



UNIVERSITY OF
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No jobs on a dead planet

– Swedish unions' perceptions of their roles in a just transition

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Abstract

If we are to avoid the worst-case scenarios of climate change and environmental issues, we must drastically reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases. Such a transition to an ecologically sustainable society has far-reaching consequences on production systems and labour markets. Even so, little research has been done on how labour unions take on these cha(lle)nges, and what they might mean for them and their members. This lack of research is particularly true for Sweden, which is an interesting case for its high union density and unique labour market structure. For this reason, this study looks at what roles Swedish union organisations perceive for themselves in the climate transition, through the theoretical frameworks of Agenda 2030 and just transition. By conducting interviews with sustainability officers at the Swedish unions most engaged with ecological issues, this study found that they perceive several roles for themselves within a three-dimensional conceptualisation of sustainability. This opens a space for union organisations to take on ecological dimensions, whilst continuing to focus their efforts on the social and economic interests of their members. They thus work to ensure that the transition is just. They also identify various challenges that they face in these efforts, and opportunities which could serve to strengthen Swedish unionism if it were to take on ecological issues through a just transition framework.

Key words: Just transition • Sweden • Labour unions • Unionisation • The Swedish Model • Climate change • Sustainability • Sustainable development • Sustainable Development Goals • SDG • Climate transition • Agenda 2030

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Abbreviations and glossary

COP – The Conference of the Parties, the annual global climate change meetings and negotiations established under the UNFCCC (see below).

EU ETS – The EU (greenhouse gas) emissions trading system

Fossilfritt Sverige – Fossil Free Sweden

ILO – The International Labour Organisation

IPCC – The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

ITUC – The International Trade Union Confederation, which is the global union organisation and represents 200 million workers in 163 countries and territories and has 332 national affiliates (ITUC, 2020).

LO – *Landsorganisationen*, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation. A central union organisation that organises the blue-collar workers' unions in Sweden, including industry, service, and care sectors.

Saco – *Sveriges akademikers centralorganisation*, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations. A central union organisation that organises the unions of workers with an academic degree in Sweden.

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

TCO – *Tjänstemännens centralorganisation*, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees. A central union organisation that organises the civil servants' unions in Sweden.

'Trade union' or 'labour union' – This study uses the term labour union, but these can be used interchangeably, and many international union organisations use the term 'trade'. A union is a group which uses collective bargaining in the context of labour.

UNFCCC – The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

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1. Introduction

If we are to avoid the worst-case scenarios of climate change and environmental issues, we must drastically reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases. Human activities have caused approximately 0,8-1,2°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels, and this is likely to increase to 1,5°C between 2030 and 2052 if we continue at our current emission rate. The higher the global temperature, the higher the risk for climate-related disasters and their impacts for human and non-human animals, as well as for the natural systems we inhabit. The rising temperature also elevates risks to food security, health, political destabilisation and unrest, as well as human security. These risks also depend on geographic location, levels of vulnerability, and on the implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies. In order to limit global warming to 1,5°C, global emissions need to be halved in nine years (2030) and reach net zero by 2050 (IPCC, 2018; Waterfield and IPCC, n.d.). Such a climate transition of society has profound consequences for labour, as our industries, production, and consumption are coupled with fossil dependency and unsustainability. Thus, the transformation of work is essential when moving towards an ecologically sustainable society (Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020; Rätzzel and Uzzell, 2011a). For these reasons, this study looks at how such a transition can be achieved without detrimental effects to peoples' livelihoods or to labour rights.

Demands for the societal changes required have widely been met with scepticism in many labour contexts, including unions, who argue that jobs must take precedence for the sake of peoples' employments, social relations and overall well-being (Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020; Rätzzel and Uzzell, 2011a). Union organisations have generally been slow in incorporating climate change and environmental issues into their agenda, but environmental movements have been equally slow to recognise the legitimacy of workers' interests (Bell, 2020; Rätzzel and Uzzell, 2011a). This 'jobs versus the environment dilemma' is increasingly being met with the idea of just transition, which entails transitioning to ecologically sustainable labour markets, service and production industries, whilst respecting labourers' rights and ensuring social and economic sustainability throughout that transition (Union to Union and Östmark, 2019). The possibility of ensuring the interests of their members, as well as new jobs being created in the transition, further fuels union engagement with the just transition concept (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021; Lundström et al., 2015). Importantly, workers are, through unions, mobilised in the largest popular movement in the world (ITUC, 2020). Unions have

two centuries of experience in managing complex political economic situations and trying to produce more just alternatives to existing situations. (Stevis and Felli, 2015, p. 40)

This means that unions have the potential to incite important changes in societies' production and industries, and thus our greenhouse gas emissions.

This study looks at these issues in Sweden, which is an interesting case to examine because of its long history of one of the world's highest levels of union membership and a distinct 'Swedish model' of institutionalised labour organisation (Cassegård et al., 2017; Lundström et al., 2015). It also has one of the most climate change aware populations in the world (Novus, 2019; Pelham and Gallup Polls, 2009). Further, Sweden is considered to be one of the countries with the best preconditions to implement the Sustainable Development Goals in the global Agenda 2030 (Regeringskansliet, 2017). Sweden has relatively low territorial emissions thanks to its high concentration of renewables in its energy mix (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021a), but one of the biggest carbon footprints in the world (The Global Footprint Network, 2019). If all people lived like the average Swede, we would need four planet Earths to sustain us (ibid). Even so, very little research has been done on Swedish unions' engagement with ecological issues (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021). This study addresses this research gap by looking at how Swedish unions perceive their own role in a just transition of the labour market. This is thus an opportunity to see how Swedish unions take on the challenges of ensuring labour interests whilst we transition to an ecologically sustainable society, and if they also identify any opportunities therein. From my perspective, as a Swedish person engaged in both climate change issues and social justice issues, I am driven to see how Swedish unions construct their roles in the intersection of these momentous concerns.

This study has three main parts: In the first part (chapters 1-3), I describe the research, its aim, and position it within previous academic scholarship. I then describe the theoretical framework that informs the analysis, as well as the methods employed to conduct the study. Through a description of the background for the Swedish case (chapter 4), I move to the second part, in which the study's results are presented and analysed (chapter 5). Lastly, in the third part (chapters 6-7), the results are discussed, and conclusions are drawn as to what roles the unions find for themselves in the urgently needed transition to a sustainable labour market in Sweden.

1.1. Aim and research questions

This research aims to investigate just transition in a Swedish context through the empirical lens of Swedish labour unions, and their role therein. The research questions that guide this research are:

- How do unions perceive their role in a just transition in Sweden?
 - o What are the opportunities and challenges for a just transition, of particular relevance for the unions, according to their sustainability officers?

1.2. Previous research and delimitations

Before presenting the theoretical framework that guides this thesis, I here contextualise this theory within previous research on the topic. The existing research on sustainability, a transition of society to

mitigate climate change and just transition are explained in the theoretical chapter. Whilst this is a study within the research field of Global Studies, the majority of previous research on the topic at hand can be found within sociological labour literature and environmental studies literature. These scholarships have to a certain extent worked in silos, where:

Environmental studies have largely ignored labour issues, while labour studies have paid little attention to climate change issues (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011a, p. 1215).

As such, this nexus is a fairly new field with many unexplored venues (Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020; Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011a). This also affects what literature is available to study (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021), which is why this study partly relies on so-called ‘grey literature’ from organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

This study is relevant to the interdisciplinary field of Global Studies because it locates global issues of transition and development to sustainable societies in the local Swedish context. As such, it opens for the possibility to look at the potential contributions of Swedish labour movements in a global just transition, or what Swedish unionism can learn about just transition from other countries. This research thus applies a ‘glocal’ approach (Eriksen, 2014; Scholte, 2005). Further, the increasing connectivity of our globalised world, together with deregulation of the global economy, has made labour a highly global issue (Block, 2003; Marchand and Sisson Runyan, 2010). The modes of organising in global production chains – into which Swedish labour is highly integrated – has had many economic, social, and ecological consequences (Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020). This speaks to labour not only being an essential part of creating a sustainable future, but also to how the topic relates to the field of Global Studies. Lastly, the issue of sustainability is by necessity a global matter. One example of this is the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which asserts that sustainability and climate change concerns all countries, actors, and individuals on this planet, as well as demands global cooperation (The UN, 2020).

Environmental justice provides a theoretical basis for the framework that this study utilises. This concept looks at how environmental issues intersect with other aspects of power and marginalisation in society, and how issues such as racism, gender, socio-economic class, and poverty create a nexus in which ecological hardships hit certain groups more severely across both temporal and geographical scales. These harder hit groups also tend to be those that historically and currently contribute the least to environmental issues and climate change. As a consequence, this understanding argues for justice being put at the core of any efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change and other environmental issues (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016; Schlosberg, 2013; Sze and London, 2008; Taylor, 2000). We can thus draw the conclusion that a just transition will have both gendered, class, body function, and racial dimensions.

When it comes to studies on changes within labour, an increasing amount of research is dedicated to automatization (Grafström, 2020). This is an issue which could be intertwined with just transition

(Bjerkesjö et al., 2021), but is outside the scope of this study since it tends to concern the practical and material aspects of the transition, whereas I am interested in the broader perceptions of this societal challenge. Further, automatization of labour does not always entail social, economic and ecological aspects of sustainability and is thus not necessarily part of a just transition (Bell, 2020, p. 219). Connected to research on automatization, labour studies are increasingly questioning society's conceptualisation of work. This literature can be found both in feminist scholarship on non-salaried reproductive labour (Chua et al., 2000; Elson, 1995; Peet, 2009); post-work scholarship on the radical transformation of labour partly due to automatization (Bell, 2020, p. 217; Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020); and the critique of 'bullshit jobs', which are seen to emerge when societal productivity increase does not lead to less working hours, but rather to pointless work tasks (Graeber, 2019). All these scholarships inform this study, but it is outside its scope to investigate how unions perceive such research's relation to sustainability issues and a just transition.

This study seeks to describe what role the unions see for themselves in the transition, it does not aim to evaluate this perceived role or to assess the theoretical or ideological assumptions on which they base these roles. Therefore, this study does not evaluate whether or not the concept of economic growth is compatible with ecological (or social) sustainability, a topic on which there are numerous studies.^a

There are several ongoing occurrences which could affect the unions' views on just transition but, for the sake of them being currently developing, are not part of this study. This includes the effects that the current covid-19 pandemic has on the Swedish labour market, as well as the developments in the Swedish Employment Protection Act (*Lagen om anställningskydd, LAS*), which is currently overseen. These developments might include reforms that relate to just transition, such as education and capacity building (Sennerö, 2020), but as these have not yet been transformed into policy or legislation it is too soon to analyse their outcomes.

2. Theoretical framework and key concepts

After contextualising the study, we can now move on to the theoretical framework that informs its analysis, namely: the theoretical concept of 'sustainability', conceptualisations of the transition, and of 'just transition'.

^a See, for example, critique of 'green growth' (Hickel and Kallis, 2020; Parrique et al., 2019), and literature arguing that sustainability can and should be a central dimension in continued economic growth (Jänicke, 2012).

2.1. Agenda 2030 and the three dimensions of sustainable development

‘Sustainable development’ is a contested concept with numerous definitions and meanings. The lack of clarity is illustrated in how difficult it has proven to be for humanity to move from theoretical discourse to action in sustainability matters (Bolis et al., 2014). The most prevailing definition states that it is:

development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

This has been the conventional way to define sustainable development as humanity’s goal (Bonnedahl, 2012). And yet, social and economic inequality is increasing (OECD, 2011; Ostry et al., 2019; Piketty, 2018), whilst we are rapidly decreasing the chances of future and current peoples to lead decent lives in thriving natural systems (IPCC, 2018; IPCC and Edenhofer, 2014). In 2015, a global effort to combat this resulted in the creation of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These 17 SDGs, with the target year of 2030, aim to

address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. (UN, 2021)

The SDGs are available in full in Appendix 1. The Agenda has made it conventional to speak of sustainability as an interconnection of economic, social and ecological dimensions, and that sustainable development must integrate these dimensions (Jones and Comfort, 2019). This holistic view on sustainable development primarily centres on governmental and intergovernmental commitments to implement the SDGs, but also acknowledges the importance of involving other stakeholders, both private and public, including unions (Johnsson et al., 2020). The three dimensions are generally given equal weight (Folke et al., 2016), which can lead to conflicts of objectives. One example is of particular relevance to this study, namely a prevalent conflict within theory, politics, and public debate on whether employments or the environment should be prioritised. Here we see how SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and SDG 13 (Combating climate change and its impacts) are perceived to be in conflict (Hoffmann and Paulsen, 2020). This is described further in the next segment.

