, because, to a certain extent you trust that it is as good as it can be, if there is a label like that on it. Then you trust it, even if you don’t know exactly what it means.
Vilhelm: I think it was mostly the Baltic Sea they were talking about. And I don’t know if our water reaches the Baltic Sea. I don’t know. I am sure you could find out.

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In this rich interview excerpt, the householders touch on trust, uncertainty, complexity, and the systems on which they rely. The label simplifies the complexity, and while Vanja trusts the label he questions its effect and actual environmental influence, since one ingredient in the detergent is allowed in one country but not the other. This relates to difficulties getting an overview of the environmental consequences of their household activities. It also shows that Vilhelm only considered the phosphate as having a negative impact on the water in the Baltic Sea, and not in his local environment. The passage provides a good illustration of how these householders ponder the effects of their individual household activities on the larger system.

In Swedish stores, consumers can choose products with various labels stating that they are environmentally sound. Both the householders and the policies have emphasized that purchasing these labeled products is an important way to help improve environmental conditions. While some labels signify that the product is ecologically sound due to the production process, such as the organic label KRAV, other labels imply that they are less damaging than other similar products, such as Bra Miljöval [good environmental choice]. This is important to being environmentally friendly in a general sense: you can choose a product that is the least damaging or you can abstain from purchasing it altogether. Still, few householders made this distinction. Focusing on environmentally labeled products may serve as a pedagogical example when discussing the opportunities and expectations to act in more ecologically sustainable ways as a householder. The labels help by simplifying matters, in an attempt to provide an overview of the environmental consequences of products, to help consumers decide how to act.

A few of the female householders, however, reasoned about the required amounts of soap, detergent, and shampoo. They displayed an awareness that the amounts of a product used, and not just its environmental label, determined whether using it would affect the environment. Åsa was among the few who reasoned about the relationship between consuming labeled products and the quantities used:

Åsa: You wonder anyway, when I use a lot of detergent, and it has an environmental label, is it still good for the environment?
Getting information, in order to deal with uncertainty and act in more environmentally sound ways, concerns whether the sources and information are trustworthy. In the following section, I will discuss in greater depth the role of experts in trust and in visualizing environmental problems and risks. First, I will give one illustration of what can happen when the householders do not trust the information.

Peter, who lives with Pia and their three children, said that he sometimes “helps” to do the dishes. He commented that he has heard that it requires less energy to use a dishwasher, but he just can’t believe that is true, so he always does the dishes in the sink. (Interview notes)

Peter had received information about environmentally friendly practices that he simply doubted, so the information did not affect his behavior.

The householders did discuss the trustworthiness of different actors. Desiree mentioned that she expected the municipality to inform her about environmentally friendly activities she could adopt, and others also discussed the actors who influenced their decisions on how to act. The media got a lot of attention when it came to discussing sources of information.
Bo: You don’t really know that much. You don’t know. They [media] talk about child labor, but what do you know? Some companies are accused of this, but a competitor might spread a rumor. This is a problem—should one act in line with what one believes or what one knows? If you only act in line with what you know, then perhaps you shouldn’t act at all. Then you can’t do anything, because how much does one know?

This illustrates how complexity, questions of whom one can trust, and variability of information can result in passivity. This information variability was also mentioned as a problem by Ulrik when discussing “good” and “bad” products. He mentioned the information on which he relies when making decisions, and related this to the boycott of French wines that took place in 1995 in response to the French nuclear tests:

Ulrik: Well, there is such a mass of information that I believe we have to be more independent. You shouldn’t be seduced by easy things. It could be a very good cause, but I should not have a bad conscience if I didn’t do it, or at least not such a bad conscience. Because our memories are very short, and I feel like we are moving from one thing to another. What was wrong before becomes right later … And this is how it might be with China as well.

He is highly suspicious when it comes to finding out how to act, and from whom, and the major issues are the variability and inconsistency of the information. This inconsistency can be interpreted as one reason why the householders decide to perform only a few “symbolic” activities, such as recycling. The issue of bad conscience that Ulrik raises will be dealt with in chapter 7. Being more independent should be interpreted in relation to his questioning the central role of the media in influencing what people do and think, and his belief that people should seek information about how to act consciously from other sources. The media, however, were described as both a source of information and a conduit by which one is affected by manipulative advertising.

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Xiomara: I watched the news yesterday, and they referred to the “chicken for Friday” advertisement. The company that runs that advertisement increases its sales by 30 percent on Fridays. That is funny, how …
Interviewer: It influences?
Xiomara: Yes, perhaps we have to be a bit less easily duped by advertising, and change our everyday consumption in the right direction. But that is not easy in our huge world.
Her comment can be interpreted in relation to the idea that our consumer desires are created by advertising. She concluded that many environmental problems could be dealt with if people were more content with what they had. Her comments are connected to concepts of a good life, and to theoretical notions of false consciousness and the distinction between created desires and basic needs (cf. Naess 1989; Heath & Potter 2006). We are fooled into desires for commodities that do not make us happier, desires that only contribute to the destruction of natural resources.

In conclusion, various householders have discussed the complexity of the environment. They have questioned whether their activities matter, just as it is difficult to know when and where everyday activities will have negative environmental effects. When they have attempted to come to grips with complexity, it is common for household members to question whether they are doing the right thing, whether their actions make any difference, and what the result of their efforts is.

**Complexity in the multitude of choices**

The problem of keeping up to date in our complex society is part of modernity. Complexity concerns several areas when discussing the environment. In chapter 2, I referred to Beck (1996) and Giddens (1994) who have argued that individuals have no choice but to choose how to act in our current society in which choices at least seem to be abundant. However, this very abundance of choices can contribute to difficulties in deciding what to choose. Ulla and Ulrik talked about this extensively; Ulla described how she gets anxious about the excessive number of issues that she needs to understand to reach her goal of being environmentally friendly.

Ulrik: That’s the thing about development, it can be positive or negative, but now we have such a wide range of choices that it requires more time.

Ulla: I know what you mean. I long for the old grocery stores with a limited range of products that have just about what I need. I don’t want to be confronted with shelves filled with different products. I feel like screaming at all the different brands of corn flakes. This one has a lot of sugar, that one has a little, and all the additives. And you try to find the place of origin of the cookies and can’t find it.

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even more difficult to keep up to date. The last comment relates to her
difficulty in acting “consciously” in connection with her household. In her
case, being conscious and acting accordingly also requires time (cf.
MacGregor 2006; Barry 2006). Managing to fit all the necessary activities
into a busy schedule was a typical problem in the households with young
children. I relate this to factors that influence the householders’ ecological
action space. The difficulties involved in figuring out the most
environmentally friendly alternative can result in passivity, as mentioned.
Ulla also stated that it was difficult to know how to choose between the
different packages. The lack of direction in making this choice makes her
insecure, indicating that she distrusts her own judgment. Even individual
activities such as recycling can be complex. One way to deal with such
complexity is to require more information.

While some argue that they are vegetarians since they care for the
lives of animals, most studied householders cared more about how the
animals were treated on their way to the slaughterhouse. Because of the
attention paid to food and meat over the past ten years, for example,
regarding mad cow disease (BST) and genetically modified organisms
(GMOs), and because eating healthy is complex in itself, sugar and fat
being at the center, it is interesting to note that it was mainly the amounts
of sugar and fat in food that received most attention from the studied
householders. The following was said by the only household who
commented on GMOs and how he related them to the environment and
nature:

Örjan: Well, I don’t like genetically modified products at all.
We shouldn’t do that! The reason is that we have no idea
about what will happen, and I mean, now it is too late. We
have let them loose. I watched a program on TV about
genetically modified corn that they grow in the US. It has
spread all the way to Mexico, and no one can stop it. They
are like the classic examples of toxic substances, such as
DDT and mercury … and it is always economic incentives.
The tomatoes get larger and don’t spoil as quickly, but they
taste less good.

Interviewer: Do you think that you find information about
these issues at the store, and that it makes you consider what
you buy?
Örjan: No, I never check anything.

Genetic modification is something about which he knows, but that
does not make him feel personally threatened. Furthermore, this is an
example of how humans tamper with untouched, authentic nature. Humans
have created the threat; it is not nature itself that is threatening, in his
Deciding on what is more ecologically sound requires that the householders grasp complexity, and reason using existing and sometimes contradictory information. What at a first glance may seem like better alternatives, such as recycling or buying an eco-car, can turn out to be complex and difficult to decide on. This dilemma was illustrated when Ärla said the following:

Ärla: We could exchange our car for an ethanol car, but they too have problems.

This points to the complexity implied in determining what the most environmentally friendly alternative is, and how she relies on certain symbolic activities. Another way of dealing with the complexity of contemporary society is, as discussed above, to trust others’ judgment.

Some social scientists who focus on the environmental challenge have predicted that our current complex society will cause people to doubt and be concerned about environmental risks; the other side of the coin is, that since we cannot comprehend everything, we need to trust other actors (Beck 1996, 1995; Giddens 1998). Trust is a way to deal with, or manage, instability and unpredictability. How Örjan responded to a question about his energy system is informative on this point:

Örjan: Well, with all the choices that exist nowadays, it is a bit too much. One can’t spend time investigating everything.

Here he referred to his limited time, opportunities, and interest to find and scrutinize different household options. His way of dealing with complexity was to imitate his neighbors, by installing district heating, thereby handing over the judgment to others.

Another way to deal with the range of choices and the complexity was to distribute responsibility within the household. Ärla described how she and Ärnst have handled this; he is not interested in ecological products, but trusts her to choose:

Interviewer: Are there any products that you choose not to buy due to how they are produced?
Ärla: Well, I have to say that I’m getting more and more aware of it. First, I check if it is Swedish. I only buy Swedish meat. Then, I have started to read the fine print on the containers. And then, the newspapers, I pay attention to them as well. I just heard that they put slaughter remnants in the bacon, so now I haven’t bought any bacon for a while [laughter] ... I believe it is good that the newspapers report on these issues. And I watch Plus [a consumer information description. Deciding on what is more ecologically sound requires that the householders grasp complexity, and reason using existing and sometimes contradictory information. What at a first glance may seem like better alternatives, such as recycling or buying an eco-car, can turn out to be complex and difficult to decide on. This dilemma was illustrated when Ärla said the following:

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program on Swedish national TV] and I read a lot and keep myself informed.
Interviewer: When you say “fine print,” what is it that you look for?
Ärla: Well, I look at the container and see that it is “clean”—how should I put this—that it doesn’t contain too much preservative. And I avoid “light” products, because I have read that they are no good.

Ärla discusses where she gets information, and how she acts in relation to the new information. Her comments illustrate how matters concerning the environment and grocery shopping are sometimes connected to individual health. In their local grocery store, she purchases meat that is produced on local farms around Växjö. Then she “knows that the meat is clean,” as she said. In this case, locally produced meat not only implies less required transport, but also that it is less “risky” to eat. Trust can thus relate to distance. In many cases, “local” is considered something that can be kept under surveillance, meaning that the householders trust what is close and familiar. The connotations of the local and familiar recalls Carson’s initial comments on DDT. They can further be interpreted as part of ontological security, which implies that humans disregard risks in order to go on with everyday life (Giddens 1996; cf. Beck 1996). The potential and immense environmental risks created by modern society are beyond individual control and could paralyze everyday life. Trusting others, especially domestic partners, can furthermore be considered an aspect of gendering. The discussion of trust touched on in this section will be dealt with at greater depth in the next section, after which gendering will be examined.

**Trust and how the situation has improved**

As already mentioned, risk awareness and trust are intimately connected. This section will focus on how the householders felt that environmental conditions had improved, and on the arguments they used that I interpret as indicating this. The following exemplifies this:

Interviewer: You said that people used to be less careful with chemicals. Are there any products that you choose not to use?
Siv: I don’t think we use any products that are dangerous. But we do think about it today, yes one does. And then many of the things that existed before have disappeared, or maybe

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Interviewer: When you say “fine print,” what is it that you look for?
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they are called something else today? … I have not bothered to keep up to date on this issue.

She alludes to the need to keep abreast of new developments, to be knowledgeable of the environmental impacts different products and practices have and how these may change over time. Another illustration of the householder belief that the situation has improved and that they trust that they are being looked after was given by Vilhelm when he discussed the brominated flame retardants:

Vilhelm: As it is right now, they have removed the bad products. But who knows, there might be new villains.

He ascribed the present products a low level of risk, while he opened up the possibility that his knowledge of products and their contents might change. The contents have improved, according to this perspective, because “they” have looked out for him by removing bad products.

Recycling receives a lot of attention throughout the material. It should come as no surprise, then, that the householders should ponder the trustworthiness of the recycling system. Suspicions about the recycling system, however, could often be traced back to newspaper articles claiming that the sorted fractions were mixed, or that the newspapers left for recycling were burnt. The waste management employee whom I accompanied for a day in Gothenburg told me about how many people got upset about the truck he drives. It has a container with two different sections inside into which he can empty two different fractions at the same time. The two sections are invisible from the street, so people believe that he is mixing the fractions in one container, leading to phone calls from concerned people to the waste management company. Desiree’s comment on waste sorting was similar to many others:

Desiree: Then you hear that it does not matter, because the waste you sort is collected together and mixed, and then I wonder why I should do it. [But] I don’t want to argue with people who are contesting why I sort waste. It feels right to do it, because someone has thought about it, and there is probably a reason for devising the system.

The fact that there is a formal system for recycling makes her trust its usefulness for improving environmental conditions. Her reasoning that someone has thought about it is at the heart of the matter of trust, as I see it. Her reasoning and her trust in the system are opposed to Ulrik’s suspicions. It seems that the householders have decided to perform certain activities to
reduce their negative impact on the environment, even though they are not completely sure of their effectiveness, since it is difficult to completely grasp complexity. Another dimension of trust concerns managing risk, which is an issue that will be dealt with below.

Manageable risks are not threatening
As already mentioned, the theory of the risk society maintains that people are experiencing increased levels of risk in modern society (Beck 1992). In this light, it was interesting to note what the studied householders said about risks, threats, and problems: has this situation got better or worse, and are there any risks and problems that are acceptable? In Piteå, I chose to focus on radon levels in the homes, and the householders described how they had dealt with elevated levels of the gas.

Oscar: In our living room, the level was just below the limit. Interviewer: So 200 is the limit? I thought it was …
Oscar: Yes, we had 300, but then you wonder, just background radiation is at least a thousand, so one is affected by everything. The only way not to be affected by radiation is to crawl into a tent.
Olivia: And how much fun is that?

They related their risk perception to how they lived their everyday life and what it is not acceptable to sacrifice in order to be safer. To lead a good life they must accept certain risks. When asked about how they perceive radon, Regina answered:

Regina: Radon accumulates in air that is not stirring. And since I smoke it never happens here, since I smoke under the ventilation in the kitchen.

Any expectation that she should perceive radon as a health risk should be related to her smoking habit, which itself entails a health risk. Here it is possible to distinguish between risking one’s own health, and risking the health of others through effects on the common environment. Many of the other environmental problems that the householders described concern the latter category. Regina’s partner Ragnar, who had previously

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57 The maximum limits for radon differ according to the Swedish national board of health and welfare. For new construction houses the maximum level is 200 Becquerel per square meter, while it is 400 Becquerel per square meter for existing houses (Prop. 2001/02:128).
occupied a different house containing elevated radon levels, commented on the ventilation he was advised to purchase:

Ragnar: The municipality told me to install ventilation … but at that time I was transporting goods for the company “Swedish Ventilation” in Umeå. So I spoke with them. He just laughed at me. He said you don’t need to buy any ventilation! The only thing you need to do is to remove the thresholds indoors, and let the air flow from the window to stir the air … as soon as you open a door the radon meter sinks to zero.

This quotations deals with the matter of whom to trust when trying to determine what might pose a threat and how to handle it. Ragnar trusted his workmate’s recommendations rather than the municipal advice and the radon meter. Siv and Simon took a similar approach. Simon installed two pumps in their basement, which did lower the radon levels, after extremely high levels had been measured.

Simon: It is like Siv says, the people who built this house in 1945 lived to 90 and 100 years old, both of them, so I don’t believe it is that dangerous.

They estimated what represented threatening levels of risk by referring to previous owners. Simultaneously, this means that they had discussed the issue and concluded that the risk was acceptable. In conclusion, the four households in Piteå considered that the risk related to radon was manageable and acceptable.

As already mentioned, it was uncommon for the householders to express perceptions of environmental threat. In this light, it is important to distinguish between feeling threatened by environmental problems and expressing awareness of environmental risks of which they know (Gyberg 2003). Other risks, like those posed by chemicals, received very little spontaneous attention. This was taken to indicate that perceived environmental conditions had improved, and that concern about risks and threats was low.

While most of the householders argued that the state of the environment has got better, only a few were pessimistic. Quintus, for example, said:

Quintus: Everything will go to hell. We are poisoning nature, the water, and the ground, and we are using far too many natural resources.
He related this sentiment to the belief that we will have to be forced to do something before it is “too late”; in particular, people in power, such as US president Bush, should act. It is consumer society itself that is threatening. Quintus continued that our desire to consume destroys people on the inside as well:

Quintus: We hunt for prestige and gadgets, and forget about what is important in life.

His description and analysis of the problem resembled that of several other householders. A more common way to deal with the question of the environment was that of Yrrol. He expressed faith that industrial pollution is being managed and supervised correctly. He also said that many of today’s environmental problems are the result of “old sins,” and not due to current behavior. It is possible to relate his comment to his household’s activities, or rather to his relieving his household of responsibility for causing environmental problems. Many others also focused on industries as causing environmental problems; for example:

Simon: No, environmental problems are, I mean, there are large industries of course, but they have removed what they emit. Now it is mainly steam they release into the air. Then they have to get rid of the excess water somewhere. And who knows what shit it contains. But I believe that the municipality keeps good track of that. Apart from that, I don’t know of any major environmental problems.

Siv: No, I haven’t heard anything.

This illustrates how many of the householders expressed trust that other actors would take care of them. It implies that the householders do not need to bother keeping informed on environmental problems, since the responsible authorities do. Ecological modernization is often said to focus on progress and positive contributions, rather than on problems and a less positive view of the state of the world, as is characteristic of the risk society framework (Buttel 2000).

In some cases, what was previously a problem has even been reinterpreted as a resource today, for example, recycling and district heating based on waste incineration.

Ärnst: It is like Ärla says, they burn the waste in Ljungby, and it turns into energy.
Ärla: Yes they make energy out of it in Ljungby.
Ärnst: In that sense I don’t think it is a problem at all.
Gendered division of labor: healthy food and energy

Gender links individuals with a collective (cf. Lister et al. 2007:1). Gendered division of labor in the household is mirrored in the ecological knowledge claims and concerns that individual householders have expressed. In ecological action space, gender is considered to influence the knowledge men and women are expected to have and to interest themselves in. I will specifically analyze two household areas in which the activities are gendered, healthy food and energy supply. It is in areas like these, in which householders are expected to know something, that they will likely notice environmental impact and accept suggestions on how to change their behavior (cf. Carson 1962; Mellor 1997). Having knowledge can also be considered a way to deal with complexity, as was described above.

In general, the women participating in the study who lived with men said that they were responsible for grocery shopping and cooking. Health was the motivation for several of the women who claimed to want to purchase organic produce for their children. In relation to sustainable development, this is connected to caring for coming generations. An
Illustration of this common way of reasoning among the women was given by Ylva:

Interviewer: What do you think is the motivation for buying KRAV or organic products?
Ylva: I imagine that they are healthier and better quality. Though of course I haven’t checked up on that. I mean, we don’t read everything; it is more like one trusts that they are better. Especially for the kids—it feels a lot better to give them a KRAV-labeled banana.

Her description of trusting the labels was common. Like Ylva, Vanja claimed that she trusted the labels, though she has never checked them out. The labels were generally trusted, even by the men. Burt commented on the environmental labels as follows:

Burt: Of course we notice the labels. They cannot be that bad. We do not know for certain about the full implication of all the labels, but if one of them is on the grocery package it has to be pretty good.

This emphasizes a rather strong trust in the labeling system, and yet, it was evident from the interviews and time diaries that Burt was not responsible for the grocery shopping, due to the household negotiation of division of labor. His expressed concern was not transformed into action for the environment. Burt also displayed inconsistency in the statement, since he discussed how to determine what is more ecological. He believed that organic production required more farmland, and that it was difficult to determine whether it was better to purchase non-organic, locally produced food or organic food shipped to Sweden from afar, causing emissions. It would have been equally possible to argue that the labels were used for marketing purposes. This illustrates how the lack of agreement between research findings and information in the media rendered some householders passive in terms of acting for the environment: there is no single “truth” with which to act in accordance.

When considering the householders as gendered with different knowledge, expectations, and responsibilities, the opportunities for and constraints on participation in changing society towards more sustainable development acquire a new dimension. Both men and women claimed to perform environmentally friendly activities, but what they did was influenced by their gendered expectations. Therefore, it is impossible to claim that this study has indicated that either men or women are more environmentally friendly or concerned.
Interviewer: Who sorts the most then?
Agnes: It is actually mum who does.
Ulla: Yes, it is like that.
Ulrik: [But] if you count the weight, I sort the most.
Ulla: What?
Ulrik: Well, I sort stones, and car tires, and pallets, I take trailer loads!
Ulla: Don’t be foolish. Since we sort, it requires a lot of time. It requires a lot of time. I put the different fractions in a bucket here in the kitchen, and then I take it to the garage where I keep different containers for plastics, metals, paper, and batteries.

This quotation was chosen to highlight how the householders can have diverging ideas of what their activities mean and who is the most dedicated: it all depends on how the activities are defined and measured, for example, in terms of spending the most time or measuring the amount of recyclable goods.

The studied men were usually responsible for and made knowledge claims about the household energy system. They gave lengthy and well-informed descriptions of these systems, while the women said that they had no or only a vague comprehension of them. An illustration of this was when Regina said the following:

Interviewer: What form of energy do you use to heat your house?
Regina: I haven’t got the slightest idea! Not at all! What could it be? District heating I believe.

This is an example of what I call a gendered claim to lack of knowledge. Similarly:

Siv: Well, I don’t really get that thing about the water and the heat from …
Simon: But you know …
Siv: … the water, yes, I have had it explained to me so many times, and yet …

The above exchange illustrates how the householders leave some of the complexity to their partners, if they have one, and trust the other to be knowledgeable and keep up to date on particular issues. It also illustrates how the householders do not necessarily regard areas about which they have little knowledge as threatening, if, that is, they trust their partner to know about it. Relying on other household members is also a form of trust, since it implies that householders can delegate becoming knowledgeable.
and figuring out what is less risky. The gendering of household activities and the expectations of what one should be knowledgeable about are part of this distribution. An aspect of the household division of labor is who should be knowledgeable and keep up to date on the environmental effects of particular everyday activities.

**Analyzing the ecologically modern talking**

The overall aim of this chapter was to describe and analyze how the householders reason about environmental problems and risks, in order to analyze how these affect their ecological action space. The specific questions initially posed were: How do the studied householders discuss the relationship between their own everyday practices and environmental effects? How do they describe and view nature? How do they interpret environmental effects and problems? Can environmental problems and risks be regarded as acceptable or manageable? When householders were asked about environmental problems, they distinguished between local problems, such as smoke from neighbors, poor air quality due to traffic, and smell, and global problems, such as global warming, acidification, eutrophication, and reckless felling of rainforests. Global environmental problems appear to occur by definition in distant places, and not to affect the householders in general. It seems as though they know how to talk about environmental problems, especially after having heard about them in the media. How their awareness of environmental problems and of the consequences of their everyday activities influences their household activities will be discussed at greater depth in the coming chapters.

The studied householders were able to describe environmental problems about which they had learned. This dimension relates to structuration theory and how individual actors are part of structures. Perceptions of environmental risks and problems are mostly created in interplay with others. I argue that even the householders who noticed changes in nature, which they interpret as caused by human activity, have learned about these in relation to others. In the cases when others (e.g., experts) have interpreted risks and problems for the householders, it is impossible to list all the people involved in such interpretation or all the occasions on which it occurred. However, in this thesis I start from the view that in some cases the householders have become sensitized to notice environmental problems, and that someone has managed to visualize problems and risks for them. Global problems are not considered to have

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local effects, and to that extent global environmental problems do not affect them. The visible problems are ones they have managed to notice, for example, garbage and litter that people have thrown out “in nature” that become “matter out of place.” Most of the householders disconnect themselves from nature and do not talk about human dependency on it.

Perhaps it is impossible to lead an ecologically sustainable everyday life; one can only lead a less environmentally negative everyday life. As mentioned, discussion of ecological sustainability can be seen as a stage or process. The householders have tended to focus on “symbolic activities” as a strategy to deal with complexity, because it is impossible to comprehend everything. As Giddens has emphasized, anyone who attended to environmental risks all the time would most likely be considered to have a mental disorder (1996). Subduing risks and trusting others, such as experts, officials, or a household partner, is thus a viable strategy in contemporary society. When attempting to act in environmentally sound ways, in line with expert advice, this study has found that lack of agreement between research findings may make the householders passive when it comes to performing environmentally motivated activities.

Most of the householders expressed very little concern about environmental risks and problems, and hardly anyone said they felt threatened by environmental problems, apart from Ulla and Quintus. Previous literature has discussed whether it is possible to distinguish different ways to perceive environmental problems between social groups (e.g., between men and women, class etc.). Among the studied householders, there was no gendered distinction between men’s and women’s risk perceptions or descriptions of nature, although there was a gendered division in the environmentally friendly activities men and women carried out, as will be discussed at greater length in chapter 6. The existence of different environmental labels impeded householder reflection on the content of products, such as the effects of chemicals used for personal hygiene, or how cleaning and washing affects the environment. It is only by simplifying complexity that the householders can “go on” with their everyday lives (Giddens 1989). One group of householders, though, was concerned about the environment due to allergies or cancer: their own or their children’s health was the motivating factor in these cases.

Many householders also described how they believed the state of the environment had improved, which is connected to theories of ecological modernization, to notions of constant progress, and means to deal with problems. They stated that there were opportunities to manage the risks and problems that arise as a consequence of our everyday lives. Few had doubts about science and technology, which many late-modern scholars such as
Beck have emphasized. This indicates that the theoretical notion of a “risk society” is not supported empirically in the present study. The householders showed that they can indeed be aware of environmental problems and risks without considering them personal threats. The householders also gave examples of how they trusted that the systems worked. It seems very important for them to help recycle and not to litter, both of which address what are considered local environmental problems. This category of environmental problems belongs to a simpler set of problems concerning “matter out of place,” which is distinct from more complex problems connected to the effects of emissions and chemicals. In the latter case, it is much more difficult to connect individual activities to their environmental effects, or to determine liability, for example. In that sense, it is easier to deal with the simple problems.

