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THE REASONS AND CONDITIONS OF SYMBOLIC POLITICS IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

A case study of the reasons and conditions for use
of symbolic politics in the decision of Low Emission
Zones for cars in Stockholm

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine the reasons and conditions for symbolic politics in the decision to implement Low emission zones (LEZ) for cars in Stockholm.

A LEZ restricts the ability to move with certain vehicles in an area to improve air quality, decrease congestion and sending a signal for upgrading the car/vehicle fleet (Connelly et.al. 2012). Symbolic politics can appear when decisions become politically important because they symbolize something important, not necessarily because they have the aimed or substantive effect (Santesson-Wilson, 2003; Newig, 2007).

The decision to introduce a LEZ for cars on Hornsgatan, Stockholm, can be considered as symbolic politics. The issue is politically important and symbolizes the importance of better air quality without having a substantive effect since the zone only covers one street. It is a suitable case for examining the reasons and conditions for symbolic politics in environmental policy.

This is a qualitative single case study and the empirical data collection consists of interviews with decision-makers and experts. Five reasons and four conditions for the use and adoption of symbolic environmental politics are the basis of the theoretical framework. These reasons and conditions were developed to hypotheses, which are tested in relation to the collected data. The hypotheses were all confirmed as present to some extent. The most important reasons were *uncertainty*, *cost reduction* and *integration and social orientation by symbols*. The most critical conditions were *political pressure to respond*, *lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits* and *societal conflict*.

Keywords: Symbolic politics, Low emission zones, Environmental policies, Air quality

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List of acronyms

LEZ – Low emission zone

PM – particulate matter

NOx – nitrogen oxides

EU – European Union

WHO – World Health Organization

NGO – non-governmental organization

Euro (class) – European emission standards

MP – The Green Party

IVL – The Swedish Environmental Institute

S – The Social democrats

CO2 – carbon dioxide

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1. Introduction

This section will introduce the reader to the decision to implement Low emission zones (LEZ) in Stockholm and the aim of this thesis as well as the research questions and hypotheses.

"This decision hurts the reputation of Stockholm and risks undermining the legitimacy of environmental work. It is a high price for this symbolic politics" Jan Valeskog (Deputy Mayor, Socialdemocrats) (Brandt, 2019).

The citation above is an example from the debate regarding the decision to introduce Low Emission Zones (LEZ) for cars in Stockholm (Brandt, 2019). A LEZ is an area where the ability to move with certain vehicles is restricted. It is used to improve air quality, decrease congestion and to send a signal for upgrading the car/vehicle fleet (Connelly et.al. 2012). Symbolic politics can be described as when decisions become politically important because they symbolize something important, not necessarily because they have the aimed or substantive effect (Santesson-Wilson, 2003; Newig, 2007).

This thesis aims to add knowledge to the existing research field on the use of symbolic politics in environmental policies, by this case study of the decision to introduce LEZ for cars in Stockholm.

The research of the reasons for use of symbolic politics on political decisions in environmental policy is scarce, especially regarding policy instruments such as LEZ. The case of Stockholm is of interest to study in relation to symbolic politics since the decision symbolizes something important regarding e.g. air quality without having a substantive effect e.g. only one street-zone (Santesson-Wilson, 2003; Stadsledningskontoret, 2018 ; Rundberg, 2019).

From previous research on how symbolic politics affect environmental policy it is visible that symbolic policies often are observed in the field of environment policy (Bache et al. 2015). Symbolic environmental legislation can have a substantive and practical effectiveness or political-strategic effectiveness (Newig, 2007; Happaerts, 2012; Bache et.al. 2015). The ability to respond effectively to the environmental problem is the substantive effectiveness while the political-strategic effectiveness focuses on responding to political pressure (Torney, 2019).

The aim of this case study is to examine the reasons for use and conditions for adoption of symbolic environmental politics that has been present in the decision to implement LEZ for light vehicles (cars) in Stockholm by answering the following questions:

R1. What were the reasons for the use of symbolic politics in the decision to implement LEZ for cars in Stockholm?

R2. What were the conditions driving the adoption of the symbolic LEZ-decision in Stockholm?

The research design chosen for this thesis is a qualitative single case study. Starting from theories of symbolic politics in environmental policy, the process of deduction is used to test the theories. Hypotheses are developed from these theories to test what reasons and conditions for symbolic politics that has been present in the investigated case.

The chosen method of data collection used is a qualitative technique of interviews. It is useful to identify factors through interviewing and it is suitable to answer the qualitative aim and research questions (Lowndes et.al. 2018).

The results from the data collected by interviews have been tested in relation to the hypotheses to be confirmed or rejected. Lastly, this process has laid the path to answer the research question and to conclude if the aim of the thesis is achieved, as well as bringing new knowledge in the area of research (Bryman, 2012).

2. Literature review

This section will introduce the reader to previous research on symbolic politics and environmental policy instruments. It will lay the foundation for the theoretical section that follows in chapter 3.

2.1 The Concept of Symbolic politics

Symbolic politics can be described as when political decisions become important not necessarily because they have the aimed effect, but because they symbolize something important (Santesson-Wilson, 2003 p.2). Symbolic politics is an interpretation of political decisions from expressed attitudes, where the attitudes become more important than the effects of the decision (Santesson-Wilson, 2003). The primary concern of symbolic politics is to send a message from the political actors to the receiving audience that is supposed to be impressed by the proposition (Ovink, Ebert and Okamoto, 2016). In this way, symbolic politics ease the decision-making process and can increase the legitimacy of a policy instrument. All in all, policies that are characterized by symbolic politics are conducted to manage certain problems, rather than to resolve them (Newig, 2007).

The phenomenon of symbolic politics has always been a part of politics but has played a more important role in contemporary times because of the complexity of political issues and interests, including political competition and a decrease in legitimacy (Bluhdorn, 2007).

A pioneer regarding symbolic politics was Lasswell (1930), with an interest in the relationship between private, emotional motives and official politics. He argued that a motive to political decisions often would be what the symbolism of the politics was, not what it aimed to achieve (Santesson-Wilson, 2003). This citation says it well: The solution is not the “rationally best” solution, but the “emotionally satisfactory one” (Lasswell 1930 p.185).

The work of Lasswell was later followed by the work of Edelman in the Symbolic Uses of Politics (1964). It is a standard work of the studies of symbolic politics. Edelman built on the previous ideas of Lasswell regarding the importance of emotions for political requirements. The most important function of a policy instrument was to give a signal of good intentions, not the concrete body of the promises. Newig (2007) explains how symbolic policies are more likely to appear in relation to more complex problems and when there is a conflict between different interests and a distance between costs and benefits (Happaerts, 2012). Sears (1993) also made an important theoretical contribution through his framework that contrasts the symbolic against the concrete. Sears argued that in contrast to an instrumental view of citizens as rational seekers of resources where politics are means to satisfy those needs, it is intangible motivations such as protecting social ingroup values that are at play in politics (Mendelberg, 2018).

These studies of symbolic politics have later been followed by others, most notably for this study the work Santesson-Wilson (2003).

Santesson-Wilson (2003) has developed symbolic politics in his dissertation. Santesson-Wilson aims to develop the concept by creating a taxonomy to systematize theoretical concepts and mechanisms to study symbolic politics. It is done by an empirical examination of and to what extent the concepts and mechanisms of symbolic politics can explain the results of political decisions. The taxonomy of symbolic politics is built on previous research (by O'Neill 1999, Nozick 1993 and Stone 1997) about the phenomenon and connection to general theories of public policy.

To find the answer to the question of “how can a political question can be important without causally affecting political goals” Santesson-Wilson (2003) develops four answers. A question can be important by being put in a category as something important, or be made principally important, it can be seen as an example of something important or an expression of something important. These are mechanisms of symbolic politics:

Categories can be explained as a case of something, which can have three effects: a focus of certain characteristics, take focus away from certain characteristics or add characteristics.

Principles can be seen as similar cases that should be treated the same way. This is a normative meaning based on principles of right or wrong and not only categorization.

Examples are questions put forward to make an example of a category or principle. Sometimes they are representative of a category or principle, but sometimes not. When they are not, it means that they are an exaggeration or a reduction of other questions in the category or principle/group.

