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WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE?

How Policymakers Consider Policy Attitudes When Designing Climate Policies

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Abstract

Despite extensive research on factors influencing citizens' attitudes towards climate policies, little is known about whether policymakers consider these when designing climate policies. This qualitative study aimed to explore which factors policymakers consider for gaining policy acceptability and acceptance when designing climate policies through semi-structured interviews with policymakers in Trollhättan as a single-case study, and how their considerations align with those identified in previous literature as important to citizens. The analysis revealed that ex post policy acceptance appeared to matter to policymakers, while the public was often reported to be unaware of policies during the proposal stage, rendering ex ante acceptability less relevant to policymakers. Policymakers considered several themes that influence citizens' attitudes, in line with previous research, including the role of personal cost and collective benefits, perceived effectiveness, and the combination of push and pull measures. However, other key factors named in research on citizens' attitudes were seldom considered: distributional fairness, environmental justice, and the tailoring of information. Most policymakers seemed to believe that communication and explaining why a climate policy matters are sufficient to make it accepted, despite research in the field finding that perceived fairness and effectiveness are the most crucial factors influencing policy attitudes. Future research could replicate the study using different cases or test the results in a quantitative study.

Keywords: Acceptability, acceptance, climate policies, municipality, policymaking, transportation

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Introduction

Climate change is currently one of the biggest challenges for humanity. It requires drastic action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which are the primary cause of climate change (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023). Climate policies are needed to support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions; however, many policies that would reduce emissions target individual behavior. This behavioral change is harder to achieve than it may seem because climate-friendly behavior, i.e., behavior that emits little to no greenhouse gas, creates a conflict between individual and group interests. More precisely, climate-friendly behavior leads to personal consequences that are mainly negative, like higher prices, but collective consequences that are mainly positive, including an intact nature and a basis of life for future generations (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018; Steg & Groot, 2018; Ulla & Povitkina, 2023). In this sense, climate-friendly behavior tends to form social dilemmas as individual and group interests conflict (von Borgstede et al., 2018, p. 208).

Extensive research on the willingness of citizens¹ to accept climate policies highlights perceived fairness and effectiveness, communication, political trust and participation, and policy design as key factors (e.g. Bergquist et al., 2022; Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016; Schuitema et al., 2011). However, little is known about whether policymakers consider these when designing climate policies. To contribute to filling this research gap, this thesis aims to explore the factors policymakers consider when designing climate policies and how their considerations overlap with those that previous literature frames as relevant to citizens. More precisely, the research question is:

How do the factors policymakers consider when designing climate policies align with findings from previous research on policy attitudes?

As little to no research had been done regarding policymakers' perspectives, an exploratory qualitative study was designed, conducting semi-structured interviews with policymakers on the subject of transport in the Swedish municipality of Trollhättan as a single-case study (Halperin & Heath, 2020). Trollhättan is slightly above the average size of a Swedish city (Kolada, 2025), making it a typical case for Sweden, while still providing a sufficient study

¹ Citizens, individuals, voters, people and the public are all used synonymously, referring to the people politicians aim to govern.

population for a single-case study, and transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Trollhättan (Jakobsson, 2024).

The study found that the factors policymakers consider when designing climate policies only partially overlap with those that previous literature frames as relevant to citizens. Policymakers considered the role of personal cost and collective benefits, perceived effectiveness, and the combination of push and pull measures. Yet, distributional fairness, environmental justice, and the tailoring of information were seldom mentioned. Most policymakers seemed to believe that communication and explaining why a climate policy matters are sufficient to make it accepted, despite previous research finding that perceived fairness and effectiveness are the most crucial factors influencing policy attitudes, while communication and information provision play only a subordinate role. Overall, policy acceptance appeared to matter to policymakers, while the public was often reported to be unaware of policies during the proposal stage, rendering acceptability less relevant to policymakers.

The thesis is structured as follows: The findings of previous research on climate policy attitudes from the citizens' perspective are reviewed as a basis for the theoretical and analytical framework. The choice of method and case study is elaborated on. The findings from the interviews are analyzed and contextualized before drawing conclusions, including an examination of limitations and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Climate Change as a Social Dilemma