According to most studied householders, environmental problems can be managed, for example, by changing household activities, and conditions are perceived to have improved. These beliefs, expressed by most of the householders, are here interpreted to indicate that they uphold the notion of ecological modernization. In relation to the discussion of “natural nature” as unaffected by humans, one can discuss the dependence that different householders feel on nature. The householders who live in the countryside likely feel more dependent on nature, since they have a different connection to systems and are more likely to be affected by power outages after storms, for example. Householders in the city may perceive that they are less dependent on nature. This perception is interpreted as building on the fact that the systems that supply energy, heat, water, and food are partly hidden because they generally work so well.

Risk awareness and knowledge of environmental problems are part of the householders’ ecological action space. However, they prompt environmentally sound activities to different extents, especially since the householders do not feel personally affected by most such problems. Ecological action space concerns the interrelatedness between individuals for example concerning household division of labor and who should become knowledgeable and keep up to date on the environmental effects of everyday activities. The morality of ecological citizenship will be dealt with in chapter 7; this concerns the rationale that householders should act responsibly in their everyday practices even if they are not personally affected, but because their activities affect others.
Illustration of how a seal is used as motivation for joining an environmental organization.
6. Practices, preconditions, and constraints

This chapter develops and analyzes ecological action space in light of what the householders described doing, and the opportunities and constraints they experienced. I will discuss the ecologically friendly activities that the householders mentioned, and how they relate to sustainable development and everyday life. The main questions dealt with in this chapter are as follows: What environmentally friendly practices do the householders describe having, and how are these related to the less environmentally friendly ones? Who does these activities? What preconditions and constraints can be decoded for environmentally friendly behavior? How do the householders contribute to their ecological action space?

One methodological approach to analyzing the constraints experienced was to ask the householders when they were unable to act in environmentally friendly ways. As discussed in chapter 2, structures open up certain opportunities for action at the same time as they restrict others; for example, the municipal policy instruments are among the constraints. Furthermore, it is important to investigate how the general and unspecified goals that most householders agreed on and expressed, for example, reducing energy use, using public transportation, or eating more ecologically produced goods, are transformed into concrete and specific practice.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, to understand how ecological action space is intertwined in everyday household activities, the analysis starts with an excerpt from a time diary describing a regular day. It illustrates several central issues encountered when analyzing the details of everyday life and ecological action space. Second, I describe and analyze the environmentally friendly activities the householders described in terms of recycling, transportation, purchasing ecological products, saving energy, being thrifty with water, and attempting to influence others’ environmental behavior; this section makes up the bulk of the chapter. Third, I review who acts and how the householders negotiate and divide their activities. These descriptions reveal some general issues, namely, the preconditions and constraints the householders describe needing in order to act in more environmentally friendly ways, which concludes the chapter and relates to the materiality of the householders’ everyday lives.
Analyzing details of everyday life

The identified practices are based on preconditions and constraints derived from the householders’ descriptions in the interviews and time diaries. These constraints and preconditions structure the householders’ ecological action space. Structures open up certain opportunities for action at the same time as they restrict others, and are both enabling and constraining (Giddens 1989). Compared with many of the other householders, Pia wrote her time diary in a very “rich” way, which here has been modified into a third-person account.

It is the end of January 2006, and the snow covers all of Piteå. When the alarm clock goes off at a quarter to eight, Pia gets out of bed. It is her day off from work. She watches her children take off on their bicycles for school. Her son calls after a while and tells her that he has left his gym clothes at home. Pia picks up the bag with her son’s clothes and takes the car to his school. When she gets back home, she puts the kettle on and makes some coffee. She pours the coffee into a thermos so that she won’t have to make any more during the day. When that is done, she tidies up in the kitchen. Then she turns on the dishwasher and moves on to the bedroom, where she makes the bed and tidies up and collects the clothes on the floor. She brings the clothes to the basement, loads them in the washing machine, and turns it on. Thereafter, she takes a flowerpot they got for Christmas, and removes the bulb of an amaryllis. She will save it and grow it in the flowerbed in their garden for spring. She can imagine how nice it will look next Christmas. She puts the decorations from the flower arrangement in a bag and saves them for later reuse. After the decorations are put in a bag in a cupboard, she takes the leftovers from last night’s dinner and takes them out behind the house for their chickens. She watches amusedly while the chickens fight for the spaghetti noodles. Then she goes back into the house and into the basement where she puts another load of dirty clothes in the washing machine, and turns it on. She waits to see how the clothes are turning in the machine, to confirm that it is working properly, and then goes back up from the basement and packs her gym clothes. Bag in hand, she gets into the car and drives to the local gas station of which her husband and son are members,58 and fills up the tank. Then she drives to the grocery store, Ica, and does her grocery shopping. She chooses local products when available. Three hours after leaving home, she is back

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58 Information added from the interview: One of the gas stations in Piteå is run as a cooperative that the inhabitants of Piteå can be members of.
again. The washing machine is done, so she moves the wet clothes over to the tumble dryer and turns it on. When the laundry is tumbling in the dryer, she goes up to the kitchen and has a cold lunch. Filled and satisfied with herself, she takes out her knitting basket and sits down on the couch to do some knitting. After a few hours, her daughter Petronella gets back home from school. Together they practice for her daughter’s violin class. For dinner, Pia has planned to make a dish in the oven, so she goes out to the kitchen and prepares the dish when they have finished practicing the violin. When the dish is in the oven, Pia goes down to the basement and puts another load of laundry in the washing machine. Then it is time to go to school for a meeting with Petronella’s teacher, to find out how her daughter is doing in school. She and her husband and daughter take the car. About an hour later, they are back home and Pia puts another load of clean laundry in the tumble dryer. “Again,” she says to herself. At half past eight, she can get back on the couch to resume knitting and watch TV for the rest of the evening.

Taking this single day as a departure point, several relevant issues regarding Pia’s ecological action space can be raised. Although Pia had the day off work, she did many different unpaid activities during the day, for both herself and her family, and both on her own and with her family. She describes the technology she uses, the systems on which she relies, and the reuse of certain products. Pia’s activities can further be related to the norm of cleanliness (Shove 2003) through her extensive laundry practices, and to the norm of being a good mother through her activities with her children. She thus acted in relation to both material and immaterial structures.

It is also worth noting how the different activities are intermingled and either follow sequentially or occur simultaneously. This illustrates how separating ecological activities into set categories risks “disentangling” them from their everyday contexts. When I say “disentangle,” I mean that for almost all of Pia’s described activities, there would be an alternative way to perform them, dependent on the contexts in which they are performed. It always depends on what an activity is related and compared to—the best way of doing it, or whether it is performed at all. She could have refrained from taking the car with her son’s gym clothes, or going by car to the gym. This raises the question of how much or how little is sustainable and compared with what. How should one regard her taking the car to the gym, compared with reusing the flower bulb, for example? This
is why I find it challenging to talk about “sustainable activities,” since a single activity must be related to the actor’s overall activity pattern.59

It is analytically difficult to separate what the householders do to deal with environmental problems and risks, from their motives, or why they do them. This is in line with what has been called the “rationalization of action” (Giddens 1989:4). Rationalization of action means explaining action in retrospect, which has similarities with intentionality. Humans may know or be conscious of what is expected of them, but still be able to justify their actions even when not acting in accordance with these expectations. This needs to be emphasized, since one claim of this thesis is that moving from changed attitudes to new behavior is not always a linear process; rather, the relationship must be understood in broader terms.

To repeat my definition from the theoretical chapter, ecological action space is taken to mean the context in which an individual attempts to influence the environment and other humans, what is considered possible and the individual’s perceived responsibility, where the actual action space is both created and recreated by the individual in interaction with surrounding social and material structures. The householders may want to act in environmentally friendly way but may encounter obstacles. Ecological action space is related to choices, perceived opportunities, and responsibilities for how to act. The practice of putting a slice of bread in the toaster for breakfast, as indicated in some time diaries, is proof of a previous purchase or gift of a toaster, and of a connection to the energy system and that the electricity bill is paid. A person can choose not to buy a toaster, or use it only rarely. In the cases when the householders were meticulous about keeping the time diaries, they have visualized the resources. Analyzing ecological action space also has methodological implications. It is distinct from other, more quantitative measurements, such as the ecological footprint (Wackernagel & Rees 1996; Dobson 2003) or measurements of total energy consumption. The ecological action space concept focuses on perceptions of responsibility, opportunities, and constraints related to acting for the environment. These perceptions need to be investigated by means of interviews, for which the time diaries served as a basis for discussion, and the ecological impact is understood from the householders’ perspective.

59 I interpret this point as similar to the critique Hallin (1999) makes when discussing the use of the “lifestyle” concept in studies of ecological behavior.
Environmentally motivated household activities

The initial goal was to search for household activities favorable for sustainable development. As discussed in chapter 3, and based on the assumption that few people are very familiar with the concept of sustainable development, I asked the householders in the initial interview what they believed they could do in their households to counteract the environmental problems they had mentioned. The discussion came to focus on activities that are “environmentally friendly.” Second, in both the initial and the follow-up interviews, specific questions were asked concerning purchases, transportation, sorting of waste, and energy.

Navigating complexity

It came as no surprise that the householders had written down in their time diaries that they ate lunch and dinner, that they slept and woke up, showered and went to school or work, and did laundry and cooked food. What, however, does this matter for sustainable development? An important issue I will examine in this chapter is the relationship between abstract and general descriptions, such as “doing laundry,” and specific details, which is where many environmentally sound suggestions fit, such as the type of washing machine, how much energy it requires, at what temperature the laundry is washed, what detergent and softener are used, how full the machine is, whether the wet laundry is dried by hanging it or putting it in a tumble dryer, whether the dryer is energy efficient, and finally who does the activity. Such specification and concretization make everyday life very complex when it comes to investigating practices that support sustainable development, since almost every detail of an activity has an alternative. This requires that the researcher concentrate on the microcosm of everyday life. Apart from the material objects the householders use in doing laundry, immaterial norms, what Giddens calls structures, of cleanliness, womanliness, etc. partly shape laundry practice. I will return to the view that the material and immaterial issues are intermingled, and that they require systems for water and energy/electricity, environmental labels, etc. Ecological action space is structured according to the housing situation of the householders. Depending on whether they live in a house or an apartment, they may have their own private washing machine or a communal one, and receive different kinds of information from the municipality concerning environmentally sound practices and regulations.
Through the study it became evident that there was a myriad of environmentally friendly activities the householders knew of, and this sometimes caused difficulties for them in deciding what to do, and how to act in environmentally friendly ways. Therefore this section will cover both more and less environmentally friendly practices. As was said, it is not just if they do something that matters, but also how they perform it. This relates to the issue of transforming general and unspecific goals into concrete everyday practices, which was discussed in the introduction to the chapter. The analysis will cover six general areas that received the most attention from the householders: recycling, transportation, purchasing ecological products, saving energy, being thrifty with water, and influencing others to be more environmentally friendly. I will show how these areas extend from the most abstract and general level, to specific and concrete practices.

**Recycling and sorting of household waste**

Waste management, including recycling, was the most common activity the householders described, the activity that received the most attention and to which they related spontaneously when asked what they could do to counteract environmental problems by means of household activities. This is curious, since it can be considered as at the end of the consumer cycle, according to waste management hierarchy.

Anna: I attempt to tell my parents how to be more environmentally friendly, and that they can do good if they help out with recycling.

Åsa: We do the regular things, we sort everything.

These quotations are two of several that illustrate just how central recycling activities were considered to be. I have attempted to organize this section so that the general goal of recycling will be understood in its smallest particulars. As will be shown, recycling not only concerns whether people sort their garbage, which the majority does, but also what they sort and what they find difficult to do. Furthermore, sorting is involved in many recycling-related household activities, including deciding what products to purchase, how to handle them in the home (e.g., washing empty containers), where to store them before recycling, deciding how often to take material to the recycling station, how the municipality has organized the recycling stations, keeping the home clean, and learning about what fractions are recyclable. It is worth noting that recycling was seen as mainly relating to food production, although some waste sorting activities arose from home remodeling and maintenance, for example, solvent, and

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paint which are called “dangerous waste” and can be left at environmental stations.

The householders were directly influenced by the municipality and the recycling company, as the latter actors had designed certain preconditions for action. One example was the size of the waste bins for owners of detached houses, which determined how much waste the householders could throw away, and whether they needed to increase the amount recycled.

Most householders focused on recycling rather than reducing the amounts of waste to be recycled, although a few householders did discuss how they could reduce waste. It was uncommon for householders to describe how they reduced the amount of waste by reusing products, though Pia told how she washed and reused plastic bags. She commented that others probably did not do things like that.

Regina and Ragnar mentioned that they had put a sticker on their door stating “No advertising,” in order to reduce the amount of printed advertising they received.

Mounting this sticker, sometimes distributed by environmental organizations such as the Swedish Nature Conservation Fund, reduces the volume of paper for recycling. It can be considered a policy instrument that affects the action space of the householders, since it reduces their need to visit the recycling station.

The extensive time spent recycling was emphasized by several householders, especially in households with children, which are less “flexible.” Apart from taking recyclable materials to the recycling station, some of the householders who lived in detached houses composted organic material. Making compost was often claimed to be too much bother, although some householders did do it; some of the householders in this group said that the municipality required this activity.

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Oscar and Olivia make compost in their garden, but Olivia thinks it is disgusting to take the organic matter there, so she asks Oscar to do it. Olivia said that it was a relief for her when they are on vacation in their campervan, and she gets to close the garbage bag and throw it away, without having to recycle or sort out the organic material. (Interview notes)

Similar accounts of neglecting to recycle were given by Anna, Greta, and Ulla, when they talked about throwing away containers and packaging in their homes, materials that possibly could be sorted out and recycled. This was because it was sometimes too difficult to decide how to sort it, or in other cases because they wanted to keep the home clean. These examples indicate that when the householders do not know how to recycle information plays a role, while it is less central when they want to keep the home clean. It is important to highlight the contextual and situational character of the activities.

Iris: I had taken out all the newspapers for recycling, but I had to put them back before you came, because I never had time to take them. [laughs] Before, we used to have a recycling station close by, but they removed it and that annoyed me. It is a bit sad that there is so much waste that you have to take the car.

The location of the recycling station is central in this account, which connects the activity to municipal planning and using the car; she also wanted their home to look nice for my visit. This concern for neatness and cleanliness was evident in Catherine’s diary as well, since she wrote that she had tidied up before my arrival, while Greta said she had used air spray before my visit to hide the smell of fish. The norm of cleanliness is important in relation to recycling, since the recycled goods need to be hidden to avoid being considered “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002).

In a number of cases, the physical opportunities and systems were what made the householders find it reasonable to spend time recycling.

Xiomara: In my apartment building they do not have any recycling facilities like they did where I lived before, so I hardly ever recycle anymore.

The householders need systems to be able to carry out the recycling. Xiomara was the only one to claim that she hardly ever recycled, and the reason that she gave was that there was no nearby recycling station. As mentioned, the householders living in detached houses paid for their waste...
management, so they had an economic incentive to reduce costs by reducing their volume of waste, by recycling. If the waste produced does not fit into the regular waste bin, the householders have to pay extra. As already stated, ecological action space relates to how the householders decide to act, and what preconditions the householders need in order to perform the ecological activities they know of. Due to the location of the recycling stations, several householders explained that they took their cars to transport the goods to the stations. This directs attention to how systems influence ecological action space, due to the location of services, distance, and how the municipality conducted its geographical planning. It is mainly the men in this study who are responsible for taking the waste fractions to the recycling stations by car. It is obvious that the car was used to organize everyday life; however, taking the car implies further considerations.

Zoran: We were looking and now I have found one [recycling station] on the way to work, which I pass anyway. Because, if you have to make an extra trip with the car, you lose what you have gained. [laughs] And then it is not that environmentally friendly anymore. Then you might just as well throw it in the regular waste.

The householders often paid attention to the relationship between activities, and in this case Zoran was estimating what was most efficient. This is one of many examples of how the householders attempted to determine what was the most efficient way to act; they emphasized that recycling requires using the abstract resource, energy, as well, in the sense of hot water for cleaning the containers, or fuel for taking the containers by car. A good example of a common argument was provided by Evald:

Evald: If you have one broken light bulb you are expected to take it to the environmental station situated five kilometers away. No way!
Evald: No! One doesn’t take one light bulb there. It consumes more resources to take the car there, than to put it in the regular waste.

Individual activities get very detailed attention when disentangled from their everyday contexts. Are these activities comparable or interchangeable? Later, I will argue that it depends on the particular rationality by which they are judged.

Even if they mostly talked about how others were irresponsible and left recyclable goods outside the station, some admitted that they sometimes did so as well.

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Evald: No! One doesn’t take one light bulb there. It consumes more resources to take the car there, than to put it in the regular waste.

Individual activities get very detailed attention when disentangled from their everyday contexts. Are these activities comparable or interchangeable? Later, I will argue that it depends on the particular rationality by which they are judged.

Even if they mostly talked about how others were irresponsible and left recyclable goods outside the station, some admitted that they sometimes did so as well.
Desiree: Things like that make me really annoyed, when you get to the recycling station to throw away the stuff, and it is completely full. But what do you do? Am I supposed to carry it back home again?

Interviewer: Would you?

Desiree: No! Probably not. I would probably leave it beside [the containers]. And then it blows away all over town, and it is a lot worse than carrying it back home again. Or I would take it back home and throw it in the regular waste, because you get so annoyed. If they don’t take care of their responsibility, why should I?

Here Desiree indicated that she would possibly leave the recyclable materials outside the containers, though she recognized that this would contribute to the untidiness of the city. A central aspect of her reasoning is how she directs our attention to responsibility, an issue that will be discussed at greater length in chapter 7.

Some talked about how they prioritized recycling certain materials, for example, by choosing products in paper containers rather than metal cans, since metals are more important to conserve. An issue that concerns recycling and the concretization of this activity is thus the materials from which the different recyclable containers are made. A common way to calculate whether recycling was efficient was illustrated by Regina:

Regina: If you wash a can made of aluminum, and use hot running water, then you have spent the energy savings you would have acquired if you had walked with it to the station, apart from the fact that a can is made of raw material. Just a thing like that. You should not wash the cans too thoroughly, and with cold water. But who wants to keep containers at home that are not thoroughly cleaned?

This example relates to the difficulties in deciding whether it makes sense to recycle and how values collide when different issues are included in the calculation. Because different rationalities (e.g., economic, environmental, energy related, and cleanliness) can be used, these conflicts can be difficult to solve. Furthermore, this concern with keeping the home nice and clean was mainly raised by the female participants in this study. They tend to store the recyclable goods in the basement, on the balcony, or in the garage, in places that do not need to be tidy and are subject to different standards of cleanliness.

An issue that preoccupied many in the interviews was how to decide what activity was the most environmentally friendly. They wanted
their efforts to be efficient and make a difference. Even so, they decided to do just a few symbolic activities, in order to “outmaneuver” complexity. It is along such lines of reasoning that recycling has solidified its status as a central environmentally friendly activity. An illustration of this line of reasoning was given by Vanja:

Vanja: I feel like a really bad person when driving the car too often. But we sort the waste and recycle.

She related the environmental impacts of her different household activities to each other; accordingly, she compensated for car driving by sorting the waste. This case replicates the complexity of each activity that was highlighted in Pia’s diary. Both Vanja and Pia dealt with moral responsibilities and with what was “reasonable.” By recycling, Vanja further relieved herself of bad feelings. The central issue of whether activities are interchangeable, by being able to compensate for each other, runs through all activity areas. There are different rationalities for how to judge what is most efficient. The rationality used depends on how natural resources are viewed, how energy is measured, what is economic, and the cultural expectations that make activities seem reasonable.

In conclusion, as it was possible to leave the materials at a recycling station, few said that it was important to reduce the amounts of recyclable goods consumed. Except for a few householders, most emphasized the end stage of a product’s life cycle. One frequently expressed constraint to recycling was that the station was too far from the home. Another was that the householders wanted to keep their homes clean, and not store the smelly used containers there; therefore, they threw them away in the regular waste, which was removed more often in a different “system.” Here the typical cultural norm (i.e., a social structure) of cleanliness conflicts with the norm of acting in an ecologically friendly way. Since constraints are considered as not only restricting certain activities, but also as enabling and creating opportunities for others, it is important to note that the existence of the system makes it possible to recycle. This example is at the center of structuration theory, since the existence of the system makes specific activities possible, and more likely to be done, than others. Using other terminology, it is even possible to talk about “path dependence”.

Transportation: “If you have a car, you use it”

The mode of transportation used received a lot of attention when the householders discussed sustainable activity patterns. When the householders talked about the most environmentally friendly means of
transportation, they spontaneously mentioned public means and stated that they ought to reduce their travel by car. Some mentioned that they traveled by public transportation, and some that they walked or cycled. The general area of choice of mode of transportation concerned the following specific areas: whether they have a car, whether they have a large or small car and what fuel it runs on, how they drive, how much they drive (e.g., whether they coordinate trips, organize car pools, or go with friends), whether they let the engine idle when the car is stopped, warming up the car, and maintaining the car (e.g., what products they clean it with and where they clean it). Some of these issues have been discussed in public debates concerning the environment and transportation, but here they relate to the conditions in the individual studied households.

Some of the householders, for example, Åsa, Yrrol, Xiomara, Michael, and Eva, described cycling to work. The householders proposed that cycling was a win-win situation, as illustrated by Quintus:

Quintus: To cycle is important for me. I get exercise, there is a certain freedom implied, and I do not destroy the environment.

This is an example of a perceived win-win situation in which health and the shared environment are both supported. The win-win argument is related to the same rationale as the calculation on which activity is most efficient, while it is opposed to the conflicting norms discussed above. Olivia cycles to save money, get exercise, and not to have to find a parking lot. Different aspects and rationalities are intermingled in the choice of transportation. Some householders, for example, Vanja and Örjan, said that though they really could bicycle to work, since the exercise would make them sweaty, they decided not to. In these cases, cultural norms of health and beauty come to the fore. In other cases, householders decided not to use the bicycle because it was more time consuming.

Interviewer: Do you use your car often?
Örjan: Yes, no, I use it every day, even if only to go to work, it takes seven minutes to drive there by car, and it takes 15 minutes to walk.
Interviewer: What is the reason that you don’t walk?
Örjan: Well, it takes the double amount of time.
Interviewer: So it is a math issue?
Örjan: Well, it is. It is always about the time, I think.

In his context, 15 minutes of a lunch break is important. The time argument was often used to justify driving, for example:
Zoran: We compost and recycle. But apart from that we are not so very environmentally conscious, since we prefer to take the car even when we don’t have to. That is probably the biggest villain.
Zubeyde: But that is mostly to save time.

Their private car is treated like all the other appliances they have in the household. Previous decisions make up their ecological action space and have implications for what they do here and now, for example, whether they decide to get a driver’s license and a car. Some of the householders, such as Quintus, Tina, Lillemor, Johanna, Hanna, and Henning, do not have a car; they cycle, travel by public transportation, or get lifts with friends or family. Both Lillemor and Johanna decided not to buy a new car after they had scrapped their old one. This illustrates how people may decide to change their behavior when a technological appliance stops working and creates a new context. Others have decided to “manage with one car,” and many households with two or more members have two cars. Even stating that they have to “manage” with one car indicates how normal it is considered to have two cars in a family with two drivers.

Regina: One car, we made a conscious decision to have only one car, and that is partly because of the environment.
Ragnar: And it is cheaper.
Regina: Well, that too. … And it is an environmental thing, we have been stubborn enough to have only one car for many years.
Ragnar: And here it works well. It doesn’t work well to have two cars since there are a limited number of parking lots and block heater hookups.

This illustrates several issues that have been raised already concerning calculation, win–win situations, planning, and norms. It is also possible to interpret it as an example of the rationalization of activities. A win–win situation may combine economic incentives with environmental benefits. Hookups for block heaters are provided by the municipality and are an example of how the municipality influences the ecological action space of the householders, through the policy instrument of planning. Similarly, when Ylva and Yrrol bought their new house they decided to have only one car. Previously, they had two cars, but when they bought a house in central Växjö, they decided that it would be “enough” to have only one. Now they organize the transportation of their two children to kindergarten by bicycle and car. The new context opens up opportunities to renegotiate everyday practices, and thereby their ecological action space.

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The car is portrayed as necessary for a multitude of household activities, and many of the householders who own a car use it often. Some of the householders said that they worked from home, which meant that they did not have to commute to work, as explained by Örjan, Evald, Walter, Oscar, and Ulrik. This alternative is possible because these householders are flexible and less “tied” to a specific place and time in their work; they can work at home by using a computer and Internet.

The studied householders generally pointed out that the environment was everyone’s responsibility, which can imply that it is nobody’s responsibility. One of several illustrations of the contradiction between causing and solving problems, which relates to the conflict between ideals and practice, is provided by Årnst, who thinks that extensive car traffic is an environmental problem. However, he continued in the interview:

Årnst: It is a major problem. But what can we do about it as individual humans? We use our car.

This problem has been described as the “dilemma of the commons” (which will be developed in chapter 7), in which individually optimal activities cause collective problems when using common resources. Later, however, Årnst showed that there were other environmentally friendly acts he found reasonable to do. If we were only interested in his intentions and attitudes, and did not relate these to the actions and behavior they resulted in, it would be possible to conclude that he is concerned for the environment, and that car driving is simply something he ought to change.

The difficulties arising from giving individuals responsibility were described by Desiree, when reflecting on what she could do about the environmental problems she mentioned:

Desiree: I am not the kind of person who considers everything. But sometimes I wake up and think, oh my God, look at all the black stuff between my windowpanes! Am I really inhaling all that?

Interviewer: But have you thought about anything to do about it?

Desiree: Well, perhaps drive the car less. But at the same time you have to have enough money to buy an eco-car, and I don’t.

Interviewer: Do you think that you are doing anything to reduce emissions?

Desiree: No, [laughs] not in the least!

Interviewer: Why not?
Desiree: I don’t know, probably because I hadn’t thought about it before. Or it could be that when you sit in your car and drive off, you think, everyone else has a car! It doesn’t matter if I change my routines. But I tell my dad all the time that he ought to buy an eco-car. [laughs]

This is a rich quotation that illustrates the complexity concerning motivations, opportunities to participate, the dilemma of the commons, and family interaction. Driving less, for example, can be replaced with buying an eco-car, which is not about driving less, but about what car she is driving. She is also, along with most of the householders studied, concerned about the visible problems. Finally, her words illustrate the notion that it does not matter what she does as an individual since others are not acting as well. Driving a car seems to be one of the more difficult practices to change, considering the examples that the householders have given.

In relation to sustainable development, it is important to note that sometimes its different dimensions conflict, while at other times they might support each other, for example, when the householders both get exercise and improve the environment by cycling. Angus made the following statement touching on his work, which involves handling environmental information in the different languages he speaks:

Interviewer: Do you use public transportation as well?
Angus: Well, I work a lot and attend very many meetings, so it is very difficult to use public transportation.