Expressions are the most complex part of a decision of symbol politics. It means that action in question x can be interpreted by an actor as an action in question y. This does not mean that it is wrong, it can be the intention of the decision-maker. The researcher has to delimitate herself to interpreting relevant actors and identify individuals or organizations that might be bearers of symbolism. The mechanisms of expressions are symptoms, signals and pose. Symptoms – not necessarily an act of awareness, Signals – a method of communication to purposely show the receiver an opinion, pose – the sender purposely tries to hide their intentions so that it will be an expression of a symptom for the receiver. (Santesson-Wilson, 2003)

Santesson-Wilson's use of the taxonomy in his studied cases, a decision to shut down a nuclear power plant and a decision of broadband introduction in Sweden, showed that expressions were the most important appearing factor of symbolic politics. One of the most important findings in his study is that expressions have been expected to create lock-in effects and that it has affected politicians' possibility to act, which creates difficulties for a long time ahead in the studied cases. (Santesson-Wilson, 2003)

Since political questions are built around abstractions such as environmental issues and not a particular dead tree in a certain place, it is a question of language constructions that affects how a problem is thought of (Santesson-Wilson, 2003). It is important when studying a decision

process that key-persons with influence are in focus since symbolic politics is connected to intentions of decision-makers.

He concludes that the studies have a combination of instrumental and symbolic political influences and that these can be analyzed by the suggested concepts of symbolic politics: categories, principles, examples, and expressions.

2.2 Symbolic Politics as a Policy Instruments

In the Oxford Companion to Politics of the World (2004), Lorenzo Morris defined public policy. "In its most commonly understood form public policy is the output or product of government action. It is what comes out of the governing process in terms of the selected goals of public officials and the impact on society of pursuing those goals." A policy instrument can be almost anything that a policymaker may use to obtain certain goals. It can also be described as a concrete intervention by public authorities. The instrument can be seen as a way to reach a certain objective that often reflects political and administrative strategies (Bemelmans-Videc et.al., 1998).

The main objective of this study is within the field public policy instruments. These are concrete forms of intervention used by governmental authorities as a set of techniques – with a focus on external policies that aim at the behavior of citizens (Bemelmans-Videc et.al., 1998).

Previous research on policy instruments has shown that a policy problem is often handled by instruments with increasing strength over time, as from information to regulation. This has to do with the legitimacy of decision-makers and the necessity of development over time. Policy choices are often shaped by how policymakers view the target population, as well as present and prior experiences of the policy instrument that address the problem (Bemelmans-Videc, 1998). The public acceptability seems to increase with familiarity, which has been seen when Eliasson and Jonsson (2011) studied the implementation of congestion charges in Stockholm and Edinburgh.

2.3 Symbolic Politics and Environmental Policy

To handle issues where industrial sectors pollute the environment around the world, governments are developing institutions and policies to address pollution in areas such as energy and mobility. Environmental policies and policy instruments aim to preserve the environment and minimize risks for human health from pollution. The complicated nature of factors causing environmental problems means that a single policy instrument is seldom likely to be enough. Policy mixes are claimed to be more effective to reach goals (UN Environment, 2019).

Symbolic environmental legislation refers to laws that often have ambitious, officially declared, objectives but designed to be ecologically ineffective. At the macro-level, such symbolic legislation can be viewed as a societal self-deception and an instrument for managing

rather than resolving environmental problems, while it at the micro-level represents either a deception of the public by politicians or a self-deception of individuals who are psychologically divided between supporting meaningful environmental policies and worrying about the costs which such policies might entail. (Newig, 2007)

Passing a law can release political pressure and demonstrate action to the public or serve political goals. It is also possible to do that without legal consequences and without improving conditions according to the declared objectives of the law (Newig, 2007). One commonly used approach is symbolic politics.

Matten's (2003, 2004) puts forward Steinberg's (2000) five reasons for the use of symbolic politics in environmental politics in his article "*Symbolic Politics in Environmental Regulation: corporate strategic responses*" and in the article "*The risk society and environmental politics in a globalizing economy*" (2004). The reasons for using symbolic politics can be divided into three that are more critical and two that are more constructive. The three more critical are; *disguise of true intentions, uncertainty and cost reduction*. The two more constructive are; *integration and social orientation by symbols and communication of abstract scientific concepts* (Matten, 2004).

'Disguise' of true intentions – This contains examples of instruments that are introduced to tackle a problem, but without having the aimed effect. Instead, it has another effect that is of interest to the decision-makers. It can also be an act of demonstrating action in an issue that can't be tackled by the governmental body alone.

Uncertainty – If regulators feel public pressure to act in an area with weak scientific explanations so far, symbolic politics can be present. Decision-makers feel pressure to take action even if there is a lack of knowledge if that action or policy instrument has the aimed effect.

Cost reduction – If there is a lack of knowledge about an issue in focus as explained in "uncertainty", the choices for a decision-maker can be to more symbolically address the risks instead of gathering costly new experience and knowledge.

Integration and social orientation by symbols. Symbolic politics can be helpful in a specialized society to get a common understanding among different interest groups, and thereby establish societal norms.

Communication of abstract scientific concepts. Symbolic elements can be very useful as an easy language to describe complicated risks and avoid mental barriers which might occur if a problem is too complicated to understand. This can often be the case with complicated environmental issues (Matten 2003, 2004).

In addition to Matten/Steinberg (2004/2000), Newig (2007) uses a hypothesis-based model that identifies key factors that constitute favorable conditions for the production of symbolic legislation.

From previous research, it has been shown that a central element in the concept of symbolic legislation is deception; how political and economic elites manipulate the general public or the electorate. That concern is also present in public choice theory, which is used as a framework for describing and explaining the phenomenon of symbolic legislation in the study (Newig, 2007).

The public choice-perspective in the study means that politicians are expected to produce a political solution to pressing issues on the political agenda by media, competing political parties and interest groups. The costs of political and legislative acts are of importance for politicians since it might mean a decrease in popularity if the overall benefits will exceed the overall costs. This is a dilemma solved by the double advantage of the symbolic solution: it demonstrates action taken and avoiding the costs of the substantive solution. (Newig, 2007)

The investigation of the mechanisms and conditions that favor the production of symbolic rather than non-symbolic legislation on the basis of public choice theory, all provide favorable conditions for symbolic legislation. Symbolic legislation is suggested to be characterized by low substantive effectiveness and high political-strategic effectiveness. According to the findings in the study, symbolic environmental legislation can be adopted under five conditions; political pressure to respond, lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits, where there is a societal conflict and when the issue is of high complexity (Torney, 2019). The factors providing favorable conditions for symbolic legislation in the researched cases were in line with most of the assumptions made in the hypotheses (Newig, 2007).

It was demonstrated that symbolic legislation can be effective in achieving political-strategic goals such as removing issues of high complexity from the public agenda and at the same time be ineffective in terms of a substantive solution for the respective issues at stake.

The first favorable condition for symbolic legislation, *Political pressure to respond*, means that politicians will act to produce a political proposal to relieve pressure and to show decisiveness in an important issue. With higher political pressure, the likelihood increase of symbolic legislation to occur and for legislation to show strong political-strategic features.

The second condition was *Lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits*, meaning that if there is a socially relevant problem that lacks an appropriate solution or where the short-term costs are higher than the benefits, it will be dealt with by symbolic legislation or refraining from passing pieces of legislation.

The *Societal conflict* contains a higher probability of symbolic legislation if there is a large societal conflict between groups. More important interest groups will be favored by more substantive legislature to their advantage while symbolic legislation will be used to satisfy demands from less important groups.

The *Issue of high complexity* refers to the condition that as a political issue becomes more complex, the more likely it is that it will be addressed by symbolic legislation (Newig, 2007).

Based on the frameworks offered by Matten and Newig, the next section offers a theoretical combined framework of the reasons for use of symbolic politics in environmental policy and the conditions under which symbolic environmental legislation is adopted.

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter will present a theoretical framework as a model based on findings in the literature review. The theoretical model will then be used to analyze my data in chapter 6.