Critique of this conceptualisation asks for prioritisations to be made between the three sustainability dimensions, arguing that these cannot be seen as equally important. Rather, it puts the planet’s ecological boundaries as the base in sustainability science, thereby viewing humans as embedded in nature and not as separate parts (Folke et al., 2016). With this view of sustainability, the biosphere provides preconditions for achieving decent living for humans, serving as the foundation upon which development and prosperity rest. As a result of this critique, and the need to prioritise between goals,

some research has embedded the SDGs into the context of the planet's ecological boundaries, in an effort to visualise the relationship between them (Folke et al., 2016). This can be seen in Appendix 1.

There are thus distinct ways of considering the balance and priority of the SDGs and the three sustainability dimensions. This is also the case for how the transition to an ecologically sustainable society is conceptualised, which is described in the following segment.

2.2. Conceptualising the transition to a sustainable labour market and society

There are four main ways of theoretically conceptualising the climate transition: 'fossil free transition', 'green growth', 'circular economy', and 'socio-ecologic transition' (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021). The first relates to the technical aspects of the transition, focusing primarily on different sectors of the economy. The transitions' consequences for the labour market are here thus decided by the technical challenges and solutions within each sector (ibid). Here factors such as making society energy efficient, switching from fossil fuel to renewable energy sources and capturing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere are central to the transition. This renders political strategy suggestions such as changed behaviours (like less travel and consumption); ceasing all fossil fuel energy production; investments in new techniques for construction and industry; changes in agriculture and forestry management; and sustainable development of cities (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021; IPCC and Edenhofer, 2014; Kuramochi et al., 2018).

The 'green growth' perspective sees the transition not only as a necessity to maintain a planet habitable for humans, but also as an opportunity to strengthen economic development in line with more conventional economic politics for employment, welfare, and growth (Laurent and Pochet, 2015). This theoretical perspective tends to be the basis for most research on sustainable labour markets. It focuses on innovations and new markets for green technology and products. This perspective sees development on the labour market mainly in the form of 'green jobs', which is described below. Political strategies rendered by this conceptualisation tend to focus on stimulating the capacity and demand for 'green' innovations, and de-coupling economic growth from resource use (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021).

The 'circular economy' concept aims to reduce the use of both renewable and non-renewable resources, by changing product design, recycling and re-use. Thus, its impact for the labour market tends to be within sectors that deal with waste management/recycling, and those sectors that use large quantities of resources, like within mining. This conceptualisation suggests political strategies to create or strengthen circular business models and behaviours (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021).

Lastly, the 'socio-ecologic' conceptualisation of the transition includes a wide variety of research which questions the more prevalent strategies. This includes critique of economic growth as a societal goal and emphasises social and justice perspectives. As such, this research tends to demand that society not only

make the necessary technical transition and ensures sustainable resource use, but that it also addresses social justice and economic equity. A common understanding of the transition within this heterogeneous body of research is that ecological and social sustainability is the end-goal, and that ecological sustainability is the foundation in which society needs to base itself (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021). This thus connects to theory which embeds social and economic sustainability dimensions within the ecological boundaries (Folke et al., 2016), and therefore views the economy as a means toward that goal (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021). Political strategies resulting from this conceptualisation tend to include e.g. taxing energy, material use and capital instead of labour; reduced working hours; changed societal norms (to lessen material production and consumption); and universal basic income (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021; Hoffmann, 2015; van den Bergh and Kallis, 2012).

These four different conceptualisations all provide insights on factors which need to be considered for the transition to be successful both in its implementation and in how to achieve sustainability (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021). This study does not argue for any particular conceptual framework, it rather uses them all as different lenses through which the data (the union interviews) can be viewed.

Green jobs

A variety of research predict a net increment of jobs to result from the transition to an ecologically sustainable society, because jobs dependent on renewable energy sources are in general more labour intense than those depending on fossil fuel energy sources (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021; IPCC, 2014). There are, however, variations and insecurities in these predictions depending on how ‘green jobs’ is defined. The concept has various definitions ranging from specific (jobs that directly measure, limit, prevent or deal with environmental damage) to broad (jobs that produce products or services which have less negative ecological impacts than others in the industry) (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021). An increasing number of studies define ‘green jobs’ as a continuum and this study adheres to such a conceptualisation, as defined by the EU project Sustainlabour:

These opportunities range from sectors traditionally associated with an environmental content – such as renewable energies or recycling – to other activities that represent emerging sectors in green jobs – such as sustainable mobility – and to activities in “established sectors” which have potential for conversion into sustainable activities (Sustainlabour, 2013, p. 3).

This definition thus includes both the new jobs in renewable energy production and other sectors, but also the employments that are maintained but whose contents are changed to become more ecologically sustainable. Consequently, it can be hard to define which jobs are *not* green, if sustainability is mainstreamed into the labour market. Yet, this definition provides us with an understanding of the span of ‘green jobs’, whilst still maintaining the focus on the aim of such a mainstreaming of ecological

sustainability in labour. Importantly, Sweden does not have an official definition of ‘green jobs’, but is affected by how this is interpreted at the EU level (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021).

Labour organisations, such as unions and the ILO, argue that if the new jobs are both ‘green’ and ‘decent’, then the transition can simultaneously improve social and environmental issues (Bell, 2020, p. 97; ILO, 2017). **‘Decent jobs’** is defined as

productive work [...] in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity (The European Commission, 2019).

This entails that work should pay a fair income; guarantee safe working conditions and a secure form of employment; include social protection; ensure equal opportunities and treatment; encourage social integration; offer prospects of personal development; and allow for workers to organise and express themselves freely (The European Commission, 2019). The idea of ‘decent jobs’ is highly integrated into the conceptualisation of a just transition (Union to Union, 2020).

Critique towards the ‘green jobs’ concept, in both research and policy arenas, argues that it is based within an ideology of continued high productivity and consumption, counter to an idea of ecological planetary boundaries (Bell, 2020, p. 216; Folke et al., 2016). Further, there is worry whether these new jobs will be ‘decent’ or available to already marginalised groups (ibid, pp. 97-99).

The ‘jobs versus the environment dilemma’

A common understanding of the global labour-environment nexus typically frames unions as blocking progress for environmental policies to save employment opportunities, as well as framing environmental movements as elitists without consideration for the interests of the workers. This is theoretically framed as the ‘job versus the environment dilemma’ (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011a). Various empirical examples can be drawn upon to confirm this frame of conflict, which has led to little cooperation between environment and labour movements, as well as few adoptions of the issues of the other (Bell, 2020, pp. 151–160). Research has disproven that environmental protection actually leads to general job-losses, pointing rather to how the ideas of such trade-offs need to be examined in the context of neoliberal economic policies and the aforementioned globalisation of labour chains (Satheesh, 2020).

Academic critique towards the framing of this conflict centres on the fact that it obscures the working class organising for the environment. This “[r]educutive conception of environmentalism” also obscures how environmental organisations have been at odds with each other, or that unions have, for that matter (Satheesh, 2020, p. 10). Generally, it can be said that the labour versus the environment conflict framing is prevalent in public debate but overlooks the fact that workers and the working class are those that are often first hit and worst affected by environmental issues and climate change (Bell, 2020, p. 161).

2.3. Just transition

The concept ‘just transition’ is theoretically contested with variability in its interpretations depending on political preferences about political economy (Stavis and Felli, 2015). Because of the concept’s contextualisation in the labour movement, and the previously mentioned gap in research on the labour-environment nexus, this study’s theoretical framework primarily relies on international labour movements’ conceptualisations. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) defines just transition as transformation in all economic sectors towards ecological sustainability:

ambitious actions aimed at combating climate change while shifting growth towards a truly sustainable development, where social welfare and broader environmental challenges are also addressed (ITUC, 2010a).

Just transition is further described as

a tool [my emphasis] [...] aimed at smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society and providing hope for the capacity of a ‘green economy’ to sustain decent jobs and livelihoods for all (ITUC, 2010a).

A key notion here is using a societal shift towards a post-carbon society as a driver also for social justice and equity. Just transition is thus a process which seeks

fairness and equity with regards to the major global justice concerns such as (but not limited to) ethnicity, income, gender within both developed and developing contexts. By its very nature, this transition must take place at a global scale, whilst connecting effectively with multi-scalar realities. It involves the development of principles, tools and agreements that ensure both a fair and equitable transition for all individuals and communities (McCauley and Heffron, 2018, p. 2).

This holistic approach of the just transition correlates with that of the 2030 Agenda (Union to Union, 2020). Even though just transition as a concept has its roots in a wider environmental justice movement (Cassegård et al., 2017, p. 1), it was developed in labour contexts and is today primarily used in union organisations’ sustainability efforts (Bell, 2020, p. 153). Notably, the ITUC definition above connects to the green growth perspective on the transition. This is a common trend in how union organisations take on ecological issues through just transition, which connects to their focus on green jobs (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021).

The green growth perspective continues in the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016), which provides a set of key policy areas:

- Social protection policies, which safeguard workers from negative impacts of economic restructuring, resource constraints and climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- Sectorial and active labour market policies to actively pursue the creation of jobs. This calls for well-managed and holistically planned adjustments to the labour market.

- Health and safety policies, in line with the decent work concept, calls for policies to protect workers from occupational risks and hazards.
- Skills and development policies, which ensure that workers at all levels have the skills to partake in greening the economy.
- All-encompassing labour standards and rights, as well as environmental regulations in applicable industries and sectors.
- Social dialogue and tripartism, which are formal processes of inclusion of relevant stakeholders in decision making (ILO, 2016, 2015; Union to Union, 2020).

These key policy areas imply that a just transition aims to address economic, social, and ecological sustainability simultaneously, whilst being adapted to each specific regional, national, or sub-national level (ILO, 2016; Union to Union, 2020). The policies should be coherent in order to ensure that sustainable development is mainstreamed throughout the labour market (ILO, 2015). The framework also calls for the participation of all relevant stakeholders at all these levels (ILO, 2016). The social dialogue between these stakeholders (or labour market parties) is the key mechanism for a just transition to be adapted to each context (ILO, 2015; Union to Union, 2020). It creates the setting for government, union organisations, businesses and civil society groups to collaborate on planning and implementation of the policies required to transition to net zero emissions (Just Transition Centre, 2017).

Just transition was included in the preamble to the Paris Agreement (UN and UNFCCC, 2015). This, together with the ILO's Just Transition Framework and further initiatives^b can

be understood as an early stage of a global governance around just transition. (Union to Union, 2020)

Notwithstanding these developments, critique towards just transition policy argues that it lacks compliance mechanisms. As with the nationally determined contributions in the Paris Agreement, it is voluntary for stakeholders and states to comply with just transition policies. The Just Transition Framework aims to guide this process in each context, to ensure that new jobs are attainable for workers and not unavailable because they appear untimely, geographically remote, or require capacities that the workers do not have (ILO, 2016).

In summary, the key concept of this study – just transition – rests on the theoretical base of sustainability, which creates a roadmap for society to ensure dignified lives for humans, without overstepping the boundaries of our planet and ecosystem. Just transition is envisioned as a method to facilitate the journey

^b These include initiatives within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and from UN Secretary General. They focus on the importance of a just transition to deliver on climate targets and national commitments under the Paris Agreement. Other initiatives include coalitions between governments to work on strategies for a just transition (COP24, 2018; ILO, 2019; Powering Past Coal Alliance, n.d.).

towards that sustainable society, by ensuring that all are given the tools and assistance they need to partake in that society.

3. Methods

3.1. Semi-structured informant interviews

The main method of data collection in this thesis is semi-structured interviews with sustainability officers in selected Swedish unions and central organisations. Although union texts alone could possibly provide enough material to analyse the organisations' standpoints on just transition, the interview methodology can reveal the reasonings behind these standpoints, which are less likely to be described in official statements. Further, previous research on environmental work at trade unions has shown the importance of individuals that push for environmental issues to be integrated to the union agenda, and that these persons are key informants in research on these topics (Lundström, 2017; Rätzzel et al., 2018). Thus, interviews as the main method for data collection provides a deeper understanding of how Swedish unions perceive just transition, by giving a fuller picture derived from the interviewees' experiences of working with ecological issues within unionism.

3.2. Selection of unions and interviewees

There are three central labour organisations in Sweden, of which 48 of the 53 unions in the country are members (Kjellberg, 2017; Medlings-institutet, 2020). The central organisations create a format for the unions to collectively pursue labour issues in each sector on a national level. These are LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation); TCO (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees); and Saco (the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations).^c The three central organisations collectively conduct their international development cooperation work through Union to Union. This joint non-profit organisation works with development cooperation projects throughout the world and also raises awareness in Sweden about global labour union solidarity work (ITUC, 2015). Additionally, LO, TCO and Saco are all affiliated with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), through which they conduct international advocacy work.