As outlined above, addressing climate change presents a social dilemma, as climate change primarily affects individuals' costs, while the benefits are mostly collective. This incentivizes people to freeride on the benefits (von Borgstede et al., 2018). This selfish behavior forms a social dilemma of trying to avoid negative personal consequences, which can be explained by the greed motive in the Greed Efficiency Fairness hypothesis (von Borgstede et al., 2018). The hypothesis claims that people are driven by greed, as a basic survival instinct (von Borgstede et al., 2018, p. 210), but that the urge to efficiently utilize resources and fairly allocate them moderates their greed, as people also care about collective outcomes in social dilemmas (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). Collective outcomes reflect the efficiency motive of the hypothesis, such that the best possible total outcome for the collective is achieved while

maintaining a sustainable level of the common resource. When people perceive collective outcomes as maximized, it restrains people's greed (von Borgstede et al., 2018). The efficiency motive is, for example, satisfied if climate policies reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). Greed can also be restrained by the fairness motive, which represents the desire to fairly distribute the maximized collective outcomes described under the efficiency motive (von Borgstede et al., 2018). To judge what is fair, people use social comparison where other people serve as reference points. To summarize, collective fairness and efficiency restrain personal greed in social dilemmas, allowing to resolve them (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018; von Borgstede et al., 2018).

Climate policies can also pose a social dilemma for individuals as they push or pull people into behaving climate-friendly. For example, a policy aimed at switching a country's energy sources to renewable ones has positive collective consequences like becoming less fossil fuel dependent and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, yet individuals in the municipalities that are selected to site new wind or solar power plants pay the cost, such as endangering wildlife, noise pollution and financial costs (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). On the other hand, policies can serve to reduce social uncertainty in social dilemmas, i.e., reducing uncertainty about others' actions (von Borgstede et al., 2018). Climate policies that either incentivize or obligate a specific behavior decrease social uncertainty by increasing the likelihood that people contribute despite the social dilemma. However, for climate policies to be effective in solving social dilemmas, policy attitudes are decisive (Bergquist et al., 2022). The forms that policy attitudes can take and the role they play are explained hereafter.

Policy Attitudes

Attitudes can be defined as “psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity [...] with some degree of favour or disfavour” (Schuitema et al., 2010, p. 102). Hence, policy attitudes are the positive or negative evaluation of policies, i.e., the support or opposition. Attitudes are based on beliefs about the expected consequences likely to occur, which can be positive, negative, or neutral, and if the beliefs change, the attitudes usually also change (Schuitema et al., 2010). There are different terms used to describe policy attitudes, such as, but not limited to, acceptance (e.g. Bertsch et al., 2016; Linder et al., 2024; Schuitema et al., 2010), acceptability (e.g. Cools et al., 2011; Ejelöv & Nilsson, 2020; Eriksson et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2020; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019; Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016; Schuitema et al., 2010; Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018), opinion (e.g. Bergquist et al., 2022; Fairbrother, 2022), preference (e.g. Bertsch et al., 2016; Steg et al., 2014), support (e.g. Coleman et al., 2023;

Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Hammar & Jagers, 2006, 2007; Rhodes et al., 2017) , and opposition (e.g. Petrova, 2013; Ulla & Povitkina, 2023).

However, the differences and definitions of these concepts often remain unclear, as studies employ several different meanings. Addressing this debate, Ejelöv and Nilsson (2020) find in their review paper that policy acceptability is usually the preferred term in psychology, while political scientists rather use policy support to express attitudes.

However, some concepts can be clearly distinguished from one another, like acceptance and acceptability. Acceptability describes the attitude towards a policy *before* its implementation, while acceptance describes the attitude *after* a policy has been implemented (Schuitema et al., 2010). Yet despite having a clear definition, several studies do not clearly distinguish both concepts but use them synonymously (e.g. Bergquist et al., 2022; Linder et al., 2024). While the differentiation between acceptance and acceptability is revisited in the theoretical and analytical framework, the following review of factors that condition support for climate policies does not clearly distinguish between the terms, due to the outlined limitations of the literature.

Factors Influencing Attitudes

There are various factors influencing policy attitudes; however, policy-specific beliefs, namely perceived fairness and perceived effectiveness, appear to be the most influential (Bergquist et al., 2022). There are other factors besides perceived fairness that can positively influence policy attitudes, such as political trust and participation, the information provided, and the policy design.

Perceived Fairness

Many scholars agree that perceived fairness is one of the most crucial factors for predicting and influencing policy attitudes (e.g. Ejelöv & Nilsson, 2020; Kim et al., 2013; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019; Schuitema et al., 2011). Perceived fairness depends on various factors, such as the object being judged fair or unfair, including “personal, distributional and procedural aspects” (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019, p. 1189), and the fairness principle used, which encompasses distributional fairness principles of equity, equality, and need, among others (Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Schuitema et al., 2011; Steg & Groot, 2018; von Borgstede et al., 2018). How fairness is understood depends on the situation, as different fairness principles are preferred in different situations (von Borgstede et al. 2018, p. 212). It is discussed in the following how fairness can be understood and how it is related to policy attitudes.

