

Breaking and Making Norms

- Young people's stories of consumption actions for sustainable development ¹

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Extreme heat waves, droughts, floods and melting glaciers have been observed to an increased extent. According to the assessment of the most comprehensive UN climate report to date, it is highly probable that humans are the primary cause of the recent increase in the average global temperature. Two thousand of the world's foremost climate researchers stand behind this massive fourth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).² The report states that the release of greenhouse gases at or above the current levels will result in further warming and cause considerable global climate change in the 21st century. These changes will most likely be of a greater magnitude than those observed in the 20th century. A Swedish Government Official Report (2005) indicates that humankind's collective life style, with an ever increasing conversion of material and fossil energy to such things as transportation, food and clothing does not establish the conditions for a sustainable development³ that takes into consideration coming generations as well as the distribution of global power and resources. The world has already surpassed its ecological carrying capacity by 25% as a result of mankind's total and unevenly distributed production and consumption (Swedish Government Official Report, 2005). A UN Food and Agricultural Organisation report (FAO, 2006) indicates that the global impact of livestock production on climate has surpassed that of the transport sector's.

In the Swedish media, climate and resource issues came to the fore in the autumn of 2006. A discussion accelerated regarding the need for the high-consuming portion of the world's population to change life style and consumption patterns in a sustainable direction. On today's editorial pages and in political arenas, voices are being raised that in addition to investing in new technology, we need to establish new norms that support actions allowing sustainable development. In this explorative study we have searched for stories describing patterns of action and actor contexts with the goal of obtaining in-depth knowledge on how and where learning on sustainable development is taking place. This is significant as the UN again is highlighting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the 2005-14 Decade of ESD (DESD) as one of the most important tools for change. Our information providers are young Swedes who, several years before the autumn 2006 sustainability boom, had

2 Recognising the problem of potential global climate change, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. The IPCC was to assess scientific, technical and socioeconomic information relevant to the understanding of climate change, its potential impact and options for adaptation and mitigation. The reports by the four Working Groups provide a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment of the current state of knowledge of climate change: "www.ipcc.ch/".

3 This is based primarily on the well-known definition of sustainable development that was introduced in the Brundtland UN World Commission, *Our Common Future*, 1987. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 stressed the three dimensions – ecological, economic and social – of sustainable development. The Summit also underscored the need to integrate sustainable development perspectives into educational systems at all levels in order to promote education as a decisive factor for change. The UN Decade (2005-2014) of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in December 2002.

already begun searching for patterns of consumption and life styles that could be combined with long-term sustainable global development. What can society in general, university employees⁴ and the world of education learn from the experiences of these young people? What can be done differently in today's education?

1 Starting Point

This study is based on the assumption that it is the *distance moral*⁵ dimension in actions both spatially, but above all temporally, that is the specific political novelty in the fundamental values of sustainable development. This can be compared with the closeness moral dimension that has a longer tradition in the Swedish environmental discourse or the Swedish school system's attitude to environmental issues. In the social norms, which are assumed and can be identified in the sustainable development themes, taking responsibility is intergenerational and global.

The goal of this study is to interpret portions of seven young adults' stories on their distance moral commitment. We have limited the study results to the young people's action patterns and social norms for three specific types of consumption: transport, food and clothing. This is because these action patterns are socially reproducible and can be empirically identified using the methods of the social sciences. The young people have a common moral-ethical-ideological point of departure in a distance moral commitment manifested through their participation in different environmental organisations. For them, acting with distant moral responsibility is not always considered as being identical with what others believe is normal, i.e. acting according to prevailing social norms.

2 Subjects and Selection

The young people who participated in the study were selected strategically.⁶ The crucial selection criterion was that they were actively committed to issues that reflected their feelings of responsibility for individuals and/or ecosystems

4 In Sweden, the research community has recently (2006) been assigned an additional task by a new amendment to the Higher Education Ordinance's opening paragraph: Institutions of higher education, "... shall promote sustainable development in their activities." This means that research and instruction directed towards ESD is one of Swedish society's prioritised knowledge and research fields that will contribute to developing and supporting norms for sustainable consumption patterns.

5 Distance moral here means an intergenerational and global responsibility. Distance moral actions have consequences for someone you have no direct relation to for example, because you do not live at the same time. The consumption of phosphates (nonrenewable resource) by the generation currently living, for instance, will most likely have consequences for generations that we will never meet. The distance from those whom the moral relation affects can involve time as well as place (see: Almers, 2005).

6 One chooses interview subjects that are of interest from the point of view of the study. The aim of such a selection is not to be representative but to discover more qualities, and as in this case, to understanding people, their intentions and actions.

beyond themselves in time and location. What they do to influence such things as climate change or the effects of flooding on Southeast Asian farmers and fishermen resulting from cutting down mangrove forests to raise giant shrimp, hardly has direct consequences for the young people themselves, anyone they know or with whom they have a personal relationship. These are examples of issues that concern distance morals.