To accommodate all his activities, he feels he needs to use the car to go between meetings. His goal of being an active and participating citizen ironically requires that he use what he considers less environmentally sound technologies, and not public transportation. The householders who owned cars generally described how they were essential for organizing their many everyday activities, especially when they had children. Zubeyde and Zoran acquired a second car some time ago. Their description of their car use exemplifies parental reasoning about taking the kids to various activities and performing household activities, such as grocery shopping:

Zubeyde: We decided to take on the extra cost of having two cars. Because it simply didn’t work when Zoran was working shift and I was at home alone with three kids and there were activities here and there. Then we realized that I had to have a car when I had to leave the kids at kindergarten, and pick them up, and leave Zusan at her dance classes, and do the grocery shopping.

Desiree: I don’t know, probably because I hadn’t thought about it before. Or it could be that when you sit in your car and drive off, you think, everyone else has a car! It doesn’t matter if I change my routines. But I tell my dad all the time that he ought to buy an eco-car. [laughs]

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The car is used to organize the family and its everyday activities. Parents, who must focus on the wellbeing of their children, have schedules that are less flexible than those of single adults.

Vilhelm: When you live like we do, it is possible to cycle, but that makes a lot of requirements—to be very organized to manage with that. Vanja works in the opposite direction from where I go. We drive every day.

Interviewer: Do you have one or two cars?

Vilhelm: We have two, everyone does out here.

Vanja: Even our neighbor [female name] does.

Vilhelm: Yes.

… Vanja: And there are so many activities for the children now that determine how we act. There are events and practices, here and there, sports ...

Having at least one car is considered a norm. Having to take one’s young children to various activities was not the only cited reason for having a car. It was common for the elderly householders to describe helping take care of their grandchildren, or driving each other when there was only one car in the household. Clearly, the social responsibility the householders have towards family members is a key reason for having and driving a car. When interpreting household activities in their everyday context, it is evident that the car is used in relation to other activities, meaning that people seldom drive purely for leisure. Driving does not seem to be a core activity; rather, it is done to facilitate other everyday activities.

Another aspect of how the householders drive is that of reducing the number of car trips, for example, by telecommuting, coordinating car trips (e.g., doing the grocery shopping when driving the children to activities), or organizing car pools with other people to get to work. Some householders described how they organized car pools with neighbors or workmates. A car pool can be considered a minor public means of transportation, and illustrates how these householders actively shape their ecological action space. Especially in Piteå, all the householders described how they organized traveling with friends or to work with colleagues, and the parents described organizing trips to take their children to their activities. A
specific example was Oscar, who, along with some colleagues, bought a minibus that they use for joint commuting to Luleå, 50 kilometers away. However, some considered the constraints involved in organizing a car pool:

Ulla: No one wants to sacrifice that much, I think. It becomes troublesome. So even if we could do it, it is very difficult to get others to do it. One almost feels a bit stupid. Interviewer: Who have you tried to arrange it with? Ulrik: It depends on the occasion … you think that if you make that effort, after a while others would pick it up and start thinking the same way, but they don’t. Ulla: I guess we do know something about who thinks a bit like us.

Here one can see how the norms of legitimate interaction influence individual householders’ activities. Picking up one’s children or getting a ride with friends, however, is influenced by different norms.

A specific example of transportation that concerns the coordination of everyday household activities is how parents take their children to school and kindergarten. In Huddinge, the “walking school bus” campaign was the focus, as explained in chapter 3; it was an attempt to create a win–win practice that fused different dimensions of sustainable development.

Michael said that it was liberating to be relieved of the responsibility of taking his son to school every day, when he participated in the walking school bus campaign. The whole idea of the campaign was generally good, he thought, but it did require planning, and he thought that it was a bit awkward to get in touch with other parents and do the organizing on one’s own. (Interview notes)

This also illustrates the norms of legitimate interaction. Through household negotiation, parents coordinate their children’s transportation. Here it is important to note that the material is heteronormative and that there were no single parents. I believe single parents would have less flexibility concerning how to organize taking their children to kindergarten, school, and recreational activities, for example. It was evident from their time diaries that Catherine and Conny negotiated and organized taking their children to and from school. Catherine usually walked to school with the children and then took the train to work, while her partner Conny took the car to his work, and picked up the children after school. During the interview, Catherine described to Conny what walking school buses were, something she had learned about at the last meeting for parents at the
school. However, she organizes her private walking or bicycling school bus on her own, just as Ylva and Yrrol could be regarded as doing.

An issue related to car pools and walking school buses is *how much* the householders drive. Regina described negotiating with herself and prioritizing the resources she uses:

Regina: If it is two blocks to the grocery store, and I decide to walk there to buy two liters of milk, and then walk back again, then I can use that to drive my snowmobile on the weekend. … Well, I don’t drive any snowmobile, but I believe that we should refrain from unnecessary driving.

Different activities and options are weighed against each other, as Regina does when she calculates what is most efficient. This is connected to sacrificing or abstaining from certain activities because they have a negative environmental impact. Regina does not, however, suggest refraining from driving altogether, but acting in a better way. *How* the householders drove their cars was mentioned by a few men, for example, Evald and Ulrik, as a factor influencing the environmental impact of their driving:

Evald: I always make sure I have the right pressure in the tires and I always look ahead not to brake too heavily.
Interviewer: How did you learn this?
Evald: I’ve noticed myself when braking is no good, since it’s indicated on the dashboard. Judging from this, I believe I drive rather ecologically.

It is not just *if* (the general aspect) one drives a car, but *how* one drives (the specific aspect) that is pertinent:

Ulrik: I always try to drive the car after it has been used, so that the engine is already warm.

These are examples of rationalizations based on knowledge claims, which was a typically male approach in this study.
In the time diaries, some householders even recorded how they maintained their cars by fueling or washing them, although such detail was uncommon. Different fuel alternatives received attention, which relates to the kind of car bought or used and to whether they considered their driving more or less environmentally friendly. In his time diary, Gunnar emphasized when he was driving their “diesel car” and when he was driving the “gasoline car.” Only a few mentioned having an “environmental car/eco-car” or borrowing one from parents, as Hanna did. Some, like Burt, Karl, Simon, and Åsa and Åke, stressed the size of their car and how much gas it required.

Åke: We do not have a fuel efficient car. And if we changed ours for a more efficient one, it would probably be for economic reasons, rather than for the environment.
Åsa: But we think before we use the car, and we do not use it all the time.
Åke: Yes, but the car is a necessary evil.

This also ties into the argument that environmental activities should be motivated by ecological rather than economic incentives. Calculations about energy use were present in discussions of mode of transportation. It was often when the householders discussed alternatives that such arguments became apparent:

Karolina: We could become members of a car pool.
Karl: But we have a reasonably environmentally friendly car.

60 When something is called “green” or “eco”, it creates an interesting discursive phenomenon.
Organizing transportation with others was not necessary, since Karl believed that their car was “reasonably environmentally friendly.” Furthermore, it is possible that he was referring to the fact that eco-cars had been chosen for the car pool fleet organized by the municipality. In many cases, public transportation was cited as an ideal, though it was seldom used. Siv’s comment seemed to apply to most of the householders with cars:

Siv: If you have a car, you use it.

Driving is a habit and is simply taken for granted. Johanna said that she was lucky that she lived close to public transportation, which was useful when she scrapped her car. Her convenient access to the system clearly played a role in shaping her action space. Lillemor also scrapped her car, and since then she travels by tram or gets lifts from friends. Both Lillemor and Johanna live in Gothenburg where the public transportation system is more extensive than in Piteå or Växjö, for example. A reason Lillemor gave for scrapping her car was that she was retired and more flexible with her time use. Cited obstacles to using public transportation included that the bus stop was located “too far away,” or that it was less convenient than using private cars. These are constraints for some of the householders.

Having a car also implies having to maintain it, and municipal regulations encourage specific actions, since the residues from washing influence the water treatment plants. When the householders washed their cars, most went to the car wash or washed their cars in the pebbled driveway or at a designated place. All the householders in Växjö said that they washed their cars, in accordance with local regulations, on a lawn and not on the pavement. Xiomara was the only one who mentioned the importance of using environmentally friendly car washing products. When talking about where they washed their cars, they showed that they knew that car washing and the products used for it are detrimental to the water system, for example:

Åsa: There is some sort of a ban on washing the car on the front driveway.
Åke: Yes.
Åsa: There is, but then people do so anyway, so to speak.
Åke: Well, you do it on the grass so that it [i.e., the dirty water] doesn’t go straight down the drain.
Here we see how the municipality, through providing information, influenced the perceptions of what activities the householders could perform.

Long-distance transportation received little attention in the interviews and the time diaries, though Lillemor said that she traveled by train to go up north to visit her partner. It is mainly when the householders talked about their vacations that they touched on air travel. Tina traveled by air to visit her son in the USA. Especially in Piteå, the householders talked about taking “car vacations.” Wiktoria and Olivia stated that they wanted to make the children happy by taking them on vacations.

What the householders do is dependent on the preconditions and constraints they face. This is illustrated by Siv’s comment, “If you have a car, you use it,” which relates to the remark that what you have is important in determining what you do. Only a few of the householders used public transportation, though most said that it would be an ecological activity, and this was generally related to whether or not they had a car. It was usual to describe how a car was necessary to coordinate all their activities, but the householders also described how they drove, how many cars they owned, and how they maintained them. The above quotations highlight the complexity of what at first glance seems a simple issue: what means of transportation to choose. When these householders attempted to do what was most efficient, they used the argument that specific activities can relate to both private health and common environmental goals, or to both economic and ecological aspects—so-called win–win situations. Win–win situations permeate Agenda 21 and are a rationale for sustainable development. However, sometimes different dimensions clash, and rather than producing a win–win situation, they conflict with each other and one rationality is prioritized.

**Purchasing more ecological food**

Another general goal that many householders mentioned was that of purchasing more ecologically produced goods. The householders described trying to purchase locally produced goods or ecologically labeled products; in some cases, they even said that they produced some of their own food. Purchasing ecologically produced goods has to be understood in relation to general consumption. Fiona reasoned in the following way about consumption:

Fiona: If there is something we need, we just go to the store and purchase it. Oops, the vacuum cleaner broke, let’s buy a...
new one. Well, now the coffee maker broke, let’s go and buy a new one. One simply doesn’t think about it.

This quotation indicates how central the act of shopping is and implies that Fiona does not consider her monetary resources especially limited. In most of the other householders’ cases, the sheer presence of a multitude of technological devices conveyed the same message. This indicates that most studied householders are part of an affluent society. Previous studies suggest that having more limited economic assets would imply fewer opportunities for the householders to consume the amounts they currently do. Few people, whether scholars, practitioners, or householders, promote reduced affluence, but rather talk about how to enhance the non-material values of life.

One interview question concerned whether there were any products that the householders did not buy due to how they were produced. I regard this as an open question to which it was possible to give multiple answers. When Siv and Simon were asked this question, which did not mention boycotting, Simon answered:

Simon: Well, if we like it, we buy it. We do not boycott anything, as long as it is tasty.

Buycotting on the other hand is not about abstaining entirely, but choosing a better alternative from a similar product group.

Interviewer: Are there any products that you choose not to buy due to how they are produced?
Åsa: Aha, exactly, we try. But no, fuck we are really bad at that! Sometimes we are luxurious and purchase KRAV-labeled products, and then I feel good about it. I feel good when I buy KRAV. But that is not always. …
Äke: Eggs from free-range hens, we always buy eggs from free-range hens …
Åsa: And then, we do that ordinary stuff. We sort everything, and we really do it all. We have all the different fractions. That’s what we do. But then I am sure we could do more. I mean what we buy.

The examples that they give concern particular and reasonable activities that they have chosen to perform from among the various ones they know of. While the first example Åsa gave related to opportunities to act through political consumption choices, the second example concerning recycling is still individual, but relates more to the civic sphere, which will be discussed in chapter 7.
Many of the householders mentioned that purchasing organic food items, ecologically labeled products, and fair trade-labeled goods were important household activities by which they could exercise their “consumer power.” Beatrice usually buys ecologically labeled bananas, but if there are none with the label she does not ask for them. She explained her purchasing of labeled products as follows:

Beatrice: I am not that consistent in my environmental … I believe it involves a lot of sensitivity … I feel like buying those bananas.

Although it was considered an important activity, several female householders also stated that they did not purchase the labeled products because they were too expensive, implying that they experienced an economic constraint.

Eva: I try to purchase some ecological products, or, yes, at least some. I always try to buy bananas that are ecological. But sometimes, it depends a bit, on what mood I am in. I try to purchase those …

… Interviewer: Why do you think it is important to purchase ecological food items?
Eva: I don’t know, I feel that it is healthier too. But then of course it is more expensive, and that is a shame.

Initially, I was intrigued by the claims implied by the feelings the women (e.g., Vanja, Anna, Eva, and Beatrice) expressed when talking about organic produce. How they expressed themselves seemed to be related to the certainty with which many of the men talked. It was obvious from the interviews that purchasing ecologically labeled food is primarily a female concern, although several men stated that it was an important household activity. This was interpreted as a consequence of women being more responsible for cooking than men are. While ecologically labeled products are considered more expensive, few, if any, commented on the fact that simply abstaining from purchasing products is the cheapest way. It is not the amount that is the focus but what products are purchased.

Tina, Iris, Pia, and Karl all reuse products in some way, give away clothes, or do some of their shopping at second-hand stores, all behaviors related to the above discussion of recycling. Specific examples of reuse are using cloth bags when doing the grocery shopping, as Olivia and Hanna mentioned, or borrowing books from the library, as described by Tina.

Olivia said that they should try to restrict the quantities they consume. One thing was nail polish. She continued that she

… Interviewer: Why do you think it is important to purchase ecological food items?
Olivia: I don’t know, I feel that it is healthier too. But then of course it is more expensive, and that is a shame.

Initially, I was intrigued by the claims implied by the feelings the women (e.g., Vanja, Anna, Eva, and Beatrice) expressed when talking about organic produce. How they expressed themselves seemed to be related to the certainty with which many of the men talked. It was obvious from the interviews that purchasing ecologically labeled food is primarily a female concern, although several men stated that it was an important household activity. This was interpreted as a consequence of women being more responsible for cooking than men are. While ecologically labeled products are considered more expensive, few, if any, commented on the fact that simply abstaining from purchasing products is the cheapest way. It is not the amount that is the focus but what products are purchased.

Tina, Iris, Pia, and Karl all reuse products in some way, give away clothes, or do some of their shopping at second-hand stores, all behaviors related to the above discussion of recycling. Specific examples of reuse are using cloth bags when doing the grocery shopping, as Olivia and Hanna mentioned, or borrowing books from the library, as described by Tina.

Olivia said that they should try to restrict the quantities they consume. One thing was nail polish. She continued that she
wants to buy things for their two sons, and said that she prioritizes them when it comes to spending her money.

(Interview notes)

This issue needs attention because it may be “pedagogically” difficult to remember instances when you have decided not to purchase something. Olivia’s description displays a contradiction between her different expectations in her different roles. For example, as a mother, she wants to be a “good mother” by giving her sons things they need and want, but as a “good ecological citizen” she does not want to consume too much. The children are prioritized, so the “good mother” role wins out.

When describing their consumption habits, some householders related being environmentally conscious to purchasing free-range eggs, and saw an environmental dimension to the conditions for animals. This is also the case with “Swedish meat,” which primarily the women stated that they wanted to buy, mainly because of its perceived higher quality. As in the section about recycling, it is also obvious here that the householders negotiated between and compensated for different aspects. Local or Swedish products were considered to be higher quality and safer, and local or Swedish animals were believed to be treated better. The householders displayed concern about the animals until they are slaughtered, and about their own private health. Tina, Hanna, and Henning are vegetarians, which means that their food consumption requires less agricultural land than if they ate meat, and that their ecological footprints are smaller. Hanna and Henning explained why they went from being vegans to vegetarians:

Hanna: We were vegans for a while, but since then I’ve found it very strenuous to get into a discussion like that.
Interviewer: How come you are not vegans any longer?
Hanna: Well, it was mostly for convenience.
Henning: Yes, mostly convenience.
Hanna: It is a lot easier to eat milk products as well. There is a lot to keep in mind if you are a vegan. There is very little information unless you go to a special store like a health food store. You really place yourself outside of society in a way.
Henning: Yes.
Hanna: You cannot just pop into a cafe and have a coffee break. You need to be aware and be the one who is influencing and commenting on things.

This is a prime example of how the norm of interaction with others affects one’s everyday activities, and how consumption habits are part of broader social contexts. Society is not primarily constructed for vegans,
which made everyday life more complex when Hanna and Henning attempted to live as vegans. Being a vegan was further connected to the ideological stance as being the one who was “influencing and commenting on things.”

Just a few mentioned that they purchased ecological hygiene products, such as shampoo and washing powder, and then this was related to dealing with allergies in the family (cf. Micheletti 2003).

Claiming to purchase locally produced goods was sometimes connected with reducing unnecessary and detrimental transportation. It was also connected with supporting local stores to reduce household car travel to distant supermarkets, and in some cases with supporting local businesses that were central to Piteå’s economy, caring for animals, and getting products (e.g., meat) that were considered safer. This implies that one argument, for example, that it is preferable to purchase local products, can be justified by different rationales.

Some less common activities the householders mentioned when asked about their environmentally friendly activities were no longer using liquid to ignite the barbecue or using eco-fuel for the lawn mower.

As was seen in the previous activity areas, there are sometimes contradictions when different values encounter or clash. Hanna and Henning described as follows:

Hanna: Sometimes I do the grocery shopping in town, after work. The stores are smaller and have a more limited range of products. At the supermarket in the outskirts of Gothenburg the range of ecological products is wider, and those are products we want to buy. But it feels wrong to have to take the car there! But as it happens, we could travel there by public transportation. But then you have to travel by tram to Oak Street, then transfer to the bus to get there.

Henning: And get very cold and wait for 20 minutes for the bloody bus.

This is one of a number of examples that illustrate how municipal geographical planning influences ecological action space, and how the areas of consumption and transportation are interrelated.

Since most householders concentrated their environmental efforts at the end stage of consumption and in recycling, it is important to emphasize that many academic analyses portray increasing private consumption as the largest environmental challenge (Oslo Declaration for Sustainable Consumption 2005). Among the studied householders, however, the focus was more on where and how something was produced than the amounts consumed.
**Saving energy**

Saving energy was a general goal that most householders spontaneously stated they wanted to support. Such support, however, can be contributed in many ways, since the goal is highly abstract. Saving energy concerns what car or technological appliances to purchase, what house to purchase (its size, location, heating technology, and how it is remodeled), turning off lamps and stand-by functions, lowering the indoor temperature, using less hot water, and choosing the most efficient energy source. Individual choices regarding what technologies to buy in the aggregate influence the amount of energy used. Reducing energy consumption can have both environmental and economic motives, as well as social dimensions in which the studied men were more interested and portrayed themselves as more knowledgeable.

Since one aim of this study was to highlight how certain practices have changed, and what motivates the adoption of new activities, it is illustrative to note how some of the householders reasoned about how they acted when technological appliances broke. These breakdowns contributed to changed circumstances and context.

Lillemor: I had my own washing machine here in my apartment. We have a really nice laundry room in the basement. And then my washing machine broke … it was 19 years old. So I’d have to buy a new one, but there are other things to spend the money on—it is not cheap. Then you have to get rid of the old one, get it down all the stairs without an elevator. And then get the new one up the stairs, unplug the old one and install the new one. I got tired just thinking about it. So I thought I’d start using our common laundry room in the basement. I pay for it, it is included in the rent. So now I will probably have a lower electricity bill.

Swedish householders who live in apartments usually have access to communal laundry rooms where the service is free of charge and included in the rent. In Lillemor’s case, the economic aspect comes into play in terms of both not spending money on a new washing machine and in not having to pay for maintaining or operating it, which means that she does not have to pay for the energy when washing. Her laundry practices connect energy use to water consumption, which will be dealt with later.

Xiomara, like Ylva and Karl, emphasized turning off all stand-by functions on appliances in her household. Karl said that he unplugs the cell phone charger after the cell phone is recharged, since he knows that it keeps using some energy even after the phone is disconnected. Karl also recorded in his time diary that he turned off lights in their apartment on

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Burt: It feels good to consume less energy, but it is also for economic reasons.61

61 This quotation also shows that men too expressed themselves in emotional ways, for example, “it feels good.”
Economic incentives were prominent in arguments favoring more environmentally friendly behavior. These incentives often resulted in win–win situations when coupled with environmental considerations, for example:

Simon: We had electricity and oil, but then we put a hose into the lake and installed a heat pump. You take heat from the water instead of having to drill. So it is a form of geothermal heating, except we take the heat from the bottom of the lake. … when we changed it, they said we would save so much money, but, well, I guess we lowered our energy costs by about 10,000 a year approximately.

Siv: Yes
Simon: And that is not bad, we lowered it from 32,000 to 22,000 kW.

Knowledge claims about energy will be dealt with in a later section. Just as many talked about the general ideal of saving energy, there was also an ideal of being thrifty with water. Using hot water is further connected to energy use and water systems, which will be examined in the following section.

The ideal of being thrifty with water

Apart from energy, many householders spontaneously reflected on all their activities that use water during a day. They also expressed a desire to reduce their water use in order to be more ecologically sound. By saying that they had become aware of how dependent they were on water, they indicated that they had taken the water systems for granted. This was illustrated by Fiona, in a way similar to her description of her shopping practices. In response to the question of whether she could describe their water system, she said:

Fiona: You just turn on the tap and there is water. I never think about it!

Turning on the tap and getting water is a habit all the householders were accustomed to, since the water systems generally function properly. When the time diaries were analyzed in the follow-up interviews, many interviewees commented on the fact that they are thoroughly dependent on water and energy. Since the water and energy systems function so well, they only really noticed their dependence on them when they experienced
power outages or the water was turned off. These occasions were, however, rare.

Routines result in resources and systems being taken for granted. Reflection is often considered to be required in order to change practices. Besides using the time diaries as a means to visualize their resource and system use, some householders noticed or became aware of how they take their technological systems for granted by watching TV programs about how people live elsewhere in the world. This forms part of an everyday form of “contrastation” (cf. Ehn & Löfgren 2001). Similarly, a vacation provided a moment of contrast to Swedish everyday life; as Simon described:

Simon: We were in Egypt a few years ago, and the guide told us about the water. About the oasis. I had never thought about an oasis as anything but some palm trees and a bit of water for the camels. But they are humongous water reservoirs! All major cities take their water from them. If the natives behaved as we westerners do at the hotels, if they let the water run while they brushed their teeth, the water would not last. But you don’t think about that when you let the water run in order to get really cold water, emptying all the lines instead of taking the first water that comes out.
Interviewer: Did it affect how you used the water?
Simon: No, no. But I believe I had it at the back of my mind.

Reflecting on and becoming aware of one’s practices does not always actually influence them; as well, the householders do not always reflect on their practices and habits.

Something else that made the householders aware of their water consumption was changing their living arrangements, especially moving from an apartment to a house in which they had to manage the water system themselves. Their perception of water consumption was different depending on whether they lived in a house or an apartment. In an apartment, the cost of water consumption is generally included in the rent, and greater consumption of hot water does not directly contribute to an increased energy bill. Being conscious of the amount of hot water one consumes has an economic dimension. Furthermore, in a detached house, over consuming the hot water can cause it to run out, which highlights the situational nature of water use.

Compared with the householders who live in apartments where everything works automatically and where it is possible simply to call the landlord when something does not work, many house owners must deal with the heating system every day. Some householders noted specifically
whether they used hot or cold water in their time diaries, and some even noted letting the water running. Hot water is related to energy use. One illustration among many of the ideal of conserving water was when Ylva and Yrrol talked about water use in their household. Ylva commented as follows:

**Ylva:** I believe you are a bit thriftier with water than I am. I usually let the kids play at the sink, with the water running from the tap. Then you come and turn it off sometimes. Then when we brush our teeth, I think we are generally bad at turning off the tap when we are not using the water.

Being thrifty is an ideal that is set in opposition to extravagance, but it is an ideal that is not always put into practice. The above quotation exemplifies household interaction and negotiation at the micro level, and in it the speaker states that she would be more responsible if she conserved more water.

**Simon:** Our daughters were very extravagant with the water and showered for half an hour each, often twice a day. So I installed a shower head that used less water. But then they started to use the shower in the basement with a regular shower head and higher pressure.

The above example shows how the household members negotiate, implicitly and explicitly, with each other, and help form each other’s ecological action space by attempting to influence how the other household members use resources. Siv concluded the discussion of long showers by saying that it takes time to wash one’s hair and rinse it, and noted the following:

**Siv:** But you do shower because it feels so lovely, it does feel very nice to shower.

Here Siv says that she takes great pleasure in showering, which makes it less likely that she would like to “sacrifice” this comfort to save water or energy. This relates to the argument that we usually consume services and not natural resources or energy per se (Shove 2003). The cultural norms of cleanliness affect household ecological action space, in terms of both how often they wash themselves and how often they do their laundry. Families with children do many household activities to stay clean. Doing laundry, as stated in the introduction to the chapter, is a household activity with environmental impacts at several steps, each of which can be more or less environmentally friendly, since water, detergent, and energy...
are used in the process. When the householders concretized the activity of doing laundry, Vilhelm talked about how they were encouraged by the municipality to use phosphate-free laundry detergent by the municipality. In this context, it is noteworthy that Ulla stated that she attempted to wash only large loads of laundry, Åsa and Ylva emphasized that they hung their laundry to dry in the laundry room instead of using the dryer, and Åsa said that she hardly ever ironed clothes, all of which saved energy. These activities also refer to the prevalent norms of cleanliness.

It was less usual to talk about what they disposed of via the water system. However, when Yrrol and Ylva talked about how they remodeled their house, they emphasized that they never flushed paint or solvent down the toilet but always took it to an environmental station. Henning described how he had made his own toilet cleaner from vinegar and soft soap. Both Hanna and Lillemor described the detrimental effects waste medicines have on the water and the ecosystem. Hanna was specifically concerned about the biological impact of birth control pills, while Lillemor mentioned that she handed in old medicines to the pharmacy in the bags they supply for the purpose, which is yet another form of waste sorting.

Householder discourse on their behavior is permeated with win–win arguments, calculations of efficiency, and consideration of how changed contexts have influenced what they do. The goal of making the home clean and cozy inside can lead to activities that are less ecologically sound, such as installing additional lamps, cleaning practices that require chemicals or energy (e.g., using a vacuum cleaner), and throwing away recyclable goods in the regular waste when “cleaning up.” It was primarily women who mentioned this category. Here it is important to be cautious of the feminist critique, keeping in mind that advertising often directs women’s attention to the ideal of keeping the home clean. Of course, advertisements are not the only source of inspiration for the gendering of activities; this is done throughout our everyday interaction, and is continuously being created and recreated. I will discuss the gendering of household activities in a later section, but before that I will deal with the last category of activities, householder attempts to influence others and commit themselves to organizations.