Fairness varies in terms of the object being judged fair or unfair, like personal, distributional, and procedural fairness aspects. Maestre-Andrés et al. (2019, p. 1187) describe perceived fairness to be divided into personal and collective consequences, so does one perceive effects on oneself and on others as fair. Personal fairness refers to the personal consequences one might face, which is somewhat similar to the greed motive of the Greed Efficiency Fairness hypothesis, where personal consequences are to be optimized compared to others (von Borgstede et al., 2018). Using the example of carbon pricing, i.e., placing a monetary value on the emission of carbon dioxide and its equivalents, personal consequences would include economic costs, like increased spending due to price increases resulting from carbon pricing. A regulation, like banning products or prohibiting certain behaviors, would be another example, and it is associated with restricted personal freedom due to regulatory restrictions (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). Both examples could raise policy opposition if only considering personal consequences or the greed component. Similar results were also found regarding congestion charges in Stockholm (Schuitema et al., 2010) and Gothenburg (Nilsson, Schuitema, et al., 2016), where acceptability before implementation was lower, due to anticipated personal cost increases, but eventually received high acceptance as positive collective consequences, and the policy effectiveness became apparent. This is in line with the Greed Efficiency Fairness hypothesis, claiming that personal consequences matter (greed motive) but that positive collective consequences (efficiency and fairness motives) restrain the longing for the best possible personal outcomes and hence make personal fairness a minor component of perceived fairness.

There are other forms of perceived fairness besides personal fairness, like procedural fairness, which can be defined “as the extent to which the public evaluates the decision making as fair, open, transparent and taking different interests into account” (Liu et al., 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, it matters for fair procedures how well decision-makers follow the rules relevant to policymaking procedures (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). This could, for example, include that the same rules apply to similar procedures, e.g., the procedures for siting two new wind power plants should be the same in both cases, and that all people should be treated the same, e.g., political participation should be open to all people and not just influential interest groups. Grimes (2006) stresses that people’s willingness to accept policies is directly correlated with their judgment of whether the decision was made fairly and whether decision-makers and authorities behaved as expected. However, another aspect of procedural fairness is the

involvement of citizens in policymaking, e.g., through referendums (Schuitema, et al. 2016). Hence, processes need to be transparent and consistent to achieve procedural fairness.

Distributional fairness aspects concern allocating resources, such as fossil fuels, water, land, or money, and the distribution of responsibilities, including who should be responsible for addressing climate change (Nilsson, Schuitema, et al., 2016). The equity principle means distribution according to input (Schuitema et al., 2011; von Borgstede et al., 2018). Following the equity principle could, e.g., mean that countries with high emissions must spend more on climate change mitigation efforts, in line with the so-called polluter pay principle (Hammar & Jagers, 2007). The need principle understands fair distribution as allocating more resources to people with higher needs (von Borgstede et al., 2018), for example, by offering free public transportation to low-income households. The equality principle, which divides resources equally regardless of other criteria (Schuitema et al., 2011; von Borgstede et al., 2018), is commonly applied when other factors, such as need or input, are unknown. For example, carbon pricing often follows the principle of equality, where everyone pays the same amount, regardless of individual needs. Furthermore, it is also common practice to combine some of those distributional principles (von Borgstede et al., 2018), for example, equal carbon taxation for everyone, but offering tax cuts to low-income workers.

Besides the distributional fairness principles, there is also an understanding of fairness or justice specifically tailored to environmental issues, like climate change, known as ‘environmental justice’ (Schuitema et al., 2011; Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). It can be defined as “the concept that nobody should be disproportionately [...] exposed to environmental threats” (Schuitema et al., 2011, pp. 69–70), which means, in practice, that the protection of future generations, nature, and the environment should be taken into consideration when designing fair policies. Furthermore, the concept acknowledges that certain population groups, like the elderly, women, the poor, and future generations, are disproportionately affected by climate change, but also animals and nature (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). Hence, it addresses the social dilemma that climate change has been caused by past and present generations and requires immediate action to mitigate it, yet most effects of climate-friendly actions and policies will only be noticeable in the future. Therefore, environmental justice once again raises the issue of present costs versus future benefits, but specifically tailored to environmental problems.