The seven young people ranged in age from 17 to 26 years at the beginning of the pre-study in 2004. The upper limit was set at 26, since that is the official age limit for membership in youth organisations in Sweden. Some of the participants passed the 26-year-old limit during the study, but they had been pupils in the Swedish school system in the 1990s when *contributing to sustainable development* was an official and articulated educational goal.

3 Focus, Aim and Research Questions

In relation to the common themes of the anthology, *Values and Democracy in Education for Sustainable Development*, our main emphasis is on distance moral dimension, social norms and impact. This explorative study is motivated by the goal of seeking knowledge about and an understanding of how it has been and can be possible to break established social norms and incorporate new social norms, consumption patterns and habits. Our focus has been to work with the themes of social norms and norm breakers to find tendencies and indications in the material that can illuminate the following research questions: What are the points on which the young people – reflectively or unreflectively – break with society's social norms and with commonly existing social consumption patterns? What are social norm environments and arenas that over time have supported the norm-breaking and norm-making development of the youths in their consumption patterns? What does this mean for ESD and ESD research?

4 Method and Theory

The empirical basis of this study can be found in the life history tradition (Bertaux, 1981). In this case, it means that the empiri is collected through a combination of life story interviews and thematically open interviews that aim to illuminate the research questions. There are different traditions in story research, each with its own approach to the relationship between life and story. The empirical study that has contributed material to this explorative study (Almers, forthcoming) has its basis in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (1945). In the present research we view the story as an articulation of life that both clarifies and provides it with a new, richer meaning.

Thus, we view the stories of the young people neither as constructions independent of lived experience nor as representations of the past from a naively realistic perspective. Instead, we see the stories from the interviews as constituted interpretations of the past, the present and notions of the future. The lived experience, including the interview situation, is the basis of the stories that are constituted.

The empirical material is from an ongoing research project and is not to be considered as general results for the entire group of young people who are distance morally committed. On the other hand, with the assistance of the empirical findings we want to try to understand how distance morally committed youth reason about their norm-breaking actions. With the social norm as an analysis tool, we have studied their stories focusing on their statements about *consumption actions* when it comes to transport, food and clothing. Embedded in the actions there is a social norm that can be identified and formulated by means of the question: What does the person say that one *ought to do in the social context*? In the analysis, we then let the results emerge from the material as answers to the questions we ask.

The *social norms* – here defined as socially reproducible action directives – that govern and influence our lives (i.e. our action and consumption patterns) are often unspoken, invisible and taken for granted.⁷ It is not until we actually study the *norm breaker* and his or her patterns of actions that we can catch sight of and identify the norm environments in effect. By focusing on the norm breaker's social consumption patterns we can learn something about these influencing processes and their terms. From a research perspective based on the social norm model developed at the Sociology of Law Department at Lund University, actions carried out in reality are studied in order to understand why things happen as they do. Norm research deals with understanding the driving force of human social actions. The action is seen as subjectively determined and science has to then work with scientific categories and concepts that are able to relate to the normative. The concept of norm can be seen as the connecting link between the actual and the desirable, between what is and what should be, or as expressed in social scientific terms, between system and action.⁸

Will and reason are central driving forces or prerequisite for acting with the intention of attaining a desired state or value. Knowledge (situated cognition) is another important prerequisite for being able to carry out actions and solve problems in the way one wishes. An additional prerequisite deals with the possibilities to realise that which one both desires to attain and has the knowledge to implement. It is the terms of the system that both enable and limit the action alternatives that are available. Norms influence everyday practice when people act according to the action directives of the social norm, when one behaves as others do in a given social situation, that is to say, normally.

Here we use the norm's three dimensions – values, knowledge and system conditions – as analytical tools for interpreting and understanding how norms are constructed. Norms are seen as a mixture of cognitive factors, system conditions and values. How they appear in the individual case is an empirical question.

7 See Hydén & Svensson's chapter *The Concept of Norms in Sociology of Law* in this volume.

8 Empirical research on norms has been elaborated in articles, books and doctoral theses from the Sociology of Law Department, Lund University – some of them only with an English summary: Hydén, 2002; Wickenberg, 1999 & 2004; Baier, 2003; Rejmer, (ed. 2004) among others. See also Aubert, 1976; Bicchieri, 2006; Elster, 1989; Etzioni, 2000; Hechter & Opp, 2001.

5 Empirical Basis

The results are illustrated with quotations from the interviews to show how the young people interviewed reason *about norms* concerning transport, food and clothing. These three consumption areas spontaneously and frequently appear in the stories about norms in the study. It is in the young people's motivations for their actions that the distance moral norms emerge. Their distance moral commitment is expressed in their life style choices as well as in their efforts to influence living conditions and structures for a sustainable development. The choice of influencing methods varies from individual to individual, but also in the course of one individual's life. For example, some of the young people have moved from an action strategy of making as ecologically and socially sustainable choices as possible in their own life styles to trying to affect structural changes. They tell how different events and encounters with other approaches have contributed to them changing action strategies – and starting to act in accordance with other norms. In this study, the statements used are disassociated from the individuals. By assigning them letters (I, J, K, L, M, N and O), however, it makes it clear which quotations come from the same individual. The statements are provided to concisely illustrate how norms related to sustainable development and distance moral can be expressed in different ways in the stories of young activists. Words that are emphasised by the young people in their oral stories have been italicised in print.