62 I have seen several advertisements for cleaning products in which women are given advice by scientists/experts in white lab coats regarding how to clean difficult spots in the home, or in which women are portrayed as very concerned about difficult spots on their children’s clothes that are removed using miraculous chemical products, or in which women are concerned about difficult stains on their china that are successfully removed using detergent. I have not documented these advertisements, so I can only reflect generally on their thoroughly gendered nature.

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Influencing others and becoming engaged

As emphasized in chapter two, collective mobilization and deliberation are ideals in green political theory, while active participation in civil society and environmental organizations is a way to act for the environment. The studied householders were asked whether they were members of any organizations. Many organizations and NGOs lobby the government, and by being members of them, householders can be said to form the basis of the work of these organizations. Membership is a way to amplify and multiply one’s voice (Norén 2005). Fredrik, Fiona, Ingvald, and Wiktoria were members of political parties; Gunnar and Greta, Tina, and Ragnar and Regina were involved in their condominiums⁶³; Peter and Patrik were members of a local gas station cooperative; Ragnar and Regina were members, but not active ones, of their unions; Karl and Karolina were members of various organizations; and finally, Siv and Simon served on two different local business councils.

Being a member of a nature or environmental association is not only a way to attempt to exert influence. If one has knowledge, it can be used in work situations, like the one Lillemor described, or at home. Henning explained how he had learned from a nature conservation organization how to make a less toxic toilet cleaner out of soft soap and vinegar. Membership in a nature group can thereby offer a way to learn about interpreting nature and how to notice changes in the environment. In their spare time, Vilhelm keeps bees and watches birds, while Eric is a member of a fishing club, in line with his interest in animals. When it comes to international solidarity, though not necessarily structural change, Johanna and Quintus sponsor a poor child through an international organization. Since I will focus more on political participation, I want to emphasize that this is distinct from acting against pesticide use in one’s immediate vicinity.

Simon described in detail how he had organized a campaign in the 1960s when he was politically active, against using disposable bottles for soda. Notably, both Lillemor and Simon discussed the practical outcomes of their efforts in political campaigns, about which they were unsure (cf. Kolb 2007; Norén 2005). Tina stated that she would not hesitate to hug trees that were in danger of being felled.

Some householders, for example, Tina and Simon, described how they “call up” local politicians and municipal officials if they believe something has to be done, for example, when they noticed that other householders had left garbage in the woods. This was a way to demand

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⁶³ Bostadsrättsförening in Swedish.
accountability from these householders via formal political structures; it is less legitimate, however, to attempt to influence what people do in their private sphere.

When the householders were asked to describe what they could do to counteract the environmental problems they had described, several answered that they could try to persuade other citizens to “act for the environment” by making them care more. In this section, I only briefly described how the householders felt that influencing others concerning environmentally friendly activities was important. I will elaborate on this matter in chapter 7, which treats political participation.

In conclusion, after reviewing the six activity areas, it is obvious that the notions of calculation, compensation, and efficiency permeate all of them. As mentioned, several areas described here are intertwined still further. For example, the expression “going shopping,”64 which many wrote in their time diaries, usually implied driving the car to bring the groceries home. Transportation is thus somewhat distinct in relation to other activity areas, since it coordinates them. Another important finding is that what I call symbolic activities, such as recycling, are partly the aggregation of entangled specific activities, such as recycling a light bulb. Symbolic activities also offer a way to navigate complexity. Many householders suggested environmentally friendly alternatives concerning very specific and detailed aspects of activities, such as doing laundry, grocery shopping, or transportation, and not the overall everyday activity pattern.65 By citing specific activities, such as recycling a light bulb, purchasing ecological milk, or braking softly when driving, the householders imply that they consider themselves to be “ecological.”

Now that I have dealt with what environmentally friendly activities the householders do and how they do them, I will move to the next question, concerning who does these activities.

### Who acts? Household division of labor

As highlighted previously, the social dimension of sustainable development considers gender equality among many other factors, including class, generation, age, and nationality. The class and nationality aspects will not be treated here. Gender is constructed in various ways, including through...

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64 In Swedish, the householders used a specific term for taking the car when “going,” i.e., åker.
65 See Hallin (1999) and the concept of lifestyle.
household activities. It is “the joint production of household work commodities and gender that is at issue” (Fenstermaker Berk 1985:203). According to the gender equality perspective, it is interesting to note who uses what technological appliances, and who believes it is their responsibility or that they are expected to perform certain activities. Gender analysis focuses on whether household activities are performed and described differently by men and women in the time diaries and in the interviews, who introduced what activities into the household, and how the householders make knowledge claims about various matters in the interviews. Gender is taken as a structure that influences who is expected to do certain activities, and who is expected to be knowledgeable about them. I argue that this concerns the norms of how to be a good man or woman, and that the activities have gendered meanings.

There was an ideal among some female participants to grow their own food or make it from scratch. Like Tina, Vanja wrote in her time diary when she used prepared food items to feed her children, which is related to the ideal of “self-production.” Some householders, such as Tina, Ingvald, Pia, Årla, and Lillemor, described how they grew their own vegetables and picked berries in the forest. Tina commented in the interview that she learned a lot about how to cook vegetarian food from her mother and grandmother. Årla’s diary was very extensive, like Pia’s, and she took great care to record how she relied on her own knowledge and experience to carry out household activities such as cooking, producing food, and cleaning. She expressed feelings of contentment after having cleaned the house or made the bed with clean sheets, and wrote that she was content with her garden and what she produced there; for example, “I fill the herring with recently picked dill from the garden.” These activities are not just performed mechanically but have meaning: some are imbued with pride and passion, while others are loaded with resentment and guilt. All such meaning-laden activities are related to the household’s identity.

In the interviews, men and women described how they were responsible for different areas of the home. Home energy and heating seem mainly to be male areas, as expressed by Vilhelm, Åke, Simon, Peter, and Yrrol. While the women focused on the home preparation of food, the men described using their knowledge to repair things like the car and lawn mower, constructing things in the garden, or chopping wood, for example. Even though home production and do-it-yourself activities were spontaneously connected to environmental friendliness, this connection is not necessarily valid. Conserving natural resources for the common good and saving money in one’s private household are different matters, connected to collective versus individual sustainability.
Peter said that he would like to be acknowledged and appreciated for the work he puts into maintaining their car, which reduces their expenses. He related this desire to how women required acknowledgement for their hidden and unpaid household work. (Interview notes)

For example, when Peter applies his knowledge by maintaining the car himself, he saves money for the household; he does not, however, necessarily use fewer natural resources than the car mechanics would. This situation refers to the definition of the household as a production, consumption, and reproductive unit. Like Yrrol, Åke described having a general interest in energy-related issues, which are found to be related to gender in this study. In both cases, their interest is connected with their education, which can be said to have made their knowledge more profound. This is an example of how gender is a social structure that influences the individual, who in turn acts on these (often unreflected-on) expectations and norms. By acting in line with these norms, the individual acquires more experience and knowledge and may in turn help recreate gendered structures. All this also influences his or her ecological action space.

Vilhelm: What keeps our energy consumption lower is that we burn firewood to heat the hot water. … I think that for every liter of hot water I put a log in the boiler.
Vanja: He could be standing there [in the boiler room] for an hour!

Household activities, such as the one described above, are imbued with meaning and pride. A gendered activity like stoking the boiler can become a source of pride.

From their descriptions, it became evident that specific events sometimes made the householders renegotiate the division of household work. One example of how the division of household chores changed after a partner got ill was given by Siv and Simon. Simon injured his knee and became slightly disabled a year before the interviews:

Simon: I think we divide the household duties in a good way.
Siv: [laughs] Well, I can see why!
Simon: She clears the snow, gets the firewood, and I read the newspaper and eat lunch. That is fair? Due to my knee, she gets to take care of everything, and that suits me fine.
Interviewer: But how have things changed?
Simon: Well, I don’t do anything outdoors.

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Interviewer: But how have things changed?
Simon: Well, I don’t do anything outdoors.
Siv: No, it is only since he injured his knee, and now he will probably keep having an injured knee. No, he’s got his chance now—it will be over sooner or later.
Simon: That’s what she says. I have carried the firewood for 25 years, what does it matter if you get to do it for some years now? “But you haven’t done any laundry for 25 years,” she replies then.

This implied that their distribution of household work had changed dramatically. Another interesting example was when Ärla talked about her household activities:

Ärla: I had to teach Ärnst how to use the dishwasher.

This was in relation to surgery Ärla had that made her immobile for months. A changed context forced them to rearrange certain everyday practices and the division of labor. Similarly, the householders who had recently had children also noted that they had adjusted their distribution of activities, depending especially on who took care of the children. In other cases, it was obvious how the householders negotiated with each other, and how one of them imposed his or her views on the other; for example:

Gunnar: One considers recycling and taking care of the materials.
Interviewer: Is that something you do in your household?
Greta: Yes we do!
Gunnar: [laughs] I guess we have pushed it through.
Greta: You pushed it through!
Gunnar: When we got those recycling stations outside here it became possible.
Greta: He was raised in a family in which everything had to be correct.
Interviewer: I see. What made you convinced then?
Greta: Well, all this about recycling. There isn’t anyone else in our house who sorts their waste apart from us.
Gunnar: And then all of a sudden when she had been out working at sea, there were two buckets under the sink, one with a label saying plastics, and one saying metals. It was the surprise effect.
Greta: Exactly. I have learned. It took some time, and I have been very annoyed many times. But now it is a habit, and that took perhaps ten years. Today I don’t think about it so much. If there is something that is difficult, I don’t give a damn about it and I throw it away in the regular waste. He doesn’t know what it contains. [laughs]
This is a rich description of how they introduced a new household practice, i.e., changed their practice, some time in the past. Several householders told stories about how one householder introduced recycling and then convinced his or her domestic partner to recycle as well. The household is a small organization that affects the ecological action space of the individual householder. In the above example, it is noteworthy that it was Gunnar who convinced Greta to start recycling, since Greta is the one responsible for cooking in their household. She therefore handles many of the recyclable containers, which she sometimes throws away. Gunnar and Greta are also interesting in terms of how they relate different ecological activities to one another; for example, they described how Gunnar drives back from work to eat lunch that Greta has prepared, and then returns to work by car.

In conclusion, both the male and female householders described how they cared for the environment through their activities, but they sometimes perform different activities related to gendering. The members of multi-person households negotiate with and influence each other, which implies that they contribute to forming each other’s ecological action space. In this sense, they may experience having different roles (e.g., parent, citizen, consumer, partner, child, and employee) and being subject to different expectations, depending on who is asking something of them. The division of labor may change when the context changes, for example, when one has a baby, falls ill, or moves to a new house.

**The materiality of everyday practice**

An issue running through all activity areas is what the householders rely on when performing their activities. Their practices are interrelated with a multitude of technologies, infrastructures, knowledge, and rules. In the resources box in the time diaries, the householders recorded using cars, coffee makers, washing machines, bicycles, vacuum cleaners, second cars, trams, computers, TVs, electricity, etc. In this section, my aim is to describe and analyze the householders’ preconditions for performing their everyday activities. Most of the resources they noted were technological appliances. This connects their individual activities and resource use to the capitalist system and to systems for water, energy, and eventually waste management, all of which collectively results in an ecological footprint (Dobson 2003). The appliances can be categorized differently depending on the perspective applied. These products are composed of natural...
resources and often additionally require that water, electricity, or batteries be used; the overall environmental impact of these products can be analyzed from the cumulative environmental impacts of their production and use. However, the technological appliances obviously have diverse meanings encompassing more than just ecological ones. I argue that technological appliances are part of socio–technical systems comprising both material and immaterial structures. For example, the immaterial social expectations of how to equip a standard kitchen have material consequences, which makes it likely to find a microwave oven, stove, refrigerator, coffee maker, toaster, freezer, and electric mixer. While the householders have little influence over the electrical and water systems due to laws and regulations, what companies and the municipality supply, and the systems’ solidity in material and economic terms (Otnes 1988), they have more influence over what they equip their household with and how they use the various technologies, systems, and products. However, and running the risk of being repetitive, the use is influenced by social structures that open up certain opportunities for action at the same time as they restrict others. These social structures influence how the householders give meaning to the possession and use of technological appliances.

Car, coffee maker, washing machine, bicycle, vacuum cleaner, second car, toaster, TV, computer …

It was mainly through their time diaries and the box for “resources” that the various technologies used by the householders were visualized. The time diaries contain various notations about the resources and technologies the householders use when performing their everyday activities. One group of technologies and products is for food production; the most frequently mentioned is the coffee maker (probably because the householders took time to write while making coffee), while the microwave oven, stove, refrigerator, electric kettle, food items, toaster, and dishwasher are commonly mentioned as well. The aim of letting the householders record in their time diaries the resources and technologies on which they relied was to explore how the householders were connected to various socio–technical and socioeconomic systems, and to examine their “material structuring of domesticity” (Freeman 2004:2). This material structuring influences the ecological action space of the householders when it comes to carrying out environmentally friendly activities. The technologies available to householders are important in determining what they (can) do.

Almost every householder recorded in their time diary that they watched TV, and in some cases they emphasized that they chose among resources and often additionally require that water, electricity, or batteries be used; the overall environmental impact of these products can be analyzed from the cumulative environmental impacts of their production and use. However, the technological appliances obviously have diverse meanings encompassing more than just ecological ones. I argue that technological appliances are part of socio–technical systems comprising both material and immaterial structures. For example, the immaterial social expectations of how to equip a standard kitchen have material consequences, which makes it likely to find a microwave oven, stove, refrigerator, coffee maker, toaster, freezer, and electric mixer. While the householders have little influence over the electrical and water systems due to laws and regulations, what companies and the municipality supply, and the systems’ solidity in material and economic terms (Otnes 1988), they have more influence over what they equip their household with and how they use the various technologies, systems, and products. However, and running the risk of being repetitive, the use is influenced by social structures that open up certain opportunities for action at the same time as they restrict others. These social structures influence how the householders give meaning to the possession and use of technological appliances.

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Almost every householder recorded in their time diary that they watched TV, and in some cases they emphasized that they chose among
several TV sets in the home, stating, for example, that they watched “the large TV” on one occasion and then later “the smaller TV.” This indicates an abundance of technological devices, which is interpreted as a sign of a “consumer society.” Technological devices for handling information, communication, and entertainment are common in the diary and interview material, and indicate the technological practice that the householders have created for themselves. The householders use CD players, Mp-3 players, stereos, and radios to listen to music, news, and programs, and they watch TV, DVDs, and videos. In this context, it is interesting to note that watching TV is considered the opposite of being “active” by the householders. For example, Desiree stated that she had been concerned about writing down all the things she did, since she did not want to highlight how much she watches TV. This indicates that their interaction with the technological artifacts bears meaning; social norms are built into the artifacts, and the user and artifact mold each other. In previous literature, this has sometimes been called domestication (Lie & Sörensen 1996). Domestication can be considered a form of standardization of artifacts and practices that may seem to govern what householders do, but when reviewing historical studies of the kitchen (Freeman 2004; Cowan 1989), food-preparation practices (Cowan 1983), or the bathroom (Shove 2003), for example, we see that standardizations change over time. Structuration theory is suitable for interpreting these changes. All the technologies and artifacts the householders acquire and use contribute to forming their ecological action space, but while some facilitate ecologically friendly practices, others result in extensive energy use, pollution, and natural resource consumption.

A challenge with using the time diaries is that the resources box, in which some householders recorded the technologies used for their everyday activities, does not reveal how the householders perceived the artifacts, i.e., they are detached from context and meaning. In a few cases, a household wrote down additional information, as Årla and Pia did. The meaning the artifacts have for the householders influences how the householders choose between different options, and is also connected with identities and desires, for example, to be cool, manly, or an environmental nerd—whatever identity they relate to. Bearing in mind the remark about the time diaries, in the interviews, the householders shared few comments on what the different technologies meant for them, apart from the importance of technologies related to specific areas about which I asked, such as transportation, laundry practices, and doing the dishes (cf. Appendix 2 concerning interview questions). An example of how technologies were connected with image and identity was how some of the men talked about
the type of car they had. They stated, for example, that when they were younger they would never have wanted a small car because it was more environmentally friendly. An illustration of this line of reasoning was articulated by Örjan:

Örjan said that he finds cars very entertaining, and that when he was younger he would never ever have made the following suggestion. But he would actually like to suggest that the center of Gothenburg became a car-free area, only electric cars are allowed. (Interview notes)

When the car is regarded as entertainment, it is described in different terms from when it is regarded as a practical means of transport for organizing household activities. The above quotation illustrates how artifacts and technologies can bear meaning, and how this householder’s view of cars changed with increasing age.

Just as whether or not the households have a car is central to their choice of means of transportation, there are other situations in which their decision as to what to purchase will influence how much energy they will consume in the future or how they will be able to act in more environmentally friendly ways. Tina stated that she had decided not to have a microwave oven, mobile phone, or computer in her home. It is possible to interpret this statement in relation to a perceived norm (or standardization in this case) concerning how to equip the household, and to her perception that these technologies are prevalent in other homes.

Another aspect of the material structuring of domesticity is how the householders cared for and maintained their homes. Various householders had remodeled their homes to make them more aesthetically appealing. Remodeling can in this sense mean increased use of resources in the form of materials such as paint, solvent, wallpaper, flooring, and tiles (cf. Freeman 2004; Karhi 2008), which has a distinct rationality from modifications made to reduce energy use and lower electricity bills. Subtle household projects, such as keeping the home cozy and clean, which can entail purchases and other consumption-related activities, may counteract the ecological intent of certain household activities. Lillemor explained that she lets various lights burn all night long to make her home cozy, as does Burt when he is home. These are important aspects to keep in mind in relation to suggestions to emphasize immaterial values of life, since they often have material consequences.

As mentioned above, it was sometimes only when conditions changed that the householders renegotiated their household practices. Karolina talked about how their dishwasher had broken; she raised the
matter after commenting on consumption in general, and saying that they should attempt to “think before purchasing something new.” I interpret these reflections on technologies in relation to changed circumstances in light of the fact that the householders took these technologies for granted until their situations changed. Karolina continued:

Karolina: It [the dishwasher] handles the dishes better than we do, and it actually requires less water.
Karl: It is a known fact that we considered, that it requires less energy than doing the dishes by hand.

When the interviewees say that the dishwasher requires less water and energy than doing dishes by hand, they are giving an ecological explanation of how the dishwasher is useful, quite distinct from how Örjan talked about cars as “entertaining.” New context implies an opportunity to reflect on habits and routines, and an opportunity to renegotiate practices and technologies. Their line of reasoning exemplifies how activities can be rationalized (Giddens 1989) and the utility of being knowledgeable about the environmental effects of everyday practices. Individual knowledge is created in social contexts, but comprises an individual precondition to one’s ecological action space.

How house construction can condition one’s everyday practices was exemplified by specific renovations necessitated by elevated radon levels in some houses in Piteå. These renovations represented a way to deal with personal risk. Some residents of Piteå had either installed radon pumps or remodeled the interior structure of their homes to increase air circulation, to reduce the risk posed by radon gas. Housing can also affect the environmental impact of everyday practices due to the energy source chosen for heating. How the householders chose among the available options was influenced by the complex networks to which their houses were connected. As discussed in chapter 5, one way to deal with complexity is to rely on others, such as partners, neighbors, or officials. Various householders used district heating to heat their houses, and in Piteå some have installed geothermal heating.

To emphasize the relationship between individual choices and collective socio–technical systems, I will repeat part of the quotation from Spaargaren and Vliet (2000) that was cited in chapter 2, and let this link the section on individual preconditions to the following section on the use of systems:

The Jones’ and Smiths’ individual choices would not have done them a bit of good if the town leaders had not decided on sustainable building programs and call-a-car projects several
years earlier, and if the electricity and water companies had not got around to connecting local solar systems to the central grid and running grey- and rainwater pipes into the neighbourhood. (Spaargaren & Vliet 2000:74)

Users of systems and services
Householders are users of socio–technical systems in and through their everyday activities; they rely on these systems to supply experiences and services and live a “good life” (Shove 2003). Their homes are linked to water and energy systems and how their homes are constructed further structures their ecological action space.

Throughout this chapter, we have seen examples of householders describing their reliance on systems that function properly and are taken for granted. Infrastructure influences how the householders act, via the location and availability of services. Structural and geographical factors affect the householders’ choice of transportation, for example, and the analysis found that municipal planning of parking availability affected how car use is perceived. In Piteå, parking lots often have block heater hookups; in cold weather, these reduce the negative environmental effects of cars, and
several householders mentioned using them. In the other municipalities, problems finding parking and the cost of parking prompted the householders to use public transportation. The availability of roads, safe bicycle lanes, and railroads influence how the householders act.

According to structuration theory, present actions are based on previous actions and decisions, and facilitate or restrict possible future courses of action. Apart from this time dimension, it is interesting to observe how the householders described coordinating their everyday activities, and where in their routines ecologically friendly activities either fit in or were excluded. Regarding the relationship between \textit{having} as important for \textit{doing}, and ecological action space, I will consider several aspects the householders described. These concern both what the householders actively construct and contribute to by themselves, as described in the section above, and the options that actors such as the municipality and the welfare state supply them with, as discussed in this section. This directs our attention to how the householders (re)create their ecological action space.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the various technologies the householders use mean something to them, but it is mainly when they have had to change technologies, due to device breakdown or personal ageing, that they have reflected on this. Technologies and resources are intermingled with everyday practices and influence the household ecological action space. Technology purchase and use is governed by various rationalities. In some cases, a technology may imply coziness, pleasure, and entertainment, in other cases, risk reduction or energy efficiency, and in yet other cases, utility. For all technologies, there are standards or norms as to what the householders are expected to have to be considered “normal.” Some technologies are connected to individual image and identity much more than others, the car being one example I highlighted. Municipal planning, for example, concerning recycling systems, parking, tram lines, and district heating, creates the materiality that also affects householder ecological action space.

\textit{Analyzing the (re)creation of ecological action space}

This chapter aimed to address how householders (re)creation their ecological action space by focusing on these questions: What environmentally friendly practices do the householders describe having, and how are these related to the less environmentally friendly ones? Who
does these activities? And what preconditions and constraints can be
decoded for environmentally friendly behavior? How do the householders
contribute to their ecological action space? The activities the householders
described have concerned six general areas: recycling, transportation,
purchasing ecological products, reducing energy consumption, managing
water use, and influencing others. The examination of these general areas
was illustrated with examples of concrete activities at a basic level. The
areas in which the householders described consciously undertaking the
greatest amount of environmentally friendly activity concerned recycling,
purchasing organic or ecologically labeled products, traveling by public
transportation, and saving energy or using less harmful energy sources.
Recycling was the area that got the most spontaneous attention in the
interviews; when the householders discussed the environmentally friendly
household activities they carried out, almost every householder described
recycling to some extent. The chapter also paid attention to the
technological appliances and technological systems on which the
householders relied to live their everyday lives. Transportation is a distinct
area in that it links a range of activities from other areas, as it is used to
coordinate everyday activities in general.

As is evident in Appendix 2, which presents the interview
questions, the householders were asked specifically how they acted
concerning cooking, grocery shopping, water use, recycling, and the means
of transportation used. The primary rationales determining how these
activities were undertaken were economic; for example, the householders
saved money by reducing energy consumption, while environmentally
friendly products were seen as often too expensive. When it came to
recycling, the motivation was virtue in most cases, while economic in
others, as described previously, depending on the type of dwelling the
householders occupied and its proximity to key infrastructure, such as
recycling stations.

I have argued that it is analytically difficult to distinguish what
environmentally motivated activities householders do from why they do
them. It has become evident that there are four areas of motivation:
economic, altruistic/environmental, time, and personal health. These
motivations may give birth to win–win situations when they are fused in
specific activities, but they may also conflict, requiring that the
householders compensate or prioritize between motivations. “Motivation”
has been used interchangeably with “rationality” in seeking to understand
the householders’ reasoning. Some householders described how they
compensated for their behavior, navigated complexity, and negotiated with
themselves on how to behave. When the householders choose between
different household activities, all of which they find reasonable, it is possible to claim that they choose “symbolic activities.” Some also described how they prioritized activities, in order to do what was most efficient. However, when considering risky products or specific activities and their measured ecological impact, it is questionable whether all choices are interchangeable. This refers back to the argument about the particular rationality on which a decision or measurement is based.

A central issue when it comes to analyzing the available options for ecological action is that they relate to systems. I argue that the individual activities that are in line with sustainable development ideals are all part of standardized practices and systems. Without recycling stations and systems it would not be possible to recycle even recyclable materials, if there is no public transportation or if it runs seldom it will be underused, unless you grow your own it is difficult to know whether vegetables are organic without a labeling system, and without alternate energy systems it is difficult to replace an oil furnace, which is perceived as contributing to environmental destruction. Yet, by using these systems the householders can exercise agency. Of course, these systems are not the only factors forming the householders’ ecological action space. All the topics discussed concern how the householders can contribute to creating their own preconditions for acting and can exercise agency. They can do this, for example, by remodeling their homes to use less energy, putting a sticker on the door saying “No advertising,” taking a course on environmental issues, considering whether and, if so, what car to purchase, introducing recycling to a domestic partner, organizing a car pool, working from home, and contacting politicians and reacting to municipal sustainable development policies. The external preconditions they have talked about relate to geographical, physical, social, and immaterial factors and have a time dimension as well, in that previous decisions affect what can be done here and now.

Ecological action space is built on structures with different rationalities that both facilitate and constrain the householders’ perceived opportunities to act in environmentally friendly ways. Structures influence the householders when they ponder different environmentally friendly options. I have identified a number of structures that influence the householders’ ecological action space: norms of cleanliness affect how they maintain their homes, what they recycle, and their laundry practices; norms of convenience affect how they travel and use water and energy; norms of legitimate interaction affect how they attempt to influence neighbors, friends, and politicians and explain why it may be awkward to organize a car pool; and gender structures affect who is expected to and who does
carry out different household activities. Guided by these structures, the householders know how to “go on” without having to reflect on every aspect of every activity in their everyday lives. However, these structures can also constrain the incorporation of certain new ecologically motivated activities. How household activities are organized may result in unintended consequences, such as undesirable habits and routines, or asymmetrical knowledge development. Through the householders’ descriptions of their practices, one can deduce the preconditions and constraints faced. In the six general areas, the householders expressed how they created preconditions for themselves, but also how their ecological action space was structured by others, including institutions providing information or determining where services are located.

The situational and contextual aspects of the householders’ action space become evident through their descriptions of their everyday life and how they incorporated environmentally friendly practices into it. Opportunities to renegotiate practices are often created by changed contexts, for example, illness of a domestic partner, having a child, moving to a new home, technological device breakdown, or retirement. The fact that the householders can act in different roles has already been explored. What was once reasonable may no longer be so, and former household division of labor may have to change. This also indicates that the householders are far from autonomous individuals, but must be understood in their wider contexts.