^c LO organises 41% of all union members in Sweden, namely workers in industrial sectors, as well as in the service and care sectors. TCO organises 37% of union members, which are 'qualified' employees and civil servants in public and private sectors, like the police, the financial sector, and journalists. Lastly, Saco organises 18% of the Swedish union members and is the confederation of unions for professionals with academic degrees, such as engineers, psychologists and lawyers (Kjellberg, 2020; LO, 2020; Saco, 2020; TCO, 2020). The remaining 4% of the union members belong to the five unions that are not affiliated with any central organization (Kjellberg, 2020). Internationally, labour tends to be categorised into 'blue-collar' (arbetare) and 'white-collar' (tjänstemän), which in the Swedish case means placing LO in the first category and TCO as well as Saco in the latter.

The selected unions in this study are those that connect labour issues with climate change and other ecological aspects of sustainability. This selection criteria rests on the underlying assumption that only those unions who engage with issues of just transition can provide information regarding their role in such a transition in Sweden.

The selection process entailed text search on the websites and online publications of the 53 unions, the three central union organisations, and Union to Union. This search was conducted during October of 2020 and used the following keywords: “just transition”; “*rättvis omställning*”; “*grön omställning*” (green transition); “*gröna jobb*” (green jobs); “*hållbar*” (sustainable); “*klimatomställning*” (climate transition); and “*klimat*” (climate). The first two of these keywords quite naturally show if the organisation uses the explicit language of just transition, and the latter five were chosen after considering what terms are often used in Swedish public debate on climate change. When collecting the material, I deemed that it was not enough for the material to merely discuss climate change, or even what actors within the particular industry were doing to adapt to or mitigate climate change within the sphere of labour. Instead, only material that brought up *unions* as *actors* for sustainability and/or connected labour issues with ecological issues would weigh towards that particular organisation having engaged with issues of just transition. To decide this, I analysed the material by looking for statements on a transition to a more ecologically sustainable society, and how it described the unions’ own role in this process. Such texts were collected into a database, and I then reached out to those that were found to be most vocal on sustainability and climate change as union issues. These were four unions in each central organisation, the three central organisations, Union to Union, and one union which is unaffiliated with a central organisation.

In total, I asked 17 union organisations for interviews with their sustainability officer. Out of these, eight unions, two of the central organisations and Union to Union agreed to be part of the study, leading to a total of 11 interviews. This voluntary nature of case selection is a further indicator that I only collected data from unions that engage with just transition. The union organisations that agreed to participate in the study are presented in Appendix 2, but in summary, they span over the health and welfare sector, construction, forestry, various production industries, the commerce sector, and social services. It became clear during the early research process that the central organisations and Union to Union are important spaces for unions to conduct their sustainability work, which is why these were also included in the selection. Saco, the only central organisation that could not participate in the study, explained that their mode of operation is to refer to their member unions in such matters (Saco, Personal correspondence, 2020).

The interviewed union representatives vary in gender, age, and career paths. Some began working in unions and later had sustainability issues introduced to their portfolios, whereas others came to work for unions with a background in sustainability. Most expressed personal commitment to climate change and

ecological sustainability issues. Out of the 11 interviewees, four were men and seven were women. The age span was between around 30-55, with the majority around 45 years old (Interview material, 2020). Some of their organisations have adopted environmental-/climate change policies or programs, some have dedicated one or more full-time employments to environmental and/or sustainability issues, whereas for other organisations these issues are just one of the topics in the representatives' portfolio (ibid). Although the interviewees cannot be seen to represent the thinking of every union member, they are each organisation's selected spokesperson on these matters. This arguably means that they can be deemed to speak on the union organisations' official stance.

Notably, some of the organisations had quite poor search engines on their websites, and others required membership in order to read their magazine articles. This could have had some effect on what material I managed to access. Throughout this study, however, it has become clear which union organisations are generally deemed as vocal and engaged within climate issues and just transition – this also turned out to be reflected in my database and selected unions.

3.3. Research implementation

This study's interview guide ensures consistency, so that I can compare and cross-analyse the informants' answers. It provides an outline of the interview but still allows for flexibility in the data collection (Bryman, 2012). The interview guide can be found in full in Appendix 3. The questions in the guide were developed with the study's aim in mind and were informed by the theory chapter, as well as the texts on the selected unions' websites. The guide was also inspired by previous research on the intersection between labour and environmental issues.^d

The interviews were conducted in October and November 2020, through video calls. The one-hour long conversations were recorded and then transcribed into written texts, in accordance with standard interview procedure (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, pp. 180–181). Although video calls can decrease the chances of picking up on body language and discerning other subtle non-verbal responses (Bryman, 2012, p. 485), the situation given by the covid 19-pandemic gave no other choice of interview method. As the interviews were conducted well into the pandemic, when society at large had gotten used to video meetings, this also lessened this potential problem.

The software NVivo was used to code interview quotes according to the themes of analysis. The data derived from this coding was anonymised to ensure that the union representatives felt able to disclose more sensitive information. They were informed of this before and during the interview, together with other information pertaining the research's objectives, methods, union selection, future publication and

^d See, for example, Rätzl et al., 2011; Stevis et al., 2015; and Lundström et al., 2015.

how interview quotes are presented in the thesis. The interviewees were also able to look at their direct or in-direct quotes and thus had a say in how their answers are used and presented. Where necessary, certain words that describe the occupation of their membership base have been excluded. A further step to ensure anonymity was to combine all interviews into a collected voice. This reflects the aim of this study, to not compare and rate different unions but rather to understand the potential roles, opportunities, and challenges that a just transition has from the labour union collective's point of view. Further, guaranteeing this anonymity and agency of the interviewees ensures that this study follows research ethics recommendations (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Swedish, the native language of both me and the interviewees, with one exception where the interviewee felt more comfortable speaking English. The interviews conducted in Swedish might have lost some of its content and meaning in the translation process. When analysing the texts, I selected the direct and in-direct quotes that either stood out, or that could be used to illustrate answers that recurred in several interviews.

3.4. Method of analysis

Because this study omits which particular organisation that each informant represents, the material from all interviews is analysed all together, thus creating data which is a collection of union voices and perspectives on the topics at hand. This creates the possibility to analyse the material according to central themes, rather than focusing on which organisation takes which stance. There are certain drawbacks to this way of grouping the material, as these unions work in specific contexts within the Swedish model. The most noteworthy is the fact that unions organising industrial 'blue-collar' labourers might face different challenges and opportunities than those of the unions that organise 'white-collar' labourers. This is further discussed in chapter 6.

The analytical themes are data driven, as they are derived from categories that appeared throughout the interviews, as well as in the analysis of the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 584; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, pp. 202–203). There are several opportunities, challenges and roles which were brought up in the interviews that were not included in the study because these were only mentioned briefly or by very few representatives. Instead, the themes illustrate the most common union roles identified in the interviews (Bryman, 2012, p. 586; Interview material, 2020).

4. The environment and the labour market

Before we go into the results of the study, I offer an overview of Swedish unionisation and how labour organisations globally and in Sweden have come to take up the challenge of just transition in recent decades.

4.1. Swedish union organisation and the Swedish Party model

Swedish unions have historically been and continue to be essential to the formation of Swedish public opinion, as well as policy and business development (Magnusson, 2017). The organisation of labour in unions is today often taken for granted, with unions representing workers on the local level in most workplaces and union organisations as one of the main actors in labour issues throughout society (Kjellberg, 2017). The Swedish unions are embedded in the aforementioned ‘Swedish model’, which is characterised by three main dimensions:

an extensive social democratic welfare state, the organisation of institutionalised, centralised and collective negotiations between employers and unions, and the ambition to emphasise consensus rather than conflicts (Lundström et al., 2015, p. 168).

A powerful Swedish unionisation creates a base for this model because it makes the organised workers an equal negotiating party to the employers. Union power is mainly derived from high membership levels (Lundström et al., 2015). The labour market model consists of strong negotiation parties (for workers and employers), collective agreements as a rule, and little state involvement in labour issues. The negotiation in collective agreements between the parties is the core of the Swedish labour market, with the state mainly acting as a regulator of factors like the usage of dangerous substances (Johansson and Magnusson, 2012; Magnusson, 2017, pp. 46–50). The collective agreements create a baseline for decent work, and in return unions concede to not strike during the duration of the agreement (Lundström et al., 2015). Compromise as a central idea of these negotiations has contributed to the Swedish labour market being able to continuously adapt to structural changes in production and labour. Swedish unions have thus been part in accepting and moulding technical advances and structural changes, rather than working against them (Magnusson, 2017, 2017, pp. 46–50; Palmgren et al., 2020).

Labour mobilisation reached its peak in the mid-1980s with around 85% of the Swedish workers being members of a union. Since then, parallel to the general global trend, Swedish union membership has decreased in recent decades, albeit from a comparatively very high level (Lundström et al., 2015). Today about 70% of the Swedish labour force are union members. When broken down this entails 60% of ‘blue-collar’ workers and 72% of ‘white-collar’ workers. It is projected that membership levels will continue to decrease and that around every other worker will be a union member in 10 years, partly because unionisation is lower in the generations entering the labour market in the past decades (ibid). Because of this,

some have argued that unions could be revitalised through [...] taking up new perspectives that interest predominantly younger people, like environmental issues (Lundström et al., 2015, p. 168).

Contemporary Swedish unionism is categorised as ‘business unionism’, which entails a dedication and specialisation to quantitative and technical aspects of work, like salaries and working hours. This type

of union work does generally not account for broader societal dimensions of labour, nor the societal-natural context in which the salaried labour is taking place (Lundström et al., 2015). ‘Business unionism’ thus to a certain extent leaves questions of equity and political economy in the hands of states and companies, in contrast to ‘social unionism’, which is more inclined to demand a say in how the political economy is structured (Stavis and Felli, 2015). The Swedish ‘business unionism’ could be compared with how Canadian unions have negotiated for ‘green clauses’ since the 1970s (Lundstedt, 2017). Even though Canada’s labour market is not directly comparable with Sweden’s, this is an example of where unions might foray outside of technical and ‘traditional’ labour issues.

The Swedish model has been criticized for having a conservative focus on premiering maintaining order over increasing labour rights, especially as neo-liberal policies since the 1990s have weakened welfare services like the health sector and unemployment insurance programmes. The increase of employer mobilisation, making the employers’ party in labour market negotiations relatively stronger, has intensified the critique that the model is maintaining *status quo* in favour of the employers (Lundström et al., 2015). In contrast, unions maintain that it is thanks to the history of the country’s unionisation that Sweden has one of the world’s most extensive labour rights frameworks (Magnusson, 2017). Other criticism points to how the Swedish unionisation has been tightly interconnected with a societal focus on economic growth that has had little to no consideration for greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental issues (Magnusson, 2017, pp. 42–50). This is argued to have led to a perception of the environment as outside the scope of issues for workers and unions. The critique points out hegemonic and ‘cemented’ union traditions that dictate which issues unions see as their own; as well as in which spaces they are empowered to act in society. Critics argue that this undermines general union transformation processes and unions’ ability to “embark on a meaningful environmental agenda” (Lundström et al., 2015, p. 171). Examples to the contrary are discussed in the following segment.

4.2. Unions’ history of acting on ecological issues

In contrast to the previous discussion on the ‘labour versus the environment dilemma’, history does show examples of when labour movements have stepped into the sphere of ecological sustainability. Although unions have been recognised as actors contributing to sustainable development since the creation of the UNFCCC structure in 1992, their role has mainly been focused on the interaction between labour and health and safety issues (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2011b). This is also the case for Swedish unionism (Cassegård et al., 2017), and such work has generally led to important regulations regarding pollution practices in production, for the benefit both of workers and the environment (Bell, 2020, pp. 151–160). Some initiatives were taken the years after 1992 by international union organisations to include environmental issues to their agendas, notably mainly unions in fossil dependent production sectors like transportation and metalwork (Rolfes, 2020). In the years 2009 and 2010, the concept of just transition started gaining traction along with the idea of unions as sustainability actors, especially in

relation to the COP15 in Copenhagen and COP16 in Cancún (ITUC, 2010b; Rätzl and Uzzell, 2011a). This later led to the inclusion of just transition in the preamble to the Paris Agreement at COP21 (Just Transition Centre and ITUC, 2016).