6 Results

The results are initially presented in relation to the norm themes related to transport, food and clothing and the arguments put forward for norm breaking in these areas. Subsequently, norm arenas are presented including school, the family and voluntary organisations where the norms are developed and supported as well as how the young people describe their significance for norm development. On the whole, the interviewed youths are satisfied with their choices of food, clothing and transport. They do not often see their choices as sacrifices even though they deviate from what are considered to be common choices among young people.

6.1 *Norms Related to Transportation*

For all the people interviewed, living sustainably when it comes to transport primarily means avoiding car and air transport as much as possible. Public transport, primarily railway, is stressed as being positive, as are walking and cycling. One of the interviewees advocates using sources of energy other than fossil fuel. Global fairness is evident with all interviewees, namely the idea that all people on earth have the same right to environmental space, i.e. just as great or limited a right to use the biosphere and atmosphere as a resource and recipient. One of the interviewees relates how he once asked in a public debate if it would be sustainable for all Chinese to have cars. And then if the same would go for all Swedes to have cars.

O: So I asked, “Is it sustainable that all Chinese have *cars*?” And for the public it was obvious: It was *not* sustainable. And then I asked the question, “Is it sustainable that all *Swedes* have cars?” . . . Even if most of them answered no, there was a totally different *hesitation* in the answer. It wasn’t as *obvious*. What is one’s view *in that case*?

Interviewee O shows indignation over a view that he thinks means that people make a distinction between Chinese and Swedes when they decide if it is sustainable to have a car, a view that goes against the idea of fair environmental space.

Reasons and arguments for norm breaking in the transport sector

The reasoning behind walking, cycling or taking the bus, train, underground or tram instead of a car or plane is, “to practise what you preach as far as possible” (K). But it also has to do with “wanting to show that it can be done” (O), that it feels good not to support bad systems, that your experience is influenced by your values to the point that you can actually feel bad about doing something that runs contrary to them. Knowledge, morals and feelings are interwoven. One of the interviewees relates how your aesthetic experience is coloured by your knowledge and moral values:

O: I don’t want to support the *system*... You’re influenced, you know, by the values you *have*, which means that I think it’s really a *pain* to drive a car everyday, entirely for my *own* sake. Just like I think that wind power can be beautiful, I think that driving is a real *plague*.

All those interviewed did not feel the same. Driving a car for another interviewee is an emotionally positive experience. But that is in conflict with his values which are against driving. He resolves this by not buying a car in spite of pressure from others:

I:...like my brother asked, “When are you going to get a car?” And I just said, “No, *I* don’t plan to get a car.” For sure, it’s *fun* to drive a car and all. And if you *have* a car you are going to *drive* it. And so you don’t get a car (laugh) if you don’t believe it is *good*. Take public transport as much as possible and . . . cycle. If you have access to a car, you *get* lazy.

Several of the youths relate that they see themselves as parts of a system and a culture that is not very easy to completely break out of. They believe that it may not even be desirable or effective. Living sustainably on a personal level is not an end in itself if it does not result in further changes. Breaking the norms is a matter of balance. They reason about how far one should go and how much one should adapt:

O: But at the same time you have to live, right? And you live in a given culture and you can’t entirely break out of it. Or of course you *can* break out of it, but I don’t think that is the smartest way to go.

For some of the interviewees, one adjustment to the norm involves flying when the purpose is perceived as being legitimate. Flying on the job or for a good

cause can be allowed, but flying to go on holiday is excluded: “It’s out of the question.” (K). It is important to be able to defend one’s action for oneself. A trip is considered legitimate if it serves a purpose and if it is because a person is going to move away for a long time and do something beneficial:

O: In that case I could imagine flying there. It would feel more OK for my own sake. [. . .]. Then I can at least defend the carbon dioxide emissions. [Who would you defend yourself against?] Myself (laugh). But that I hopefully *learn* something in the works and do something *worthwhile* when I’m there.

From the perspective of impact, some of the youths, over time, tone down the individual responsibility aspect for emissions and life style in some contexts. You cannot expect that individuals should be so up on the issues and motivated that they “should pay 10 times as much to take the train” (O) instead of flying, for example. In O’s opinion, a more accessible approach would be to influence public opinion by lobbying for “political acceptance” among citizens of policy decisions that make flying more expensive and trains cheaper.

O: In other words, I was probably more judgemental during high school. Now I have greater understanding that some people have other priorities or that they don’t *know* any better. It’s like impossible to *have* that knowledge. You can’t expect that of every individual . . . Well, yeah, maybe *knowledge* about climate change and some awareness that we have to do something about these problems.