The sixth area of activity concerned influencing others to act in more environmentally friendly ways. This relates to both individual responsibility and political participation, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.
Two central issues that recur throughout the sustainable development discourse are the need for lifestyle change and broader participation. These two demands are intimately related. The strong emphasis on change in the discourse implies that, unlike the future, our present is definitely unsustainable. The argument is that people need to change their everyday practices, usually called their lifestyle, to save the world. As early as *Our Common Future* it was stated that:

Sustainable global development requires that those who are more affluent adopt life-styles within the planet’s ecological means … in the end, sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs. We do not pretend that the process is easy or straightforward. Painful choices have to be made. (*Our Common Future* 1987:9; my emphasis)

The implicit assumption is that if people are made conscious of their destructive practices they will change them. This relationship between becoming aware and changing practices will be elaborated on here. The processes of making people aware and of changing daily habits are manifestations of participation in the shift towards a more sustainable society.

Participation, however, is a vague concept having a multitude of connotations depending on one’s theoretical perspective, and concerning when and how citizens can and should participate, as demonstrated in chapter 2. In chapter 2, different ways of participation were accounted for, and the tendency to politicize everyday activities was highlighted through a focus on responsibility and rights. The individualization of responsibility for the environment has further challenged the notion of participation. In normative theoretical approaches, people who are environmentally friendly are expected to be knowledgeable of and to take responsibility for the environmental consequences of their everyday activities wherever and whenever they arise (Dobson 2003). Citizens are expected to act for
reasons beyond concern for personal interest and economic or material benefits, and to make sacrifices for the environment; these expectations will be problematized in this chapter. Furthermore, a distinction has been made between collective mobilization and how people participate individually in their everyday lives. In line with Lister (2003), I argue that the emphasis should be on the places and spaces where lived citizenship is practiced, and on the “interactional experience”. Interactional experience refers to the fact that political influence is created in many different situations, and through experiencing these situations, people learn what politics is (Brand 1997; Elia soph 1998). Here I wish to repeat Shove’s caution (2003:9) that ordinary routinized and taken-for-granted practice should be a focus in environmental studies.

The attention paid to the individualization of responsibility has prompted discussion of what could actually be defined as political participation. This analysis therefore aims to isolate whether and, if so, what household activities related to sustainable development can be considered political and/or civic participation. As indicated in the theoretical chapter, there is a common distinction between participating as a citizen in a democratic community and as a consumer. While the former is considered to center on altruism and the common good, the latter is considered to relate to self interest and material benefits (Berglund & Matti 2007; Bauman 2004). This is a one-dimensional distinction, which will be elaborated on in the following section where I argue that the picture is more complex. Boycotts and what the householders decide not to consume, as in “dematerialization,” could express both citizenship and consumerism. Participating as a citizen implies broader connotations than acting merely as a consumer. Norén (2005) distinguishes between civic and political participation. Civic participation focuses on specific issues and interests but lacks any ambition to influence the structural political context of society. Political participation, on the other hand, aims to influence the political decisions of authorities. These two concepts will be elaborated on in the analysis presented in this chapter.

The overarching question that guides this chapter is: How do householders perceive their responsibilities for the environment, and how do they attempt to exert political influence, i.e., participate? This question has been divided into the following sub-questions: Is it possible to discern a private sphere? Do the householders indicate that they are participating as consumers and/or citizens when they describe how they participate? For whom do they participate and have responsibility, i.e., what collective do they describe? How do the householders give meaning to civic and political participation in the interests of sustainable development?
In this chapter, I want to further concretize and develop the concept of ecological action space through analyzing the empirical material. In chapter 2, the householders’ ecological action space was defined as the context in which individual actors and structures encounter and mutually create and recreate their perceptions of responsibility and of what environmentally friendly activities are considered possible.

**Political participation for the environment**

I take as my departure point the definition that political participation concerns attempting to influence “common, collective, or public goods” (Kolb 2007:25), such as a good environment. As discussed in chapter 2, there has been a tendency to politicize “thoughtless action” (Segerberg 2005). This has challenged the definition of political participation as encompassing the intention behind activities, and related it to the effects of actions. The definition, as I see it, is in line with structuration theory, which focuses on the encounter between and mutual construction of actors and structures, in which intended attempts can have unintended consequences that may counteract sustainable development. These structures are normalizing and of various kinds, being material as well as immaterial. The following simplified model presents issues concerning (political) participation for the environment that have been dealt with in previous literature; these are referred to in the present study, and they are the issues that I will treat in the analysis. I acknowledge that they are not the only aspects of political participation.

**Dialectical aspects of participation**

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<th>Means and methods to participate</th>
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<td>Voluntary action</td>
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When to participate
Setting agendas  Implementing a set agenda
Roles when participating  
Act in role of consumer  Act in role of citizen
Aim of participation for the environment
Changing structures (such as thinking in new ways or constructing systems), change the cause of environmental problems
Acting for specific issues, in an organization or movement, or dealing with symptoms
Motivations for participation
Private goals  Altruistic goals and virtue
How to judge participation
By focusing on intention and attempts  By focusing on effects (the politicization of thoughtless action)

Several of the issues in the above model are interrelated and assumed to be interdependent, for example, challenging political structures using non-parliamentary means for altruistic motives. As will be demonstrated in the following, several combinations of the above categories are possible, and this chapter focuses on how the householders reasoned about their responsibilities, how they took action and participated, what their motivations were, and in what roles they acted. A general issue that influences participation, but is not part of the model, is the distinction between efficient and legitimate means and policy instruments.

In the methodology chapter, I concluded that people learn how to talk about and interpret phenomena through socialization. It is structures, for example, political culture, that influence how one perceives individual versus collective responsibilities, legitimate civic interaction, and one’s own role in politics. Legitimacy is not used as an analytical concept here as in political analysis, but rather as a synonym for what is considered justifiable and reasonable. These structures affect how people are able to join in public discourse as well as their strategies for action (Brand 1997:211; cf. Eliasoph 1998; Kolb 2007). By political discourse, I refer to the specific issues that are experienced as central and thus make it into local and global debates through agenda setting. As emphasized in structuration theory, however, structures cannot force people to act, though through their agency, people may well contribute to reinterpreting structures. However, I interpret structuration theory as claiming that householders actively need to relate to norms and structures, through both rhetoric and actions. That is the overarching theoretical approach to political participation.
The chapter is organized as follows. First, I will describe and analyze the relationship between environmental consciousness, everyday practice, and the rearrangement of everyday life (i.e., participation by changing private activities) that is required for sustainable development. Second, I will discuss how the householders identified themselves as responsible actors, occupying a middle ground between what they described as “fanatical” environmental activists and “irresponsible” others. Third, I will examine individual versus collective forms of participation, parliamentary versus non-parliamentary methods, legitimate and efficient ways of exerting influence, and how the private sphere is described and outlined.

Responsibility and change

Acting in environmentally friendly ways to support more sustainable development concerns not just accepting one’s responsibility and being willing to act, but also knowing what to do and why, i.e., being conscious. In this section, I will take an in-depth look at the empirical category and common self-identification found among the studied householders, namely, being “environmentally conscious,” and see how it relates to participation and behavioral change. Here, the emphasis is on perceptions of the opportunities for and constraints on participating in the change needed to create more ecological alternatives.

Changing behavior as participation

As argued above, it is important to note how the householders reasoned about changing their everyday practices. To an extent, this reasoning relates to two ways of viewing such change: as reaching a stage at which it is possible to describe oneself as environmentally conscious, or as a process of constant opportunities for (ecological) progress and change. The problematic notion of changing everyday practices was highlighted in an illustrative way by one of the householders, Karl. He reflected on areas in which he could change his everyday activities and become more ecologically friendly, but concluded:

Karl: Of course I see things I could change. But I also know exactly where my limits are. … We are conscious enough of the choices we have made, and we stand up for these
choices. Therefore, there is no need to change much else.
We have already made the adjustments.

He argues that the members of his household have reached a stage. This example should be viewed in relation to general decision making processes, and the focus on changing household practices. What if you have already changed your practices, and now call yourself environmentally conscious? It also illustrates how the householders actively contribute to their ecological action space by creating the opportunities to act in environmentally responsible ways. What the householders do today depends on previous decisions and choices, and outlines what will be possible to do from now on.

Delving into how the studied householders consider the fact that the people who created environmental problems can also contribute to changes that will ameliorate them, an interesting matter is habits that are especially difficult to change. Curiously, several of the householders reasoned about factors that more or less oblige them to act in certain ways. Advertising and consumer culture, for example, were perceived as “forcing” them to want things. These factors pertain to constraints, according to structuration theory, since they are considered as forcing the subjects to act in a specific way. Henning and Hanna described themselves as “environmental nerds” and were thus uncharacteristic in relation to the other householders in this study. It is noteworthy that even they emphasized that consumer culture discourages more environmentally friendly behavior and changing one’s practices:

Henning: It is a lot easier to think the thought than to actually carry it out.
Hanna: The most difficult is stuff like books and records and so on …
Henning: … because they are so nice to have.

Advertising, and thereby companies and the production sector, are regarded as persuading people to want to consume, which in turn causes increased waste. This is a constraint, since it is interrelated with how the householders discuss individual responsibility and the cause of environmental problems. This view is permeated by the theory of false consciousness that has created desires. The central issue of “thinking the thought” and being aware of it, and harnessing that awareness to change practice, which Henning illustrated above, is central. That consciousness is important, but does not necessarily lead to changed practices, was further mentioned by many, for example, Burt:
Burt: Well, we are extravagant, actually. Even though we work on energy-related issues at home, we do waste energy, since there are only two and a half people in this house [referring to his son who is not home very often] ... there are a lot of things one can do if one is a bit conscious and does things that don’t affect the quality of life. And there are a lot of things that can be achieved there. I mean, we have a small car, and get into town anyway. ... But if we lived in a smaller house ... we would have to sacrifice our quality of life.

The quotation shows that Burt is not ready to perform activities or abstain from resource consumption that negatively affects his quality of life. Like many other householders in this study, he is unwilling to make sacrifices as a citizen through rearranging and changing everyday life. Talking about and knowing how to be environmentally friendly do not equal actually performing environmentally friendly activities (cf. Brand 1997). However, this is a tricky relationship, since talking is an important activity when participating in “public discourse” (Young 2003 cited in Luque 2005:211).

Changing individual practices concerns the individualization of responsibility for the environment. Simply stated, once upon a time the householders rearranged their everyday lives to incorporate specific activities such as recycling. Since that is considered “enough,” most householders do not believe they need to change much else, although many are bothered by a “bad conscience” when not doing all the environmentally sound activities of which they know.

Thinking doing

Throughout the study, the householders claimed to be “environmentally conscious.” Rhetorically, one can ask what does it mean when the householders describe themselves as environmentally conscious? In one sense claiming to be environmentally conscious could be interpreted as a Swedish and perhaps even global, phenomenon:

... an environmental consciousness has largely ceased to serve as a living source of identity for a relatively small number of activists and experts, and has become instead a

66 This heading is taken from Segerberg’s (2005) dissertation about the politicization of thoughtless action, which has the same title.
broader, but also much more diffuse, source of inspiration for society as a whole. (Jamison 2001:18)

Building on this view, environmental consciousness is considered to have been internalized in the Swedish culture and personality (Jamison 2001). On the other hand, there is a difference between arguing about responsibility and describing how ideas of responsibility are being transformed into action. For example, when asked what they could do to counteract the identified environmental problems, the householders often said “I am environmentally conscious” and backed up this statement by citing an activity, such as recycling or purchasing ecologically labeled products as a consumer. Showing that they knew of environmentally sound activities was important to them. There were typical ways of expressing such responsibility, and claiming to be “environmentally conscious” was itself interpreted as a way of acting responsibly.

Interviewer: Do your parents sort their waste too?
Desiree: Yes, they sort.
Interviewer: Have they always done that?
Desiree: Well … as long as I can remember they have, or, well, it is mum who takes care of that, sorting. She sorts milk boxes and newspaper, glass bottles and plastic bottles and plastic containers, and whatever—there she is, doing it. So there are many different bags in the garage.
Interviewer: So your dad does not sort at all?
Desiree: No he doesn’t, he isn’t that aware. Or, I mean, it is not like he is throwing it in the waste, but it is mum who is organizing it and he knows that he shouldn’t throw away milk boxes. And then my mum packs everything up and takes it to the recycling station.

Desiree claims that her mum is environmentally conscious because she recycles, while her dad is not considered conscious even though he does recycle. Desiree believes that a person can act without knowing why, consciousness being at the center. A central tenet in the material is the relationship between responsibilities and being “conscious,” which is sometimes decoupled from action. When it is decoupled from action, it is enough to be environmentally conscious without manifesting this in any specific activity or practice. This implies that one can ask what difference it makes for the state of the environment if the householders claim to be environmentally conscious. The above quotation was also selected to illustrate gendered expectations and household negotiation. In conclusion, it is possible to claim that ecological action space is defined by context (structures) as well as by individual aims and understandings.
Thinking and being conscious were important. Ärnst described how householders can be responsible in the following illustrative way:

Ärnst: Individuals can be responsible by cleaning up after themselves and even after people who don’t think.

This statement implies that someone who litters is not “thinking.” Here he focuses on “the thinking” rather than “the doing,” just as Desiree did when she talked about her dad, who also acted without thinking or being conscious. Desiree, like many other householders, distinguished between thinking and doing in their everyday speech. The reason for paying attention to the issue of being “conscious” here is that the relationship between “being environmentally conscious” and acting has several facets. First, a person can be aware of the impact of his or her everyday activities, but also be aware of environmentally friendly activities that could be done. As well, a person can transform this awareness into acting in environmentally conscious ways in his or her everyday behavior. Here is another way of describing consciousness and how it relates to everyday practices in a multi-member household:

Interviewer: Is ecological food something you think about?
Evald: Well, I am not really the one who does the grocery shopping, but I am conscious of it.
Interviewer: Is it something you talk about before you decide what to buy?
Evald: No, not really.
Eva: No.
Evald: If I see something, like when the Norwegians colored the salmon red, then I tell Eva not to buy Norwegian salmon.
Eva: But that is the only one [to buy], so I do so anyway.
Evald: You do so anyway? Only because I tell you to?
Eva: But there is no other salmon to buy. I have checked, and I don’t know where to buy any other salmon. . . .
Evald: And then one shouldn’t buy any Norwegian products whatsoever, since they kill the wolves.
Interviewer: Is that an argument not to buy them?
Evald: Yes, well, I think so. Of course, it is not enough for just one person to do this, but it feels better to show your dissent. It clears your conscience.

This is a rich extract, since it relates to various interesting issues, especially concerning the relationship between acting in environmentally friendly ways and being conscious: the household division of labor; caring about animals, which are taken to be part of the political community, since they support his argument; and the fact that it feels morally good to wield
consumer power to show dissent. His consciousness makes him attempt to persuade his wife to buy different salmon, due to their division of household work. In this sense, talking is a way of doing in this case. This significance of talking points out the methodological importance of studying not only one but all members of a household, and their negotiations and division of labor. The individual is part of a social context that influences, i.e., both facilitates and constrains, possible actions in ecological action space. Evald’s expression was an example of attempting to act politically through consumption, but also illustrates the relationship between intentions and action that is at the center of being environmentally conscious. It can also be interpreted as highlighting that individuals need to act collectively to have an efficient influence. A relevant question is how Evald expected anyone to find out about his intentional boycott. They could have argued that they should vote for environmentally concerned politicians and parties in the elections, or join a consumer organization, as well as emphasizing their role as individual actors and consumers at the grocery store. Summing up, consciousness never forces the householders to act, and the householders claim to be environmentally conscious as both citizens and consumers (cf. Berglund & Matti 2007).

Most householders commented that though they knew of more ecological activities that they could potentially perform, what they already did was enough to define them as “environmentally conscious.” There was only one householder, Simon, who stated that “I don’t give a damn about the environment,” and yet he carried out and motivated some of the same activities by them being environmentally friendly, as the other householders in the study.

The descriptions that the householders gave me concerned an area in which there were intersecting relationships between being conscious and unaware, responsible and irresponsible, and thinking and doing. Being conscious was generally used in two different senses. First, it was used in relation to a specific activity, such as stating “I am conscious since I recycle.” Second, it was used as a claim to be knowledgeable about a fact or a relationship between human activities and environmental effects. The latter case was typically used to rationalize not acting in environmentally friendly ways, as in stating “I do not purchase ecologically labeled products, but I am conscious of the issue.” In the latter sense, it is benevolent simply to think about a matter! No one stated that they knew nothing about environmental effects, or that they should be regarded as “unaware.” A related issue pertaining to consciousness is that the householders held the prevailing view that people, not just politicians,
should “practice what they preach.” It was often used as an argument for putting words into action, rather than “just talking.”

What is defined as reasonable, which seems to be what they claim that they are willing to and could perform in relation to what is “beyond the limit,” differs somewhat between the householders. However, it is interesting how many use the concept to reason about their environmental activities. The concept of “reasonableness” also illustrates ecological action space and the creation of opportunities for oneself or one’s household to act in environmentally responsible ways. What people do today depends on previous decisions. As has been shown, the householders knew about a fair number of environmentally related activities that they could perform.

In the previous section, I demonstrated that while one could define oneself as environmentally conscious solely by claiming to perform a specific activity, often recycling, this does not equal “doing the right thing all the time.” Informants stated that “consciousness” was an important characteristic of both citizens and consumers, and it was often mentioned as part of who they were and wanted to be. Already being environmentally conscious seems to imply that the householders do not need to rearrange their everyday lives any further. Claiming to be environmentally “conscious” can be used in two different ways: it can be a way to justify environmentally friendly activities, but it can also be a way to acquit oneself of responsibility. Both ways structure householders’ ecological action space. In the following, I will analyze how the householders described themselves by positioning themselves relative to others.

**Positioning the self in relation to others**

Most householders in this study said that they as individuals were responsible for causing environmental problems, and they gave various examples of how to help solve them. A striking way of considering responsibility was how the householders positioned themselves relative to others. A common way of arguing was to discuss how other people neglected to act responsibly in the sense of participating in solving environmental problems. It would seem that talking about others’ responsibilities is a way for the respondents to relieve themselves of liability, an interpretation in line with sociological studies of political participation. It is through interaction, which is influenced by structures, that people learn and recreate what are perceived as individual and collective responsibilities, legitimate civic interaction, and their own role in...
politics and society (Brand 1997:211; cf. Eliasoph 1998; Kolb 2007), all of which are important parts of their ecological action space.

“Irresponsible” others and reasonable activities

It is obvious that by discussing how others behave responsibly, fanatically, or irresponsibly, the householders shape what is deemed reasonable for them to do, and set the limits for their individual efforts. In the interviews, it became clear that this positioning is done towards various others, ranging from family members, neighbors, and other inhabitants in the municipality, to the nation and other nationalities. The norms of when, how, and who it is possible to influence concern what can be termed “interactional spheres.”

A common character used for mirroring oneself, or reflecting one’s own identity in relative terms, was the “irresponsible” other. This was done, for example, by parents focusing on their children as mostly irresponsible when it came to the environment, which further indicated how they negotiated in the household. Talking about others as irresponsible thus often had a generational aspect. In families, children were sometimes portrayed as irresponsible when extravagant in using hot water and energy, for example. Irresponsible young people were positioned against the more responsible older generations, a pattern illustrated by Årnst, a man in his late 70s:

Årnst: You would never see someone who is 70 years old throw a beer can from the car.

Another illustration of this, and a reason for why, was given by Regina, a woman in her early 40s:

Regina: Younger people hardly seem to consider environmental issues at all. ... I believe that young people of today think it is too big, and that there is nothing they can do. But we have to start somewhere and our generation has sorted the garbage for quite some time.

Apart from reasoning about the generational aspect and how young people do not care about the environment, it is curious to note that she claims that her generation is acting responsibly simply because they recycle. In relation to what Årnst said, they are responsible when not littering and when they recycle. The irresponsible others were thus fellow municipal inhabitants in other cases, as Evald described in the following:

Evald: Irresponsible others were thus fellow municipal inhabitants in other cases.
Interviewer: Do you have any idea what the resource management vision of the municipality is like?
Evald: Yes, that they will reduce the waste by so much. But I don’t know how much. It was a mistake anyway when they implemented the system in which the house owners pay by weight for how much waste is collected. Because then they only dump it in other places instead, so it becomes a lot more untidy. They just drop their garden waste outside their own garden, and they take all sorts of waste to the recycling stations at night.
Interviewer: Do you think the municipality should do anything more?
Evald: Yes, locate the recycling stations in the areas of detached houses! [laughter]

This is a case of irresponsible others who “free ride” the system out of economic self-interest. This extract was one of many telling of how irresponsible people littered and left recyclable goods at places other than the designed stations.

Like many of the householders, Fredrik was concerned about irresponsible car drivers who let their engines run when the cars were stopped. This prompted more concern than the total distance car drivers drove.

Fredrik: If I told others to stop running their engines after the allowed minute here in Gothenburg, they would call me a policeman, and I wouldn’t want that, so I simply don’t tell them.

If Fredrik were to reprimand the irresponsible car drivers, he would risk being considered a fanatical environmental activist. This is curious, since he would be acting in line with municipal policy. It is through this daily interaction that the legitimate boundaries of civic activities are created and recreated. The above quotation illustrates how responsibility and legitimate interaction are interrelated, and how householders can reason about their influence on others in their everyday interaction in many different places and situations, i.e., interactional spheres. I argue that it is through their descriptions of these interactions that the householders stress what they consider important. The focus on irresponsible others can be interpreted as a way to portray themselves as more responsible. Irresponsible others are those who litter at the recycling stations, or neighbors whose wood heaters produce irritating smoke in areas of detached houses. The irresponsible others who litter at the recycling stations...
stations were frequently mentioned by the householders, as they were believed to discourage more people from starting recycling.

The transnational character of environmental problems connects the local and global levels, since activities in a Swedish household may have environmental consequences in other parts of the world. The irresponsible others can thus be other “global” citizens. Sweden is considered clean and good in relation to other countries, which the householders have experienced especially when on vacation. Simon illustrated this as follows:

Simon: They throw everything out. You can see that when you are abroad. There are plastic bottles along all the roads. They throw them out through the car windows. But I believe that Spain is starting to take care of this matter. But imagine if a billion Chinese people threw away plastic like that!

It is noteworthy that he paid attention to “visible” problems such as littering, while symptomatically not considering his own influence on this other country while on vacation in his camper van with its (invisible) emissions. He considered Sweden a master example, and believed that the government had acted appropriately. The way he reasoned about China was common in this context. A similar example of the way people frequently talk about the Chinese is this statement by Quintus:

Quintus: It is scary to think about what will happen when all the Chinese people get a car each. It is not like they don’t deserve that, but what about the consequences?

In this quotation, Quintus stresses that other “global” citizens have a right to the same standard of living, including material possessions such as cars, as Swedes do. However, it is the sheer number of Chinese people with the same hypothetical standard of living that is believed likely to have a dramatic negative effect on the common environment. The social concern about Chinese workers and improving their working conditions, which was raised by the householders, and the environmental concern about growing Chinese consumption are somewhat contradictory.

In this section, I have dealt with the empirical category of “irresponsible others” who are described as existing at different levels: from the family and village, to nationally and internationally. The irresponsible others were at one end of the spectrum, while the fanatical others were at the other. The reason for paying attention to this is the normative goal of post-cosmopolitan citizenship and the fact that the environmental effects of individual activities influence others and
transcend national borders. The fanatical others will be discussed in the coming section.

“Fanatical” others and the limits

It is through interaction and the described norms of interaction that what is deemed reasonable to do for the common environment is defined. Individual identities are maintained and constructed in relation to others. A typical example of defining one’s identity in relation to “fanatical” others was given by Burt and Beatrice:

Burt: We do think about it. We are not fanatical, like those who devote their whole lives to doing the right thing every second, but we are not bad.
Beatrice: No, not that bad.

Note how the description of the others creates a backdrop against which the speakers portray themselves. Being fanatical or radical was described in terms of never purchasing anything produced using petrol, never traveling by car or airplane, or never buying any new clothes. Possessions can thus be cited in defining one’s identity, as illustrated by Karl and Karolina:

Karolina: We are not fanatical.
Karl: We do have a car.

The limit to what is deemed reasonable when it comes to acting in environmentally sound ways corresponds to the definition of responsibility. Citizenship has an interactional dimension, so I argue that the householders gauge their own degree of responsibility in relation to what others do. What was reasonable was partly communicated through the descriptions of the perceived fanatical other. This was mostly done by citing examples of environmentally related activities of which they knew, but then finishing off by saying “there is a limit to what I am willing to do.” Whereupon they identified the activities that they actually felt they could carry out, from among those they knew of.

Desiree: But anyway, one has to be a bit conscious …
Interviewer: Why do you have to be?
Desiree: Well, because, it’s dependent on, it gets more and more littered and more polluted, and everything, in the environment. And that is because of us, human beings. But then, of course, one doesn’t have to exaggerate. But I
believe that if everyone could do a bit it would become easier.

This quotation implies that nobody has to undertake every environmentally friendly action they know of. There are limits to one’s individual responsibility, and one should not exaggerate, as stated by Desiree and several other householders. This also concerns the norm of individual freedom to choose among alternatives. However, like many other householders, Desiree emphasized the belief that the mission should be shared by everyone.

Environmental responsibility is permeated by moral considerations and especially bad conscience, which turned up constantly. A common way to deal with the moral implications prompted Evald to talk as follows:

Interviewer: So it’s in the basement that you are storing the compostable material for collection?
Evald: Yes … and well, it is not really compost, but rather a paper bag where you throw it. But no one does.
Interviewer: Is that something you have talked about with each other in the house, or …?
Evald: No, not really, I have noticed that there are never any bags in it [i.e., the receptacle for compostable material]. But … we got special bags to use, but we never got around to doing that. So this is something we are cheating on.
Interviewer: It feels like cheating?
Evald: A bit.
Interviewer: Why does it feel like cheating?
Evald: Well, one could possibly do it. But then it is a question of whether there is space in the cupboards, and there is plainly not enough room. And then, if you gather everything … one has to draw the line somewhere.

This excerpt relates to various interesting aspects: how Evald has been observing others and the interactional experience of citizenship; how the fact that others do not act relieves him of the responsibility to act; the cheating, which has a moral dimension; and, of course, what is deemed reasonable and where he “draws the line.” Several householders drew the line at making compost. Wiktoria gave an example from a TV program they had watched recently in which a woman who led a very environmentally friendly life was portrayed:

Wiktoria: It must be the only thing she has time for. She makes her own jam without preservatives, and she plants her flowers in soil from her compost that she has maintained for years, and she has seven or eight buckets under the sink for
everything. It is not reasonable in your everyday life. Unless someone constructs a system that works more easily. I would have to have the system just outside my door. Otherwise it is a joke, and it only gives me a bad conscience [laughs].