It was in the run up to COP21 that Swedish unions started to actively push for ecological sustainability and to discuss just transition (Cassegård et al., 2017). An earlier noteworthy example of how Swedish union organisations have adopted environmentalism is when LO established an environmental unit and programme in 1991 after metal and chemical member unions requested guidelines for how to deal with workplace safety and ecological issues in their production lines. The programme was considered progressive at the time as it integrated internal and external environment issues (in contrast to the specialisation to technical aspects of work); called for integration of environmental and redistributive policies (in line with an environmental justice reasoning); promoted general environmental awareness at workplaces and among union members; as well as stated that environmental legislation is not in conflict with job creation – the programme rather saw it to create jobs over time. This can be seen as an early example of unions promoting just transition, although it was not labelled as such at the time. However, the programme quickly lost its momentum the following year, largely due to the Swedish financial crisis in the early 1990s. This reflects potential conflict of objectives between labour and environmental issues; the ‘jobs versus the environment dilemma’. When jobs were threatened due to an unstable economy, interest in environmental work diminished within LO (Lundström et al., 2015).

In summary, union organisations have since the 1990s increasingly, albeit only to a certain extent, taken on the role as actors for sustainable development. More so in the last decade, especially when it comes to Swedish unions. However, this does not mean that ideas of a conflict between jobs and ecological issues have subsided; but rather that these areas of conflict are increasingly countered with the vision of a just transition in union spaces.

4.3. Conditions for a just transition in Sweden

A key to deliver on the Paris Agreement, and in alignment with environmental justice concerns, is recognising that peaking emissions “will take longer for developing country Parties” (UN and UNFCCC, 2015). This draws a distinction between mitigation efforts of different nations, through the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” (ibid). This means that so-called ‘developed country Parties’, like Sweden, should lower emissions at faster rates than less affluent countries, so as to create a buffer of emission for when other countries increase the social and economic well-being of their populations (Anderson et al., 2020). Different models give different results on exactly how fast and how much Sweden’s emissions need to decrease, but the Swedish parliament has set the

target to reach net-zero emissions by 2045.^e To reach this goal, the country's territorial emissions need to be lowered by 6-10% per year, depending on the usage of negative emission technologies.^f The rate of emission decrease was 2,4% in 2019 (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021a). Even though Sweden currently is far from reaching the 2045-goal, researchers argue that the emission decrease actually required for Sweden to comply with its commitments in the Paris Agreement is even bigger (Anderson et al., 2020).

Sweden's territorial emissions were 50,9 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalents in 2019^g (Naturvårdsverket, 2020, p. 19). Around one third of these are from Sweden's industries (the majority of which comes from the iron and steel industry, mining, and refineries) (Naturvårdsverket, 2020). Another third is emitted by the transport sector, a large majority of which comes from private and freight transport (ibid, p. 64). The remaining emissions come from farming (14%); the energy and heating sector (11%); and waste, machinery used for agriculture and construction, as well as the use of solvents and other products (3%) (Klimatpolitiska rådet et al., 2021; Naturvårdsverket, 2020, pp. 79–117). There is thus a dire need within the coming years to cut emissions both globally and in Sweden to avoid damage to – and loss of – human and non-human animal lives as well as ecosystems.

Fortunately, there is now a general momentum and institutional maturity to create the conditions to make the transition to an ecologically sustainable society (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021a; The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, 2018). This includes roadmaps for fossil-free competitiveness created by the major Swedish industries (Fossilfritt Sverige, 2021); The Swedish climate policy framework with its climate goals, legislation and the governmental evaluation framework (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021b); as well as new EU regulations linking policy on the recovery from the covid 19-pandemic to climate and biodiversity issues, a circular economy, and a just transition (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021a). Another factor is public acceptance of political interventions, where 88% of Swedes think that the environment should have a higher priority than economic growth (Hammar et al., 2021).^h

^e This goal is set for emissions to be 85% lower than they were in 1990, with the possibility to cover 15% of these emission cuts with negative emission technologies (Anderson et al., 2020).

^f Negative emission technologies include increased carbon uptake from land and forests, international offset, and carbon capture and storage techniques. Such techniques are not yet available at the scales required to counter the increasing emissions, hence the need to lower overall emissions at higher rates than current emission cuts (Anderson et al., 2020; Waterfield and IPCC, n.d.).

^g This is the latest available official data, and pertain emissions within Swedish territory, excluding land-use and forestry (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021a, p. 27). These numbers do not include consumption-based emissions, which consist of emissions from consumption by Swedish households and the public sector, as well as public investments (in infrastructure and buildings) within and outside of the country's territory (Klimatpolitiska rådet, 2021a, p. 32). These emissions are of a greater magnitude: Swedish consumption-based emissions were 82 million tonnes CO₂ equivalents in 2018, when territorial emissions were 52 million tonnes (Naturvårdsverket, 2020).

^h This study involved 108 countries, and Sweden was the country where the largest percentage of the population valued the environment over economic growth (Hammar et al., 2021).

Swedish union organisations have through their common policy for Agenda 2030 (adopted by LO, TCO and Saco in 2019), expressed that they can contribute to the SDG on combating climate change (see Appendix 1) by continuing their historical tradition of affirming structural change. Therein they adopt the concept of just transition and argue that to reach the global and national climate goals, the transition has to be implemented in a way that “improves working conditions and leads to full employment.” (LO et al., 2019) They thus open for their engagement with just transition in Sweden adding that this can be achieved through “active engagement between unions, business and the state” (ibid).

5. Results and analysis

With this historical and contextual background in mind, we now turn to the results of this study. Through thematic analysis of the interview material, we examine which roles the union organisations perceive for themselves in a just transition, as well as what opportunities and challenges these might pertain. As previously mentioned, the union representatives are grouped into one collective voice to ensure anonymity. Quotes included in this chapter illustrate what was said in several interviews, or because they express noteworthy exceptions to the material. It is explicitly stated when the latter is the case.

5.1. Using the three-dimensional conceptualisation of sustainability to find their roles

We begin by looking at how the union organisations position themselves through the three-dimensional conceptualisation of sustainability. The interviews express how Agenda 2030 can be used as a framework for unions to legitimise their own organisation’s commitment to ecological issues, thus interlinking the dimensions rather than working on them separately (Interview material, 2020). Agenda 2030 helps in this way because it constructs

an entirety of goals, and it becomes clear that the different dimensions of sustainability support one another (Interview material, 2020).

This “makes it easier to talk about green sustainability and the climate issue” and because of this “Agenda 2030 has helped us to find our place in all of this.” (Interview material, 2020) Others explained that it bridges together different issue areas or departments at the union organisations (ibid). This holistic three-dimensionality thus creates a theoretical framework in which the unions can situate themselves, and this has practical consequences in how the unions organise their work internally.

The representatives’ general imaginaries of a just transition correspond to the definition of a Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016). Most notably, this means that they bring up justice and equity as key values; a holistic approach to sustainable development; the importance of social security

infrastructure and capacity development in the transition; as well as the need to adapt the implementation of the just transition to each specific national, regional, and sectorial context (Interview material, 2020). It is not surprising that all interviewees bring up the importance of social security and capacity building for the transition. These issues are, after all, included in unions' core issue areas, and are an intrinsic part of the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016).

The majority of the representatives emphasise the inseparability of sustainability's three dimensions, and that as these should be mainstreamed into the organisations' internal structure, goal setting and way of working (Interview material, 2020). Even though the mandate from the members might not always be clear on the inseparability of these dimensions (see the following section), most sustainability officers at the unions seem to have taken this definition to heart. Thus, the interviews show that the three-dimensionality of the sustainability concept aids the unions in carving out a role for themselves, as the interconnectedness means that ecological issues also concern and affect labour, just as labour and production affect nature. Hence unions, as the main organiser of labour, become an actor in climate change mitigation efforts. It also means that the interviews make connections between traditional union issues, such as social and economic equity and equality, and ecological issues. However, this means stepping outside of the traditional Swedish unionism:

the Swedish union movement is very burdened by traditions [*traditionstyngd*], there are a lot of structures of how to do things, and what is done. Working with sustainability issues is not one of them, it's not part of the structure (Interview material, 2020).

It is logical that the unions – being true to their historical role and what their members tend to ask of them – maintain their focus on social and economic dimensions of sustainability. The difference now seems to be that whilst focusing on their core issues they simultaneously integrate ecological issues in their efforts to work for sustainability. However, as the quote above suggests, this is not always a given. But the interview materials suggests that, overall, the Swedish unions have found their role within sustainability:

it isn't about being an expert on what environmental measures are needed [...] It is [rather] probably our most important issue to promote a strengthened capacity [of the members] to transition, and that means both further education and training as well as better social security infrastructure (Interview material, 2020).

This quote summarises both how the three-dimensionality creates a role for the unions and how this role should focus on what the unions (and their members!) see as their core undertaking. They can focus on the social and economic dimensions of developing a sustainable society, whilst at the same time linking these efforts with ecological dimensions. The following sections (5.2-5.5.) detail various areas in which the unions can realise this role. But before venturing on, we take a more detailed look at the challenge for unions to prioritise between the issues, and how the member mandate is decisive in this process.

5.1.1. Prioritising according to the membership mandate

The theoretical chapter presented ways in which conflicts of objectives arise in the transition to a sustainable society, which create the need for prioritisation between the various issues. On this topic, several representatives brought up that when prioritising, they fall back on what their members want, as decided by the decision-making body of the union congress. In the case of the central organisations, their decisions are made by member union delegates at their congress. The interviews show that this mandate given by the members tends to be along two lines: either business unionism, or steps outside of this traditional scope (Interview material, 2020). The following quote expresses an example of the first:

people are in a union mainly because they want good salaries and working conditions – you have to understand that. That is the core of our mission (Interview material, 2020).

This statement brings up traditional business unionism mandates as the continued primary reason for members to join unions. This would mean that members want their unions to prioritise salary increases and improved working conditions. Contrarily, others expressed that it was the congress that had given their union the mandate to take substantial steps in taking on ecology as their own issue:

it began with our congress, where our elected representatives petitioned a bill on the topic. So, it came from within the organisation itself. [Members] wanted the union to do more with the environmental issue and build our knowledge in that area (Interview material, 2020).

Thus, we see that the members in this case asked their unions to engage with ecological issues. Other interviewees also expressed that they had many highly engaged members demanding that their unions get involved in these issues (Interview material, 2020).

So, some of the unions included in this study see that their mandate is to remain within the traditional business unionism, whilst others express that their mandate reach beyond this scope. When discussed further, it was made clear that this is far from categorical. Rather, there are also internal struggles within the membership bases on how to prioritise, even if they have been given the congress mandate to engage with the ecological sustainability dimension:

The whole organisation is not on board. There are quite a lot of people that question us working with these issues: ‘is it really the role of the unions to talk about the climate?’ (Interview material, 2020)

As member organisations, it is of course essential to their legitimacy that the unions do the work decided by their members. However, this

is a dilemma on which the members can disagree quite a bit. (Interview material, 2020)

It is quite logical that an organisation run by its members has an easier task to implement its members wishes when those are unified. However, an interesting counterpoint was raised in one interview:

to think differently is part of our DNA. It's just like within politics, it's what creates dynamism, it's what makes us move forward. We have to think differently, we have to test our opinions, dare discuss and have an open debate. It's really important! So, in a way that's not a challenge, rather it's our fuel (Interview material, 2020).

This quote alternately argues that unions as democratic organisations *should* have internal discussions and open debate, and that if unions lack these they do not move forward. This arguably speaks to how unions are interconnected with democratic principles, and perhaps suggests that this challenge is less tough for unions to tackle than it seems. It arguably depends on how they handle these disagreements internally.

One representative explained that they had managed to avoid internal disagreements on their engagement with ecological issues by “having a very inclusive process.” (Interview material, 2020) This was done by establishing the organisation’s environmental work both in their board through workshops; with their members and employees through reference groups; by incorporating the views of the membership base through surveys; and by keeping their members informed about the work through digital seminars. They also mentioned how they linked this transition to how unions historically have been adapting to industrial development and transitions. This was, according to them, a good entry point in communications with their members (ibid). This way of managing internal disagreements is, arguably, a way that the unions can work to meet the challenges that they identify of conflicts of objectives and internal disagreements.

A logical consequence of the reasoning on the member mandate was for the interviewees to wish for more active engagement by their members on ecological issues:

The more pressure there is, the bigger the steps that the organisation takes. As we are membership organisations, we do what our members pressure us to do (Interview material, 2020).

It is no surprise that the union sustainability officers would want their organisation’s members to ask for stronger union engagement within these issues. Such membership pressure would increase the representatives’ mandate and help them argue that the organisation should consider ecological issues when faced with conflicts of objectives.

In conclusion, what we can see is that the unions strongly adhere to the mandate given to them by their members, even though they might work to inform and find the right language to stimulate such member engagement on sustainability. When the member mandate allows for making ecological sustainability one of the issues to prioritise, the unions involved in this study act on this. The interviews did not express that they had been given the mandate to prioritise ecological issues more than other issue areas, but

rather that it had become one of the topics on their agenda, alongside the more traditional union issues (Interview material, 2020).

In the following segment we look at the first role that the union representatives identify for themselves: to maintain the Swedish model and put it to use within the framework of a just transition.