6.2 Norms Related to Food

The food related section of the young people’s stories are associated with the following norms: not to eat meat or eat less meat, purchase KRAV (organic) labelled/ecologically produced food, purchase locally produced and seasonal products, buy fair trade certified products, boycott products that are considered to be unsustainable “villains” such as giant shrimp and threatened fish species. Here you find boycott⁹ as well a buycott¹⁰ among the methods of putting pressuring. Another, and in part alternative approach to advance sustainable food consumption and production by means of one’s own life style is to work for collective changes in food and agriculture policies.

Being an aware consumer also means striking a balance. Buying local produce can at times outweigh buying ecologically. It is a matter of *considering* sustainable aspects when you shop, and adjusting accordingly:

M: There is so very much, to consider . . . that it’s not just the *label* but . . . that it is more a matter that you *think* a little when you shop [. . .] Like, for example, I would rather buy Swedish apples that are not ecologically grown. Things like that. I *never* compromise on *certain* products, like . . . coffee and cocoa and tea and stuff like that. Because it is so very *important*, and yet, I see it as a bit of a luxury. And bananas, too. You do what is sensible.

9 Here it means actively refusing to buy something with the intention of having an impact.

10 Here it means actively and positively choosing to buy a product because it is fair trade or environmentally labelled, for example.

Reasons and arguments for norm breaking related to food

Being a vegetarian or vegan is motivated in the stories because by so doing, you place fewer demands on the limited environmental space than a carnivore does, as well as enabling food production that is less resource demanding.

M: In part because it uses less *energy*; it is less resource demanding and takes up less environmental space. It would give more people the opportunity to increase their standard to a fairer level if we didn't use as much agricultural land for cows to graze.

One argument is that the same arable area could feed more people.

K: Well you know that ten times more land is needed to produce a kilo of meat than to produce a kilo of vegetables and such.

But it also has to do with animal ethics and one of the interviewees feels that it was the animal rights argument that convinced him to become a vegan. Even milk and egg production involves the exploitation of animals.

K: It was like this classical thought that animals are individuals with their own worth, so to speak. And that it is wrong to use them just to produce . . . yeah, like producing food for people. Especially if it is done on a large scale and in a way that is painful.

The only one of the interviewees who started to eat meat again after several years as a vegan and even more as a vegetarian motivated the decision as follows:

K: Suddenly I could no longer buy the idea that animals were individuals. Plus that I had a more nuanced picture of the environmental argument for vegetarianism and veganism and that stuff. Maybe I had realised that . . . an *optimal* diet from an environmental point of view was, perhaps, a mixed diet. [. . .] So it was a combination of what is a good environmental choice and how you view animals.

He still tries, though, to keep down his meat consumption because he knows that “there is an upper limit to how much meat you can eat [...] if you want to keep yourself within an equitable environmental space and such” (K). He thinks that the optimal diet for a Swede from the point of view of environmental and global fairness is one of locally produced root vegetables and grains with smaller amounts of vegetables, meat, milk, eggs and possibly fish. His reasoning is that there is land that is not suitable for cultivation but better for grazing.

As it was with the positioning in the transport sector, reduced meat consumption is motivated with “practise what you preach” (L), but without going to extremes because it is important that others accept the message and reduce their meat consumption:

L: I don't think you have to be that careful and that you can eat fish now and again because I am a vegetarian for solidarity reasons and for environmental reasons. So I don't absolutely follow my own rules. I think that is very important

too because you want to get people to accept the message, that it's not just about turning on and off a switch, but that you can *reduce*. If people *reduce* their meat consumption, that's good.

Boycotting unsustainable villains is something young people do, among other reasons, for their own sake because it feels good not to participate in unsustainable development. But they also see boycotting as a way of having an impact. It is comforting to know that you do not support the depletion of cod, while at the same time, according to O, you probably would do more good if you put your energy towards building public opinion against illegal cod fishing and less on your own personal eating habits.

O: It feels really good not to eat fish when you see all the stuff about illegal cod fishing and giant shrimp and there is a lot that is related to fish consumption. Just so you're not a part of it, right? Not *supporting* it. My *money* doesn't support that awful black market mafia that is depleting the sea . . . But, I mean, I would probably do more good if I ate cod and did one of those documentaries (critical of the cod fishing industry).

The feeling of living a life consistent with one's values is a strong driving force, i.e. to live according to one's convictions. A positive basic outlook can be another driving force. You *can* make a difference.

N: And then I suppose I have chosen to believe in . . . that you still *can* . . . reverse the trend. So that things turn out *better*. In other words, that everything doesn't *have* to go to hell. It *can* actually . . . It is a fairly *positive basic outlook*, I think, that is the driving force . . . I can be *really* angry and *really* tired and yet, I wouldn't be able to keep on fighting for different causes if it wasn't that I believed that you *can* make a *difference*. That you can reverse the course of things.