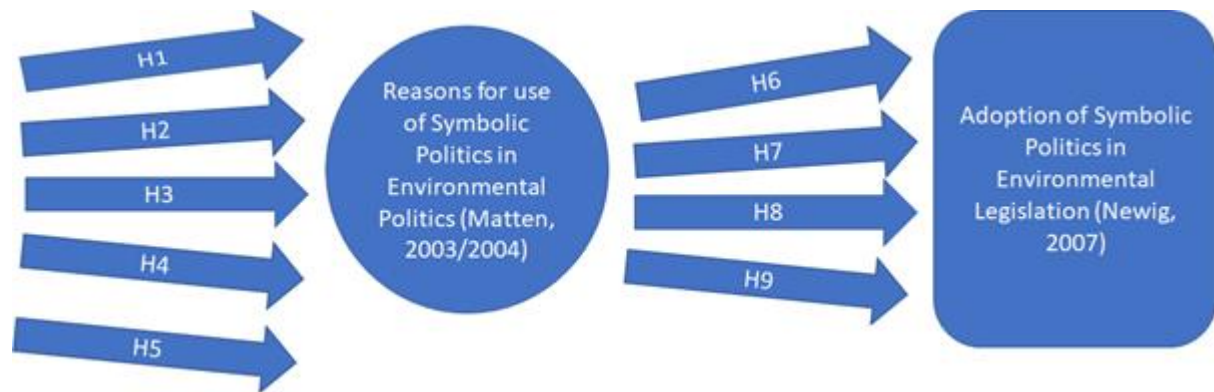


Figure 3.1. *Reasons for Use and Adoption of Symbolic Politics* (Matten, 2003/2004; Newig, 2007)

H1: *'Disguise' of true intentions* was present in the decision

H2: *Uncertainty* was present in the decision

H3: *Cost reduction* was present in the decision

H4: *Integration and social orientation by symbols* were present in the decision

H5: *Communication of abstract scientific concepts* was present in the decision

H6: *Political pressure to respond* was a factor in the decision

H7: *Lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits* were factors in the decision

H8: *Societal conflict* was a factor in the decision

H9: *The high complexity of the issue* was a factor in the decision

4. Methodological Approach and Research Design

This section will provide the reader with information about the chosen methods and considerations made regarding the research process.

4.1 Research Design

This case study aims to examine the reasons and conditions for the adoption of symbolic politics that has been present in the decision to implement LEZ for light vehicles (cars) in Stockholm.

This heuristic single case study is well suited to examine and fulfill the aim of identifying factors through interviewing and is a suitable approach to have in order to answer the research questions of what reasons and conditions for adopting symbolic politics that has been present in the decision to implement LEZ in Stockholm. According to Bryman (2012) qualitative methods are emphasizing the meaning of words rather than focus on quantification when collecting and analyzing data, thus why the methods chosen for this case study are qualitative as the focus is to examine the interviewees' responses and thoughts on the studied phenomenon.

It is a single case study since the decision of a LEZ in Stockholm can be considered a unique case that is interesting to test the reasons and effects of symbolic politics on. The case of Stockholm can be considered a unique case in the dependent variable; the symbolic decision of LEZ for light vehicles. As in symbolic politics, the decision become politically important since it symbolizes something important regarding e.g. air quality without having a substantive effect e.g. one street-zone. Thus, it is a suitable case in which to test the reasons and conditions for use and adoption of symbolic environmental politics; the independent variable. The justification of case selection is explained further and developed in section 4.2 below.

Starting from theories of symbolic environmental politics, the process of deduction is used to test the existing theories. Hypotheses are developed from these theories to test the reasons for symbolic politics and conditions driving the adoption of symbolic politics in the chosen case study. The chosen method of data collection is a qualitative technique and semi-structured interviews are used, with open-ended questions, to give the interviewees the possibility to develop their answers. This is also in line with the heuristic approach. (Lowndes et.al., 2018)

The qualitative case study is beneficial to examine the reasons and conditions of the LEZ-decision in this specific study. A precondition to understand the purpose of this study is to recognize and understand the meaning of the context in which the reasons and conditions appear. The qualitative method is suitable for that and also to be able to examine categories in the data. This differs from statistical analysis in which it is not possible to examine these kinds of qualitative issues (Bryman, 2012).

The results from the data collected by interviews will be tested in relation to the hypotheses to be confirmed or rejected. Lastly, this process has laid the path to answer the research question

and see if the aim of the thesis is achieved, as well as bringing new knowledge in the area of research (Bryman, 2012).

The epistemological and ontological orientation in this study is interpretive and constructivist. The interpretive view implies that the researcher considers the world to consist of people and their institutions, which means that it needs a different logic of research procedure than in natural science. This stems from a hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition. The constructivist position sees social phenomena as constantly changing and constructed by social interaction (Bryman, 2012). These are suitable considerations for this case since this thesis aims at studying social interaction from an interpretive perspective.

The research objective in this study can be considered as exploratory since the study aims to seek new insights by testing the existing theory on a new area and be the groundwork for future research (Rahi, 2017). The existing theory is the theoretical framework and hypotheses that will be tested in a new area that is the case of the LEZ-decision in Stockholm.

4.2 Background

This section will provide the reader with a background and context to understand the case of LEZ for cars in Stockholm.

“Increasing the use of renewable energy in transportation from 16% to 100% by 2040 will likely be the city’s most significant challenge, as this will entail removing all conventional fuel-powered vehicles from the city’s streets.” (C40, 2015).

4.2.1 Air Quality in Cities

Increasing air pollution in cities is one of the challenges of achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement and limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C (C40, 2019). The main issue of air pollution is the harm on human health and the environment, which is significant in cities and stems from particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) from transport (EEA, 2019). Traffic is the main source of particles and NOx in many European cities today and leads to premature death and health issues (Kuik et.al. 2018, Henze D.K et.al, 2016 & Amundsen & Sundvor, 2018).

Cities face the problems of bad air quality, which can be seen in all of the big cities in the world and many European cities violate the air quality limits set by the EU (Amundsen & Sundvor, 2018). At the same time, it is also these cities that are at the forefront regarding solutions to global challenges such as air quality (Sassen, 2018). The air quality standards in the European Union is established in the two EU Ambient Air Quality Directives and the World Health Organization (WHO) air quality guidelines (EEA, 2018). These are binding rules where emission limits and noise limits are set for cars, trucks, and buses (EEA, 2019). It is up to the member states to implement policies to attain the standards and report back to the EU (Wolff & Perry, 2010).

4.2.2 The Dieselgate Scandal

Cames & Helmers (2013) describe how an agreement in 1998 between the car industry in Europe and the European Commission was the start of the diesel development in the European market, with benefits for the car industry. Cames & Helmers (2013) states that the development with an increased proportion of diesel cars has worsened air quality and global warming.

It was already in 2013 that an NGO and the environmental regulator in California started to look into the larger emissions from Volkswagen's diesel cars in tests (Goel, 2015). When the "Dieselgate scandal" exploded in 2015, it was revealed that the German car company Volkswagen had equipped millions of cars with software in the shape of a defeat device to disguise emission levels and cheat on the laboratory emission tests (Jung and Park, 2017 and Ewing, 2015). By the time of revelation half of all cars sold in Europe were diesel cars, mainly because diesel fuel was cheaper than gasoline thanks to government policies (Ewing, 2015). As an example, the real fuel consumption of new European cars was more than 30% higher than what the manufacturers claimed (Blumberg & Posada, 2015).

4.2.3 Introducing New Policy Instruments

The goals of cities tend to be very ambitious and challenging when it comes to environmental politics. Air quality and the Dieselgate scandal are important factors of a city's awareness and action to shift to fossil-free transport. Other ambitious goals from cities around the world are the diesel cars ban in Paris and Madrid in 2025 (UNFCCC, 2016).

The challenge of getting the shift from the traffic that is causing air pollution in cities to less traffic and other vehicles is very much a political issue that is not easy to handle, which as currently been seen by the yellow vests protest in France because of higher fuel price, a big debate in Gothenburg regarding congestion charges and the appearance of a new Party in Norway that is against higher "bompeng" (road fees) (BBC, 2018), (Hysing, 2015), (Sveriges radio, 2019). These are just a few examples of the responses to political decisions that aim to work in the direction of changing car usage and decreasing air pollution.

Strict policy tools that regulate people's daily life is seldom popular and politicians tend to go from softer to stricter instruments to have higher legitimacy for the policy and the public confidence in it (Bemmelman-Videc, 1998). This thesis concerns a restrictive policy instruments that regulate areas where only certain vehicles with low emissions are accepted to drive; so-called Low Emission Zones (Amundsen & Sundvor, 2018). A report made for the European commission in 2017 presented recommendations for national frameworks for Low Emission Zones (European commission, 2017). By then, countries such as Germany, England and France already had LEZ for cars (Amundsen & Sundvor, 2018).

4.2.4 Low Emission Zones and the Case of Stockholm

Sweden was the first country in the world to implement LEZ in certain cities for heavy vehicles in 1996, but thereafter other European countries have been leading the way concerning LEZ for cars (Amundsen & Sundvor, 2018). The Swedish government presented the first regulation of LEZ for light vehicles and cars in March 2018 with two new legal options for zones. The new zones were to be decided upon and implemented on a local level (Regeringen, 2018). In 2019, Stockholm decided to introduce the first LEZ for cars on the street Hornsgatan (Trafiknämnden Stockholms stad, 2019). The final decision was taken in the city council on the 2nd of September (Jennervall, 2019).