Personal, procedural, and distributional fairness aspects, the latter with its different fairness principles, as well as environmental justice, all contribute to the perceived fairness of a policy. Policies seem to be perceived as fairer and more acceptable when they relate to environmental justice and the equality principle, with a stronger preference for the former (Schuitema et al., 2011).

However, as this review has made clear, fairness can have different meanings to different individuals, referring to personal, procedural, or distributive fairness, environmental justice as well as the different distributional fairness principles. Hence, for the empirical investigation of this thesis, it is crucial to consider what concept of fairness respondents refer to.

Perceived Effectiveness

Perceived effectiveness, similar to perceived fairness, influences whether a policy is accepted, as policies perceived as ineffective tend to lower public acceptance and vice versa (Bergquist et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 2023; Eriksson et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2013). Evaluations of perceived effectiveness depend on whether the policy is directed toward the proper target population and what the policy's consequences seem to be (Bergquist et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 2023). Namely, it can alter the perceived effectiveness if policies equally address everyone, or only consumers or industries, and specifically if the target group is the one causing the problem, e.g., emitting a lot of greenhouse gases due to certain behavior. The policy consequences, i.e., the changes that occur due to the policy, improve perceived effectiveness if the policy appears to lead to an improvement in the situation, e.g., a reduction of greenhouse gases, less congestion, or improved public transport.

Perceived effectiveness is important for policy attitudes because it diminishes people's selfishness and greediness, as described in the Greed Efficiency Fairness hypothesis. Hence, policy attitudes are more positive when policies seem to achieve their objectives (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). This, however, requires a clear policy objective to start with, and that policies are evaluated and their success communicated to the public.

Information and Communication

Policy attitudes towards climate policies can become more positive with high satisfaction with the information provided by the government (Cools et al., 2011; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). However, Nilsson, Hansla, et al. (2016) indicated that the effect on policy attitudes is relatively low compared to other factors. Nevertheless, informing citizens and

educating them on the need for and benefits of said policies is important (Cools et al., 2011). However, it matters not only to provide information, but it is almost equally important *how* said information is communicated, as certain tailoring of information has shown promising effects (Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016). Even small differences in wording or the order of the information presented can influence attitudes (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016, p. 177). Tailoring can be described as “a method whereby the information is adjusted to the unique interests and needs of a specific person or target group” (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016, p. 177). Tailoring is especially effective if the message aligns with people’s values. If someone has ecocentric values, such as assigning strong importance to nature, information tailored in that direction has a stronger positive effect on acceptability than messages with mixed appeals, both in line with and opposite to their values (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016).

Political Trust and Participation

Policy attitudes seemed to be positively correlated with political trust (e.g. Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Fairbrother, 2022; Hammar & Jagers, 2006). Political trust, also sometimes referred to as institutional trust, is “the general belief in the performance capacity of political institutions and/or belief in the benevolent motivation and performance capacity of office-holders” (Norris, 2017, p. 24). Hence, it refers to believing in the well-doing of an institution such as the government or city administration in general and the person in charge, like the mayor or head of state, yet it could also be the politician or administrator responsible for a specific policy. The connection between policy attitudes and political trust appears to be bidirectional, as negative attitudes toward climate policies or the planning and implementation process can lower political trust (Ulla & Povitkina, 2023, p. 27). Political trust seems to be particularly important for carbon taxes because accepting them requires trust in revenue usage (Fairbrother, 2022). However, political trust matters beyond taxes, and people in higher-trust societies are generally more willing to engage in climate-friendly behavior and address environmental problems (Fairbrother, 2022).

Political trust is strongly related to procedural fairness aspects of policy attitudes (Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019), but influencing trust is less straightforward, as trust is dependent on several factors (Fairbrother, 2022). However, increasing procedural fairness through, e.g. community involvement can alleviate issues of missing trust (Ulla & Povitkina, 2023, p. 29). However, it was emphasized that political participation has only moderate effects on trust and overall policy acceptance (Grimes, 2006). Therefore, political participation in decision-making is a way to increase trust and strengthen procedural fairness and trust, which then, in turn, could

increase positive policy attitudes; however, it is rather moderate compared to perceived fairness and effectiveness (Bergquist et al., 2022).

