

*Climate Policy as a Window of Opportunity  
Sweden and Global Climate Change*

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Gothenburg Studies in Politics 121



**GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET**  
**STATSVETENSKAPLIGA INSTITUTIONEN**

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i statsvetenskap  
som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsnämnden  
vid Göteborgs universitet framläggs till offentlig granskning  
fredag den 12 februari 2010 kl. 13.15 i sal 10,  
Universitetsbyggnaden, Vasaparken, Göteborg.

Zannakis, Mathias, 2009. *Climate Policy as a Window of Opportunity. Sweden and Global Climate Change*. English text. Gothenburg Studies in Politics 121. Department of Political Science, Box 711, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden. Gothenburg 2009. 270 pages. ISBN: 978-91-89246-45-4 · ISSN: 0346-5942 · e-published version: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/21439>.

### *Abstract*

Because of their social dilemma character, global environmental problems are difficult to successfully manage. States have few incentives to contribute to the common good because doing so would imply costs but not guarantee that others will contribute. Without a global government that can maintain order states do not want to act the sucker. But this picture is not always true. Sweden's behaviour in climate politics is a clear anomaly given such expectations. Sweden opted for a more ambitious target than obliged to under the Kyoto Protocol and will most probably *over-implement* this target. The aim of this study is to explore why Sweden has acted contrary to social dilemma expectations in climate policy.

Following a social constructivist approach, Swedish climate policy—nationally as well as in selected sub-national cases—is analysed as regards the 'is-ought-do' of politics. How are global climate change and its international political responses interpreted in Swedish policy? How is Sweden's responsibility constructed? Further, what is perceived as necessary and possible to do in order to contribute to the mitigation of climate change? The theoretical assumption is that this will be constructed against the background of a social structure consisting of socially and historically established discourses, including ideas, norms and practices.

This study suggests that one reason why Sweden acts contrary to expectations is because the consensual climate science as advocated by IPCC is reproduced in the Swedish polity. This acknowledgement of the problem makes possible the construction of Sweden's sense of responsibility through a combination of two storylines: an Ecological Justice story-line and an Opportunity story-line. In Swedish climate discourse, being rich implies a moral obligation to show initiative. But Sweden also looks at climate policy through a window of opportunity; being in the frontline of the restructuration of society would be beneficial to Sweden. At the sub-national level, on the other hand, the politics analysed had a less elaborated construction of responsibility, but saw it as something which was more or less beyond questioning. Apart from taking the problem seriously and appointing itself responsibility, Sweden's strategy has been to 'involve the whole society' in the mission to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Further, there is a strong belief that through planning, introduction of cost-efficient policy measures, and providing incentives to various actors in society, the rational state/society is well capable of accomplishing this mission. Thus, Sweden reproduces the discourse of ecological modernisation, which spells out the Win-Win situation of environmental politics.

*Keywords:* climate policy, social dilemmas, social constructivism, discourse, story-line, norms, identity, legitimacy, ecological modernisation, environmental forerunner, Sweden.