4.3 Sampling of Context and Justification of Case Selection

The choice to do a single case study was made to be able to understand the decision of LEZ in Stockholm in-depth. It was also reasonable in relation to time and costs as well as the availability of data, which is in line with Bryman's (2012) view of when to do a single case study. The case was strategically chosen since the Stockholm-case can bring a better understanding of the reasons and conditions for symbolic politics in this decision of LEZ for cars.

The decision to implement LEZ for cars in Stockholm can be considered an unique case since the zone only will cover one street, which differs from existing zones in other cities and since the decision has become politically important since it symbolizes something important regarding g.e. air quality without having a substantive effect g.e. one street-zone (Bryman, 2012 and Amundsen & Sundvor, 2018). The existence of symbolic politics in the Stockholm-case is also interesting to study since the zone does not appear to be substantive since the effect on air quality will be minor, according to investigations made by the City of Stockholm (Stadsledningskontoret, Stockholms stad, 2018).

The Stockholm case includes a capital city with a long record of high green ambitions. The city was among the first in the world to introduce LEZ for heavy vehicles, but at the same time is very late to implement it for cars in relation to other European cities. The highly infected political debate of the LEZ for cars in Stockholm makes it suitable to study in relation to symbolic politics.

4.4 Study Object and the Scene of Data Collection

After the introduction of LEZ for heavy vehicles in Sweden 1996 the policy instrument spread to other countries in Europe. LEZ made it possible for municipalities in Sweden to ban trucks and buses above 3.5 tons that were maximum eight years old at the time, or had a filter that could handle particles. The reason was to decrease the amount of particles and heavy traffic in cities and to reward new technologies (Trafikanalys, 2015).

The first public investigation of introducing LEZ for cars in Sweden was initiated in 2009 when the Government gave the Swedish Transport Agency an assignment to analyze the possibility to develop the regulation of LEZ for heavy vehicles to also include cars (Eveby & Franzén, 2010).

In December 2015 the Government of Sweden gave the Swedish Transport Agency (again) the task to propose a development for the environmental zones to better reach the transport and environmental goals. It included not only the existing zones for heavy vehicles (zone 1) but also for cars and lighter vehicles. The task was to suggest a system for emission-free and quiet vehicles and how the monitoring should be conducted (Regeringen, 2015).

In the autumn of 2016 the Ministry for Transport put forward a proposal of two new zones for light vehicles and cars. Zone 2 would allow light vehicles and cars with Euro VI for diesel vehicles and Euro V for gasoline, ethanol, and gas-driven vehicles. Zone 3 would cover cars, trucks and buses, motorcycles and mopeds class I. The light vehicles would be allowed in the zone if they are electric or hydrogen driven, while the heavier vehicles would run on electricity, hydrogen or electric hybrid that would reach Euro VI standards. The government presented the new regulation for LEZ in March 2018 (Regeringen, 2018). The differences made from the original suggestion was that zone 2 euro VI for diesel vehicles in 2022 instead of instantly, for zone 3 euro VI allowed for gas and hybrid vehicles.

The zone 2 would probably be inefficient around 2030 since the car fleet by then would almost entirely have changed to new higher standards. The monitoring was suggested to be done by the police and the municipalities would have the possibility to decide if, where and how they would introduce the new zones (Transportstyrelsen, 2016). The zones can be introduced in "environmentally sensitive areas", which are urban areas where many people live and where there are risks of exposure to emissions and noise (Trafikkontoret, 2008). The municipalities can decide on the introduction since they already are responsible for city planning. The regulation for LEZ in Sweden does not originate from EU-legislation but the exceptions are strongly connected to vehicle restrictions within the EU (Elo, 2016).

4.4.1 Low Emission Zones in Stockholm, Sweden

The decision to investigate LEZ for light vehicles was included in the city budget for 2018. The budget was put forward by the ruling majority by then, which was containing both the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party at that time. The City Executive Administration was given the task to lead the investigation of LEZ for light vehicles (cars) in cooperation with the Administration for Environment and Traffic (Trafikkontoret, 2019).

In April 2018 a political reference group was assigned and an investigation of environmental and societal consequences and benefits as well as the assumed development of the traffic situation over time was to be investigated (Kommunstyrelsen, 2018).

The report was finished in December 2018 and presented to the political reference group in February 2019. It was seen as a knowledge base for the decision and was noted in the City Executive Board in April of the same year (Trafikkontoret, 2019).

The investigation described the possible effect of four kinds of LEZ 2; one on Hornsgatan, Sveavägen, St Eriksgatan and the same area as the existing zone 1. These were also compared to a zero-alternative which counted in the effect of the new regulation for heavy traffic in zone 1 that will be stricter in 2021 (minimum Euro VI) and that the existing car fleet will be renewed continuously over time.

The recommendation of the investigation was to not implement a LEZ. The reasons were that the calculated possibility to reach the air quality standards without the LEZ, the costs/sacrifices that were calculated to be higher than the benefits and a calculated risk that the LEZ might have a negative effect on air quality. The suggestion was instead to implement a charge on emission standards with higher costs for older vehicles, using the existing congestion charge system. This was considered to be less expensive and easy to administrate (Stadsledningskontoret, 2018).

All of the alternatives counted on full compliance from heavy traffic. Hornsgatan had higher levels of NO_x than accepted in relation to the Swedish standard, which is stricter than the EU-standard. The EU-standard was not exceeded. The conclusions were that the stricter zone 1 in 2021 will have an important effect on air quality if there is a high level of compliance. The effect of zone 2 in the same area as zone 1, which covers almost the inner city, was counted to have a positive effect on air quality. The societal costs were expected to be higher than the benefits in all cases, which meant a negative effect for many inhabitants and few benefits. Hornsgatan was the zone with the least negative effects of a zone 2.

The report also put forward a concern regarding that people would stop buying diesel cars because of the signal zone 2 would send to not buy diesel cars or that people would assume that it would be stricter in time and therefor buy petrol cars instead. Therefore, the report emphasized the importance of communication if a LEZ was to be implemented on Hornsgatan (Stadsledningskontoret, 2018).

During the time period for the investigation of LEZ, between April and September 2018, an election had occurred that changed the majority in Stockholm from left-center to center-right. The Green Party had switched sides and joined the previous opposition. The introduction of LEZ was an important factor for the Green Party to be part of the governing coalition after the elections in 2018. They were driving the decision process to implement LEZ in Stockholm (TT, 2019). In the budget for 2019, which was adopted in November 2019, it was stated that the same actors that had made the previous investigation (the city executive administration together with environment and traffic) were going to investigate and prepare for an introduction of LEZ 2 on Hornsgatan from the first of January 2020 (Trafikkontoret, 2019).

The Traffic Committee in Stockholm decided to implement a new LEZ 2 on Hornsgatan in April 2019 and to be implemented at the beginning of 2020. The decision was based on the

knowledge in the investigation from December 2018 and was motivated by the challenge to meet the air quality standards on Hornsgatan. The Traffic Administration had tried to make the levels go down for many years but without enough results and there was an inspection case active regarding the air quality (NO_x) on Hornsgatan. The introduction of a LEZ was aiming to target this and make the air quality better on the street and possibly the nearby streets (Trafiknämnden Stockholms stad, 2019). It would then be allowed only for Euro 5 or 6 vehicles to drive on the street where it today is a ban of studded tires. There would although be an exception to cross the street for cars with euro 4 or lower. The responsible politician Daniel Helldén from the Green Party said that the decision was important to get better air quality on the most polluted street in the city and that the municipality has to act to reach the statutory regulation. The opposition Jan Valeskog from the Social Democrats said that the decision was hurting the legitimacy of the environmental politics in Stockholm and that it was only symbolic politics (Brandt, 2019). The final decision was supposed to be decided on the city council level in June but the political resistance ended with referring the proposition back by a minority (Magnusson, 2019). The decision was then decided upon again on the 21st of August in the city executive board before heading for the final decision on September 2nd in the City Council (Larsson, 2019).

4.5 Qualitative Semi-Structured Interviews

The empirical data collection consists of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. This was chosen to get flexibility for both interviewees and the researcher as well as to give the interviewees a possibility to develop their answers (Bryman, 2012). It was useful to get as much information as possible and let the interviewees talk more freely. Semi-structured interviews are often advised to be used when there are certain topics to be uncovered, which is of importance for this study since this study aims to capture the social reality and discover what reasons and conditions that influenced the existence of symbolic politics in this specific case study (Bryman, 2012).

4.5.1 Interview Guide and Conducting Interviews

When formulating questions for the interview guide, the point of departure was the research area of symbolic politics and the case of the decision to implement LEZ for cars. Since the interviewees had expertise regarding the case and LEZ for cars, the questions were formulated with this in mind.