Policy Design

The policy design and the choice of policy measures are important determinants of policy attitudes (Coleman et al., 2023). Policy attitudes towards more coercive push measures, such as regulation and taxes, are generally less positive than towards less coercive policy proposals, like subsidies and information, or a combination of push and pull measures (Coleman et al., 2023; Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Eriksson et al., 2008; Schuitema et al., 2011, p. 79; Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). This is because pull measures are generally less coercive compared to push measures and are associated with lower costs in terms of financial expenses and behavioral change (Coleman et al., 2023; Rhodes et al., 2017; Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). In a study regarding transport policies, for example, pull factors such as better public transport were perceived as “effective, fair, and acceptable” (Eriksson et al., 2008, p. 1117), and push factors, including a carbon tax on fossil fuels, were perceived as the opposite. However, push measures can be made more acceptable by providing alternatives for the ‘sanctioned’ behavior to facilitate behavioral change, such as improved public transportation infrastructure that allows for a behavioral change away from car usage (Eriksson et al., 2008).

Coleman et al. (2023) conducted a study to determine what other factors increase positive policy attitudes besides pull and push measures. They found that people prefer policies that target others, like large businesses, over policies directed towards themselves, as in the consumers, but are skeptical about policies only targeting wealthy individuals. People seem to have a strong sense of fairness regarding the equality principle, as they prefer funding through higher entities, such as the European Union, which divides the cost among many people instead of just a few locally (Coleman et al., 2023).

Another factor influencing acceptance through policy design is whether a policy is also implemented elsewhere, e.g., in other municipalities or countries (Coleman et al., 2023). Consequently, it seems advisable to focus on local benefits while sharing the costs to minimize the social dilemma that climate-friendly behavior and climate policies can create.

Overview of the Factors Influencing Attitudes and Research Gap

Overall, from previous research, policy-specific beliefs such as perceived fairness and perceived effectiveness appear to be the most important factors (Bergquist et al., 2022). Environmental justice and the equality principle seem to be perceived as the fairest (Schuitema

et al., 2011), though people are also initially concerned about their personal consequences (von Borgstede et al., 2018). Pull measures are preferred over push measures, although the latter are usually more effective, which is relevant to the perceived effectiveness of policies. A combination of push and pull measures can help make policies effective but acceptable (Schuitema et al., 2011). Political trust and participation appear to have positive effects on policy attitudes, although these effects seem to be less than perceived fairness and effectiveness (Bergquist et al., 2022). Information can help increase understanding of a policy, address people's concerns, and report a policy's effectiveness. It has only a moderate direct effect on policy attitudes, but information can indirectly influence individuals when tailored to focus on the aspects of a policy relevant to a target group that help increase positive policy attitudes, like fairness and effectiveness (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016).

Most previous research focuses on the voter side, more specifically, the factors influencing the public's policy support. However, much less is known about the degree to which policymakers consider these factors when designing policies, which creates a research gap. This thesis aims to contribute to filling that gap by exploring which factors policymakers consider when designing climate policies and to what extent their considerations overlap with those the literature frames as important to citizens.

While, as outlined earlier, most research refers to policy attitudes as the evaluation of policies in general, with some degree of favor or disfavor, rather than separating attitudes into before and after implementation (Bergquist et al., 2022; Linder et al., 2024). This thesis builds on insights from research in psychology and political science, differentiating between the acceptability of the policy proposal before and the acceptance of the policy after implementation (Schuitema et al., 2010), and what factors policymakers give higher importance in each of the two phases. Using this more nuanced distinction between the planning and implementation phases of a policy allows for a more differentiated understanding of the policymaking process. In the following, a theoretical and analytical framework is developed on what factors influence acceptability and acceptance that policymakers are expected to consider when designing policies, and how these might manifest in the subsequently described material.

Theoretical Framework

Acceptability

Acceptability, or the lack thereof, refers to the policy attitudes towards policy proposals before their implementation (Schuitema et al., 2010). It regards the critical first impression of a policy where no real-life experience can be taken as guidance for making sense of the proposed policy, but when the evaluation depends on the citizens' imagination and understanding of the draft. This is a critical phase of policy design, as low acceptability can lead to policies being postponed or not proposed in the first place due to politicians' fear of not being reelected if they propose or pass policies that are widely unaccepted by the public (Bergquist et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 2023; Nilsson, Schuitema, et al., 2016). In the following, it is outlined how several factors identified by previous research to shape citizens' acceptability could be present in policymakers' considerations when designing policy.

Policy-specific beliefs, such as perceived fairness and perceived effectiveness, have been argued to be the most influential on policy attitudes (Bergquist et al., 2022); yet, the latter is expected to be slightly less vital for acceptability from policymakers' perspective. Policymakers are expected to incorporate a clear objective into the policy proposal as preparation for allowing proper judgment of the effectiveness after implementation (Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). Citizens might expect a certain level of effectiveness or lack thereof, but can only judge whether a policy is effective after it has been implemented. Consequently, perceived effectiveness likely matters more for considerations of acceptance than acceptability, as further elaborated below.