5.2. The role of being a party in the Swedish model

Many of the interviewees emphasise the importance of the Swedish model for the transition to an ecologically sustainable society, and especially for such a transition being just (Interview material, 2020). This aligns with the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016) and is exemplified by the following quote:

If you consider all the elements of the just transition, the strongest one is social dialogue and industry relations. We have that in Sweden. The unions are a part in discussions, you negotiate together with all parties. [...] The same goes for social protection, there are unemployment schemes and safety nets, which are needed to ensure that no one is left behind when switching from one industry to another (Interview material, 2020).

This way of thinking is repeated by many others, although they, also express worry that these structures might be weakening due to the aforementioned neo-liberal policies in for example unemployment insurance programmes (Interview material, 2020; Lundström et al., 2015). The interviews also bring up more specific dynamics of the Swedish labour market which can be utilised to ensure a just transition, such as union representatives being elected political leaders on various levels in society; labour market party cooperation on workplace education programmes; local union representatives having seats on the board of directives in their workplace; and cooperation between unions to lobby for the interests of their members within business and politics (Interview material, 2020). Even though several interviewees described strong cooperation with their counterparties:

We want the companies to be successful and to stay in Sweden, invest in research, etcetera. It's good for both the companies and the employees. So, yes, we have a lot in common. I guess that that's the strength of the so-called Swedish model (Interview material, 2020).

The negotiation aspect of the parties' relationship is intrinsic to how the Swedish model functions, but for the sake of ensuring a transition to sustainability, having a common goal of sustainability between the parties is arguably quite essential.

Several representatives connect a climate transition to historical developments, saying that by working together with the other parties, the unions can work for the transition instead of against it:

this can be related to a Swedish union tradition of affirming structural change and technical developments. [...] Swedish unionism hasn't really been that protectionist, rather focusing on making sure that everyone

has the security of income, good unemployment benefits and education so that you can take the new jobs that appear. [...] This is just [...] the next step in the structural change (Interview material, 2020).

This quote describes Swedish unionism as cooperative, alluding that if the members' interests are respected, then the unions will adapt rather than be protectionist and fight against change.

All in all, the interviews express a strong conviction of the fortitude of the model:

I have a fairly strong trust in the negotiation model, that if we see a need or a space to take steps towards solutions that are good for the climate, we can make advances on that in negotiations with the employers. [...] our model, with independent and strong parties representing employers and employees' organisations, has showed such potential to reach further. It could do so in this area as well (Interview material, 2020).

Not only do the interviewees agree with the continuation of the model for ensuring traditional labour issues in accordance with business unionism, they also express how it sets the framework to cooperate and negotiate on ecological issues. Importantly, the representatives express that this

requires strong unions with the stamina to keep going. (Interview material, 2020)

They thus see the importance of the unions' negotiation power to ensure that the interests of their members are respected in these structural developments.

Lastly, the representatives discuss the importance of the state working together with the other labour market parties. They use the example of Fossil Free Swedenⁱ and argue that such cooperation between the state and companies is needed, especially when creating the settings for investments (or co-investing). The interplay between these stakeholders is, according to the interviewees, what creates the foundation for a just transition (Interview material, 2020).

5.2.1. An opportunity to mobilise new members

The representatives thus request strong unions for them to be an equal part on the labour market. For this to work, they need to maintain high membership levels – which are now declining. Some interviewees identified engaging with sustainability and ecological issues as one way to counteract this (Interview material, 2020). One representative says that they are cautiously optimistic that explicitly linking ecological issues with social and economic ones could boost unionisation (ibid). Another adds:

If you stop focusing so much of the economic gains of [being part of] a union – in Sweden you already have things like social protection and [paid] vacation [...] – and [instead] you're working on [members

ⁱ Fossil Free Sweden, or *Fossilfritt Sverige*, is an initiative by the Swedish government started before COP21 in Paris. It connects Swedish businesses and other actors in the efforts to make Sweden fossil free. This is partly done by industries creating roadmaps of how to decarbonise their industries and sectors (Fossilfritt Sverige, 2021).

feeling] ‘I do push my company to work on climate change’ [...], then I think you would have more people interested [in unionising] (ibid).

They thus argue for a mobilising potential of embracing ecological issues: attracting new members by actively working with ecological issues as part of the union mandate.

A majority of the representatives brought up the Fridays for Future movement^j and spoke of a “Greta effect” in how Swedes are mobilising around issues of climate change (Interview material, 2020). They expressed how this took unions by surprise:

I think that the unions were a bit dazed in September 2019. We tried to find a response. (ibid)

This suggest that Swedish unions had previously not been fully aware of this opportunity and potential to mobilise new members around ecological issues. They also expressed how their current members became very active in asking for union engagement with climate change issues because of the Fridays for Future movement (Interview material, 2020).

The interviews connect such potential to mobilise with the three-dimensionality of sustainability:

[We need] to be able to connect a sustainable work life with a more ecologically sustainable society, to see that those are two sides to the same coin. [...] this is a good issue for us to pursue, if we’re able to, because it’s good for both the world and our members, and for us as a movement. (Interview material, 2020)

In more concrete terms, the representatives argue that it can “be positive for recruitment and involvement” in unionisation (Interview material, 2020), especially amongst future employees and members – a large portion of which is the younger generations:

Sweden has an incredible union density, [...] but it’s going down. The unions whose membership numbers are going up are using strategies to organise differently than the traditional ways. They’re not keeping to one sector; they’re looking broader than just one workplace. They’re trying to go to universities and talk to youth. Young workers entering the job market in Sweden are increasingly thinking ‘why would I need a union?’ (ibid)

These new ways of mobilising members thus entail opportunities:

^j Fridays for Future is a global youth movement started by Greta Thunberg when she in 2018 began protesting outside the Swedish Parliament in Stockholm to raise awareness on the climate crisis before the Swedish election that autumn. The global movement has since then attracted more than one million young people in more than 100 countries in their regular strikes and marches (UNEP 2021). In September 2019 the movement invited adults (and unions) to join them.

it's about being relevant. [...] It can be a chance for unions to gain more members. [...] it's really important that the unions show the relevance of being part of a union, and that entails social sustainability, but also ecological sustainability, and what the unions can do there (Interview material, 2020).

By showing union engagement on ecological issues, as well as showing how these are interconnected with what is traditionally seen as the unions' domain, these actors can show their continued relevance in today's labour market. This seems to be the conclusion that some of the representatives draw.

5.3. The role of creating acceptance

So far, the interviews have established that union organisations should focus on the social and economic dimensions of a transition to an ecologically more sustainable society. They argued that such efforts will create acceptance for the transition. To do so, unions need to

push for what our members need in order to not be worried, not afraid to lose their jobs, to not be stressed by these measures, but rather feel that there is a transition that works. Then there will be a much larger acceptance for measures taken for environmental issues. (Interview material, 2020)

Many of the interviewees agreed that unions have the capacity to create this acceptance:

Changes can always be perceived as threats unless something tells you that it will be better in the end, that there might even be higher salaries and better working conditions. If you're not able to convey that, if the unions aren't working on this, then you risk ending up [...] with an elite idea of what needs to be done, and people get angry instead [...] Strong unions are an imperative to transition. Without us, [members] will work against all changes instead (Interview material, 2020).

This representative highlights how unions can be an actor which ensures that workers feel that their interests are catered to. It also brings up potential risks of discontent if workers are not involved in the transition. They continue:

For [just transition] to work, there needs to be strong unions that can earn the respect from the other party in an industry and from governments. [Strong unions] that give their viewpoints, but also that agree to things and say 'all right, we'll bring this back to our members and discuss it.' If we say yes, then we will work towards that and do what we can to ensure that the end result actually is achieved (Interview material, 2020).

Strong unions, as they put it, can thus both make sure that workers are being heard by other parties, but also work together with their members to ensure that the transition is being implemented.

A role is thus identified for the unions; through ensuring the justice in the transition they can help create acceptance for the transition. This acceptance then rests on unions working for social security and re-education as integral parts of the transition, as well as other aspects of the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016).

5.3.1. The challenge of bringing workers on board

One aspect brought up in the interviews, which many representatives saw as inherent to the role of creating acceptance, is ensuring that the Swedish workers (and more specifically; union members) are on board with the societal transition. This challenge was highly stressed in the interviews (Interview material, 2020). The representatives bring up commonly described obstacles to peoples' active engagement with climate change, like the complexity and abstractness of the issue, and how people are set in their ways and used to their level of comfort (ibid). They also raise issues of unevenly distributed consequences of some climate policy measures and how these might dissuade certain groups from doing anything in the name of mitigating climate change (ibid). As one interviewee put it, these factors make ecological dimensions of sustainability

difficult issues to communicate. We say that it's all connected, but it's challenging to illustrate this in a way so that each individual understands the possible impact on their everyday life if we do not address climate issues (ibid).

Another representative adds that it's difficult to communicate to members how social, economic and ecological issues are connected and that this is made especially demanding by the fact that union members tend to associate unions only with the first two of those dimensions (Interview material, 2020). A third agrees, saying that they have to be careful about how they communicate certain truths of what needs to be done to combat climate change, like diminishing consumption, for fear of how that will be perceived by their members and the general public (ibid). Touching on this point, one representative says that:

you don't want to run ahead of your members [...] You want to push and encourage them, but you don't want to come up with stuff that they're going to look at and say 'what do you mean? That has nothing to do with us.' (ibid)

They go on to say that the solution is to

find the right language, [...] the correct entry point. And that takes a lot of time. It's a challenge. But every sector has a specific entry point for climate change and for a just transition (ibid).

Likewise, another representative argues that

it is important to achieve breadth in the climate discussion, wherein more people see [it as their issue] and have the possibility to be part of the transition (Interview material, 2020).

So, the interview material shows that a challenge for the unions is to communicate a transition to a fossil free society in a way that appeals to Swedish workers. This is especially difficult if members fear that traditional union issues (in line with business unionism) are being disregarded for the sake of ecological issues (Interview material, 2020). The interviews thus, arguably, present the idea that for the unions to

get their members on board with the transition, they need to showcase how the transition (through being just) could provide workers with better conditions and higher salaries. This seems to suggest that union members are mainly interested in the transition if their material gains and quantitative aspects of work are secured (and increased). If such gains cannot be guaranteed, does this mean that Swedish union members would not accept a transition to an ecologically sustainable society and labour market? This is discussed further in the following section.

5.3.2. The challenge of conflicting objectives

All interviewees claimed that ecology is, indeed, an issue for the unions (in line with the case selection process). They disagreed with the claim that labour and the environment are inherently in conflict. However, it was a common understanding that a lack of union perspectives in efforts to combat climate change can create such conflicts:

if you only focus on the climate issue and not on social and economic consequences, *then* you have this conflict. It doesn't have to arise, and it can be avoided by broadening the perspectives a bit, and by taking responsibility for all of society (Interview material, 2020).

In contrast, another representative argues that

there is definitely a conflict between short-term economic interests and the will to make the transition that is required for us to deal with the climate [issue] (Interview material, 2020).

This seems to suggest that conflicts of objectives arise when certain sustainability dimensions are not considered. This connects to the role that the unions have found for themselves through Agenda 2030.

The following quote illustrates how the 'labour versus the environment' conflicts could arise:

If there is a risk of unemployment and so on, of course you might not be very excited about a transition that might result in losing your job (ibid).

Such risks were brought up by several representatives when discussing the vehicle industry, who used it as an example where a just transition would counter potential challenges of conflict (Interview material, 2020). This indicates that they imagine that a transition to a more ecologically sustainable production – without factoring in issues of justice – would leave automobile workers without jobs or safety nets:

It is a challenge: [...] transitioning from fuel engines to electric engines means that a lot less workers are needed in manufacturing. [...] For us that doesn't mean that there is an opposition between climate and jobs, but rather that we need an efficient transition where all are involved. It's about continuous capacity building of [workers] in workplaces that need to transition, but also for those who will end up having to change jobs. [...] If all are included, there is no conflict (ibid).

This study's material suggests that some union members fear that the climate transition would eliminate certain jobs in Sweden, like in the vehicle engine factory when it transitions from producing fuel to electric engines. Other jobs would no longer exist as they depend solely on fossil fuels, like oil and coal production. The representatives pointed out (quite relieved) that this is rarely the case for Swedish workers as very little of the country's industry relies solely on fossil fuels (Interview material, 2020). However, some Swedish jobs could be eliminated (or at least changed) by the transition. One representative argued that the discussion on these jobs being eliminated tends to focus on the emerging 'green jobs':

we talk very little about all the things we need to stop doing. We instead talk about creating the alternatives, and then we hope that everyone will automatically change over to those. [...] There needs to be an understanding of all the things we need to stop doing: behaviours, consumption... [...] And jobs being lost. [...] that's a challenge to actively take on (ibid).