According to Kvale (1996), there are at least nine different types of questions in qualitative interviewing. Some of the types are used in this study is introducing questions to specify the relationship between the interviewee and the research subject, follow-up question and probing questions to be able to develop answers and specifying questions to get expanded answers from the respondents (see appendix 9.1) (Bryman, 2012).

The questions were, as mentioned before, open-ended to get as much information as possible. The same interview guide was used for all respondents but depending on the discussion and different results, new follow up questions emerged.

Questions were sent before the interview so the respondents would be able to prepare. Four of the interviews were made face-to-face and one interview was made over the telephone. The respondents were all asked about the acceptance of recording of the interviews to be able to use quotations correctly afterward, which they all agreed to. The interviews were conducted in Swedish since it was the native language of both the researcher and the respondents. I aimed to listen and not be judgemental during the interviews, although it is not possible to be completely objective according to Lowndes et.al. (2018). The recorded interviews were each around 30 minutes long.

4.5.2 Sampling of Respondents

Sampling in qualitative research can be challenging for the qualitative researcher, which can be avoided by having a sample size enough to be able to achieve data saturation and theoretical saturation. At the same time, it is not possible to know when theoretical saturation is achieved in relation to determining many people that should be interviewed. That's why it is important to be clear as a researcher about why the sample size is chosen is appropriate. The purposive sampling of respondents resulted in data saturation since it was possible to problematize and analyze the research questions by the collected data (Bryman, 2012).

The respondents were chosen based on their expertise, familiarity, experience and knowledge of the decision to implement LEZ for cars in Sweden and Stockholm. Their titles can be seen in the table below.

From the political side, the respondents are the two main combatants in the discussions of introducing LEZ in Stockholm. Daniel Helldén is from the Green Party and responsible for traffic issues in the ruling majority. He has been on the forefront of introducing LEZ. The introduction of LEZ in Stockholm was an important issue for the Green Party when they switched side after the elections from the left-side to the right-side so the new coalition would be center-right (TT, 2019). Jan Valeskog from the Social Democrats is the largest Party on the oppositional side and lost the Government in Stockholm after the elections. Valeskog has taken the fight against an introduction of LEZ and towards Helldén (Brandt, 2019).

From the civil servant-side the respondents have been the commissioner for the national LEZ-investigation, the commissioner for the LEZ-investigation in Stockholm and a LEZ-expert from the Swedish Environmental Research Institute (a company run by the Swedish state together with enterprise). The respondents' competence and knowledge of the policy formulation and introduction of LEZ in Sweden and Stockholm was supposed to give a broad picture and insight for the study.

The respondents were contacted via email with a brief description of the aim of the thesis and an explanation of the master program and the researcher. All of the asked respondents accepted

to participate in the study. No one asked specifically to be anonymous in the study and they were also contacted later to be able to accept to appear by name and were offered to be anonymous. All respondents accepted to have their names and quotes in the study, although one participant wanted to clarify that he did not consider it to be quotes since it was translated from Swedish to English.

| Name | Title | Interview questions | Interviews |
|----------------|---|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Daniel Helldén | Deputy Mayor, responsible for traffic (MP) Stockholm city since 2014. <i>As chairman of the Traffic Committee he led the decision process. He has been advocating for LEZ both externally and within the Green Party.</i> | Sent August 19 | 22/8 at 10.00 in Stockholm |
| Anton Västberg | Former Commissioner of the LEZ investigation, City Executive Office Stockholm City. <i>He was project leader for all major infrastructure projects and the right hand of the City Director General for six years. In this role he was in close contact with the political leaders in Stockholm.</i> | Sent August 19 | 23/8 at 9.00 in Stockholm |
| Anders Roth | Commissioner IVL, an expert in LEZ <i>A leading expert on LEZ in Sweden. He has worked both as an investigator, researcher and public servant in Gothenburg.</i> | Sent August 20 | 21/8 at 15.15 In Gothenburg |
| Kristofer Elo | Commissioner, Swedish Transport Agency responsible for the LEZ-investigation <i>The most important investigator on the national level. He led the investigations commissioned by the Swedish Government that was used to form the LEZ-legislation.</i> | Sent August 19 | 21/8 at 10.00 over telephone |
| Jan Valeskog | Deputy Mayor, Opposition (S) Stockholm city <i>The former coalition partner of Helldén that started being in favor of LEZ but later turned to be the leading opponent.</i> | Sent August 19 | 22/8 at 9.00 am in Stockholm |

Table 4.1 Respondents

4.6 Data Analysis

The strategy of data analysis followed some of the main steps, according to Bryman (2012). The collected data was transcribed to make the data manageable. By listening to the interviews and doing a thematic analysis deriving from the research questions, important factors were discovered for the decision to implement LEZ for cars in Stockholm. In the identification of

themes in the data, several useful quotes were found for the results and analysis. Lastly, an important step in the data analysis was to do data reduction (Bryman, 2012).

The respondents got the possibility to see and accept the quotations that the researcher intended to use from the data after the data analysis was completed. Two language adjustments were made after feedback from respondents.

4.7 Critical Discussion and Limitations of Chosen Methods

Regarding the methodology in this thesis there are several limitations to it. The factors of reliability and validity are debated if they should be considered in case study research and when the methodology is qualitative (Bryman, 2012). The researcher of this study has tried to consider reliability and validity in relation to the research design. The researcher has tried to be as transparent as possible and shows how data collection was made and how it has been analyzed.

The choice to do a single case study means that the external validity or generalizability of the research conducted is limited (Bryman, 2012). The reliability of this study could have been stronger if additional interviews had been conducted since more added interviews and respondents could have strengthened the results by providing new angles or experience to the empirical data collection. Since this is a unique case study, it lacks possibility to generalize the results. If a comparative study had been conducted instead, the generalizability could have been stronger.

The chosen process of deduction instead of induction is unusual in qualitative research according to Bryman (2012). This might be a limitation of this thesis considering the limitations of qualitative methods that it is hard to replicate, that the interpretation of the researcher is important and that there can be a lack of transparency of why respondents are chosen and why certain data analysis is made (Bryman, 2012).

There has been a lot of translation made by the researcher since many documents and articles are in Swedish as well as the interviews conducted. This is important for the study since interpretation is a fundamental tool of the researcher in qualitative research, which means that the translation might have affected the exact correct interpretation of the collected data.

It is not optimal to use a process of deduction in qualitative research methods, and it was challenging to test the hypotheses in this qualitative study in a reliable way since it is hard to measure the strengths of the results. The qualitative nature of the study relying on the interpretation of the researcher means that it is impossible to be totally objective (Bryman, 2012).

The concept of symbolic politics is interpreted differently in different research areas, which makes it difficult to study and the researcher has to be observant and critical of sources used. This can mean that the respondents might have different views and understandings of the concept of symbolic politics, which might have influenced the results. Symbolic politics is an

abstract concept and the practical use of the concept is often different than the academic understanding. To handle this, the researcher has tried to be transparent regarding the use of the concept symbolic politics in this thesis.

5. Results

The results will be presented according to the questions that are the basis of my study;

- *What were the reasons for the use of symbolic politics in the decision to implement LEZ in Stockholm?*
- *What were the conditions driving the adoption of the symbolic LEZ decision in Stockholm?*

These are presented under headlines, one for each question. This section is followed by the Analysis section where the results are applied and analyzed in relation to the theoretical model presented in chapter 3.

The interviews gave a picture of a much-debated and contested political issue regarding the decision to implement LEZ for cars. The use and presence of symbolic politics in the decision were mentioned by all of the respondents.

5.1 Reasons for use of symbolic politics

The first of the five reasons for using symbolic politics in environmental politics was ***‘Disguise of true intentions’***. The disguise of true intentions means that the purpose of introducing an instrument to tackle a problem is not the aimed effect of it but the interest of the decision-maker. It can also contain an aim to demonstrate taking action in an issue that can't be tackled by the governmental body alone. This was present in the results in several ways.

Regarding the interest of the decision-maker to introduce LEZ for better air quality, there were different views among the interviewed persons. Some interviewees were talking about the importance of LEZ to tackle the problem of air quality and some about the ineffectiveness of the chosen LEZ to meet air quality problems.