Contrary to effectiveness, perceived personal fairness is expected to play a significant role in policymakers' considerations regarding acceptability. Positive outcomes have not yet manifested, but anticipated negative personal costs may be substantial; therefore, policymakers are expected to include strategies for offsetting anticipated negative personal consequences and communicate them to increase acceptability. For example, focusing more on the need principle when designing policies and ensuring that the higher needs of individuals with medical conditions, the rural population, and lower-income households are considered could increase perceived distributional fairness and policy acceptability (von Borgstede et al., 2018). Considering the needs of vulnerable groups aligns with environmental justice, which is complemented by emphasizing the importance of considering future generations and nature's needs, as this leads to a fairer and more acceptable perception of policies (Schuitema &

Bergstad, 2018). Policymakers are expected to communicate those considerations of vulnerable groups, nature, and future generations, as *perceived* fairness is about the fairness perception, not whether a policy is fair in theory. Hence, policymakers likely emphasize the fairness components incorporated into the policy proposal to ensure the public perceives them as such.

As already indicated, it can be expected that policymakers value communication, as properly informing the public is vital at this stage due to concerns about possible negative consequences. Attitudes toward a policy proposal can be improved by thoroughly informing citizens about what is planned and addressing their concerns (Cools et al., 2011; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). Furthermore, tailoring information can be a successful strategy to specifically adjust information to what citizens care and worry about, although the impact may be moderate compared to other factors (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016). Hence, policymakers likely provide information to clarify the policy proposal and highlight how it addresses the higher needs of specific groups, tailoring it to the target group's needs and concerns. For example, policymakers could provide targeted information in rural areas before implementing congestion charges or similar measures, outlining how their higher dependence on cars is considered and compensated, to increase acceptability.

Policymakers are likely to consider combining push and pull measures, as they are expected to reflect the public's preference for pull measures like subsidies or information, because they are less coercive, while push measures are more effective (Coleman et al., 2023; Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Schuitema et al., 2011, p. 79; Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018). A combination of push and pull measures is best for designing acceptable *and* effective policies (Eriksson et al., 2008). Policymakers might consider emphasizing how pull measures offset anticipated negative consequences before implementation, and the greater effect of pull measures when reporting effectiveness after implementation.

Policymakers likely consider creating opportunities for political participation and ensuring procedural fairness, as both positively influence acceptability (Liu et al., 2020). The former might occur by including the public in the policy design through referendums or opinion polls, while the latter could be visible in the form of openly and consistently informing the public about the steps taken in the policy design to make processes more transparent.

Political trust is expected to play a less significant role in policymakers' considerations when designing climate policies in Sweden. Political trust generally influences acceptability; however, trust is dependent on several factors, such as procedural fairness, including political

participation (Fairbrother, 2022; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). Furthermore, Sweden has a high-trust society (Hammar & Jagers, 2006), which means Swedes generally trust each other to have their well-being in mind. Although a high-trust society does not necessarily mean high political trust, it can still be expected that political trust is less prominent in policymakers' considerations, compared to other, more crucial factors. Therefore, political trust is excluded from the analytical framework and is only indirectly considered through procedural fairness and political participation.

Acceptance

Policy acceptability lays the foundation for policy acceptance; however, the factors that policymakers are expected to consider regarding acceptance differ slightly from those related to acceptability. Acceptance can be defined as positive policy attitudes after the implementation of a policy (Schuitema et al., 2010). According to the literature on citizens' preferences, policy-specific beliefs, such as perceived fairness and perceived effectiveness, are the most important factors influencing policy attitudes (Bergquist et al., 2022). However, perceived effectiveness plays a more significant role in acceptance than in acceptability. The reasons for this difference, along with an explanation of other factors influencing acceptance, are provided below.

Policymakers are expected to consider the shift that the personal fairness perception undergoes as it becomes less influential on policy attitudes following policy implementation. The Greed Efficiency Fairness hypothesis predicts that fairness and efficiency restrain greed (von Borgstede et al., 2018), which can be understood as the personal fairness perception being restricted by other aspects of perceived fairness and by perceived effectiveness, when applying the hypothesis to the factors used in the literature review. Citizens still care about negative personal consequences to some extent after the implementation of the policy at stake, but once they experience the positive collective consequences and potentially encounter fewer personal negative consequences than expected, they give more significance to the former and less to the latter (Schuitema et al., 2010). Against this background, policymakers are expected to communicate the effectiveness of policies and emphasize collective benefits as these become more important for judging a policy and accepting it.