This representative points at three main issues: firstly, there is a lack of understanding of the urgency and scope of the transition (discussed further in the segment on an educational role); secondly, we cannot assume that there will be an automatic change because new alternatives are created; and, lastly, it is a real challenge for the unions to manage the conflicts of objectives that arise from the changes required to create an ecologically sustainable society. The second point seems to suggest that there needs to be concurrent action that both outlaws or discourages production, behaviours and actions that emit greenhouse gases, as well as simultaneously creates incentives to and capacity for the 'greener' alternatives. This is another argument for the holistic approach of the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016).

On the third point raised above, we can again see how the conflicts of objectives creates a challenge for unions in their communication with members. Many interviewees agree that their work to engage with ecological issues sometimes means that they suggest actions that, in the short term, might have negative consequences for individual members (Interview material, 2020).

Another potential conflict between sustainability dimensions is prioritising between material gains of the members and overconsumption:

Raised salaries and decreased consumption. That is in itself a conflict that I think one has to think about as a union organisation. [...] There are many groups, including amongst our members, that for sure should have better salaries and working conditions, but for some members the salaries perhaps... Maybe we should be talking about other types of compensations? Like working hours, or something else (Interview material, 2020).

A second voice adds:

It is in the unions' mission to work for better working conditions, higher salaries, vacations, parental leave and pensions – to mention a few. But some might say that a part of that work, to get more, also should include reflections on the concept of economic growth and link it to sustainability and the climate crisis (Interview material, 2020).

The topic of material gains has historically been one of the unions main missions, but is questioned by some representatives because of the impact that higher salaries (and by extension increased purchasing power) have on greenhouse gas emissions caused by materialism and over-consumption. Clearly, then, a conflict of objectives for the unions, and quite the challenge for them within a just transition. Members might not be willing to let go of their interest to increase their salaries in return for action that decreases emissions, if the two are put against one-another. There is also a strong case, like the first interviewee states, for some member groups to continue to have increased salaries to achieve social and economic sustainability. One potential way to meet this challenge could be for unions to shift their priorities to demanding fewer work hours instead of continuous general salary increases.

5.3.3. The opportunity of new 'green' jobs and more union members

We now turn to what opportunities the representatives identify within 'green jobs', which they associate with their role of creating acceptance (Interview material, 2020).

Again relating to unions' strong relationship with other labour market parties, the interviews were optimistic about the possibility of Swedish goods having increased shares on the global market and what this could mean for unions and their members (Interview material, 2020). One representative explains that through innovative projects (like Hybrit^k), companies

can launch a whole new product for a climate aware generation (ibid).

They continue, saying that the Paris Agreement means that

everyone needs to start finding those solutions. And, if we've already developed them, this will lead to employments here [in Sweden] (Interview material, 2020).

A second voice adds:

We can export both finished products, but also knowledge, to other countries. (Interview material, 2020)

The unions' conviction here is that if Swedish companies (with production in Sweden) are forerunners and can meet the increasing demand for sustainably produced products, this will benefit Swedish workers (and, by extension, unions). The unions mainly connect this opportunity to increased

^k Hybrit is a project to develop and implement the technology to produce steel without coal, thus reducing Sweden's total carbon dioxide emissions by at least ten percent (Hybrit Fossil-Free Steel, 2021).

employment. They also argue that if Swedish companies do well, they can improve working conditions (as described in the following section). So, the multi-layered opportunity that the unions identify is that the transition could give Swedish companies advantages in the global market, rendering in increased profit, whilst simultaneously resulting in ‘green jobs’. Making sure that these new jobs are ‘decent’ and available to those workers laid off as a consequence of the transition is an integral part of the justice in the transition, as well as the social and economic sustainability dimensions (ILO, 2016; Interview material, 2020).

One representative explains that ‘green jobs’

can be almost anything, it’s actually quite broad. But it’s also been something that brought about the whole climate work in the union movement (Interview material, 2020).

Not surprisingly, and in accordance with what was found about the challenge of getting workers on board the idea of societal transition, unions seem to be taking on climate work when it becomes clear how it can benefit their members. Job creation, through the promise of ‘green jobs’, arguably made it legitimate for unions to adopt the just transition concept, as it creates the possibility to overcome potential conflicts between employment and ecological issues.

Another representative describes why this is an opportunity for unions:

We see a win both for the climate and for us to increase our membership base, because more jobs are created. Mainly outside of the cities, which is also important (Interview material, 2020).

This thus means that a just transition could not only provide the opportunity of general job creation, but also of re-distribution of work opportunities to rural areas (Interview material, 2020) – an integral part of the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016).

Interestingly, the interviews not only mention the creation of new jobs due to a just transition, they also bring up how jobs that have been ‘outsourced’ to countries where labour is cheaper can be brought back to Sweden. A few of the examples mentioned are mending clothes and other products instead of buying new ones, as well as moving battery production to Sweden (Interview material, 2020). This opportunity has the potential to not only decrease over-consumption and emissions from transportation of consumption goods, but also, of course, to result in even more job creation in Sweden.

In conclusion, the unions identify the transition as an opportunity for increased profit for Swedish businesses, job creation and, by extension, stronger unions.

5.3.4. The opportunity to improve existing jobs

Job creation is thus identified in the interviews as an opportunity which helps unions in their role to create acceptance for the transition. But so are improvements of the working conditions of jobs that already exist in Sweden:

the green transition will demand a capacity development of the work force, so we'll have a more competent and more educated work force, which will lead to better jobs, hopefully. Maybe more decent jobs, maybe more ergonomic jobs, which will benefit our members (Interview material, 2020).

Another representative adds:

[a just transition] means new exciting challenges for our members. Many of them work in research, development and innovation, and there are many new exciting technical solutions that are needed. [...] many new jobs will be created. And many interesting work assignments (Interview material, 2020).

These quotes explain that new techniques and capacity building brought about in the transition could mean exciting tasks and better ergonomics for Swedish workers. This development is, arguably, not available or applicable for all unions or their members.

One component of this opportunity, as perceived by the interviewees, is improved work-life balance:

For us, work environment issues are very connected to sustainability – having a sustainable psychosocial work environment – which is the most important thing for many of our [membership] groups. (Interview material, 2020)

This representative goes on to discuss material versus immaterial values for their members:

[it] is a really difficult issue, but we try to connect it to growth having more dimensions: it can be about having a sustainable work life in many ways, like considering converting growth [increased production] in time instead of in [increased salaries]. We know that many of our membership groups wish to have a better balance between family and work life, and that wealth can mean many things – not just money (Interview material, 2020).

Some interviewees thus identify a just transition as an opportunity to improve working conditions by reducing working hours, or finding other ways to improve work-life balance. These statements link the three sustainability dimensions, and connects to the previous discussion on whether unions should prioritise general salary increases when this collides with the societal goal of reducing waste and over-consumption. Thus, the interviews seem to argue that a just transition not only provides an opportunity to ensure more balanced work lives through reducing working hours, but also a way to overcome that potential conflict of objectives.

There are other interlinkages between the sustainability dimensions that could improve jobs:

a climate transition leads to better health in very large groups, and that's also something that affects the labour market. People are [now] sick and cannot work. These things are connected (Interview material, 2020).

Several other representatives also make these connections between workload, stress, the amount of hours in a full time employment, health and sustainability (Interview material, 2020). They give examples of how a more sustainable society can be better for the individual, like flexibility in working from home and decreased consumption in favour of more fulfilling hobbies (ibid). The interviewees thus connect less stress for the environment with less stress for the individual person.

Health and stress are also connected with gender issues:

What is needed, primarily in female-dominated sectors, is investments in the working environment, so that they can cope with the workload (Interview material, 2020).

This representative explains that in some occupations the workers have precarious part-time employments that do not give security, whereas in other sectors (like health and education) the labourers feel that they are forced to work part-time to not collapse under the strenuous workload. These employment situations not only affect stress levels, but also pensions and salaries (Interview material, 2020). Their occurrence in mainly female-dominated fields genders these injustices. This is another way in which the interviews identify how the three dimensions interconnect on issues like health, consumption, economic sustenance, and gender. The interview material thus shows us how the unions see that a just transition provides an opportunity to meet these needs when improving jobs that already exist in the Swedish labour market.

To conclude the discussion on the potential role of unions to create acceptance, we can see that if the unions are able to bring workers on board and find ways to counter conflicts of objectives, partly thanks to the opportunities of new as well as improved jobs, there is much to say for their potential role to mobilise acceptance for the transition.

5.4. The role as mass educator

The interviewees connect creating acceptance for the transition with another potential role: that of disseminating knowledge. They identify a knowledge gap as one of the challenges to their work with a just transition, and it is in addressing this challenge that the representatives discuss the role of unions as educators. As one representative puts it:

It's the opportunity of a lifetime to utilise the unions, which can disseminate knowledge and education all the way to the factory floor, all the way into the homes, in every country around the world (Interview material, 2020).

This quote demonstrates how the unions perceive their own capacity to reach far with information and knowledge. It is thus “about a mass education intervention” (Interview material, 2020).

Another representative delved a bit deeper into this potential:

The single most important factor is knowledge – being aware of the effects [of emissions]. [...] Union organisations have a big and important role when it comes to spreading knowledge. Both in investigating and gathering information and then passing on the knowledge about these issues, [...] to both our members and the general public (Interview material, 2020).

They explain that unions can both spread knowledge *to* their members, but also gather the knowledge *of* the members, and make sure that those experiences are being listened to (Interview material, 2020).

Many of the representatives brought up their current efforts to educate members on sustainability (Interview material, 2020). They name how these range from making short informational texts on environmental actions to take in the workplace, to an ongoing effort to educate members on Agenda 2030 and sustainability:

You have to work in several arenas at the same time. [...] Every time we can talk about these matters, the better (Interview material, 2020).

The representatives thus see how unions already have an educational role in spreading awareness on climate change in the workplace and argue for their far-reaching capacity to be utilised in efforts to mitigate climate change. They also state their ongoing efforts to expand such endeavours (Interview material, 2020).

The representatives saw the previously mentioned varying priorities from their members as a matter of awareness and knowledge:

we have a job to do internally to inform our members on how the climate transition works, what affects it, what political goals there are and so on. [...] I also think that it’s really important to show our members [...] that we think this is a very important issue we must push for. That helps our members to also have the energy to pursue this issue locally (Interview material, 2020).

This representative highlights the need for both providing those union members already championing sustainability issues with materials to support them, but also to educate other members to raise awareness on how production and sustainability are intertwined. This would perhaps diminish the internal disagreements, but might create internal problems if the union members perceive their union to work outside of the scope of their mandate.

In conclusion, we see that the interviews map out a role for unions as mass educators. By raising awareness of the urgency of the crisis, and using each sectors’ entry point for climate change, the

representatives seem convinced that their members will give them increased mandates to push for ecological sustainability. Perhaps the members might also take the matters into their own hands and (informed by union-spread knowledge) press for sustainable changes at their workplaces. Through such educational efforts, the representatives seem to conclude, workers will understand – and accept – why their jobs might have to change. They thus interconnect the roles of spreading knowledge with that of creating acceptance.

5.4.1. A knowledge gap – a challenge for the unions in the transition

As previously mentioned, the interviews identified a challenge of ensuring awareness and knowledge of what needs to be done:

many don't understand the transition that is needed, and how fast it has to be in order to reach sustainability [before it's too late] (Interview material, 2020).

Another voice agrees:

When it comes to the Agenda [2030], there are large gaps in knowledge [...] – education on this is needed (Interview material, 2020).

It is this knowledge gap that the representatives perceive can be countered by their role as educational actors. The representatives connect this knowledge gap with the wider understanding of a three-dimensional sustainability:

There needs to be a greater awareness that if we carry on our business as usual, we might save jobs in the short term, but then fewer will have jobs in the future, when we will have to focus on solving crises and deal with catastrophes. It's about talking about this broader perspective [...] We need to create an understanding about the necessity of the transition, which is hard if short-sightedness, and perhaps short-term economic interests, set the agenda (Interview material, 2020).

This quote illustrates how short-sightedness could create conflicts of objectives, which this representative deems can be countered by applying the three-dimensional sustainability perspective. They thus connect the specific role of educator with the wider situational context that the unions have found for themselves through Agenda 2030. Thereto related, many of the union voices explain that they often meet a lack of understanding of how the dimensions of sustainability are interrelated and how labour relates to the environment (Interview material, 2020).

The interviews thus identify a need for knowledge amongst Swedish workers, which they connect to their potential role as mass educators in the transition. This would also allow for them to empower their members, both in increasing their knowledge, but also by making their knowledge known to the decision makers and employers. We explore this second aspect of this role in the following section.