There were also other views on the interest of the decision-maker. Some respondents mentioned the use of symbolic politics in the decision of LEZ as a politically important issue for the Green Party and affecting the results of the coalition negotiations after the elections. This is an example of such a quote:

Västberg: *”The Green Party changed side (to the center-right coalition) and LEZ became symbolic politics in that game”*

There was also a very present discussion regarding if there was a problem with air quality at all, and if the decision was necessary. On the other side was the argumentation based on the problem that Stockholm doesn't reach the air quality standards on Hornsgatan and the importance of a LEZ as the only available instrument that was possible to be introduced on the local level. Examples of such quotes were the following:

Helldén: *“The whole inner city would have benefited from being inside the LEZ but it is a political issue how hard you can push. Hornsgatan is the dirtiest street so it is a good place to start.”*

Valeskog: *“Daniel Helldén is bluffing about this to affirm his voters”*

Västberg: *“I understand why they (the politicians) act as they do. But it has less to do with air quality and more about symbolic politics. The same goes for the opponents. Their arguments are more about betrayal and not at all about air quality”*

Several of the respondents mentioned the challenge of tackling the issue of air quality and car traffic on the local governmental level, which is connected to “disguise of true intentions”. The lack of possibility to use the congestion charge-system (which is governed on the national level) to monitor heavy traffic and to use it to differentiate the charge depending on car emissions was mentioned by both civil servants and both political representatives. The following quote is an example of the challenge to tackle the issue on local level:

Helldén: *“We need to reduce the nitrogen oxide emissions on Hornsgatan and the only alternative to Low Emission Zones is that we reduce the traffic. It has always been a problem and there has been little we can do about it until we got the possibility to introduce Low Emission Zones”.*

The reason **Uncertainty** was also present in the results. Uncertainty could be when regulators are taking action in an area with weak scientific explanations because of public pressure to act, even if there is a lack of knowledge of policy instrument effects on the issue.

The big debate of the introduction of LEZ was a discussion about facts and regarding the state of the air quality in Stockholm and the possible development that would follow from introducing LEZ. This can be connected to “*uncertainty*” since the effects and facts about LEZ was so debated and LEZ for cars was not yet adopted in Sweden.

From the beginning, all parties were positive to introduce LEZ in Stockholm and the Green Party and Social Democratic Party was both in the Government together that proposed the law that allowed introduction of LEZ for cars on local level in Sweden. Here are two examples of that:

Helldén: *“At that time (after Dieselgate) all parties supported that we should have LEZ at our disposal. The design process was the next step. But for us it was obvious from the beginning that this was a policy tool that we wanted to use to reduce pollution.”*

Valeskog: *“We thought it was good the get this tool after Dieselgate.”*

According to the civil servants and the Social Democratic politician the investigation in Stockholm showed that a LEZ for cars was not necessary, but was pushed forward on one street since the political majority, led by the Green Party, demanded a LEZ. On the other hand, Helldén from the Green Party talked about not reaching the national goals for air quality in

Stockholm and Roth mentioned that the discussion 20 years ago was also that we would have reached the air quality goals by now and have much cleaner vehicles than we actually have today. Here are quotes considering this reasonings:

Valeskog: *"When we saw the numbers, we realized that this is only a symbolic issue and has no environmental effect at all. It only causes a lot of costs."*

Västberg: *"We investigated numerous variants of LEZ. The intention with the law is to have a larger zone. We investigated a zone equal for the one for heavy traffic. Our recommendation from the public servant side was not to take this action. The benefits were lower than the costs. If you, however, want to act it is more appropriate to test with one street only. The politicians demanded in principle that we should proceed with this type of instrument. Hornsgatan is the least inappropriate. But even there the benefits do not exceed the costs"*

Roth: *"A small effect but not much. It all depends on what will happen next"*

Cost reduction, when the lack of knowledge mentioned under "uncertainty" makes the decision-makers act more symbolically instead of gathering costly new experience and knowledge, was visible in the results. The cost reduction appeared as the will to introduce LEZ as the only available instrument, even though it was so debated from opposition and civil servants.

Several of the respondents mentioned the availability of LEZ as one of the few policy tools that the city can use, and the lack of other kinds of tools to handle emissions from cars and air quality. As mentioned before, it was also a common wish to use the differentiated congestion charge based on emission from cars and to monitor violations of heavy vehicles. This was agreed upon by civil servants and both political sides. The possibility of doing it although contained different views. One civil servant thought that it would be possible to make the Government change the law of the congestion charge but another civil servant thought that it would have been a dream to differentiate and too complicated politically, something that Helldén from the Green Party also mentioned.

Helldén: *"There is a normal trend in environmental politics that you blame the situation on the lack of policy tools, but when you get a tool then you don't want to use it. Instead you start asking for another tool."*

When it comes to the more constructive reasons for use, Integration and social orientation by symbols can be helpful in a society that is very specialized. The use of symbolic politics in this case can have the purpose of getting a common understanding among different interest groups and establishing societal norms. This was present in the results as a discussion of timing and the future development of fuel for cars in society. As the quotation below show, one important effect of the LEZ can be to send a signal about the transformation in society from diesel cars towards electric cars or gasoline:

Helldén: *"It is much easier now after Dieselgate. Volkswagen and Scania now have a report about how Stockholm can become an e-car city by 2030, but Volvo is totally silent."*

Valeskog: *“It is a way to signal that old diesel cars are not welcome”*

Västberg: *“The diesel market will probably continue to shrink. It’s because of the big picture”*

Communication of abstract scientific concepts was also a more constructive use of symbolic politics by using easy language and descriptions of complicated environmental issues as well as risks and barriers connected to it. This was visible in the results but there were different opinions of what the decision communicated.

The signal of the LEZ was considered important for the interviewed persons, as mentioned above. The LEZ was considered to be a bit blunt by some of the interviewed but also quite straightforward and clear for the public and inhabitants. Several also mentioned that it has worked in other countries and cities so it should not be so hard in Stockholm:

Roth: *“It is a bit of a duck pond. There are many cities that have introduced LEZ (for cars) so the question should maybe be why we haven’t done it”*

Roth: *“It is a combination of doing something actually for the air quality and to send a signal that the city is not, in first hand, for the cars and especially not the polluting cars, but the city is for the inhabitants”*.

Helldén: *“We hope that people will change cars to cleaner vehicles.”*

Elo: *“The law has clearly a symbolic value. It will get increased symbolic value if you impose LEZ on city level.”*

It was also debated what was actually communicated and whether a LEZ would mean a change to electric cars or towards gasoline. Helldén mentioned that both the car industry and the public sector have a large interest in electric cars and that some people in Stockholm have money to buy electric cars. Others were not so sure about the electric car development. Valeskog, for example, talked about a transformation towards gasoline. Here are examples of different views:

Valeskog: *“Almost all car magazines have put forward the question if I should buy a gasoline or diesel car. The advice is to buy gasoline, because you don’t know what will happen with the LEZ and you need to have your car for 10 years”*

Helldén: *“Valeskog thinks diesel is the solution to everything. He argues that I destroy the climate work because diesel cars can run on HVO, but what we do is to push for electric.”*

Valeskog: *“We got an increase of CO₂-emissions by 700 000 tons last year because of the change from people buying gasoline cars instead of diesel cars”*

5.2 Conditions driving the adoption of the symbolic LEZ

When it comes to the conditions for adopting symbolic environmental legislation **Political pressure to respond** is when political suggestions aimed to show decisiveness and relieve

pressure in an important issue because of political pressure. The high pressure could make the legislation more symbolic and show strong political-strategic features.

The political pressure to act was one of the most commonly mentioned reasons for LEZ to be introduced in Stockholm. Much was connected to the importance of LEZ for the Green Party and the turn out of the elections. Several of the respondents said that the Green Party has a profile of caring for environmental and climate issues, which makes air quality and LEZ important for their voters. The Green Party had been pushing for LEZ from the city of Stockholm towards the national level and in their national government coalition, something that was mentioned by Helldén. When it then was made possible on national level to implement LEZ for municipalities, Stockholm was first in line to implement it. Two examples of statements made that had connection to the pressure to act are the following:

Västberg: *“A party like the Green Party want to have a profile in environment and climate issues. They will try to win voters. A decision like this will upset many people but it is not the same as they target.”*

Helldén: *“This has been an extremely political tense issue”*

Some respondents consider the pressure to come from political prestige and some consider it because of bad air quality and finally having a tool to use. The bad air quality issue was referred to by Helldén to a legal process in court towards Stockholm concerning Hornsgatan because of bad air quality. The political prestige was mentioned as the political importance of LEZ for the Green Party who had been at the forefront of implementing it. Examples of political pressure as an important factor can be viewed in the following quotes:

Västberg: *“LEZ was definitely an issue that was politically controversial. Politicians had very different views of the effect”*

Valeskog: *“The Green Party and the Center Party have locked themselves to this symbolic issue”*

The second condition ***Lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits*** were aiming at the use of symbolic legislation or refraining from passing pieces of legislation because of lack of appropriate solutions to a socially relevant problem or when the short-term costs are higher than the benefits.