Here she not only mentions what is reasonable, but also the system within which she acts and how others can give her a bad conscience, which in turn relates to morality. The prevalence of householders’ mentioning “bad conscience” indicates their conviction that one should take responsibility for the environmental consequences of individual actions, but that there are constraints to replacing all one’s practices with more sustainable alternatives. Mentioning conscience is taken to indicate that the householder is referring to the norm of taking responsibility. While most householders talked about the limits of what they were willing to perform, and claimed that they were not fanatical, Hanna and Henning, on the other hand, described themselves as follows:

Hanna: [what] everyone else sees is two environmental nerds who go shopping with their bags made of cloth.

By claiming to be “environmental nerds,” it seems that they consider themselves different from the perceived typical Swede due to their possession and activities. Perhaps one could say that they believe that they are the fanatical others, and it is the bags made of cloth that give them away. While the irresponsible others are found at many different levels, the fanatical and radical others mainly seem to be Swedish, and Sweden is deemed to take responsibility in relation to other countries. In the following section, I will deal with to whom the householders said they were responsible, after concluding that they believed they were responsible for the environment.

What is the collective and to whom are the householders responsible?

In many citizenship models, the nation-state is the community within which citizens have rights and responsibilities (Delanty 2002). Environmental problems have challenged the nation-state, since they often transgress national borders (cf. Dobson 2003). The simple question that was posed initially in this chapter, of what the collective is, relates to a complex set of issues when dealing with sustainable development. In discourse on sustainable development and ecological citizenship theory, the collective is seen as extending beyond national borders, and citizens are expected to
consider present as well as future generations, and the environment. This relates to discussions of interconnectedness, and the matter of the intergenerational, intra-generational, and international aspects of sustainable development, and who is incorporated in one’s community (Lister et al. 2007; Eckersley 2005). The norm of altruistic post-cosmopolitan ecological citizenship entails considering the environmental consequences for other global citizens. I have further touched on the distinction between caring for other citizens in solidarity through the anthropocentric approach, and caring for animals, the environment, and nature through a more ecocentric approach. This corresponds to the issue of “everyday, apparently harmless practices … [and the] attempt to politicize the local, personal and present in terms of the general, the public and the future” (Luque 2005:221).

When considering the issue of for whom, the environmental consequences of individual activities extend outwards in time and space. In chapter 6, I concluded that the householders acted in different roles in different situations, and that they justified many activities by citing concern for children, partners, or other family members. This is a dimension of how the householders expressed their responsibilities to family members rather than to other global and distant citizens through their everyday lives and household responsibilities. This is what many feminist scholars have highlighted when claiming that the private is political, concerning what citizenship means to individual citizens (Lister 2003). This is distinct from many citizenship theories in which the nation-state is the collective to which the citizen is responsible and within which the citizen has rights. The intra-generational citizenship aspect of gender equality focuses on what can be considered the micro level, while the global aspect of responsibility can be considered the macro level. Responsibilities thus extend both “upwards” with de-territorialized citizenship (Delanty 2002) and “downwards” in relation to the nation-state, to the family and domestic partner relationship. This extends the sphere of citizenship. Here I will analyze how the householders discussed what their collective was, in the sense of expressing their responsibilities to a possible multitude of others. I conclude that they only related to a few of the “others” exemplified above. However, by discussing for whom they are responsible, the householders structure their own ecological action space.

Some householders explained their environmental activities in terms of caring for nature and the environment. This was illustrated by Wiktoria, for example, who explained that she recycled by stating:

Wiktoria: It feels like I’m contributing by pulling my straw to the ant hill and helping the environment.
The environment and animals were given the character of actors, and it is not necessarily the people who live in the environment that are referred to, so in this sense, the statement displays signs of an ecocentric motivation. However, it is the common environment that is the focus. Later on, Wiktoria, like many of the other householders, advocated purchasing fair trade-labeled products and thereby highlighted the working conditions of banana and coffee producers, among others. Another central tenet was to connect care for the environment with care for animals. Animals thus become “the others” that are part of the political community, illustrated vividly by Evald in the example citing the Norwegian wolves that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. He said that since Norwegians kill wolves, he believed Swedish consumers should dissociate themselves from Norwegian products. Although several scholars of political theory argue that animals and nature should be given an “intrinsic value” through an ecocentric approach (Regan 2001; cf. Eckersley 1992, Naess 1989), the anthropocentric and ecocentric approaches are often intermingled in empirical cases (Grendstad & Wollebaek 1998). As discussed in chapter 5, it is often specific animals and landscapes that have a value for people.

Only a few householders reasoned about where the environmental effects of our everyday activities occur. It is more common for them to describe how other nationalities influence the Swedish environment in a negative way. This is distinct from the social justice approach that is promoted in sustainable development. An elaborate illustration of this was given by Ragnar and Regina when they said the following:

Ragnar: It is pretty strange about emissions. We are paying a lot of taxes for the environment in this country. … And the people on the other side of the Baltic Sea just emit whatever they feel like, and it doesn’t cost them a single penny.
Regina: We went over there last summer. We took the ferry from Stockholm to Riga. And when leaving Stockholm, they drive very carefully through the archipelago, you know, in order not to disturb the animals.
Ragnar: And the people living in cottages that shouldn’t be disturbed by waves.
Regina: No, it is very, very important. And then when you get over to the other side, there nothing matters any longer. There are Russian oil tankers outside the port of Riga, and they are just spewing out black smoke every single one! Every factory is like that. And that is something one has forgotten about, that it was like that here as well once upon a time.
Ragnar: Yes, it was like going back to the 1930s.
Regina: Well, perhaps not in Riga, but …
Ragnar: Yes, we went to Belarus.
Regina: And when they drive in Sweden, when the Estonian and Russian trucks come off the ferry, and puff away into Stockholm, they don’t use any environmental diesel or things like that, it [i.e., the exhaust] is just spewed out into nowhere.

Here they acknowledged the transnational character of environmental problems, although the “nowhere” happens to be a specific Swedish place. However, they do not reflect on their environmental influence when they drive off the ferry and puff away into Riga, for example. In the householders’ wording, Sweden is portrayed as an international leader that on the whole is doing very well in environmental terms. They position themselves as members of a successful community, and the political community to whom they are responsible is the nation-state since they pay taxes to it. The green welfare state seems to have taken root among these householders. Like many other householders, it was on their vacations abroad that they noticed that other countries had not come as far as Sweden in environmental policies.

Many householders spontaneously mentioned the poor working conditions in China when asked about whether there were any products that they did not purchase due to how they were produced. Some questioned whether it was morally defendable to purchase products that were “made in China,” due to the working conditions there. This oriented their attention to the global level and to social justice, which are aspects of the social dimension of sustainable development that are not necessarily connected with the environmental dimension. The working conditions of Chinese workers were highlighted in various TV programs around the time of the interviews. None of the householders reflected on the possibility that environmental conditions had improved in Sweden due to the relocation of harmful production to other countries. Caring about worker health is related to past and present events and mostly to the social dimension, while

67 The “green welfare state,” as discussed in chapters 1 and 2, concerned the promotion of ecological modernization and making Sweden its leading proponent (Anshelm 2002).
68 The debate concerning whether purchases of products from a country, and resulting economic growth, could contribute to improved environmental conditions is connected to ecological modernization, as discussed in chapter 2.
69 This discussion refers to the “pollution haven hypothesis” that stipulates that “dirty” industries have been relocated from the affluent North to the less affluent South (Cole 2004).
creating environmental problems is related to future risks and the environmental dimension.

One more perspective is to emphasize solidarity and responsibility for the future community as a citizen. This concerns the intra-generational aspect of sustainability. Here I want to make a connection to private and altruistic motives for acting in environmentally friendly ways. In chapter 2, I cited the example on which Michelle (2003:20) builds her argument, about a mother who purchases a less environmentally hazardous shampoo for her child in order not to give the child an allergic reaction. An environmentally sound act can thus have a purely private motivation and goal, but nonetheless have shared environmental consequences. This is what structuration theory deals with when claiming that intentional activities can have unintentional effects (Giddens 1989). Lillemor, for example, used the environmental knowledge she had acquired through an environmental organization in teaching at a school. She justified this practice by claiming that it was good for the pupils to learn such material. Another example, which was discussed at length in chapter 6, was how women explained their purchases of ecological products for their children. The justification was the family, but the consequences reached beyond that. On the other hand, detrimental activities work according to the same logic. Purchasing things for the children in order to be a good parent affects the workers who produce these goods and the common environment through the consumption patterns.

Since many environmental problems transcend national borders and are seldom felt where they are created, it is interesting to note how the householders reasoned about global and local responsibility, especially in relation to justice. Agenda 21 (UNCED 1993) and Our Common Future (1987) have a global justice perspective that connects the affluent North and the less affluent South. Sometimes acting in an environmentally friendly way is framed as altruistic, rather than arising from perceptions of or being personally affected by environmental risks and problems. Hardly any of the householders commented on their role in a way that could relate to what Dobson (2003) calls post-cosmopolitan citizenship, or to awareness that their everyday activities might affect others in near or distant places. Apart from working conditions, there were only a few explicit examples connected to global justice and the environment. One was given by Åsa and Åke, as follows, when asked about their definition of resources:

Åsa: Yes, how will it be? … We, finish off our resources so to speak, oil and that stuff. All those are resources. And what do we people do? We just lay our hands on the resources.

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Åsa: Yes, how will it be? … We, finish off our resources so to speak, oil and that stuff. All those are resources. And what do we people do? We just lay our hands on the resources.
We finish everything, and then there is nothing. So finally that is the wrong way.

Åke: But the whole way of thinking is that it should be sustainable, in the long term. Well, people are aware of that, but we are living beyond our resources. There is no doubt about that. That’s how it feels. And the whole matter of us living as well as we do, in a small part of the world. We take a larger share of the cake than others, and what right do we have to do that?

The global North is using and consuming an unfair share of natural resources, but no one explicitly stated that we created more environmental problems. On the other hand, there were few things Åke and Åsa were ready to sacrifice for the environment and these distant others. It is a moral issue they know of and relate themselves to; however, they do not necessarily act or rearrange their everyday life in line with this awareness.

When explaining whether and, if so, why we need to care for the environment, many of the householders referred to their children and grandchildren. To some extent, this could be seen as caring about the environment out of egotistical reasons, though it could also be viewed more positively as caring for the environment more altruistically for the sake of others. In this way, the chapter refers to the central issue in sustainable development: the motivation to care for our common future. The collective to which the householders said they had responsibilities can be made up of different groups of people, ranging from the family to workers elsewhere in the world.

Now that I have examined to whom the householders believed they had responsibilities, I will focus on how they attempted to influence the collective by accepting responsibility and by participating.

**Categorizing different political actions**

What is the difference between using consumer power to buy a box of environmentally labeled milk, and walking down the main street in a demonstration? Is there necessarily a difference? In this section, I want to analyze how and for what motives the householders described participating, i.e., to attempt to influence the common good. As described in the theoretical chapter, different disciplines consider different activities as expressions of political participation. It is therefore useful to distinguish between different means and categories of participation, since there is a heterogeneous set of factors and definitions. According to normative
ecological citizenship theory (Dobson 2003), it is impossible to be passive since most everyday activities exert political influence. Here my aim is not to call into question whether all activities have a political influence, but to analyze the perceptions that the householders expressed in the interviews and enrich the theoretical discussion by this analysis. The analysis relates to the model of participation presented at the beginning of the chapter.

It is interesting to highlight how these householders argued about responsibility in general. While most claimed that it felt good to contribute, and that they wanted to do their share, the other group claimed that “doing something” was the responsibility of politicians and/or companies, since “the little person” has a limited capacity to influence. These two different arguments are both interesting, since they direct our attention to how these householders give meaning to their roles in the global household (Linnér 1998) and to civic “participation.” As an illustration, Vilhelm said that there should only be environmentally good products for “the little individual person” to choose from at the store. In this sense, he was neglecting his own opportunity to exercise consumer power and individual accountability, and instead wanted to rely on regulations. He believed that others created the ecological action space of individual householders. When describing how other actors, such as politicians and formal institutions, had responsibilities, the householders were also outlining their own responsibilities and their ecological action space. Most of the householders pointed out that it was legitimate to influence citizens through formal institutions. Distinct from emphasizing individual responsibility, some discussed how “others” ought to be accountable. These discussions of the opportunities to take responsibility and to participate relate to ecological action space.

In chapter 4, I showed how the municipal officials who work on implementing sustainable development attempted to reach the householders in their role as municipal employees. Similarly, an aspect of holding others accountable for addressing the environmental challenge is that the householders emphasized the responsibilities of formal institutions. Parents expected school to educate their children about environmental issues. There was evidently a tension between relying on welfare state institutions and individualizing responsibility. When some of the householders mentioned that the municipality ought to give subsidies to householders for certain things, this indicated that the municipalities were being handed responsibilities. It illustrates how the municipalities were expected to create suitable conditions for household action. Regarding politicians as having a responsibility to solve environmental problems contradicts the view of the increased individualization of responsibility. On the other hand, even
though the householders emphasized individual responsibility, they could still hold politicians responsible as well.

Several of the householders stated that individual action was not meaningful if others did not also act in environmentally friendly ways, a belief that concerns the goal of collective mobilization. An example of this line of reasoning was when Ulrik and Ulla were asked about whether they could attempt to influence the risks related to global warming, which they had mentioned as an environmental problem:

Ulrik: No.
Ulla: Not as an individual.
Ulrik: There are far too many people who consider other goals more important and who don’t give a damn about acting in environmentally friendly ways.

Individual efforts can be negligible. Nevertheless, Ulrik and Ulla gave several examples of how they tried to influence environmental problems in a broader sense, so this statement can be considered as showing their doubt as to whether their individual attempts were efficient. This can be related to the belief that it is impossible to unite or coordinate all consumers, for example. These above matters can be seen in terms of game theory and collective dilemma theory, which have been dealt with extensively in the literature (see, e.g., Hardin 1968; Krantz-Lindgren 2001; Ostrom 2000). Individual efforts are considered negligible since not everyone is acting. This is in line with questions of whether small activities for the environment have any impact in the larger picture. Is it the beginning of a long journey, or is it so small that it is insignificant? Even though individual action may not be considered efficient, individuals may still act since it relieves them of bad conscience, or because it feels like the right thing to do, for example. When discussing whether their own efforts are worth making, many householders referred to what others were expected to do. However, the lack of effort from others can be used as both a reason for acting and an excuse for not acting. For example, while the “irresponsible” others who litter at the recycling station were considered a problem, it did not stop the studied householders from recycling; the opposite govern driving, since irresponsible others who drive by car can be used as an excuse for driving.

Collective mobilization and deliberation
Collective mobilization and deliberation are ideals in green political theory. As shown in chapter 6, many of the householders mentioned that
persuading others to care for the environment was an important environmental activity that they could possibly perform. I would consider such an action to be a form of collective mobilization and deliberation. However, this activity was shown to be influenced by what I termed the norm of legitimate interaction, which implied that few actually attempted to influence others. Influencing other citizens in everyday encounters can be interpreted as intruding on the private sphere. Acting as a member of an organization, however, is governed by a different norm of interaction, which to a larger extent concerns the public sphere. In the interviews, I posed specific questions about whether the householders were members of any organizations. In their answers, the householders described different ways to perceive membership in organizations and movements. Karolina and Karl, who support several organizations, were typical in this regard:

Karolina: I am a member of Children’s international summer villages, CISV. It is an organization that works in peace education for children and adults, but I have not been active for several years. And we are members of a choir. ...
Karl: And I am a supporting member of the Red Cross, and the National Association for Disabled People. But no, involved in organizations ...
Karolina: It depends on what level you mean?
Karl: There are some that one only supports financially. ...
Karolina: But we are not active members.
Karl: No.
Karolina: But we are not members of the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, or Greenpeace, or Friends of the Earth, or the World Wide Fund—nothing like that.

The way they distinguished between being a paying member and an active member is interesting. It is possible to conclude that organizations with many paying members can have more influence. They also referred to what they expected would interest me by naming organizations they were not members of. Becoming involved in social movements and organizations can be done by paying membership fees, without becoming actively involved, as some of the householders stated. At the other end of the spectrum, engagement can entail spending time, expending effort, and giving one’s knowledge, and, for example, gaining experience and learning new ways to interpret nature in return. The motivations for becoming engaged can range from a neighbor's action to be a form of collective mobilization and deliberation. However, this activity was shown to be influenced by what I termed the norm of legitimate interaction, which implied that few actually attempted to influence others. Influencing other citizens in everyday encounters can be interpreted as intruding on the private sphere. Acting as a member of an organization, however, is governed by a different norm of interaction, which to a larger extent concerns the public sphere. In the interviews, I posed specific questions about whether the householders were members of any organizations. In their answers, the householders described different ways to perceive membership in organizations and movements. Karolina and Karl, who support several organizations, were typical in this regard:

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supporting a child who lives in poverty. The means to get involved range from parliamentary to non-parliamentary methods and the goal can be to influence the political structures and/or the causes of the problems, or simply to manage the symptoms.

In the following extensive excerpt from my notes, Lillemor showed how responsibility and knowledge can be deeply connected, and how her private household activities and spare-time civil involvement were connected. This long passage illustrates what it can mean to become involved in an organization; furthermore, it relates this form of “participation” to other individual activities, in order to develop distinctions and similarities between them.

Along with other residents in a small village close to Gothenburg where she lived, Lillemor started an organization called “The future in our hands” inspired by Erik Damman. They started by organizing a study circle to examine his thought, where the focus was on caring for the environment and for each other. One summer, they found out that the responsible authority, Domänverket, was going to spray against shrub birch in the Svartedalen nature conservation area. They didn’t expect any environmental group would be ready to protest this fumigation, she reasoned. So “The future in our hands” felt that they had been called up, and saw an opportunity to implement their knowledge in reality. They were fed up with just studying.

But the news about the spraying reached them during the summer vacation, so they suspected they would not manage to gather enough people. But they met in the organization and decided “to do what they could.” They gathered enough money to place an ad in the local newspapers. Then they got in touch with Domänverket and offered to clear the area by hand. It was decided that they should take care of two of the five areas that would have been sprayed. Someone in the organization owned forest and was knowledgeable about how to manage chain saws. At this time “they” didn’t understand that it was very bad to spray everything, with the result that everything died, she said. The organization put an ad in the newspaper and could not believe how many people wanted to help out! They also organized a petition that people could sign against the spraying. It all turned out very well, because they had not expected people to be interested, or want to be accused of being “red socks” for their involvement. They managed to get 3000 people to sign the petition, and it was really easy to get people involved.

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70 A derogatory term for feminists.
Together, they helped clear the area, and the people who didn’t know very much about clearing did what they could. A beautiful memory, she claimed, was when a young man from the communist party, KPML, and an elderly man from the Conservative Party helped each other out with a large saw. She interpreted this as a sign of how their commitment to save the earth transcended party limits. She mentioned that they had discussed how to work further on the issue during the coffee break, and that while the young KPML member wanted to do more radical activities, most of the others didn’t think they would gain respect by using those methods. Lillemor emphasized the importance of showing that one is “ready to do something.” In the petition, they had written that they expected Domänverket to work using similar methods in the three other areas. But it all ended with their spraying “as they always had done.” But the organization got paid for the manual work they had performed in the two areas, and that covered their expenses for the ads in the newspapers. This was just a year before it became illegal to use this specific pesticide, and Lillemor reasoned that perhaps their activity had had a certain effect and perhaps been “the final straw.” She repeated that it was an incredible experience to run this campaign together with other people. She also added that she could implement the ideas gained from the organization in her practice at the school where she worked as a teacher. (Interview notes)

At the center of her story was “being ready to do something” for the local environment, but she also touched on different means to exert political influence and on the relationship between parliamentary and non-parliamentary methods. Another issue concerns how the activists used the media in their campaign. Furthermore, the anecdote provides an example of collective and public mobilization, used here to reason about whether such action is distinct from individual environmentally friendly everyday activities, such as recycling or purchasing organic produce. The way Lillemor participated required that she commit time and knowledge, which in turn came to influence her everyday life. The motivation was to care for the local environment. Whether or not the activists were concerned about their private health was not investigated here.

Three different approaches to being involved in organizations and environmental associations were described by the householders in this study: the first approach is that of individuals who are not members of or active in any movements or groups, the second approach is that of paying members (who get a newsletter or a magazine in return), which included at
Individual versus collective action?

In chapter 2, I referred to Dobson and his remark about contemporary theories of political participation that consider that “campaigning for recycling centers is citizenship, but composting in one’s own garden is not” (Dobson 2003:136; cf. Segerberg 2005). This section discusses the common distinction made in previous studies, in which individual activities are considered to differ from collective activities, such as being part of a social movement, a demonstration, or a campaign in which many citizens are mobilized. All these individual activities concern specific everyday household activities that could possibly be replaced with more environmentally sound alternative activities, as discussed in chapter 6. Since replacing specific activities in favor of more environmentally friendly alternatives contributes to improving the common environment, it is theoretically possible to claim that it is a form of political participation. The key issue concerns intention and motivation. To exemplify: If someone stops driving a car because it is too expensive, he or she has acted on a motivation that concerns his or her own private economic circumstances as a consumer. On the other hand, the act also has an effect on the common environment and the collective. I previously defined political participation as activities that aim at influencing a collective. Political participation can be judged from the perspective of either the intention behind the action or the effect of the action. Since many political actions do not have the intended outcomes, it is alluring to focus on the intentions expressed by the householders. However, I have claimed that existing knowledge states that individual activities result in environmental consequences. Therefore, it is not enough to focus solely on individual intentions when it comes to environmentally influential activities that affect the life chances of others and the collective, but also on how the householders transform intentions into practice.

71 This distribution of organization involvement can be compared to the results of a statistical study performed by Olsson et al. (2005), which shows that approximately 50% of the Swedish population performs some kind of voluntary work and that 85% of those who perform voluntary work are members of the organization where they perform the work. They identify “meritocratization” among those involved in voluntary work, since people with high levels of income and higher educational backgrounds are represented to a higher degree (Olson et al. 2005:25).
One category of individual activity that has received a lot of attention is consumer choices, probably because it concerns the capitalist system. As already described, previous research has focused on the greater need to change attitudes than everyday activities, in the sense that people may act for the “wrong” reasons, for example, due to economic and material incentives and more like consumers (Eckersley 2005; Dobson 2003). Part of this focus is the norm of participating in public discourse or in deliberative processes out of altruistic reasons as citizens, not because of any material benefits. Consumer power, boycotting, and purchasing labeled products have challenged the delimitation of the political, and some scholars now consider these to be forms of political participation, as discussed in chapter 2.

Boycotts were common in the 1980s, when they were used to exert political pressure against South African apartheid, for example, which was a case to which one of the householders, Simon, referred. Boycotts were also used against bleached coffee filters and chlorine (a bleaching chemical) in Sweden in the late 1980s. What distinguished the example of the boycott of South African products from the boycott of chemical products and processes is the focus in the latter case on the national environment and possible personal risks. These examples are cited here not because they are representative of all the householders in this study, but rather as a way to emphasize that most of them focused on how they chose better alternatives by purchasing ecologically labeled products through boycotting (Peretti & Micheletti 2006). As was discussed in chapter 6, the studied householders relied more on labels and boycotting than on traditional boycotts. This shifts the focus towards how consumer choices are explained and justified. My argument is that choosing ecologically labeled milk, for example, means that the householders are boycotting conventional milk and supporting the ecological production system. When boycotting products, however, they do not abstain from consumption.
The general idea among these householders was that they had responsibilities as global citizens through their role as consumers, and had the opportunity to influence working conditions in poor countries. An uncharacteristic example was given by Henning, who reasoned about the pedagogical challenge inherent in getting people to act in response to complex issues such as the environmental relationships between consumption here and production elsewhere in the world:

Henning: The most difficult part is that [as a consumer] you don’t see all the steps behind a product. You just see a spotless banana. You don’t see the people who die from the chemicals. It was a long time since we bought any bananas that were not organically labeled.

The justification he cites for this consumer choice is the welfare of a “collective”—workers who grow bananas who may die from chemical exposure. He gives an anthropocentric and altruistic motive for purchasing ecological bananas. It is through the products they purchase as consumers that they have an influence on other global citizens. Here it is possible to argue that the different labeling schemes and consumer information concerning what country a product comes from, and what it contains, have contributed to this perception.

Householders who live in detached houses can sort and recycle in order not to pay extra for waste management, so this activity is at the margin between being considered a consumer and a civic activity. With rising prices for natural resources, recycling acquires an economic rationale as well. Apart from Peter, however, few commented on recycling as a lucrative business, which requires that the fractions be sorted properly.

Peter: It is all about making money on garbage. There are a lot of people who make enormous amounts of money off it, but it is the people who pay, people who give away voluntarily something that has value. … if I take my car to the recycling station, it costs me 40 Swedish crowns to take it there … it is a cost for the environment and then there is a company that makes money out of it.

This is an interesting illustration of what can happen when the municipality outsources its services to a private company, and yet, as was mentioned in chapter four the recycling company is run on a non-profit basis. However, viewed from Peter’s perspective, unpaid household activities are part of a business logic.

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When researching how the householders participated politically, I found different ways to participate. In analogy with Putnam (2000), it is possible to claim that recycling, along with many other green activities, has become private, and could signify the individualization of politics in the sense that the activity does not encourage collective mobilization. However, householders may have other priorities and feel good about being able to “help out” by doing what is reasonable, such as recycling when they have time. On top of this, Putnam’s definition may be too narrow when it comes to investigating when and where political activities take place (Eliasoph 1998; Luque 2005). Most Swedes recycle, for example, and is that not an expression of a “collective act,” yet something they do at different times and different places? It is an existing system in which individual activities fit, and it is maintained and reconstructed through the same practice.

After having reviewed the activities that the householders have described as ways to exert political and collective influence, I will shift my attention to the different means they use. In the coming section, I will discuss both parliamentary and non-parliamentary means.

**Different ways to participate**

When researching how the householders participated politically, I found that there were different means and strategies they could use, and as a researcher it was possible to distinguish between the intentions behind the actions, and political effects. As already mentioned, the distinction between the two has been challenged by the concept of “thoughtless action” (Segerberg 2005). One set of ways by which the householders exert political influence concerns legal and illegal means in which the end can justify the means. Illegal means involve, for example, leaving garbage in unassigned places or destroying the property of others. A similar set of means has been termed parliamentary and non-parliamentary means. Parliamentary means imply that democratic structures are being used to communicate either support for the status quo or requirements for change, by acts such as calling politicians, voting in general elections, or working through political parties. Getting attention in media is central in the non-parliamentary means for political communication, as well as in lobbying by companies and organizations. Through the present study, some other ways that householders can use to exert political influence have been identified.