The reason for choosing to put time and energy into a boycott of the unsustainable villains can, apart from the gains in factual matters, be because it can be a way of attracting the still uncommitted to a greater awareness and involvement in sustainable issues in general. For one of the interviewees, the giant shrimp issue is an example of a truly "educational" (N) question when it comes to talking to other people who are less interested in sustainability questions about what ecological, social and economic sustainability can be:

N: I got caught up in it (giant shrimp issue) because it was such a *clear* example of something in which the social, economic and ecological are interrelated. That's when you can really *speak* the different languages when you're talking to other people. To not *just* say, "Yeah, save the mangrove forests because they are so *fine*. A lot of fine animals live there. And the biological diversity, you really have to have more of that." You *can* continue on until you are talking about deep sea fishing. Or anything *conceivable*. And then it immediately becomes more interesting, even for economists.

In that way, N believes, it becomes a question about which you can communicate with *everyone*. It can be a gateway into talking about global

contexts of an ecological, social and economic nature. And of what we have the *right* to do towards other people:

N: It's not just that it's easy to talk about it. If they've understood *that* question, they can also often talk about other things *as well*, when there are clear examples of how everything is *related*. Socially, economically and ecologically, you can say. It's such a good . . . (short laugh) summary of global *environmental problems*. And you can ask yourself . . . "by what *right* do we think that we . . . can eat giant shrimp in Sweden?"

That giant shrimp are such a clear symbol of luxury also makes it interesting as an issue to become committed to. It is so easy to replace:

N: But *this* is a product that I can't even really . . . that is probably what makes it so interesting, that I can't even see the *point* of it. I think that they can be *replaced*, that there are shrimp in our oceans too (laughs). They are not giant here, but . . . In that way it becomes *even* more of a kind of luxury symbol.

Becoming very knowledgeable about issues involving the ecological and social consequences of different sorts of production results in one easily *thinking* and *feeling* more and *caring* more, according to one of the interviewees. But one problem is that the information does not get out to the population in general. "I believe that you could talk about banana cultivation with poisons for an hour and quite a lot of people would care. It's just that you can't get the information *out*" (N). But even when the information is spread, it does not always have an impact on everyday action anyway: "But sometimes the *economic* arguments take over so that it doesn't manage to trickle down into everyday life anyhow" (N).

6.3 *Norms Related to Clothing*

The young adults in this study associate the West's over consumption of clothing with resource depletion, environmental pollution and socially unsustainable working conditions in the producing countries. Their counter strategies are to reduce clothing consumption, make conscious choices of producers, and second-hand purchasing. Clothes are also seen as style indicators with consequences for the possibilities one has to reach out with ideas and messages.

Reasons and arguments for norm breaking related to clothing

The young people's arguments for reduced consumption of clothing and other goods are energy consumption, hazardous emissions, emissions that negatively affect the climate, health problems of workers on cotton plantations and unacceptable working conditions for employees:

M: If you think about, say, clothing production, it is really very terrible when people die from poisoned cotton when they are only 40 years old.

There should be incentives for reduced consumption even for consumers, such as a shortened work week and more leisure time:

M: If you bought *less* . . . then maybe you would also have more time. You would see that everything is related, so to speak. A shortened work week, for example. If we bought less, we wouldn't need to work to get as much money either and then we could maybe *live* a little more and do *other things* that are fun.

Changing clothing norms is related to a bigger life style change, the aim of which is to reduce one's consumption and negative impact on other people's health and environment. It is the result of an awareness that all of one's actions have an impact. Sometimes the life style change is radical:

O: People don't believe me when I *say* it. That I really could spend all my *days* trying on *clothes* and going to McDonald's when I was in junior high. I hadn't started to change my *life style* like I did later on in senior high. I tried to consume as little as possible (during senior high). Not to *buy* so much. Not buy so much clothing. Mostly second-hand clothes. Yeah, reduce your consumption and environmental footprint quite simply. Related to the fact that all of your actions have an impact. And try to reduce the impact and reflect on the ways you *want* to make an impact. It is *enormously* related to consumer power. But not *just* consumer power. It's also a matter of reducing your consumption.

It is a dilemma for one of the youths because he thinks it is fun to buy new clothes:

M: There is so much artificial need. I *have*, like, . . . one and a half closets full of clothes. I can hardly push *in* any more. But I still think it's fun to buy new clothes (short laugh). You wish you could somehow be satisfied, be mentally stronger and not care so much about the *superficial* and *clothes*.

Another of the young people still uses clothes from when he was in middle school and does not feel any need to buy new ones:

J: In other words, I have worn the same clothes since I was in 6th grade. So it's like no problem for me. And it's really no problem for them (friends who buy lots of clothes) either, but it must be some kind of psychological attitude that they need clothes even if they really don't. And that type of attitude can very well be altered with trends.