There are several aspects mentioned by the interviewees that concern the lack of solutions and the costs in relation to benefits. The issue of not having access to relevant tools such as using the congestion charge system to a greater extent, as mentioned above, or having dynamic zones as in Oslo where zone gets activated when the emissions are at a high level, are such examples. The mentioned concerns regarding higher costs than benefits according to the investigation made by the city of Stockholm can fall under this category too.

The design of the LEZ on only one street and as zone 2 and not 3 are examples of not using all the possibilities of the LEZ-tool and refraining from passing pieces of legislation, but it is

considered by several interviewees as a compromise to start with to get acceptance from the public and considering what is politically possible and to send a signal of a possible development in the future.

The debate about whether it is necessary to do something about the air quality at all and the political debate is other aspects that can have contributed to the lack of solutions and benefits of the LEZ. The following quotes are examples of this:

Roth: *"It is important to take actions that you feel are politically balanced"*

Elo: *"How large zone you choose to impose have great importance for the effect of the zone. Also, if there are possibilities for other traffic to cross or go around; then the effect of the LEZ decrease"*

Valeskog: *"As the compromise became a LEZ for only one street, it is obvious that this is only symbolic politics"*

The **Societal conflict** is the condition when there is a larger societal conflict between groups that is driving the adoption of symbolic legislation. As seen in previous research, politically more important interest groups can be favored by a more substantive legislature that goes in line with their interests. For less important interest groups it is more common with symbolic legislation to manage their demands.

The possible societal conflict in the results was visible mostly in one way: the effect on car owners. Car owners can be seen as an interest group that will be affected by the LEZ according to the results. Some respondents mentioned car-hate as a societal conflict were car owners feel threatened by the LEZ-proposal and some mentioned car owners to be affected by higher costs in relation to LEZ. Here are some examples of the "car-conflict":

Roth: *"Some people argue that it is car-hate that is the reason for this type of proposals, so it easily becomes polarized."*

Helldén: *"I think people are going to accept this quite easily. Because people are changing cars to hybrids or electric cars."*

Västberg: *"Zone 3 has been discussed but then it would really be a question of social standing. Electric cars are so expensive so then you would really shut people out. That does not seem to be viable."*

Elo: *"The negative aspect is that it affects the public and companies to a large extent. You can say that you push the costs on the public because this does not burden the state or the municipality. The public must invest in new vehicles"*.

The last condition of adopting symbolic environmental legislation was the **Issue of high complexity**. It is quite straightforward and refers to that more complex political issues are more likely to be addressed by symbolic legislation.

Many of the issues mentioned above regarding possible tools to use and what is politically acceptable make it a complex issue. The political reality after the elections was mentioned several times as important for the decision to introduce LEZ since the Green Party switched sides partly because of the LEZ-issue. It was a political compromise. The fact discussion was very present among both civil servants and politicians. There were also discussions about facts regarding if the air quality is bad or not, what is good enough regarding air quality and what effect the LEZ might have. As the quotes from two civil servants below show, the views can be very different:

Västberg: *“The air is not so bad. We tried to kill the myth that we had terribly bad air quality”*

Roth: *“Are we really satisfied with reaching EU:s air quality directive? We have a smoking ban on public places, but we are still allowed to drive around with an internal combustion engine in the city. Is it really reasonable?”*

6. Analysis and Discussion

This section follows the format of the presentation in previous section 5.1 (Results) that was divided into headlines based on the questions and hypotheses in this study. The results are analyzed and discussed in relation to the theoretic framework.

The first hypotheses (H1-H5) were disguise of true intentions, uncertainty, cost reduction, integration and social orientation by symbols, communication of abstract scientific concepts. These are connected to the first part of the theoretical model and the first question in the investigation concerning the reasons for using symbolic politics in the decision to implement LEZ in Stockholm.

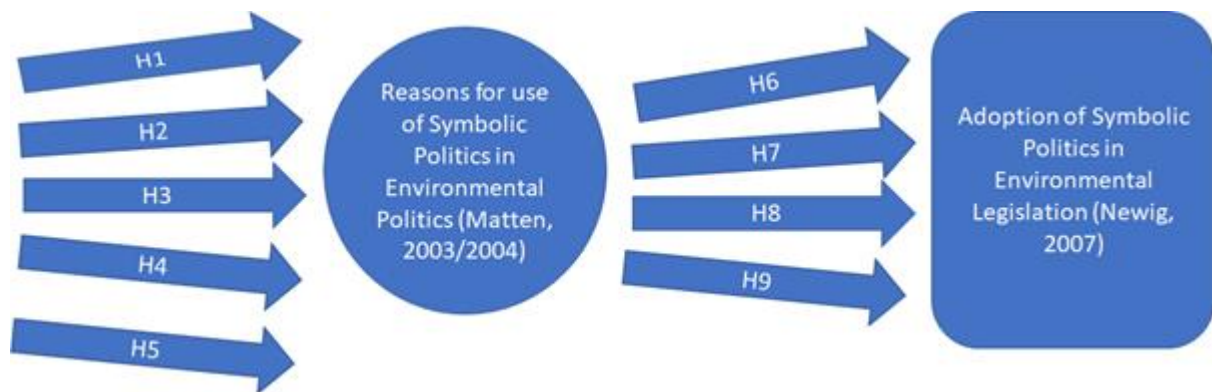


Figure 6.1. *Reasons for Use and Adoption of Symbolic Politics* (Matten, 2003/2004) (Newig, 2007)

The following hypotheses (H6-H9) political pressure to respond, lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits, societal conflict and the high complexity of the issue were considered as possible factors influencing the decision from the second part of the theoretical model. This was also connected to the second question; what were the conditions driving the adoption of the symbolic LEZ decision in Stockholm.

As the previous research described, symbolic environmental legislation and politics can be an instrument for managing rather than solving environmental problems and to release political pressure and demonstrate action. Symbolic legislation can also be seen as a self-deception of individuals that are psychologically divided between the costs of policies and supporting meaningful environmental policies. The public choice-perspective suggests that symbolic politics is used to produce a political solution to pressing issues (from media, political opponents or interest groups) and that it is of importance to avoid a decrease in popularity. It's also to demonstrate taking action and avoiding costs (Newig, 2007). Symbolic legislation is suggested to be characterized by low substantive effectiveness and high political-strategic effectiveness. According to the study by Newig (2007), symbolic legislation can be effective in achieving political-strategic goals such as removing issues of high complexity from the public agenda, and at the same time be ineffective in terms of a substantive solution for the respective issues at stake (Newig, 2007).

There are to some extent examples of all the hypotheses present in the material, as we have seen in the results section. The reasons for using symbolic politics and the conditions driving the adoption were present in the results to different extent and strength.

6.1 The reasons for use of symbolic politics in environmental politics

The *disguise of true intentions* contained a view that the decision-maker would have an intention to implement a symbolic instrument to handle a pressing issue. It also meant that the decision-maker wants to take action but lacks the possibility to tackle it by the governmental body alone. This was most visible in the results regarding the possibility to handle air quality and car traffic on the local level, and that there was a lack of instruments to use. The “disguise” was visible in some ways but mostly as a critique and as handling a pressing issue with a symbolic instrument. It was not clear whether it was a disguise or an intention to make the LEZ symbolic. It is hard to measure this and the respondent that might be able to give an answer, which is the responsible politician Daniel Helldén, would probably not admit deceiving motives if it was the case.

Uncertainty meant taking action because of pressure, even if the knowledge about the policy instrument was uncertain. This was visible as a fact-discussion based on Dieselgate. LEZ was considered an important tool after Dieselgate for the politicians, but the views among them changed in relation to the elections and later in relation to the LEZ-report. The different views of the possible effects of a LEZ contained views of the development of the car fleet from diesel towards petrol or electric, the possibility to use LEZ as the only available tool and the societal cost of a LEZ.

Cost reduction was considered when decision-makers were taking symbolic action instead of gathering new costly experience or knowledge. This was visible as a consequence of lacking instruments on the local level and not being possible to use the congestion-charge system in a desirable way since it was regulated on a national level. It was a consensus regarding the significance of lacking the possibility to use the congestion-charge system. This might also have had an effect on the choice to use the only available tool, LEZ, on the small symbolic scale.