My point of departure when collecting and analyzing the interviews was to focus on the everyday practice of citizenship in order to get...
“empirical surprises” concerning what politics and participation mean (Luque 2005). Some of the householders described how they attempted to exert political influence by implicit means, as captured by the metaphor “voting with your feet.” This is interpreted as a way to circumvent the fact that telling other citizens about how they could be more environmentally friendly was often not considered legitimate. It contradicts the ideal of deliberative democracy72, although it could be considered as taking part in public discourse, since discourse does not necessarily have to be expressed in spoken words. One of the few illustrations of “voting with your feet” was given by Örjan:

I asked what Örjan knew about the municipal resource management vision. He answered that he had no idea. But he wanted to complain about the fact that it costs money to leave large items of waste. Previously it was possible to leave large items that didn’t fit in the regular waste. When the municipality started to charge him he protested by leaving the waste in bags outside the gates of the station. (Interview notes)

This illustrates how Örjan would contradict the policy in force using a non-parliamentary and illegal means, rather than calling politicians, as some of the other householders said they did. How and why he acted are interrelated here, since he considered the municipality to be responsible for the waste, and he felt he could legitimately leave it at the gates since that was how far his individual responsibility reached. (Yet, he still bothered to take it there.) Örjan’s description is also an example of silent but practical protest or resistance against municipal sustainability policies, an action of the non-parliamentary sort.

Many of the householders mentioned that they considered writing a letter to the editor of the local newspaper a viable way to influence others. This can be interpreted in at least two different ways. It can be considered an example of how the householders did not promote activities that involved “face-to-face” encounters with others when they wanted to influence environmental policies. Second, it can be interpreted as in line with finding the local newspaper an important and efficient way to reach many people. Whichever way it is interpreted, writing a letter to the editor takes time and may interfere with the organization of one’s everyday expression to concerning the norms of interaction with other citizens in their everyday encounters, will likely influence these specific situations as well.

72 Deliberative democracy and deliberative processes are expected to take place at specific times and places, the examples that many of the householders have given expression to concerning the norms of interaction with other citizens in their everyday encounters, will likely influence these specific situations as well.
activities. This was elaborated on by Örjan, who mentioned that he could write a letter to the editor as a way to influence environmental policies. He explained it as follows:

Örjan: If I would write one [letter to the editor] a week, it would mean 100 hours a year, which equals 2.5 weeks of paid work, or half a monthly salary.

Participatory and unpaid activities compete with paid work, as many feminist scholars have emphasized (MacGregor 2006; Lister 2003). “And on top of that, one cannot be certain that the editor will publish your letter,” Örjan concluded. Discussing how unpaid household activities could be valued in salary terms was an uncharacteristic way of reasoning about them.

Considering the use of media as part of parliamentary means to exert political influence is perhaps misleading. Here I emphasize that the studied householders described the writing of a letter to the editor as a legitimate means. They could have mentioned other means, such as monkey wrenching, liberating caged animals, or burning down corporate facilities (cf. Somma 2006) but that is probably means for “fanatical others”.

When the householders talked about responsibility, some told how they dealt with the environmental policies and regulations they encountered, and how people in general ought to deal with these. One group of householders emphasized that people should follow the rules. The parliamentary and non-parliamentary methods correlate with the notion of whether or not people should adhere to policies and rules established by democratic means.

As already noted, several of the householders in all four municipalities were concerned about littering at the recycling stations. Their concern was mostly about how others might not take their recyclable goods there since the stations were too messy. In the spring of 2006, an elderly woman who had left her frying pan outside the container for recycled metal attracted attention in the Swedish media. She was charged for illegal and irresponsible behavior, but the court decided she did not have to pay a fine since it could not be proved that she intended to leave the pan at the site for good (Lundmark & Ödberg 2007). The story about the woman was vividly discussed in the interviews that I carried out at the recycling stations. They were hired by the Packaging and Newspaper collection company (ttiab) to come to grips with the littering problem at the stations.

73 At this time there were what came to be termed “garbage spies” at some recycling stations. They were hired by the Packaging and Newspaper collection company (ttiab) to come to grips with the littering problem at the stations.
time, and people gave colorful descriptions of this elderly woman who had managed to take her used frying pan to the recycling station. The example relates to policy legitimacy, which in this case pertains to the policy of a company, ftiab, and to how to show disagreement with regulations and policies. “Garbage spies,” for example, can thus be considered legitimate in this light. Commenting on the old lady with the frying pan, Peter said:

Peter: Rules are meant to be followed. The old lady ought to know the rules.

This quotation about following rules describes how citizens should act in a democratic state, even though it does not solely concern environmental responsibility. It stands in stark contrast to the illegal activism and methods to challenge policies as discussed above.

A few very interesting descriptions treat how the householders who wanted to influence others tried to circumvent the private sphere. I repeat that I take the private sphere to be a context, rather than a place, in which it is not legitimate to influence what others do. Beatrice and Burt explained their approach as follows:

Interviewer: Do you ever have to argue for your environmental opinions?
Beatrice: No … But I probably don’t stand up for my opinions often enough. There are a lot of people at work who always drive to work alone, who could not imagine using public transportation. But I don’t argue with them, because I don’t feel like doing that. Instead, I state that it is very nice to go by bus. Because I can read and have a good time, but I don’t feel like …
Burt: … no, getting into a fight. That is too strong of a word for me as well …
Beatrice: Then of course we get very annoyed at our neighbor who uses liquid to light the fire in his wood stove because he leaves the logs out in the rain so they are wet.
Burt: It smells really bad.
Beatrice: But we don’t tell him of course.

This description concerns the lived experience of citizenship. Beatrice explained how she uses the strategy of a carrot rather than a stick to try to influence her workmates. Concerning the neighbor, they said nothing to him at all, like several other house owners in this study. These examples are related to the “vote with your feet” category, but are still distinct. How the private sphere has been outlined through the
householders’ descriptions of how they can influence others in legitimate ways will be discussed in the following section.

The private sphere: beyond political influence?

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, various scholars have discussed how private activities have political consequences. Therefore, the private sphere is challenged when responsibility is placed on householders and everyday activities are politicized. As was mentioned in chapter 6, several of the householders stated that they could try to influence other citizens, as a way to “act for the environment” by persuading them to care more as well. Implicitly, these householders were describing themselves as more aware than others. For example, several parents said that they tried to raise their children to care about the environment. However, it is not justifiable to try to impact other citizens directly, as they are here argued to be “shielded” by private sphere norms. This puts the situation for interaction and one’s relationship with others at the center of attention.

One group of householders argued that politicians were not allowed to determine what they could do in their own private homes. This line of reasoning was vividly illustrated by Xiomara:

Interviewer: Are there any limits to state or municipal intervention when it comes to what householders do, or concerning what you do in your household?
Xiomara: Yes, well, that is a very sensitive issue, because you want to feel like a private person in your own home. No one should have opinions about what I grow in my flower pots [laughs]. But when it comes to building houses, there I believe they can exert influence. They can put pressure on private landlords, or when discussing electricity and water use, that it should be environmentally friendly, or persuading consumers to turn off the lights, and use district heating and stuff. There is more to do. But you can never force people to purchase solar panels to place on the roof. But you can give people incentives. And that is what the municipalities do to a certain extent.

This exemplifies the thinking of this group of householders, who believe that people cannot be forced to act in environmentally friendly ways by the authorities, but only given incentives. However, building possible ways of acting into the system is considered more legitimate than being told how to act, which directs our attention to the materiality of the ecological action space. I further interpret the arguments of this group of householders to imply that voluntary action is favored. This also
emphasizes that how systems are constructed can make it possible for individuals to act in more environmentally sound ways. Systems are given agency in a way that is in line with structuration theory, in that the structures enable certain actions on the part of individuals. To a certain extent, this is about the preconditions for acting in environmentally friendly ways and about what policy instruments are seen as justifiable. Similarly:

Åke: Well, they [i.e., the municipality] can never tell us what diapers to use for our son. That is something that they can never do.
Åsa: No, they could not …
Åke: … when it comes to prohibitions. They can attempt to direct you in the right direction, but not tell you what you are allowed to do. I do not think prohibitions work.

This group of householders believes that authorities can remove bad choices and products from the shelves, which they have a responsibility to do, but that they can never demand that the householders refrain from purchasing certain products in their role as consumers. It is not legitimate to tell them as householders how to act in their private sphere in consumer situations.

When performing the interviews in Piteå in the spring of 2006, and asking questions about possible policy instruments that the authorities could use to promote environmentally friendly household activities, Peter mentioned the traditional spoof news item on the first of April in the local newspaper. The joke in Piteå Tidning was that Peter Eriksson, the leader of the Green Party, who is from Piteå, had suggested that house owners who use wood stoves to heat their houses should have to purchase specific charcoal on which they would pay taxes. The smoke would be green and signal that the charcoal was being burned. I interpret this story as highlighting the absurdity of intruding into the private sphere. His spouse Pia continued and said that her workmates, who did not understand that the story was a joke, got very upset.

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Another group of householders in this study argued that we need laws and regulations to force people to act, even in private homes. However, these householders also noted that it would be difficult, in practical terms, to determine whether people were meeting their responsibilities, especially in the home. Environmentally friendly activities have to be performed voluntarily and cannot be forced. The argument that some of the householders used to justify regulations was that people are “lazy” or “egotistical,” which made them suggest different policy instruments to be used to force people to act in more environmentally friendly ways. According to this perspective, this group of householders would be willing to submit themselves to regulation in the interest of acting for the environment, because they know that they will not change their everyday practices by performing the suggested activities voluntarily. They contradict the view that no one can force, or control, householders in their homes. However, few of the householders had any suggestions for how such “eco-authoritarian” laws, as discussed in chapter 2, should be controlled and administrated or how they could be efficient. A policeman in the kitchen was not suggested.
The issue of voluntary action directs our attention to the connection between political participation and legitimate policy instruments. When considering that householders should act in environmentally responsible ways voluntarily, the family context often came to the fore. A typical way of arguing about expectations in the family was exemplified by Zubeyde and Zoran:

Interviewer: What do you think has contributed to improving our [environmental] conditions? What policy instruments can be used to make people act in more environmentally sound ways? Usually one talks about taxes, laws …
Zubeyde: Well, facilitate for people. That is one of the things. It should not be difficult. Today one has so much pressure, from school. Parents have more responsibility than they had when I was a child, that’s what I find. And then you have to make a career, to keep the home nice and tidy—there is so much. Then one should be environmentally conscious too. And then if it is important to be, it should be easy! Like, the environmental stations should be situated close by, and there should not be too big a price difference. Perhaps products that are environmentally friendly could be subsidized. Cost should not influence families so much that they cannot make an active choice; it should not be that you cannot afford to make that choice.
Zoran: Yes, it comes down to economics and time as the most important issues.

She claims that she should act as an environmental consumer and should recycle, but she is constrained by everyday complexities and family responsibilities, so environmental obligations cannot be too time consuming or expensive. She expressed conflicting responsibilities due to the different roles and spheres of expectations in which environmental activities are not prioritized in her everyday context. This aspect needs to be explored, since it is central to householder ecological action space, and to what the householders see as their responsibility as well as what they feel they can manage to do.

The private sphere also relates to another issue, namely, whether it is possible and legitimate to seek to influence others, or whether these others are considered to exist within a private sphere within which one should not intervene. Issues one would like to raise may not be discussed, since it is not legitimate to interfere in other people’s private sphere. This stands in marked contrast to calling up politicians, for example, who are part of the public and political sphere in which it is legitimate to demand accountability. The private sphere is thereby defined as where and when it

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is not justifiable to interfere. However, trying to exert an influence on people you know well, such as family and friends, was often expressed as legitimate. Peter told about how he used to raise his son Patrik to pay attention to nature. Like Peter, Pia stated that it was important to raise one’s children to respect nature when they were young, by taking them out to experience the forest. This illustrates how they, as parents, attempted to pass on their interpretations of nature to their children. These examples of interaction within the household place emphasis at the micro level, and indicate that it is not necessarily only for foreign and unknown citizens that the householders are motivated to take responsibility for the environment. It indicates who is included in the private sphere, and why household negotiations are important. This is interesting, since Dobson (2003) claims that ecological citizenship is a relationship between strangers, which obviously concerns where exactly our everyday activities exert their environmental impact. In conclusion, the householders in this present study mainly believed that environmentally friendly activities should be performed voluntarily. One group, however, did suggest that people need to be forced, since we are lazy and egotistical, but they also acknowledged that it would be difficult, in practical terms, to control what people do in their private homes.

With that said, it is time to analyze how the householders understood citizenship and participation.

Analyzing the citizen multiple

The aim of this chapter was to describe and analyze how the householders conceived their responsibilities in the private sphere, and how that corresponded to public participation. The initial questions that were posed concerned why, how, and for whom they acted and participated. According to previous debate, I also distinguished between acting as a citizen and acting as a consumer. It is obvious that the householders have referred to their dual roles as both consumers and citizens in the descriptions they gave. When analyzing how the householders understand their responsibilities and opportunities to participate, as citizens, for the environment, I have shown how they created their ecological action space.

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through encounters with structures and other individual actors in what have been called interactional spheres. Depending on with whom they are interacting, and when, the sphere can be private. My analysis concludes that the existence of a private sphere is not dependent on a specific place, but rather on the particular situation. In chapter 6, I concluded that the householders were acting in different roles based on distinct rationalities that influenced how they experienced their citizenship as well. They have responsibilities towards family members as well as to other people, the municipality, and the nation-state. Throughout this chapter, I have shown how it is through their ecological action space that the householders interpret citizenship along with responsibilities, rights, and what is considered possible to do for the environment.

Some of the householders described participating in existing organizations, while a few described creating movements for environmental causes, such as Lillemor, who started an organization along with others called “The future in our hands.” She devoted time and effort to this organization, but gained new experience that she applied in her work as a teacher. Householders can be creative in structuring their ecological action space when structures are considered as enabling action. However, structures can also constrain action. Paying membership fees to an environmental organization is here taken to build on the same rationale as taking recyclable goods to a recycling station. It requires an existing system in which individuals can take part, and is a way to maintain and support a system through practice. These examples are distinct from that of the householders who contributed to creating their own ecological action space, for example, by starting movements, or demanding that recycling systems be initiated, as Simon did.

Recycling received a lot of attention. It is an activity that is situated at the border between acting voluntarily in the role of a citizen for the common good, and acting as a consumer responding to economic incentives and for the household economy (as was the case for the householders who lived in detached houses). However, it does involve a certain effort in terms of spending household time on sorting and handling the materials, and taking them the extra distance to the recycling station. 

Householders related themselves to “fanatical” and “irresponsible” others when discussing their responsibility within what I have called their ecological action space. By positioning themselves between these two categories of people, they outlined what was possible and reasonable to do concerning environmentally friendly activities, and, furthermore, outlined how their actions were considered an expression of taking responsibility. I concluded that performing environmentally friendly household activities is through encounters with structures and other individual actors in what have been called interactional spheres. Depending on with whom they are interacting, and when, the sphere can be private. My analysis concludes that the existence of a private sphere is not dependent on a specific place, but rather on the particular situation. In chapter 6, I concluded that the householders were acting in different roles based on distinct rationalities that influenced how they experienced their citizenship as well. They have responsibilities towards family members as well as to other people, the municipality, and the nation-state. Throughout this chapter, I have shown how it is through their ecological action space that the householders interpret citizenship along with responsibilities, rights, and what is considered possible to do for the environment.

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a form of political participation, since the effects concern the common good.

As discussed in chapter 2, feminist studies have made important contributions to our understanding of the lived experience of citizenship and of opportunities for participation, emphasizing, for example, that this requires time (Lister 2003; Lister et al. 2007; MacGregor 2006). In this chapter, gender has been dealt with mainly in the passages that concern household negotiations, but also in relation to the intra-generational aspect of sustainable development that concerns gendering. Responsibility for the environment was acknowledged by both men and women. However, the able-bodied yet “disembodied” ecological citizen as described by Dobson (2003) is challenged by the descriptions the householders gave in the interviews.

In chapter 2, I presented the four characteristics of ecological citizenship as outlined by Dobson (2003). Ecological citizenship focuses on: 1) non-reciprocal responsibility that expands the range of citizen duties; 2) non-state understanding of political space and the “ecological footprint”; 3) the fact that the private arena and household activities is as much a sphere for citizenship as the public arena; and 4) adhering to the notion of citizenship virtue. The analysis, based on the interactional and individual experience of citizenship, indicates that there is empirical support for some of the aspects of this normative theory. For example, the householders acknowledged having individual responsibility for the environment, and no one talked about their right to a decent environment. It was primarily the responsibility that was highlighted. The householders focused on the obligations rather than the rights aspect of participation, just as Dobson advocated, although they emphasized that there were limits to their responsibilities. However, there were a few cases in which the householders connected the environmental impact of their activities to conditions of other global citizens, and to a certain extent acknowledged that they were responsible for others’ environmental conditions. Most of the householders acknowledged that their consumer demand here has consequences there for other people as workers. Thereby they politicized some everyday activities in their role as consumers. When the householders described participating, it was obvious that they were acting as both citizens and consumers. Acting and participating as a consumer must be considered one of the possible ways a householder can act as a citizen; however, it is not the only way. Through individual, though collective in a sense, activities such as sorting waste or purchasing organic milk, deliberation is not created since people do not meet; they act at different times and different places. Since I have argued that political participation is a form of political participation, since the effects concern the common good.

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defined as activities that aim to influence the public good, purchasing ecological milk or recycling, insofar as they influence the common environment, must by definition be considered political. In this light, the various ecological labeling schemes are considered systems within the structure in which individuals are expected to act in their role as consumers.

Most householders in the present study believe that Sweden is a prime example and that the Swedish government has acted appropriately. Nevertheless, almost all the householders said that they were accountable for the environmental problems arising from their everyday activities. However, some shifted their own responsibility for solving the problems from themselves to politicians and producers, while others justified their trust in laws rather than virtue and moral obligations by claiming that people are lazy and egotistical and need to be forced. A few stated that the global North was using and/or consuming an unfair share of the natural resources, but no one explicitly stated that we created more environmental problems than the global South.

Throughout the chapter, I have discussed justifiable and legitimate aspects of participation and political influence. One group of householders emphasized that it was not justifiable for the authorities to regulate what they did in their private sphere. On the other hand, they mentioned various activities that they do perform voluntarily for the environment. I concluded that the distinction between the political and private spheres is fluid and depends on when, how, and with whom the householders interact. When analyzing citizenship from the householders’ perspective, the household responsibilities and constraining structures come to the fore. One structure to which they relate to is the norm of legitimate interaction with other citizens. The householders who attempted to participate in public discussions adopted individual strategies to circumvent the norm of legitimate interaction concerning how to talk to others or convince them to act in environmentally friendly ways. Some of the householders challenged municipal policies. Through their everyday activities, the householders maintained or challenged structures, such as norms for what is legitimate and justifiable. Examples of avoiding transgressing such norms include not reprimanding someone who is flouting the rule to turn off the engine when the car is stopped, or is causing excessive wood smoke in areas of detached houses.

Several householders mentioned mobilizing others for an environmental cause, via both parliamentary and democratic action in parties, and civil movement activism. This implies that they sometimes attempted to persuade other individuals to act more environmentally defined as activities that aim to influence the public good, purchasing ecological milk or recycling, insofar as they influence the common environment, must by definition be considered political. In this light, the various ecological labeling schemes are considered systems within the structure in which individuals are expected to act in their role as consumers.

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responsibly within existing structures. However, it seems that they regard discussing such matters with other citizens or suggesting alternative ways to act as not legitimate, so they shifted their focus to institutional contexts, just as the municipal officials did. One way to study ecological citizenship in the making would be to consider whether the householders directed their attention to structural transformation (Luque 2005). This aspect was absent from most of the interviews with the householders in this study. These householders expressed belief in sharing responsibility for raising consciousness with accountable formal institutions, such as schools, municipalities, and politicians.

Since the householders considered doing a few environmental friendly activities enough to make them “environmentally conscious,” and since they did not want to exaggerate and become “fanatical” or to make sacrifices, they are unlikely to become more environmentally friendly by reducing their levels of consumption, for example; they have reached a stage they believe is “reasonable.” When participating as a citizen by taking responsibility, there is a difference between arguing about responsibility and actually taking responsibility. The householders are aware of various environmentally friendly activities they can do, and it seems important to them to be able to talk about these issues. These householders have internalized environmental norms in the sense that they get a bad conscience if they do not act. The members of only one household described themselves as “environmental nerds” who did “exaggerate.” Only one person stated that he did not care about the environment; he nevertheless described some environmental household activities that he performed and was also a very active citizen in Piteå. This means that how they talked about what they knew, and whether they said they cared about the environment, has to be related to what they actually did, and to their everyday practices.
The aim of this thesis has been to investigate how householders perceive their own role in the creation and solution of environmental problems, and what actions these householders take. The study has analyzed how the householders themselves define their role in relation to other citizens and to social institutions, and indicates how *ecological action space* is (re)created in the interaction between structures and actors. Another central issue has been when people believe that they do enough already. If they do not perceive further action to be their responsibility, it is unlikely that they will incorporate activities in their everyday life that are motivated by being environmentally friendly. If environmental problems are claimed to be caused by human activities, they are our responsibility. The main indication in this present study is that by performing a few standard environmentally motivated activities, the householders claim that they are “environmentally conscious”. What is perceived as reasonable environmentally friendly activities to do is related to how they weave everyday life and different activities together. Everyday life is complex, and different ambitions may clash when the weaving, or structuring, is performed in practice. The interplay between individual actors and structures when living everyday life is what I have called *ecological action space*, and the concept is the main theoretical novelty with this research. It builds on structuration theory (Giddens 1989). The possibility of both stability (recreation) and change (creation) has made me use the word (re)creation. Metaphorically one can say that I attempted to disentangle their weaving of everyday life in order to understand what they perceived as facilitating and constraining structures, and how they contributed to them.

This has implied a privatization and individualization of the responsibility for the environment. However, the private aspect has contributed with a challenge to traditional political theory. Two issues that are recurring in documents on sustainable development are the need for changed everyday practices among the affluent segments of society, (to which the majority of the Swedish population belongs), and wide public participation.

For householders in the study who believed that environmental problems are caused by humans -the issue of who and what should change is connected to who is responsible for a more sustainable future society, and who is to be held accountable for causing the problems.
The responsibility to solve problems can be divided into dealing with the causes and preventing them from arising (the precautionary principle), or managing existing problems (the symptoms). A householder may consider someone else to be responsible for causing environmental problems, but it is her citizen responsibility to help in solving them. On the other hand, it is equally possible to argue that her everyday activities cause environmental problems, but others - like politicians - are the ones who need to solve them. Suggestions for what to do to counteract the environmental problems may also differ, and relates to how different policy instruments are used to motivate householders to act more environmentally friendly.

The conclusions drawn from this study are both theoretical and empirically based. By applying structuration theory in the analysis, several norms that structure the individual householders’ ecological action space have been revealed. In addition to the norms of cleanliness, comfort and convenience, which Shove (2003) has identified, this analysis has also identified a norm for “legitimate interaction” with other citizens through the focus on political participation, and gender as structure with norms for manliness and femaleness.

Through the study I have applied a feminist perspective in order to highlight who is doing what, which concerns the social dimension of sustainable development; I have also used the normative theory of ecological citizenship and theories of ecological modernization to discuss the householders’ view of their environmental impact and individual responsibility.

This chapter is organized as follows. First I discuss how ecological action space can be studied. Then I consider the conclusions from chapter 5-7 and discuss the implications of these for the general aim of the thesis. Then I move on to discuss the methodological implications. Finally, I discuss the role of municipalities and their possibilities to improve their efforts to reach sustainable development, and I show how the ecological action space has a place.

**Studying ecological action space**

Everyday life is composed of a myriad of activities, and in order to analyze the environmental effects the researcher has to zoom in on the microcosm of the details. I have used Giddens’ concept “rationalization of activities” (Giddens 1989) to analyze how the householders make sense of their environmental actions. The framework enables us to analyze how the householders make sense of their actions in relation to the various norms that structure their ecological action space.
activities. Rationalization of action concerns how people talk about, and reflect on, what they do. However, this makes it difficult to separate what they do from why they act. The concept concerns how people are motivating and being able to talk about everyday activities. I concluded that this present thesis is an example of the attention given to the politicization of thoughtless action, like environmental effects of everyday practices (Segerberg 2005). All the suggestions (including all the visions) for sustainable activities that householders could perform have to be incorporated in their everyday lives, and adjusted to all other goals and rationalities that govern what they find reasonable to do. By giving attention to how the ideals and intentions are transferred into practice, the focus turns to normal daily routines and standardized practices. The ecological action space directs the attention to structural conditions, constraints, and resources for environmental action. Thereby, ecological action space can be useful to deepen the understanding of how risk perceptions, political participation, and distinctions between private and public are (re)created.

The analysis of the everyday practice has been performed by focusing on constraints and opportunities to act environmentally friendly within the structures the householders live in. To capture the dialectics between what is enabling and what is constraining when it comes to environmentally friendly activities, I have attempted to catch the situations where environmentally relevant activities are performed or constrained, where the actors and the structures encounter and (re)construct each other - their weaving of everyday life and routines. In weaving and structuring, the householders navigate between competing goals of everyday life. While the majority of the structuring is done by routine, they know how to talk about and motivate specific and symbolic environmental activities. The householders have described how they rely on systems that work and through their use - they maintain them. Talking about them is another way to consolidate and recreate them. Negotiations and division of household labor are some aspects that may affect their individual attitudes to what is important. None of the interviewed householders said that we have to live with the environmental problems, and only one said that he does not care about the environment.

Ecological action space is a relative concept in the sense that it focuses on the relationship between responsibility and opportunities and constraints to act environmentally friendly. Thereby it is distinct from “ecological footprint” (Wackernagel & Rees 1996) for example, which measures how much of the earth’s geographical area a person uses; or ecological citizenship (Dobson 2003) which mainly focuses on what people could perform have to be incorporated in their everyday lives, and adjusted to all other goals and rationalities that govern what they find reasonable to do. By giving attention to how the ideals and intentions are transferred into practice, the focus turns to normal daily routines and standardized practices. The ecological action space directs the attention to structural conditions, constraints, and resources for environmental action. Thereby, ecological action space can be useful to deepen the understanding of how risk perceptions, political participation, and distinctions between private and public are (re)created.

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Everyday life has had a central place in this thesis. All the different possible choices for how to carry out the multitude of household activities make up an intricate and complex web that makes it difficult to measure who is more or less “sustainable” or environmentally friendly in the continuous weaving. However, the statements by the householders that they are “environmentally conscious” - and the fact that the majority feel that there are limits to the sacrifices they are willing to make - says something that can be analyzed concerning the ecological action space. The environment makes them act in specific ways in their (re)creation of society, and they feel irresponsible and get bad conscience when they do not act in environmentally friendly ways. This is a central conclusion. I remarked that few of the householders considered that the perceived improved environmental situation in Sweden may be connected to the
relocation of hazardous production to the global South, which in turn relates to the field of environmental justice (cf. Stephens & Bullock 2004).