Consumption of immaterial services instead of consumption that reduces the earth's resources "could become fashionable" (J). "That people buy those kinds of immaterial services, I mean, like programmed codes . . . It can very well vary with trends" (J). However, J is also of the opinion that it is not entirely impossible to expect that even his "hedonistic friends" (J) could one day realise the unsustainability of continuing with consumption that would deplete "6 earths" (J) if everyone was to live like we do in the West.

J: It's certainly not the case that they are so hopeless either. They could very well come to the conclusion that it might not be entirely reasonable to expect that we will use up 6 earths . . .

So far, though, J has not seen any tendency in that direction among his friends.

Low consumption compared with average, particularly when it comes to clothing, can have undesirable consequences in that the low consumer stands out. This is a consideration that some of the interviewees also talk about. Extreme clothing styles can attract some young people, but repel others and thus reduce the ability to involve broader group of youths. It becomes a choice between the goal of reaching more and broader groups by keeping within the accepted clothing norm, and reducing one's resource consumption by distancing oneself from the accepted clothing norm:

I: Even if I also buy a lot of my wardrobe second-hand and maybe don't dress like someone in Vogue magazine . . . I still try not to have a clothing style that is too extreme. Because I *believe* that also make you stand out a little. I have to admit that to a *certain* extent radicalism, just like extremism, can *attract* those who are searching for it. At the same time, I think that we have to be more *mainstream* to get more young people to join the movement.

6.4 *In Summary*

An overall social norm expressed by the young people in the study is that they want to live in a way that means their consumption is restricted to a fair and just Environmental space¹¹. Their justification for their actions is that it feels good to act in a way that agrees with what they think is right, but their motivation is also of a strategic nature: They see action as a means for change and a way to make an impact. Some of the youths have altered their view of individual responsibility for life style being the key to change. They now strongly emphasise action strategies to try to influence structural changes that make living sustainably easier for all. In spite of this shift in perspective, they continue to adapt their consumption to a great extent to what they consider to be sustainable, for several cited reasons.

7 Norm Arenas where Norms Develop and are Supported

Three important norm-building arenas are described by the young people: school, family and voluntary organisations. The roles these arenas play are different for the interviewees especially when it comes to where the balance lies between school and family. The study's strategic selection procedure ensures that voluntary organisations are a significant arena for all the young people involved because it was here the interviewees were found in the first place.

In the young people's stories, the significance of family often has a weak relationship to the interviewees' actions on specific issues, with the possible exception of food. The family has great significance when it comes to basic

11 *Environmental space* means the consumption of natural resources and pollution of the environment that is acceptable without compromising the ability of future generations to support themselves and maintain biological diversity. *The fairness principle* means that each country has the right to the same amount of environmental space per person. It does not mean that everyone has to necessarily consume exactly the same amount of every individual natural resource. However, it guarantees all people's right to have their reasonable material needs satisfied.

values, general commitment and confidence in one's ability to make a difference. The importance that the adult world plays emerges in the stories: adults are there to challenge the opinions of the young people and as a confirmation that their commitment is positive. School is also described as influencing values, self-image and knowledge growth. Membership in associations and friends play a big part in knowledge growth when it comes to problem definitions but primarily when it comes to solutions and action alternatives.

Family's significance

One of the youths describes his and many other young people's commitment as though it "builds on a legacy from our parents" (K), a legacy that is expressed in a new way today. It may concern different issues in different families. When it comes to food, it might be about everyday activities such as buying ecologically produced groceries:

A: We (in the family) have been a lot into "buying *ecologically* and buying *locally*." My mum bought milk from a place, a farm where she worked. She bought cheese and bread from a local ecological farm. And she was involved in starting up a shop that sold ecological produce.

B: My mother really went in for ecological milk. She was a part of the old vegetarian movement. I think she joined up in the 60s. She always pushed for ecological products.

Parents were a springboard and discussion partners in factual matters but some of the youths describe it as being more the other way around, that their parents were influenced by the discussions. One of them related the impact he had on his father's understanding of transport issues, "I don't know if he had it from *the start* but he *got* it in any case. He is quite receptive" (O).

Several of the interviewees relate that a positive basic outlook of their own abilities to have an impact come from their families:

N: I think that I got it from *home*, because I have a mother who . . . never gives *up*. She is really a giant . . . she can *convince* most people of what she thinks is appropriate. I mean, she can go into a petrol station and get them to remove the pornographic magazines just by *talking* to them.

School's significance

Some of the interviewees point out positive and committed teachers as being significant in developing confidence in their ability to have an impact. One of them relates that he remembers "that they were positive" (K). They questioned such issues as homelessness, starvation and environmental pollution and showed alternatives, "It could be like this instead" (K). His teachers presented development as something that grew out of the action of humans. "That democracy was something humans had established and won" (K). That it was "someone who arranged it, so to speak" (K). His teachers emphasised "the ability to take action" as being significant for change.