Integration and social orientation by symbols meant that the purpose was to get a common understanding among interest groups and establishing norms in a specialized society. This was present as a societal discussion following the Dieselgate. The LEZ was supposed to send a signal that diesel is out and electric cars are in. Some although thought that the effect might be that people would, in fact, buy gasoline-cars. This discussion is also part of the overall discussion regarding facts and effects that is the core of the issue.

Communication of abstract scientific concepts had similarities with *Integration and social orientation by symbols* but focused on communicating complicated environmental issues in an easy way. The discussions were similar and concerned that the LEZ was a bit blunt but at the same time easy for people to understand. Since it exists in other countries and also to some

extent in Sweden for heavy traffic, there might already be knowledge of what a LEZ might mean. The diesel-discussion can be considered as a complicated environmental issue, that might be handled by a LEZ if the signal described above is working to make people change cars. What the effect would be was strongly debated between the politicians. It is not easy to judge who is right and what a LEZ will signal and how people will act in the end.

6.2 Conditions driving the adoption of symbolic environmental legislation

The political pressure to respond might be one of the most present conditions in the results together with *lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits*. The *political pressure* aimed at relieving the decision-maker from political pressure by responding with more symbolic legislation with stronger political-strategic features. The *lack of clear solutions and greater costs than benefits* focused on the use of symbolic legislation when there is a lack of appropriate solutions or when the short-term costs are higher than the benefits. It can also mean not passing pieces of legislation. These were mentioned in relation to the importance of the issue of LEZ for the Green Party and as a question of high relevance and pressure for them. Political prestige was mentioned but also the genuine importance of LEZ as an environmental instrument and symbol for the Green Party.

Considering the pressure from the opposition and the civil servants that the LEZ was unnecessary or not a good tool to use, it can have made the LEZ weaker. The pressure from media, the civil servants and the opposition considering the investigation of LEZ and that the costs would be too high in relation to the benefits might have influenced the negotiations within the ruling majority and made the LEZ more symbolic. This would support the hypotheses *Political pressure to respond* and *Lack of clear solutions or greater short-run costs than benefits* since the pressure might have affected the decision to implement LEZ to be more symbolic. The issue of implementing LEZ was of great importance for the Green party and since it was such an important political issue for them, they would implement it in some way as it was of *political-strategic* importance.

As mentioned above under *Cost reduction*, the lack of appropriate instruments might have affected the LEZ decision and the design of the LEZ since the city only considered to have LEZ as an instrument and was unable to use the congestion-charge system since it was governed from national level. At the same time, the LEZ tool was not used to its maximum regarding the possible zones, which might be seen as refraining from passing pieces of legislation. This might have been a compromise to get the introduction of a LEZ at all, concerning the critical view of the costs and benefits of the LEZ in the investigation and the heavy critique from the opposition. It was probably not so easy for the Green Party to convince the other parties in the ruling majority.

The *societal conflict* concerned interest groups and previous research which said that more important interest groups might be favored by more substantive legislature while symbolic legislation will satisfy less important groups. The results showed a “car-conflict” that can be

seen as a larger question of the role of the car in the city in relation to “people” and city planning. Car-owners as an interest group were considered to be affected by the LEZ and car-hate as a societal conflict was mentioned as well as that car-owners might feel threatened by the LEZ-proposal and some mentioned car-owners to be affected by higher costs in relation to LEZ. This might be of interest considering the self-deception of individuals mentioned in the theory, where people might both want to support meaningful environmental policies but also consider the costs of it. Concerning the view of satisfying the privileged group, they can be the electric car owners in this case.

Finally, the *high complexity of the issue* is not so easy to judge but there were several complex aspects of the issue regarding possible tools to use, what was politically acceptable, the political-strategic features in the decision, the fact-discussion of the how bad the air quality was, what is good enough regarding air quality and what effect the LEZ might have are all quite complicated concerns affecting the issue. It is not so easy to get a non-symbolic and straight-forward environmental policy when the views are so divided.

Given the analysis and discussion above, the findings of the study identified that the examined reasons and conditions for adopting symbolic politics in environmental policy are present in this case.

7. Conclusions and Future Research

This section declares for the conclusions drawn from the analysis and discussion in this thesis and based on that, suggestions for future research will be presented.

The contribution of this thesis is in accordance with the aim; to examine the reasons and conditions for the adoption of symbolic politics that has been present in the decision to implement LEZ for light vehicles (cars) in Stockholm. On a higher level, it has contributed with knowledge of the use of reasons and conditions for the adoption of symbolic environmental policies, especially when the policy decision is politically sensitive. It is not a generalizable result since this is a unique case study and thus lacks the possibility to be generalized. It might although be useful for studying other unique cases that are strongly affected by symbolic politics. The methods used in this study have proven to be successful to examine the use of reasons and conditions for adopting symbolic environmental politics in the chosen case.

The collected data confirms the presence of all hypotheses to some degree, as we have seen in the previous sections. The analysis reveals a stronger support for the following three hypotheses of reasons for using symbolic politics; *uncertainty, cost reduction, integration of social orientation by symbols*. The hypothesis that symbolic politics can be used to *communicate abstract scientific concepts* was weaker, although present to some extent. This was also debated as the respondents had different opinions about facts regarding air quality and hence came to different conclusions about the need to take action. If symbolic politics was used to *disguise the true intentions* in this case, was hard to determine because it was disputed among the respondents. This was partly used as an accusation from the opposition and denied by the responsible politician Daniel Helldén.

Three hypotheses of conditions for adopting symbolic politics showed a stronger confirmation in the results. The first was the *political pressure to respond* to Dieselgate, especially from the Green Party's electorate and members. LEZ was one of few policy tools available on the local level to limit diesel car traffic. The low effect on air quality and high costs for using the policy tool was in line with the condition *lack of clear solutions and greater short-run costs than benefits*. The *societal conflict* about LEZ was centered around the role of cars vs pedestrians and residents in the city. Car-owners are an important interest group and therefore it was in accordance with the hypothesis to pass only a symbolic decision limiting them from driving with old diesel cars on one street in Stockholm. The condition *high complexity of the issue* was visible in the data to some extent but hard to measure. Several complex circumstances appeared in the material, but the decision-makers arguments were not connected to the complexity of the issue directly.

This thesis can have a practical contribution to decision-makers' understanding of the reasons for using symbolic politics in environmental policy and what conditions are important in the adoption of such a policy tool. The study can also be of interest for policy experts and

researchers since it is important to understand the reasons and conditions of symbolic politics in environmental policy as well as the decisions from a political perspective.

7.1 Suggested Future Research

For future research, there are several different paths to discover. One area of potential research in relation to this thesis is to look at more cases, compare or do a quantitative study to discover patterns of reasons of the use of symbolic politics in environmental policy and in what kind of contexts or combination factors appear.

Further research could also study the decision to implement LEZ in Stockholm by using game theory to study the motives of different actors. Such a study could also contain interviews with other party representatives to investigate the interests that might have affected the decision of the ruling coalition.

Since this study could see that the political proportions and symbolic value of the issue were much larger than the concrete effects of the issue itself, it might be of interest to study the potential movement and influence of symbolic politics to other politically important issues.

Finally, this study has contributed with new knowledge to the area of reasons and conditions for adopting symbolic environmental policies in the case of LEZ for cars in Stockholm. One area that was not present in the theory or hypotheses but that appeared to be of importance for the researcher in the results was the issue of conflict in politics. Since politicians have the need to show their different ideological starting points and seek conflict, the issue of power of the communication and the built-in conflict in politics might be important as factors affecting why issues become symbolically important. This would be interesting to look at as a complementary reason for symbolic politics.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Interview Guide

This semi-structured interview guide was used since it gives a structure of the interview to cover important aspects and also have the flexibility to pick up on what the interviewees say. It is a useful guide to get the frames and understandings of the interviewees (Bryman, 2012).

I. Introduction

The study was introduced, and the respondents were asked if recording could be accepted.

- Could you please introduce yourself and your role in relation to the introduction of LEZ for cars in Stockholm?

II. The decision and design process of the LEZ for cars in Stockholm

These questions are aimed at identifying the context of symbolic politics in the design process as well as factors that were the most important for the LEZ design:

- What factors do you think were the key factors affecting the design of LEZ in Stockholm?
- What factors do you think were most important?
- What factors do you think were most disputed?
- Do you think that the LEZ-design in Stockholm is well integrated with the intention of the national framework for LEZ?
- What do you think of LEZ as a policy instrument?
- Do you think that the LEZ, as it is designed, will have an effect on air quality?
- Do you think that the decision to introduce LEZ had any more reasons than to get better air quality on Hornsgatan? If so, what could that be?
- Do you think that the LEZ is implemented for better air quality or symbolic politics?