**Have we ever been ecologically modern?**

In chapter 5 it was concluded that few of the householders expressed that they are generally concerned about environmental threat. In spite of this, all of the householders gave examples that indicated that they are aware about several environmental problems, and various household activities are performed that are motivated by care for the environment. They rely on systems that work (water, electricity, heat), and have money to pay for food at the grocery store, whereby dependency is veiled in practice as well. The majority of the householders mentioned global environmental problems spontaneously, and many also mentioned local environmental problems like disturbing smoke from irresponsible neighbors, smell, and pollution from cars. The local problems seem to be the ones they may be affected by; while the global ones are problems they have learned about from media that do not affect them. However, it is possible to argue that they have learned to interpret the “local environmental problems” as well, when connecting headache to car fumes for example. Their everyday life is then structured by social rules and commonly shared ideas that integrate these interpretations.

Humans are all interconnected, however unequal, and humans need natural resources in order to survive. The questions in focus here are how the householders make sense of their relationship to nature, what activities are meaningful, and how they conceive of the responsibility for the environment. It mainly concerns the responsibility for causing environmental problems; consciousness - as in how they pay attention to environmental impact (if they notice changes in the environment, who they learn from, if they trust descriptions by experts, if they feel threatened); and finally how awareness is transformed into acting concerning what they do based on their perceived responsibility and consciousness.

In the introductory chapters, it was acknowledged that sustainable development bears on a management ideal from the notion of modernization as progress. The heading of this section therefore connects to the argument by Latour (1993) that by claiming that “we” are modern, we create an illusion that it is possible to control the present (and the future). I do not intend to give any generalized claims concerning what all Swedes believe, so I will move from an all encompassing “we” to the 28 households in this study in order to analyze how they perceive nature and environment as analyzed in chapter 5. Most householders do not describe
themselves as part of nature, but rather disconnected from nature. The analysis was related to ecological modernization, and I showed how many believe that environmental problems are possible to manage by different, singular, activities. They know of risks, but do not feel personally threatened. This implies that there is no unidirectional step between being aware and increasing the environmentally friendly activities. A few householders expressed a fatalistic stance, and they believe that there is urgent need to change the environmental impact.

Ecological modernization theory also focuses on market mechanisms. Through the way the householders live their everyday life, it is possible to say that they practice ecological modernization. They can purchase ecologically labeled products and buy the right products through “buycott”, focusing on the recycling rather than decreased consumption, and emphasizing that the environmental situation has gotten better. The latter implies that the householders consider it possible to manage environmental problems, and that hazardous products for example, have been removed from the shelves at the store – even if they do acknowledge that the situation changes and there may be new hazardous products that are discovered. The majority emphasized their role as consumers. They have the capacity to purchase, and they enjoy consuming, which further is an illustration of being at the “receiving” end of the postcolonial capitalist world - a structure founded hundreds of years ago. Through this structure, modernization efforts have had a central position, for example by categorizing the global South as “developing”, in contradistinction to the perceived “developed” regions. By distinguishing regions in this way, the relation between them is hidden, a relation where “underdevelopment” may be caused by the very “development” of another region (cf. Gunder Frank 1969). I argue that it is partly this logic that makes it possible to claim that Sweden is ahead of other nations when it comes to environmental efforts, and that other nationalities contribute to environmental problems in Sweden.

To be able to grasp complexities and be able to monitor the consequences of activities for you, as well as for other people, and let this examination inform the decisions for how to act, is a central tenet in the risk society. However, as has been argued throughout this thesis, it is difficult to see many environmental problems, and it is especially difficult to decide what effects different individual action can have. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that many of the householders pay attention to visible environmental problems like littering, which looks bad, as “matter out of place” (Douglas 2002). The visualization of environmental problems is a
pedagogical challenge, but the perception of them makes people motivate their actions in certain ways.

**Being “passive” is also a way of acting**

The politicization of thoughtless action (Segerberg 2005) implies that regardless of how a householder acts, he or she has an effect on other humans and the environment. This is furthermore an important aspect of structuration theory. As was highlighted, especially in chapter 6, different activities can support each other and create win-win situations where the householders find economic, social, and ecological incentives to support each other. But there are also many situations when the motives for acting contradict. This directs the attention to the situational and contextual aspect of individual activities. In the analysis in chapter 6, it became clear how detailed environmental aspects of everyday activities are “disentangled” from the context and how general ambitions, like reducing energy use, are concretized in everyday activities. This works in two directions. First, it is important to give attention to how the suggestions for how to carry out specific activities fit into the normal daily routines. Second, specific segments of activities can excuse other - less environmentally friendly - activities that are considered as interchangeable. An example could be the statement: “I drive my car far too much, but I recycle”, or the idea that purchasing eco labeled milk is doing enough. This is when I claimed that in order to describe one as environmentally conscious, it is enough to describe how one performs a single, specific environmentally friendly activity. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that “doing something is better than doing nothing”. But, the above rationale implies that, for example, as long as one sorts and recycles waste few talked about the amounts of waste that is created through consumption. A similar kind of argument could be: “As long as I do not exceed the time limit for letting the engine idle, it does not matter how far I drive.” When the householders claim that they are “environmentally conscious”, it seems to imply that the householders do not need to rearrange their everyday lives any further. Activities can also be performed out of economic rationalities, but can have positive additional ecological and/or social consequences. However, environmentally friendly behavior is complex in the sense that what is the “right” way to perform a certain activity can change, which makes it difficult to know what the best thing to do is. This is further complicated by the fact that a single activity can be measured from different rationalities. It requires keeping up to date. Many householders have decided to do a few things, and stick to that. They perform symbolic activities and thereby
incorporating new environmentally friendly activities would be “beyond the limit”. This, however, does not mean that it is impossible to do more. Furthermore, there were several indications of how responsibility for certain household activities was gendered, which was expressed through “knowledge claims”. Knowledge claims are illustrated by who answered what questions, who claimed that they have knowledge about a certain topic, and how the householders living together turned towards each other, showing that the other was expected to know the answer – the household negotiations. The interview is a moment when gendered expectations are “staged”. Through this analysis, it became noticeable that women are doing many of the indoor activities, like cooking and related activity of grocery shopping, and the purchases of products like organic produce. If they had children, it was mainly for them they bought organic products. Women were primarily caring about keeping the home cozy, and these expectations make them want to use certain products and perform certain activities. Men in this study, on the other hand, are mainly responsible for energy systems and the construction of the house (like changing windows), taking recyclable goods by car to the depots, and household activities outdoors. However, it is important to distinguish between performing an activity for others, like maintaining the car for the family or washing the clothes for the children – and enjoying the result of the activity. When performing an activity, the individual uses experience, and simultaneously gets better at it. Knowledge is an important dimension of the ecological action space. Through everyday activities and interaction with others, ecological action space is structured. Differences in ecological action space do relate to the way the households are composed, whether they can rely on each others’ knowledge, take turns at performing activities, like taking children to school, or if they experience that they are less flexible due to other family responsibilities.

Spaargaren has suggested the concept “lifestyle segments” to analyze how an individual can be more or less environmentally friendly in different everyday domains for clothing, food, shelter, travel, sports and leisure (Spaargaren 2003; cf. Ellegård & Nordell 1997). There are minor differences between the householders in this study when looking into what they describe that they actually do, and what they use in order to perform their everyday life. From a quantitative perspective it is possible to conclude that one group of the householders consume fewer resources and use less energy by their choice not to have a private car for example, or by being vegetarian, or by reusing things. The other group performs “symbolic activities” like recycling. Based on the conclusion in this study, I claim that it is difficult to categorize the householders in specific “lifestyle” or incorporating new environmentally friendly activities would be “beyond the limit”. This, however, does not mean that it is impossible to do more. Furthermore, there were several indications of how responsibility for certain household activities was gendered, which was expressed through “knowledge claims”. Knowledge claims are illustrated by who answered what questions, who claimed that they have knowledge about a certain topic, and how the householders living together turned towards each other, showing that the other was expected to know the answer – the household negotiations. The interview is a moment when gendered expectations are “staged”. Through this analysis, it became noticeable that women are doing many of the indoor activities, like cooking and the related activity of grocery shopping, and the purchases of products like organic produce. If they had children, it was mainly for them they bought organic products. Women were primarily caring about keeping the home cozy, and these expectations make them want to use certain products and perform certain activities. Men in this study, on the other hand, are mainly responsible for energy systems and the construction of the house (like changing windows), taking recyclable goods by car to the depots, and household activities outdoors. However, it is important to distinguish between performing an activity for others, like maintaining the car for the family or washing the clothes for the children – and enjoying the result of the activity. When performing an activity, the individual uses experience, and simultaneously gets better at it. Knowledge is an important dimension of the ecological action space. Through everyday activities and interaction with others, ecological action space is structured. Differences in ecological action space do relate to the way the households are composed, whether they can rely on each others’ knowledge, take turns at performing activities, like taking children to school, or if they experience that they are less flexible due to other family responsibilities.

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mentality categories, since the householders are doing “a little bit of everything” at a very detailed level.

**Dealing with individualized responsibility**

The ideal in many environmental theories that I have reviewed for this thesis is the active, public and “deliberating” citizen, where the activities are expected to be good for the environment, and result in more “ecologically rational” results. The description of everyday life and the attempts that the householders have described to exert political influence on the common environment, is an empirical contribution to the discussion about what citizenship and participation is.

In chapter 7, the aim was to describe and analyze how the householders conceive their responsibilities in the private sphere, and how that corresponds to participation, with questions concerning why, how and for whom they act and participate. The householders have referred to their dual roles as both consumers and citizens in the descriptions of how they participate. When analyzing how the householders understand their responsibility and opportunities to participate as citizens for the environment, I have shown how they structure their ecological action space in the encounter with other individual actors and structures. Depending on whom they are interacting with, and when, the sphere can be seen as private or public. This implies that a private sphere is not dependent on a specific place, but rather on the situation and the meaning of the activity. It is through the ecological action space that they interpret citizenship with responsibilities, rights, and what is considered possible to do for the environment. When discussing their responsibility within their ecological action space, the householders related themselves to “fanatical” and “irresponsible” others. By positioning themselves between these two categories of people, they outlined what is possible and reasonable to do concerning environmentally friendly activities, and further how what they do is considered to be an expression of taking responsibility.

Through discourse we learn what to attend to and how to motivate activities. In the everyday practice these householders and the four municipalities (re)created a distinction between private and political. Many of the householders decouple themselves from nature at the same time as they connect their everyday activities with environmental effects. In their interaction, they carve out what is reasonable to do, and they have learned from others that there are environmental problems they should attend to.

By widening the scope and looking into what the householders do when citizenship is practiced and lived, it is possible to grasp how certain
roles and activities contradict the rationale of the “environmentally conscious” householder. They want to buy things for their kids, they do not want to tell other people how to behave, and they do not want to get sweaty from riding a bike to work, for example. This does, however, give rise to uneasiness and bad conscience, as mentioned above. It is when they have been asked to define what they can do in their households to counteract the environmental problems and in their explanations of why they do not perform these activities that they have unveiled constraints. The ecological action space is made up of their awareness of environmental problems and risks, and notions of responsibility for causing the problems, as well as doing something about them according to the political culture. With the individualization of responsibility to solve environmental problems in mind, I concluded that performing environmentally friendly activities is a form of political participation since the effects concern the common good. However, since they mainly act where there are existing systems in place - upon which they depend - it would be incorrect to solely focus on the individual perspective. Municipalities and companies have created systems for recycling, organic products, and transportations (we are still waiting for a system for decreased consumption).

Wide political and civic participation is central in the documents for sustainable development, even if the definition of when and how people are expected to participate often remains vague. From previous literature on citizenship and participation to decrease environmental stress, I concluded that there has been a predilection for deliberation, and that citizens should make sacrifices, show virtue, and be active. But why not accept that whatever works that makes people behave more environmentally friendly is good, regardless of whether it is based on economic or altruistic rationalities. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that people act out of different reasons and rationalities; sometimes economic, while at other times based on risk perception, comfort, wanting to be cool, or in order to act like “a proper wo/man”. Ecological citizenship places extensive requirements on individuals, like time and knowledge in order to be able to monitor the environmental consequences (Barry 2006; MacGregor 2006). And when monitoring consequences the question: “better in relation to what?” is motivated.

In chapter 2 I presented the four characteristics of ecological citizenship as outlined by Dobson (2003), and in chapter 7 I made some empirically derived reflections on the theory. The analysis, based on the interactional and individual experience of citizenship indicates that there is empirical support for some of the aspects of the normative theory. For example, the householders have expressed that they have an individual empirical support for some of the aspects of the normative theory. For example, the householders have expressed that they have an individual
responsibility for the environment, and no one talked about their right to a decent environment. The householders focused on the obligation aspect of participation rather than the rights, just like Dobson asks for; even if they emphasize that there are limits to their responsibilities. However, there are few cases where the householders connect the environmental impact of their activities to the situation of other global citizens, and the extent to which they are responsible for other people’s environmental situation. However, the majority of the householders acknowledge that their consumer demands here have consequences for workers in other countries. The concern about the workers’ health partly motivates some householders to purchase ecological bananas, for example. They thereby politicize some everyday activities in their role as consumers and in a global market context. When the householders have described that they participate as citizens, it has been obvious that they act both as citizens and as consumers. Acting and participating as a consumer has to be considered as one of the possible ways a household can act as a citizen. However, it is not the only way. Many green theories focus extensively on the intentions behind activities, the rationalization of action and the ability to motivate activities with knowledge of environmental consequences. I want to keep a critical stance to this approach and maintain that the unreflected activities may be just as important.

Through individual, though collective in one sense, activities like sorting of waste or purchasing ecological milk, deliberation is not created since people do not meet. They act at different times and in different places. But since I argued that political participation is defined as activities that aim at influencing the public good, purchases of ecological milk or recycling that influences the common environment have by definition to be considered as political. The ecological labeling regimes are considered as systems that structure what individuals are expected to do. This system stresses that the householders should act in their role as consumers and maintain the system through their consumer activities. This is how structuration theory is suitable to analyzing householders’ everyday activities and the dual relationship between human agency and social structures.

One group of householders have emphasized that the authorities cannot legitimately regulate what they do in their private sphere. Yet, this same group has mentioned various activities that they do perform voluntarily for the environment. Through my analysis, I further conclude that if the authorities construct systems that facilitate environmentally friendly behavior that is considered legitimate, it is the verbal telling which they react against. This directs the focus to materiality, and how material responsibility for the environment, and no one talked about their right to a decent environment. The householders focused on the obligation aspect of participation rather than the rights, just like Dobson asks for; even if they emphasize that there are limits to their responsibilities. However, there are few cases where the householders connect the environmental impact of their activities to the situation of other global citizens, and the extent to which they are responsible for other people’s environmental situation. However, the majority of the householders acknowledge that their consumer demands here have consequences for workers in other countries. The concern about the workers’ health partly motivates some householders to purchase ecological bananas, for example. They thereby politicize some everyday activities in their role as consumers and in a global market context. When the householders have described that they participate as citizens, it has been obvious that they act both as citizens and as consumers. Acting and participating as a consumer has to be considered as one of the possible ways a household can act as a citizen. However, it is not the only way. Many green theories focus extensively on the intentions behind activities, the rationalization of action and the ability to motivate activities with knowledge of environmental consequences. I want to keep a critical stance to this approach and maintain that the unreflected activities may be just as important.

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structures can govern action, like the design of bicycle lanes, or the construction of buildings and heating systems, transportation routes and locations of services that influence the opportunities for how to act environmentally friendly.

The interactional aspect of responsibility

In line with Beck (1996) and Giddens (1994), I noticed that individuals have no choice but to choose how to act in our current society, where choices at least seem to be abundant. However, this very abundance of choices can contribute to difficulties in deciding what to choose. A central issue when analyzing the householders’ expressions is the freedom to choose among alternatives. Being able to choose freely among environmentally friendly alternatives concerns individualization. Even though all householders stated that they have a responsibility for the environment, there are limits to an individual’s responsibility, and one should “not exaggerate”. So even if they should act environmentally friendly, no one can force them to.

I conclude that the householders’ perceived ecological action space is made in this space between the “irresponsible other” and the “fanatical other”, where specific (symbolic) activities and “consciousness” meet. They are not interested in making sacrifices concerning what they view as their good life. This is a form of rationalization of action (Giddens 1989) and of their ecological action space where they relate what they do with motivations to why. From an outsider’s perspective some of their motivations and activities may seem contradictory when measured in environmentally friendly terms. In their everyday life they have various intervening “roles”, identities, and responsibilities that they have to attend to, and the environmentally friendly practices are not always prioritized. For the majority of the householders in this study, to be “environmentally conscious” is not the core identity, even if it is important to be environmentally conscious. The householders perceive of their ecological action space in relation to these aspects, and it depends on how they want to be understood, which of course interplays with how they are “ascribed”

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by others. Ecological action space pays attention to the situatedness of practice.

A structure that most of the householders relate to is the norm for legitimate interaction with other citizens. The householders who attempted to participate in the public discussions adopted individual strategies to circumvent the norm of legitimate interaction concerning how to talk to, or convince, others about how to act environmentally friendly. I have interpreted that discussing with other citizens or suggesting alternative ways to act is not always justifiable, and therefore they turn their focus towards institutional contexts, just like the officials at the municipality did.

Recycling has received a lot of attention. It is an activity which is at the border between acting voluntarily and in the role of a citizen for the common good. The householders who live in detached houses can also do it for economic incentives (to keep down the fees for waste collection) in the role as consumers. However, sorting and recycling require effort; spending household time on the management, sorting, and taking it the (often extra) distance to the recycling station.

The analysis based on structuration theory points out how the householders in this study rely on different systems for acting environmentally friendly, like recycling systems, eco-labels on food and products, public means of transportation, and energy that companies supply. This contributes with a more complex picture when discussing the individualization of responsibility for the state of the environment. These systems reduce the complexity by facilitating choices. Concerning the central trait of individualization, it has been argued that the householders may participate collectively - yet at different times and places - when performing activities like sorting and recycling household waste, purchasing ecological and/or locally produced products. However, the ideal of deliberation in meetings does not come about - which possibly implies that their only option is to maintain the systems. These activities are still considered to be acts of political involvement since they concern acting for the collective good.

So, the householders have internalised environmental norms in the sense that they get bad conscience if they do not act. However, since they rely on systems, the construction of systems that enable more environmentally friendly practices will probably improve the situation. With the point of departure that humans are history-makers and life shapers, the change to a more environmentally sound world is possible, even if not necessarily easy to accomplish.

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Methodological conclusions

By applying an ethnographic approach with thick descriptions, focus was on the aspects of everyday life and practices. In the interviews, the householders have expressed social expectations and cultural norms. These norms are structuring what they find reasonable and important to do, but also concerning whose the responsibility for the environment is. The descriptions that they have shared with me have contributed to an enriched understanding of how choices are dealt with in their everyday life, and what factors which are structuring their ecological action space concerning what is possible and desirable.

The ecological action space is interpreted in the householders’ context, and within the municipality where different ecological practices are concretized. The municipality is part of the structuring of how the householders can act environmentally friendly. I have argued that the municipalities contribute to the standardization of many environmentally friendly practices. In the first chapter I accounted for previous research on households and contributed with a definition. The definition focuses on the household as a place for reproduction, consumption, and production, and when more than one household live together - negotiation and division of labor is central. Focus turned to how household division of labor, responsibilities, and expectations within the household are gendered. Through everyday life the householders act in different roles like parent, employee, member in an organization, citizen etc. The different roles contribute to how they act in different situations and how they choose.

In order to analyze how sustainable development is implemented in the households, the householders’ interpretations of what facilitating factors and what constraints they experience when it comes to acting environmentally friendly have been asked for. Development usually implies change, but from this study it is obvious that everyday practices are not that easily changed. In the recruitment process, I could have asked for householders that wanted to change their practices, but instead I focused on everyday life and routines. An attitude that has been possible to highlight among the householders in this present study is that they “do enough”, which has been related to where the limit is, and what they find reasonable to do. This is in turn related to what has to change and who is responsible and liable for sustainable development.

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contribute with the necessary information. Since activities and resources are detached of meaning in the time diaries, they have to be coupled with interviews. Another challenge for using time diaries for studies of sustainable development is that many of the activities are carried out at a very detailed level, which seldom is expressed in the time diary. I had to develop the time diaries by adding a box for “how” since many environmentally friendly activities concern very detailed aspects of an activity, like for example how to wash clothes. However, the attempt was not thoroughly successful, and the time diaries have mainly been useful in getting the everyday context where individual activities are carried out, and where the constraints to act environmentally friendly can be highlighted and further discussed through the interviews.

By understanding the weaving and structuring of everyday life, and how singular environmental friendly activities are enabled or constrained through this, it will be more easy to understand why or why not sustainable development can be implemented or not.

The ecological action space takes place

The individualization of responsibility for the environment has connected the private and the political. The individual householder is interconnected with other human beings where social structures influence how they interact, and act, in material structures. In the present study, the work and ambitions of four municipalities was related to the ecological action space of the householders. I attended to the question of what strategies the municipalities use to reach the householders, which was based on municipal policies for sustainable development and interviews with officials. The conclusion of this analysis is that the work for sustainable development in the four municipalities is very similar in a lot of ways, and they have similar approaches and ambitions, policies, and suggestions for what the householders should do. Municipal policies suggest activities for the citizens, like how to sort and reduce waste, environmentally friendly modes of transportation, how to reduce energy use; and how to get engaged in the municipality among various other things. But the politicians and administrators do not find it legitimate to try to direct what the householders do in what is interpreted to be perceived as the private sphere. To circumvent this, they attempt to give suggestions through information, and direct their effort at formal contexts like schools, employees at the municipality, and work sites within the municipality. The ideas about
private and public spheres are created both in theory and practice (cf. Giddens 1989). This study has indicated that the distinction between private home beyond public/political interference is recreated even if the theoretical goal is to dissolve this demarcation. However, here it is important to acknowledge that the dissolution can be required for different motivations. While Dobson (2003) for example, states that the private is political because householders are already asked to perform politically relevant activities in their home, many feminists required the private to be considered political in order to give women agency in politics. Concerning the possibility to affect what householders do, the municipal officials that were interviewed in this study recognized that they had an opportunity to do so through information for voluntary activities that are more environmentally friendly than alternatives, and through administrative policy instruments like where services are located, and economic policy instruments and laws. In chapter four I showed that the municipal websites are abundant with information concerning environmentally friendly activities and alternatives. The information is interpreted to be a sign of how the municipality recognized that they can seldom force the householders to act more environmentally friendly, but only give suggestions for voluntary activities.

Space in this meaning has a place, a materiality, and depending on how the householders are situated, certain opportunities will seem viable. As was commented previously, structuration theory mainly focuses on structures in the sense of being social rules and culture. But I have argued that structures has materiality which for the householders’ ecological action space means that it relates to the walls and windows, energy systems, water taps, products and technical appliances, which nonetheless have immaterial aspects like comfort etc. Through the ecological action space, focus is both on factors that limit their environmentally friendly activities as well as on the situations that function as enabling to perform all the environmentally friendly activities they know of. This contributes with a “dialectical” notion since both enabling and constraining factors are given attention, which gives a richer understanding of why the political goal of sustainable development is (not) implemented. Environmental impact can be analyzed from different perspectives. I have argued that ecological footprint does not take into account the individual’s perspective and how he or she motivates behavior that requires natural resources. By ecological action space I thus aim at uniting the material and the immaterial structuring of everyday activities. Material structures can contribute to facilitate certain activities while constraining others, which is the point of departure in structuration theory.
Municipalities in Sweden have been given the responsibility for many of the areas that concern the implementation of sustainable development, and were thereby deemed as important for understanding how householders act. The municipalities structure the ecological action space of householders since they supply many of the services and systems that the householders need in order to act environmentally friendly. Even if the municipal officers expressed that they have few means to influence what the householders do within the private sphere, it became obvious that the way they outline services influence the ecological action space a lot. However, as has been shown, everyday life is influenced by a multitude of social norms which the householders (re)create through their daily activities and interactions with others. This web of norms, coupled with the fact that sustainable development is a highly complex issue, makes it difficult to alter behavior by singular efforts.

If the municipalities, or other authorities, have ambitions to make householders act more environmentally friendly they need to comprehend both what enables environmentally friendly practices, and support these factors; as well as the constraining factors, and try to remove them - they need to create ecological action space for the householders.
What does the prevalent “thinking about nature or the environment” mean, and does it help to improve the environment?

Dear Nature!
I am thinking a lot about you, just wanted you to know!

Warm regards!

To: Nature

What does the prevalent “thinking about nature or the environment” mean, and does it help to improve the environment?
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**Illustrations**


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Appendix 1 Call for participation

Example of a call for participation in Piteå (translated from Swedish).

Hi – would you like to participate in a research study that focuses on your routines, resources and activities?

What you do everyday is very interesting, and that is the reason I would like to study how you organize your everyday life, what activities you perform, what resources you use and how you perceive of your restrictions and possibilities to live your everyday life. I am a doctoral student at Linköping University and my research project is funded by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. The study departs from your household and if there are more household members in the household it is important that they want to participate too. Piteå was chosen along with three other Swedish municipalities to be included in the study. I am searching for five households in Piteå for this study.

If you would like to participate in the study it would imply that I will make two interviews with you in your home, and that you write a simple diary during a week at the end of January or beginning of February. The diary is introduced at the first interview, and is composed of a form where you will write down all activities. Your participation would be very valuable for our research.

General information:

- The study will result in a thesis in about three years, but is also of interest for the municipality in Piteå which will receive a report about the findings long before that.
- The material will be treated confidentially according to prevalent research ethics. You are free to interrupt your participation at any time.
- As a form of substitution for your participation I will bring a meal at both the interview occasions.

I will contact you personally during the coming week to ask if you would consider participating in the current research study.

Best regard    Karin Skill (phone: XXXX; e-mail: XXXX)
Appendix 2 Interview guides

Introductory interview

Background, age, education and employment/activity.
Living and technologies.
Ask them to describe the following as thoroughly as possible: means of transportation they have access to and the pro and cons of these, shopping, situations when they use water.
What do resources mean to you? What resources do you need in order to live a good life?
Are there any environmental problems? Who do you think is responsible for the creation of these environmental problems?
Is there anything you can do about the environmental problems you have described? Do you experience any obstacles to perform these mentioned activities?
What does environmental friendliness mean to you?
What does development mean to you?
Describe what a good life implies for you.

Guide for follow-up interview

How did you perceive of writing time-diary?
Was there something you got surprised by?
What activities would be most difficult to change out of the activities you have written down?
Are there any ways you could act more environmentally friendly?
Do you have any suggestions and ideas concerning how the municipality could improve the conditions and make householders act more environmentally friendly?
Can you describe how you would express dissatisfaction towards policy instruments that the municipality and government direct to your household?