The young people bear witness to varying experiences of how school contributed to their knowledge growth in the norm areas being investigated.

There are examples of disappointment with high school environmental instruction on transport. Information material from the car industry was used uncritically in classroom instruction. The catalytic converter was portrayed as having already solved automotive environmental problems, which contradicted the information they had received from the voluntary organisation in which they participated:

O: In school we had information material from the car industry that told how catalytic converters had fantastically changed the Swedish environment. First there were *dark* pictures and then it was just, “Oh, after the catalytic converter all the water was clean . . .” We *knew*, though, that things *hadn’t* changed. We *had those* kinds of facts, of course, from the environmental movement. We may have gone through it in chemistry class as well; I’m not sure, though, maybe. But not with *that* teacher in any case. And he was not at all critical. . . . *Really strange!*

But the young people also have very positive things to say about the school’s role in their knowledge growth. The education they received has led to an understanding of scientific relationships that has facilitated their reading of environmental literature outside of the school context:

O: . . . but *chemistry* was fun because you could understand more about acidification, ozone . . . Yeah, the teacher got into a lot of that . . . chemical reactions. Or low-altitude ozone, how it is formed. Now I don’t remember that stuff anymore, but *then* I knew it well. Exactly how it worked. Thanks to school.

For one interviewee, what he learnt in school has stimulated him to reduce his meat consumption:

I: I went to a high school that was located in a nature reserve and we were served vegetarian food. I was a vegetarian and I already had some kind of environmental political involvement then . . . and there was, of course, considerable environmental awareness at that school and there was a lot of discussion on questions of fairness and equality at school.

In another case, it was the absence from school that was experienced as enabling:

J: I usually . . . from a popular science point of view say that I became a vegetarian when I had strep throat and watched educational programmes all day. I stopped eating pork and then beef and then I stopped eating lamb; chicken I had already stopped eating and I stopped eating fish two years later [. . .] Yeah, it had a lot to do with the global waste of resources involved in livestock breeding. It had something to do with 10% . . . On the whole, these bouts of illness were much more productive than my time in school.

But school played an encouraging role when a student had already taken a position. J related how a teacher in a biology lesson on the nutritional pyramid incorporated the position J had taken to eat vegetarian. J thus received attention and an opportunity to develop his arguments:

J: The nutritional pyramid was a part of it, of course, though it wasn't a part like this "with the 90 percentage loss." In the books it was presented more as a good quality picture with a lot of fish at the bottom and one at the very top, or a person or something like that. But . . . then . . . I don't think that I *wasn't* considered as a resource as a vegetarian. There is still a point there. I mean, the teacher saw me as a subject for debate . . .

One of the interviewees describes the role distribution as follows: it is in the family and school that basic values are formed but, "On the other hand, I would probably say that it is in the voluntary organisations, those contexts that you choose yourself, that the real development or processing takes place" (K). An organisation is a context one has chosen and that is where one starts to talk to peers about it.

Voluntary organisations' significance

As one of the interviewees formulated it, it is in the voluntary organisations (as Nature and Youth Sweden) that one starts to reflect on what fundamental values, such as everyone's equal worth, really mean. Organisations and the courses and spare time activities they offer have been important in supporting the young people's break with previous norms. The non-formal lectures in voluntary youth organisations are highlighted by some of the interviewees as important clarifiers of concepts and connections. That the non-formal lecturers have been young committed people is also stressed as important. The context plays a significant role in the emotional impression and thus on the impact:

O: And it was really . . . it was *really awesome* to hear the lecture on . . . *global* . . . issues and hear someone put it in words . . . It became so *obvious* somehow when . . . 20% of the world's population consumes 80% of the world's resources. I don't remember having *that* presented so clearly to me before. I mean, it can't have been the first time I *heard* it in my life. But just in that *context* and with those *people* made it so enormously *powerful*.

Organisations as well as friends have contributed to knowledge about the role of transport in sustainable development. One example is knowledge of structural causes of increased emissions from the transport sector:

O: ...and it was really connected to the insights that freeways increase traffic. [Yes, and how did you gain those insights?] It was *not* at *school*. It was through discussions. It was being at *meetings* . . . then it was also in discussions with others in the Society for Nature Conservation or that you received a brochure, or that you talked about it with someone.

There are also stories that describe the road to conscious vegetarianism by means of adapting to a significant person or group. Vegetarian eating habits came first and then the arguments and awareness were gradually developed: that it had to do with global environmental space and not exceeding one's ecological footprint.

L: I became a vegetarian in junior high but it probably was mostly because my brother was one and I looked up to him so it wasn't so much taking a stand – or it was that – but it wasn't like I had come up with the idea myself. [. . .] The first vegetarians in 7th grade – it was me and the Muslims who got special meals in the cafeteria. The next year there were more who became vegetarians. In the beginning I couldn't find any arguments for being a vegetarian – I thought sausages were a bit disgusting (laugh) but gradually I learnt that it had to do with global environmental space – how much space a person can occupy without exceeding his or her ecological footprint. That you shouldn't consume more than what the earth can bear . . . and to show solidarity with animals.