Similarly, it can be expected that policymakers combine different distributional fairness principles when designing climate policies (von Borgstede et al., 2018), but to change the distributional fairness principle emphasized in communication from the need principle, which is expected to matter more for acceptability, to the equality principle, which is likely more

important for acceptance. Environmental justice remains highly important as it acknowledges the benefits for the collective, as in nature, future generations, but also for present generations. This differs slightly from the equality principle but can follow the same argumentation: all generations should be given equal importance. The equality principle and environmental justice perspective are more relevant to the collective perspective, and as a consequence, for policy acceptance (Schuitema et al., 2011). Policymakers could emphasize this by highlighting the benefits of a policy for present and future generations, as well as nature and the environment, while sharing costs equally.

As policies cannot be changed in their design after implementation, i.e., they cannot first follow the need principle in written form but then focus on the equality principle once implemented, policymakers are expected to combine both when designing the policy (von Borgstede et al., 2018). The information conveyed is what changes, and tailoring information to the specific situation, proposal phase or implementation phase, can be of help. This can, for example, be done by emphasizing before the implementation how vulnerable groups are considered, like protecting low-income households or individuals depending on their car, and stressing after implementation what effect a policy has and how all equally contribute to implementing it.

Furthermore, policymakers are expected to include a revision mechanism in the policy design to properly evaluate policies and report on their effectiveness to the public, thereby making positive effects more visible and increasing perceived effectiveness, which in turn will enhance acceptance. Experiencing policies after implementation allows citizens to properly assess the effectiveness in real life or through information published on effectiveness. Raising possible prejudices towards a policy and disproving them can further decrease the significance of personal interests and concerns. That way, policymakers may support the public's shift in perception from focusing on personal costs to giving collective benefits more importance.

Policymakers can follow a similar strategy for selecting policy design and choosing policy measures as they did for distributional fairness by combining two aspects, but highlighting one depending on the phase. Pull measures are still preferred over push measures after implementation (Coleman et al., 2023; Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Eriksson et al., 2008; Schuitema et al., 2011, p. 79; Schuitema & Bergstad, 2018); however, the preference for pull measures is not as pronounced, with environmental justice and collective consequences being of higher importance following policy implementation. Hence, the perceived

effectiveness is expected to be of higher importance after implementation compared to before. Therefore, it seems likely that policymakers might combine push and pull measures but communicate more of the benefits of the pull measures during the proposal phase and focus on emphasizing the effects achieved by the push measures once the policy is implemented. This appears to be a promising approach for creating effective yet acceptable policies.

Policymakers are expected to continue strengthening procedural fairness through political participation after implementation, e.g., by issuing a call for feedback. However, political participation and perceived procedural fairness, as well as the related political trust, are likely to be less relevant for acceptance after implementation. It still matters that policies are implemented as designed and as procedures prescribe, and that politicians keep their promises, but participation and procedural fairness seem to matter more for acceptability. Trust is excluded from the analytical framework for acceptance, as described in more detail for acceptability.

Analytical Framework

The various factors that policymakers are expected to consider in policy design to increase acceptability and acceptance are summarized in Table 1. Acceptability of policy proposals refers to policy attitudes toward policy during the proposal phase, before implementation, but after the policy has been discussed. In contrast, policy acceptance concerns policy attitudes after implementation, whether in the form of a test phase or as a long-term implementation. Each factor is categorized based on its importance for acceptability or acceptance, as interpreted from previous research outlined in the literature review and theoretical framework. High importance indicates that it is expected to play a role in acceptability or acceptance (marked in blue); moderate importance suggests that it is expected to be fairly, though not entirely, unimportant (left white). The indicators provide examples of how the factors may be observed in the interviews.

Table 1: Factors and Indicators From the Policymakers' Perspective of Acceptability of Policy Proposals and Acceptance of Implemented Policies

Factor	Sub-Factor	Acceptability	Acceptance	Indicator
Perceived fairness	Personal fairness	High importance → Awareness that possible positive outcomes are still unsure, while negative personal consequences seem certain and more relevant	Moderate importance → Awareness that experienced positive outcomes usually offset personal negative consequences	Acceptability: Acknowledging personal cost that might occur; including strategies to reduce the impact of personal costs especially for vulnerable groups Acceptance: Planning on reporting that personal costs are lower than expected
	Procedural fairness (including political participation)	High importance → Awareness that high procedural fairness, like transparency and letting the public participate in designing policies, increases acceptability	Moderate importance → Awareness that procedural fairness still matters in the form of proper implementation, but is less relevant than before	Acceptability: Referendums, opinion polls Acceptance: Feedback surveys