5.4.2. Empowering members by spreading their knowledge

Several union representatives argue that a just transition could empower their members and heighten their status in society, by extension giving them better claims to improved working conditions and salaries (Interview material, 2020). One interviewee argues:

the combined work input of the [memberships base] have quite a large effect on the creation of environmental problems, but also their solutions (ibid).

Even more positive towards their membership base's sustainability efforts, another interviewee indicates that their members have been pushing for sustainability for decades:

if we'd had more [membership base] leading the projects, then we'd have a more sustainable industry (Interview material, 2020).

The members of this union are trying to make three-dimensional sustainability an essential part of the fabric of their industry, but as they are not the ones with the final say in the end-product, factors such as short-term economic gains and keeping with tradition are being prioritized over sustainability (Interview material, 2020). Thus, arguably, if these members were to be empowered within their industry, that industry would become more sustainable. Another voice adds:

it's our members who are the ones to execute the Agenda 2030. (Interview material, 2020)

Hence, if sustainability becomes society's main goal, the union members could be empowered since they are the ones implementing this goal. These quotes thus show the interconnectedness with union membership empowerment and sustainability: the former arguing that if their members are more empowered in their work, then their industry would be more sustainable; and the latter arguing that if society becomes more sustainable, then their members would be empowered as the implementors of that societal goal.

Similarly, another representative argues that their members can provide society with a lot of beneficial knowledge, if they were to have higher status. They also connect this with how their memberships bases face the consequences of ecological detriment:

Our members are at the front lines, dealing with the consequences of climate change. We need to communicate their importance and inform others about the significance of their knowledge in this context, to make sure that our members can be part of the solution. [...] Society needs to benefit from the knowledge our members possess about how to deal with this (Interview material, 2020).

Here, the interviewee highlights intersections with gender issues:

We need to value and raise our members' occupations to the level of equivalent male-dominated sectors...
[...] gender equality [is] part of the solution for the climate dilemma and climate crisis. It cannot be left behind. It is interrelated with everything else (Interview material, 2020).

Just like on the topic of improved jobs, we thus see how the interviews make the connections between the three dimensions of sustainability. 'Boosting' the status of their members' (female-dominated) occupations could entail their increased salaries (economic dimension), add these members' knowledge on solutions to climate change issues (ecological dimension), and meet challenges in public health (social dimension) – all whilst dealing with the social issue of gender.

Further, this representative argues for including their members in the development of adaptation strategies because

they are the ones that recognize and can help anticipate future needs. (Interview material, 2020)

The interviews thus show how union members can contribute with innovations and in-depth knowledge within their respective fields, which could be of use in the transformation to a fossil fuel-free society.

Consequently, there are several dimensions to this perceived opportunity of just transition. The interviews explain that just transition could heighten the societal status of their members by virtue of them creating technical, bureaucratic or service-related solutions that lower emissions and/or increase ecological sustainability. It could also be the other way around: ecological sustainability increases the societal importance of disenfranchised occupations, which could heighten socio-economic equality. The interviews made clear that empowering the union members was a goal in itself, as the representatives on multiple occasions came back to how good such an outcome would be. None explicitly said the reason for such a goal (Interview material, 2020), but it is not far-fetched to link this to unions' general mission of bargaining for the empowerment of their members.

5.5. The role of involving workers in the transition

The final role that the unions identified for themselves within the transition was that of involving workers in the transition, thus democratising it. When discussing the Swedish model as a framework for the transition, a majority brought up workplace dialogue between the parties as the way forward (Interview material, 2020). One representative goes one step further when they suggest how to involve workers:

Many of the emissions come from the individual workplaces: transport, manufacturing [...] Since there are so many local union organisations in Sweden, you could consider having discussions with the employers about the local emissions. Take inventory! Look at the emissions from your own operations and from what you purchase, and transport to and from the workplace. [...] see what the problem is: 'which emission do we cause?', and then think about 'what solutions are there for us, here?', 'which

investments do we need to make?', and 'what kind of capacity building or education might the personnel need to deal with these changes?' [...] people would feel that they are part in creating the circumstances for the transition. [...] instead of someone saying 'here is what you should do', society would vitalise politics and democracy around these issues. They become concrete and you feel that you have some influence. [...] it would make the transition more democratic (ibid).

What is proposed here is thus a nation-wide local inventory at each workplace, most probably driven by all labour market parties. The suggestion relies on the workers' and employers' knowledge of the local context at their workplace, and thus connects to the previous roles of empowering union members and disseminating knowledge. It would arguably also address the challenge of bringing workers onboard for the transition as it draws on democratisation as a tool, which has the potential to make people feel like stakeholders.

The representative's idea could both result in substantial inventories at each workplace, which provide a framework for lowering emissions, as well as a list of what capacity building is required to take on these changes. Further, the idea also connects to how we as humans tend to relate to climate change:

These big questions, they're complicated. You can't ask that of everyone, to know everything about this, people have other interests. But, your own workplace and your own work situation, *that* you care about. And that you can influence. If all do this, all these small contributions, a lot of things would happen (Interview material, 2020).

It is only natural that people care about their own employments and places of work, which has been made clear in examples on how people sometimes prioritise keeping their job over environmental protection. As the quote above states, it is often difficult for people to be up to date on the latest research on climate change. Even though awareness and knowledge are instrumental parts in a just transition, it is too much to ask all citizens to be climate scientists or activists. But, by involving labour in the local context, people would be able to use the knowledge that they do have about their own organisation.

The representative brings up examples of workplaces where this is already being done to some extent and that these efforts could take various forms in spaces where the parties meet (Interview material, 2020). One example is to bring ecological aspects into collective agreement negotiations:

[We need to] make it possible for local [party] negotiations to include climate change issues and the effects that becoming climate neutral will have on capacity building and investments (ibid).

It is through unionism and collective bargaining that the unions have the greatest possibility to change how production and workplaces are set up, according to the interviews (Interview material, 2020). Therefore, it is interesting to note that very few Swedish unions have incorporated ecological issues in their negotiation demands to employers; only two of the eleven organisations involved in this study have

begun to do so¹, and these organisations are amongst those most engaged on ecological issues in the country.

However, party negotiations do not only take place in the formal settings of the larger collective agreement negotiations, but are also consistently undergone at the workplaces with the local union representatives:

It's hard to draw a sharp line where the union mandate ends, but most employers are usually positive towards engaged employees who have opinions and ideas about how things could be improved (Interview material, 2020).

This representative describes how such dialogue could be on the topics of

how the company should act internally, but also about the products and services you create and can affect [...] [for example] when companies are doing their sustainability accounting [*hållbarhetsredovisning*] (Interview material, 2020).

Another voice describes examples of successful cases where their members have made their workplaces enforce recycling at the office or brought sustainability issues into the decisions they make as part of their jobs (Interview material, 2020). These local spaces for labour and employer negotiations are connected to macro levels by another representative:

we have to work within the arenas that we've got access to. The Party model plays an important part in that. Being able to exercise influence on workplaces at a local level, for example, and also to negotiate and close agreements at a central level (ibid).

Thus, the unions reiterate the importance of the Swedish model for them to be able to work for sustainability in the labour market, and how this means that their members can create change both locally and nationally.

The unions have historically been and continue to be the vessel that organises labour and acts as the voice of the workers. This is thus, one could argue, an opportunity to utilise the organisational and mobilising capacity of the Swedish unions for the sake of the environment. When workers are involved in deciding on how to achieve the necessary emission cuts, mitigating climate change could also strengthen social and economic dimensions of sustainability.

¹ Notably, this was done in the latest round of collective negotiations (year 2020).

5.6. Analysis conclusion: unions working for the justice in the transition

The union representatives imagine a just transition to be a transition to an ecologically sustainable society, whilst still ensuring economic and social sustainability. To them, the most important factors for this are capacity building and social security, which is in line with the theoretical understanding of the just transition concept (ILO, 2016; Interview material, 2020). Throughout this chapter, we have seen that the union voices identify the opportunities to mobilise new members, the potential for new ‘green’ jobs, improving the jobs that already exist, empowering union members, and democratising the transition. These are inherent in the roles that they identify for themselves as a party in the Swedish model; as creators of acceptance; as mass educators; and as actors that ensure workers’ involvement in the transition. These roles are also, according to the interviewees, a way to counter the challenges that they identified, which were to prioritise the various issues; to bring workers on board; to manage conflicts of objectives; and to counteract the need for knowledge amongst members. Although their potential roles could counter these challenges, the union voices did express how these made this task more difficult to take on, thus showing the complicated nature of the union organisations’ efforts to work for sustainability in the Swedish labour market and society.

6. Discussion

Unions conceptualising the transition

The four theoretical conceptualisations of the transition (‘fossil free transition’, ‘green growth’, ‘circular economy’ and ‘socio-ecologic transition’) are all prevalent in the interview material to various degrees. We see that the interviewees bring up technical solutions in line with the fossil free transition conceptualisation when they mention new fossil free production methods. As they connect these advances in techniques and know-how with the possibility for Swedish companies to be forerunners and increased competitiveness on the global markets, they see how this can benefit Swedish workers through the creation of new jobs. This thus connects with the green growth conceptualisation, in that the interviews argue for economic development as a driver for the transition through profits rendered by Swedish companies being ecologically sustainable. The circular economy was the least prevalent conceptualisation in the interviews, but did appear when respondents brought up possible new jobs within mending services and second-hand stores. Lastly, the socio-ecologic conceptualisation of the transition appeared when the interviewees questioned the economic growth paradigm and whether unions should shift their focus to other priorities than salary increase. Some research in this area suggest reformed taxes and universal basic income (Bjerkesjö et al., 2021; Hoffmann, 2015; van den Bergh and

Kallis, 2012), but such developments were not brought up by the interviewees. They did, however, refer to other possible strategies within this conceptualisation, such as reduced working hours and changed societal norms. Interestingly, the unions utilise all four conceptualisations when they discuss the transition in Sweden, and their role within it. This suggests that they all have some relevance for the unions – and I would argue for society at large – when constructing a more sustainable society. All the interviewees share important insight into what the transition must entail. The challenge for us as society, and especially for politics, is to find ways to prioritise between the interventions suggested by the various conceptualisations.

The interview material suggests that even though critique of economic growth as the paradigm for societal development is increasing in union spheres, they still largely place themselves within the green growth visualisation of the transition. This relates to the history of Swedish unionisation as interconnected with a focus on employment and economic growth with redistributive dimensions. The academic critique of how this focus limits unions' space to act on ecological issues (Lundström et al., 2015) does also appear to be true in this study's interviews, as the representatives explain that traditional ideas of what should be on the union agenda can hinder them from taking on these issues.

Not surprisingly, the representatives continually connected the possible ways to imagine and implement the transition with the interests of their members, as is pertinent of member-led organisations. The unions appear to be challenged by their members' varying importance put to environmental issues, and whether the unions should push their members towards engaging with these, or if this should surge from the members first. There was however a common understanding amongst the sustainability officers that climate change and ecological issues will affect the Swedish labour market and union members, and that thus it is within their mandate as parties in the labour market to engage with these topics. This came through in what roles they perceived for themselves, primarily in the broader function to ensure that the transition is just by ensuring that changes in the labour market improve the conditions for their members by creating new possibilities (new employments or new tasks in their current jobs). As such, they continuously presented their own roles in ways that align with the Just Transition Framework and its focus on social dialogue to ensure decent jobs, capacity building and social security infrastructure (ILO, 2016).

The Just Transition Framework can arguably be placed within both the socio-ecologic and economic growth conceptualisations of the transition, even though these are based in quite contrasting ideological perspectives. This, again, challenges unions and other actors (mainly politics) to find ways to prioritise between economic, social, and ecological dimensions of sustainability. This study shows that the economic growth conceptualisation has facilitated Swedish unions' engagement with ecological issues whilst remaining within the traditional business unionism paradigm. By focusing on the jobs that can be created by the transition, they can continue to work with parameters of quantitative and technical aspects

of work. To take steps outside of this paradigm by arguing for changes in the societal-natural context in which labour exists and the structure of the political economy could perhaps mean approaching a social unionism, which could affect the relations between the parties in the Swedish model. With the basis of this study's material, I would argue that it is unlikely that this should happen in the near future. Union members and society at large should decide whether this is compatible with what research argues need to happen to maintain labour within the planet's ecological boundaries (Folke et al., 2016).