Not eating broiler chickens was a prevailing social norm in the Nature and Youth Sweden club that collided with the family norm when one interviewee, as a 12 year old, joined the club. The attitude towards eating broilers among the “old” members appeared to be a bit tough, but it felt like “no offence was intended.” Having different norms in different contexts could be a solution when approaches and habits collided. One norm could be the standard at home and another in the club: “You changed *there* (with the Nature and Youth Sweden club) in any case” (N). Even though you continued eating chicken at home. “If you are 12 years old, it's not very often that you can really restructure an entire *family* . . . I don't even think I *tried* to take that battle on at home” (N).

Some became vegetarians more or less on their own, but eventually met other vegetarians in organisations. One of the youths related that he did not know any vegetarians when he became one but, “On the other hand . . . It was at about the same time I joined the Nature and Youth Sweden club. And then, a little bit later, I met other people who were vegetarians and vegans” (K).

Another of the interviewees related that to start with, it was quite unusual to have vegetarians at school, but that the norms there changed gradually. Some of the friends who at first pestered him and thought it was bizarre were eventually influenced and became vegetarians themselves:

L: I was the first at school to become a vegetarian. And all of my friends were on my case. They nagged me about it weeks on end. “But why? Oh how strange! Why are you like that? Oh, oh.” And then *they* were the ones to become vegetarians themselves later on. They thought I was some kind of Martian when I did it. But it has an effect eventually. Often. Not on everyone. But on some.

All of the interviewees testify to the importance of school knowledge. But all strongly emphasise the knowledge growth that takes place in their time spent in organisations. As one of them expresses it, it was in the organisations that knowledge felt important and fun:

L: All I have learnt, on the whole, that I have had use for – no, *all* is an exaggeration – but *most*, I have learnt in *organisations*. I learnt a lot in school, too. There is a lot of basic knowledge you have to have and such. But the place where I felt that it was *important* and *fun* was, for sure, in the organisations.

Another young person describes the importance of meeting peers in the organisation setting like this:

K: ...in school we learnt such things as that all people are created equal and that we have a responsibility towards future generations. On the other hand, we never were allowed or encouraged to reflect on what that really *meant*. But I think that is something that is rather natural because . . . in school it's like the meeting of two generation . . . and one has the upper hand because they have the authority. And then when you discuss with peers, that is when you formulate, as it were . . . the *significance* of it all.

It is clear from the stories that the three norm settings – family, school and voluntary organisations – have contributed in varying ways to the young people's formulation of norms. It is also clear from the results that organisational life plays a crucial role in the youths' reflected consumption choices and in their considerations of how they can have an impact on development in a sustainable direction. In the mission from UNESCO (2005) to work for change of consumption norms through EDS, it appears reasonable to focus some of the searchlight on informal and nonformal learning arenas such as the family and voluntary organisations.

8 Discussion and Conclusions

In our empirical material, we have observed a number of tendencies in the stories of young people. From them we can draw the following conclusions:

The young people in our explorative study have broken social norms concerning established and frequently occurring consumption patterns for food, transport and clothing. Their norm breaking corresponds to recommendations for life style change that the IPCC advocates in its fourth report on steps to counter climate change. In other words, they are actions that could be on their way to becoming social norms. The young people in the study can be seen to be at the forefront of this change in norms and thus became norm breakers as a result of their way of transforming knowledge of sustainable development and the taking of a distance moral stance into action in their everyday lives and in their communities.

Different norm settings have had varying significance for the young people's ability to break established norms when it comes to consumption actions – food, transport and clothing. Consequently, it is of scientific value to consider the importance of different social groups, organisations and social movements in ongoing ESD research and education. We can describe these as norm supporting (or norm-breaking facilitation) settings for young people. The organisations and social movements have been significant for knowledge growth and in providing an arena for action, thus enabling and supporting the establishment and reinforcement of new social norms.

The ESD research can learn from the processes in norm-building settings to be found outside of school. We can understand and describe these processes as informal and nonformal education for sustainable development.

It is important for ESD research to not just focus on the system aspects of education (school, teachers, teacher training, textbooks, etc.) but to see other active arenas of influence and norm settings such as the home, family, peer groups and voluntary organisations, media and the press that are significant for

young people's norm building and norm breaking. What concrete significance can these have for the ESD research and the educational system? The soon-to-be-completed study of Swedish active youths that this article has borrowed empirical material from examines how commitment and distance moral in action has emerged, from the perspective of young people. It would be valuable to have international studies to compare how the three arenas – informal, nonformal and formal learning – interplay in other conditions than Swedish ones. What role do the differences in legislation and regulations play between countries? What role do the distinct conditions for voluntary organisations and social movements as well as family life play in active young people's stories from different countries? These are questions that are highly topical and urgent in the UN's decade of education for sustainable development.

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