Unions' role in transition

The roles that the unions identify for themselves are, as previously described, based in the broader idea of making the transition just. Their view is that this is best done within the social dialogue of the Party model, which also correlates with the Just Transition Framework (ILO, 2016). This reiterates how Sweden has beneficial preconditions for a just transition. The roles they bring up largely connect with historical roles of unions, such as mass educators and promoters of the empowerment of their members. This reflects how the sustainability dimensions are interrelated and how the unions see that transitioning to an ecologically sustainable society can improve social conditions as well. Recognising the value of Swedish workers' knowledge and facilitating their contribution to create a sustainable society could both improve conditions for the transition to take place, as well as utilises their know-how to make it a reality. The interviewees did not go much further into how they can amplify the voices of their members, other than localising the transition through inventories at each workplace. This could be an exciting possibility worth exploring, by all labour market parties.

It could be beneficial to problematise the unions' self-identified role in creating acceptance and analyse whether this includes a reductive construction of workers as solely interested in employment no matter the ecological consequences, and if this simultaneously ignores environmentalism of the working class (Bell, 2020). However, the interviewees presented this to me as part of their reality in working with sustainability in union spheres, hence the weight this role is given in this study. There is no denying the multitude of factors inherent in public acceptance of ecological interventions, and how this has played a role in shaping humanity's response to the climate crisis so far. As such, this role that the unions identify for themselves has great potential to counter resistance to environmental measures. Their history as actors for societal change, mass education, and as mediators of varying priorities of the workers does suggest their capabilities in this regard.

The history of Swedish unionism, as well as its current agency, shows unions' ability to mobilise workers. As the largest popular movement in the world, unions have the capacity to reach far and wide through their roles as party in social dialogue and by involving workers in the transition. The relative high union density in Sweden creates the preconditions to shoulder these roles, but this hinges on increased high unionisation. As was described in the analysis, there is an opportunity within the just transition for unions to recover their declining legitimacy amongst Swedish workers by addressing

ecological issues and placing these in the context of a three-dimensional conceptualisation of sustainability. Herein lies the possibility to work for the democratisation of the transition by ensuring Swedish workers are involved in the transition.

Several topics were brought up in the interviews that showcase how interconnected issues are within the framework of sustainability. The interviewees described how gender, migration and integration, precarious work, and class all relate to one another, and how these issues have implications both on the labour market on a systematic level, but also on the individual workers. These issues connect to one of the problematic aspects of this study's grouping of all union voices into one collective – which was done to ensure the interviewees' integrity and anonymity. This does not allow for distinctions to be made between unions that organise workers belonging to particular communities or groups, like socio-economic classes. There are undoubtedly aspects of class inherent in how both ecological concerns and the transition affect various societal groups, as made apparent in the segment on previous research. This study's anonymous grouping of the interviews also obscures the fact that there was a slight tendency of the unions to bring up issues that would relate more to the labour sectors and groups in society in which they locate their members. These factors could provide varying responses in terms of how unions conceptualise the transition, as well as which roles they see for themselves and what opportunities and challenges they see within it. This suggests that there are areas where the Swedish unions disagree. This could be amplified since some unions have more to benefit from a transition than others.

This study's focus on Sweden assumes that jobs created here are inherently positive developments. This could, however, generate negative consequence in other countries as jobs that have previously been moved there in the creation of globalised value chains are moved back to Sweden. This could be the case, for example, in battery production or the textile industry. These matters require their own research, but suffice to say that the Swedish labour market is connected to the global, and that developments here have effects globally. This arguably calls for global solidarity and a global just transition.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This study set out to investigate just transition in a Swedish context through the lens of Swedish unions, and their role therein. This was done by interviewing sustainability officers at union organisations that engage with ecological issues, to answer the research questions

- How do unions perceive their role in a just transition in Sweden?
 - o What are the opportunities and challenges for a just transition, of particular relevance for the unions?

The interview data (Interview material, 2020) put together with what the central union organisations identify as their contributions to combat climate change (LO et al., 2019), shows that there are several roles that the unions can take on to ensure that the transition to an ecologically sustainable society is just. These include creating acceptance, disseminating knowledge, and involving workers in the design and implementation of the transition. The unions find that these roles fit within their function as a part in the Swedish model, in which they can push for the interests of their members within the transition. There are several challenges and opportunities for the unions within these roles. If they manage to align the interests of their members with the transition to an ecologically sustainable society, there are opportunities in new jobs and improvements to those employments that remain, as well as to empower Swedish workers when their knowledge is utilised in the transition. There is also an opportunity for unions to mobilise new members and counter declining membership bases by engaging with ecological issues. It is encouraging to see that Swedish union organisations are increasingly taking on these momentous concerns.

This study has shown that even though there are tough prioritisations that need to be made, the assumed conflict between jobs and the environment does not have to exist. If the transition to an ecologically sustainable society and labour market is just, the societal shift can act as a driver for social justice and equity as well. This entails a transition which includes social protection, active labour market policies, health and safety policies, investments in skills and capacity building, labour standards and rights, as well as social dialogue between the parties in the labour market. This can be contextualised in Sweden in various ways. The interviews brought up capacity development to ensure that workers can move from manufacturing fuel engines vehicles to electric vehicles; to lower working hours to ensure more sustainable and healthy lives of the workers; and doing emission inventories at all Swedish workplaces – to name a few examples. In fact, one can conclude that the interviewed sustainability officers view a just transition as an advantageous framework for Sweden to deal with its need to lower emissions of greenhouse gases, whilst also ensuring that all Swedish workers benefit from the transition.

This study has explored how those union organisations most engaged with ecological issues perceive their role in a just transition. The results can thus not be generalised to all Swedish unions. Indeed, the fact that these organisations identify several challenges with internally mainstreaming these issues seems to suggest that less engaged union organisations could struggle even more to do so. There are many interesting areas of further study on how Swedish unions engage with ecological issues, one of these is why some organisations have not yet done so. Future research should further integrate other dimensions of justice which could not be considered in this study, such as a closer examination on how socio-economic class, race, or body function interplay with union organisations' perceptions on the transition, as well as if union engagement with climate change issues correspond to their own labour sector's greenhouse gas emissions. Further, there is much to learn from how unions around the world engage with just transition – investigating this could bring many important lessons for Swedish unionism. Even

though the results of this study are not representative of all Swedish unionism, they do describe what roles, challenges and opportunities union organisations could perceive for themselves in relation to a just transition.

Swedish unionism arguably has work to do to ensure that it fully engages with ecological sustainability. Nevertheless, it has historically proven its ability and willingness to partake in structural changes and seems to increasingly perceive the transition to an ecologically sustainable society as such a challenge to take on. This will arguably require unions to work together across sectors and venture outside of traditional approaches. However, unions cannot take on this challenge alone and need Swedish governance, business, and civil society to negotiate and assume the shared responsibility through dialogue and participative policy processes and implementation.

There is reason to argue that the divide between labour and environmental movements is keeping the two most powerful social movements separate, working against each other rather than together (Bell, 2020, p. 213). As such, just transition could become a framework in which these movements meet. From the perspective of someone engaged with climate change issues, I would argue that if workers and the working class become an essential part of the environmental movement, the environmental movement would be strengthened – since it *only then* takes all dimensions of sustainability into account.

In light of these results, I encourage the environmental movement to fully engage with labour interests, just as I encourage all union members to insist that their unions engage with climate change and other environmental issues. It is apparent that when union members demand ecology be put on the union agenda, the unions take on these matters. This could be a great way for Swedes to channel climate anxiety and ensure emission cuts, both in their own place of work and in society at large. Being responsive to such demands is a chance for the unions to remain relevant in today's labour market. Withal, we need to recognise that “workers in every sector and in every country are central to the question of whether there is a future for human life on the planet.” (Lundström et al., 2015, p. 166)

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8.1. Interview material

Union organisation representatives 1-11 (2020). Interviewed by Hedvig Schylander over video call between 2020-10-29 and 2020-11-18. See Interview guide in Appendix 3.

8.2. Images and layout

The image in Appendix 1 (Folke et al., 2016). Redrawn from Rockström and Sukhdev, as presented at the 2016 EAT Forum (<http://eatforum.org/event/eat-stockholm-food-forum-2016/#program>). The SDG icons are from the Global Goals (<http://www.globalgoals.org/#the-goals>).

Front page image with the approval of the designer “elenabsl”. URL: <https://www.shutterstock.com/sv/image-vector/multiethnic-group-people-supporting-earth-protecting-1339321994>

Front page design by Boel Algulin (algulinsform.se)

9. Appendix

Appendix 1: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals positioned by embedding economic and social dimension into the ecological (biosphere) foundational dimension. Image source: Folke et al., 2016.



Appendix 2: The unions involved in the study

Union (name in Swedish)	Name in English	Union members	Central organisation affiliation	Organisation type
Akademikerförbundet SSR	The Union for Professionals	56 800 (Kjellberg, 2020)	Saco	Labour union
GS-facket (Facket för skogs-, trä- och grafisk bransch)	GS (The Union for the forest, wood and graphic industry)	37 600 (Kjellberg, 2020)	LO	Labour union
Handels (Handelsanställdas Förbund)	The Commercial Employees' Union	122 300 (Kjellberg, 2020)	LO	Labour union
IF Metall (Industrifacket Metall)	IF Metall (The Union for most of Swedish industrial sectors)	242 000 (Kjellberg, 2020)	LO	Labour union
LO (Landsorganisationen)	The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (The central organisation for 'blue-collar' workers)			Central organisation
Sveriges Arkitekter	Architects Sweden	Ca 14 000 (Sveriges Arkitekter, n.d.)	Saco	Labour union
Sveriges Ingenjörer	The Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers	127 400 (Kjellberg, 2020)	Saco	Labour union
TCO (Tjänstemännens centralorganisation)	The Confederation of Professional Employees (One of the two central organisations for 'white-collar' workers)			Central organisation
Union to Union	Union to Union		LO, TCO, Saco	The three central organisations' joined efforts for international development cooperation
Vision	Vision (The Union for civil servants in welfare organisations like municipalities, regions, private companies and churches)	39 600 (Kjellberg, 2020)	TCO	Labour union
Vårdförbundet	The Swedish Association of Health Professionals (the Union for midwives, nurses, biomedical scientists and radiographers)	91 200 (Kjellberg, 2020)	TCO	Labour union

Appendix 3: The interview guide

Here follows the interview guide used in the study. These have been translated from Swedish to English.

Introduction and information about anonymity and the study in general

Questions	Examples of follow up questions
Name and title	What is your role at [union organisation]? How long have you worked in this? How long have you worked with labour issues? What is your previous professional background?
What made you start working with environmental issues?	Personal interest? Are you the only one working with sustainability issues at [organisation]?
Would you say that climate change and sustainability are union issues?	If yes: why? If no: why not?
Would you say that there is a conflict between labour and environmental issues? Between the labour movement and the environmental movement?	If yes: why? Where lies the conflict? If no: why not? Do you personally perceive this conflict? Do others who work at [organization] perceive this conflict? Do your members perceive it? Why do you think there prevails such an idea of a conflict between labour and the environment? What does this perceived conflict have as its consequences?
Is it common in Sweden to talk about climate as an issue for the labour movement?	How come? Is it more or less common that labour movements in other countries adopt ecological issues? Why do you think that is?
Are climate change and sustainability highly prioritized at [organisation]? Do your members/you member unions' members ask for you to work with ecological sustainability?	If yes: why? How is this visible to you? If no: why not? How is this visible to you? Is there any particular event or development which has made your work easier, or which has increased interest for these issues?
Has it been difficult to push for ecological issues at [organisation]? How have you dealt with these difficulties?	If yes: In what way? What have these difficulties been? Why do you think it has been difficult? If no: why do you think it's been easy to push for ecological issues to be on the union agenda?

Which are the challenges when it comes to working with sustainability issues in labour movements?	Which challenges have you personally faced? Which have [organisation] faced? Which general challenges do you think union organisations face when working with sustainability issues?
Which space to act would you say that Swedish union organisations have when it comes to working with sustainability issues?	In society at large? Between different union organisations? In the work between the central organisations? Within the unions? In what ways is union agency restricted? What could give union organisations a wider mandate and agency to act on sustainability issues?
Which visions and plans do you have at [organisation] to work with sustainability issues? Are there any plans or visions that have yet to be implemented in official statements/texts/work?	What is the next step for Swedish union organisations' sustainability work? What would you personally wish that you did?
How do you define a just transition? What would a just transition look like at a Swedish labour market? What is needed for Sweden to achieve our climate goals? What is needed for your sectors to lower their emissions? Do you see a just transition in Sweden as feasible? Can it be done? What needs to be changed in Sweden for us to be able to implement a just transition?	Which are the challenges in implementing this transition? Which are the opportunities? What role(s) does Swedish union organisations have in a just transition in Sweden? What is the role for your organisation? What role do your members play? What would you wish that other actors did to ensure a just transition?
What would a just transition mean for your members?	
Is continued economic growth compatible, or even required, for ecological sustainability?	[Organisation's] standpoint? Your personal opinion?
Anything you want to add?	

Finishing words and thank you.