	Distributional fairness	<p>High importance</p> <p>→ Awareness that citizens worry about negative personal outcomes</p> <p>→ Focus on the need principle, as considering higher needs of vulnerable population groups can increase policy acceptability</p>	<p>High importance</p> <p>→ Awareness that collective benefits matter more than personal consequences after implementation once citizens experienced the positive effects</p> <p>→ Focus on equality principle, as it is more relevant for the collective perspective and acceptance</p>	<p><u>Acceptability</u>: Compensating low-income households, handicapped or other vulnerable groups</p> <p><u>Acceptance</u>: Planning on communicating after implementation how all contributed equally</p>
	Environmental justice	<p>High importance</p> <p>→ Awareness that considering the needs of future generations, nature, vulnerable population groups, etc. matters</p>	<p>High importance</p> <p>→ Awareness that acknowledgement of benefits for future generations, nature, etc. increase acceptance</p>	<p><u>Acceptability</u>: Including benefits for future generations and nature; considering climate change's higher effect on vulnerable groups</p> <p><u>Acceptance</u>: Planning on reporting on effectiveness and benefits for future generations, climate, nature etc.</p>
Perceived effectiveness	General	<p><u>Moderate importance</u></p> <p>→ Awareness that clear measurable objectives of policy prepare for an effectiveness evaluation after implementation</p>	<p>High importance</p> <p>→ Awareness that citizens' judgment of a policy's effectiveness influences acceptance</p>	<p><u>Acceptability</u>: Integrating clear objectives into the policy proposal</p> <p><u>Acceptance</u>: Planning policy evaluation and public reporting on policy effectiveness</p>
Information and communication	General	<p><u>Moderate importance</u></p> <p>→ Awareness that proper information about what is planned and addressing citizens' concerns can improve policy acceptability, but that the effect is limited</p>	<p>High importance</p> <p>→ Awareness that information about successful implementation, positive effects of the policy, and policy evaluation matters for acceptance</p>	<p><u>Acceptability</u>: Providing information to improve the understanding of the policy proposal, disproving common concerns</p> <p><u>Acceptance</u>: Addressing citizens' possible prejudices and concerns to disprove them</p>

	Tailoring information	High importance → Aware that citizens focus more on personal consequences before implementation but that those concerns vary in different groups	<u>Moderate importance</u> → Awareness that tailoring information still matters though less than before	<u>Acceptability</u> : Tailoring information to target group's needs and concerns <u>Acceptance</u> : Supplementing reporting of general effectiveness with tailored information on target group's benefits
Choice of policy measure	Push versus pull measures	High importance → Awareness that pull measures are preferred over push measures, but that a combination can make push measures more acceptable	<u>Moderate importance</u> → Awareness that skepticism towards push measures weakens after implementation, as citizens' priorities shifts and the policy's effectiveness matters more	<u>Acceptability</u> : Combining push and pull measures, communicating the benefits of the pull measures during the proposal phase, <u>Acceptance</u> : Planning on emphasizing the effects achieved by the push measures once the policy is implemented

Case Study Context

The case selected for this thesis is the Swedish municipality of Trollhättan, where the interviews were conducted. Transportation was used as a case for the climate policies. The selection of these two is explained in the following.

The Case of Trollhättan

Sweden, in general, presents a fitting case for investigating policymakers' considerations when developing policies, as it is relatively advanced on the path to becoming climate-friendly and in its response to climate change. Sweden's carbon tax, for example, was one of the first of its kind, and Sweden remains today the country with the highest tax rate (Hildingsson & Knaggård, 2022).

The municipal level in Sweden is particularly fitting to study policymakers' considerations, as municipalities constitute Sweden's biggest administrative unit from an political and economically perspective (62% of public employment as of 2014 is on the municipality level and 20% of the Swedish gross domestic product comes from the public municipality consumption while the national government accounts for only 7% of the gross domestic product (Bergh et al., 2017)). Furthermore, most work on environmental problems occurs at the municipal level (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner, 2024).

The municipality selected for this thesis is *Trollhättans stad* (English: City of Trollhättan), which refers to the Swedish municipality that includes Trollhättan as a city and the surrounding rural areas. The municipal organization, which governs the municipality, is at the center of the study.

Trollhättan, with 59,003 inhabitants as of 2024, is considered a bigger city according to the Swedish database Kolada (2025), which defines bigger cities as municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. As of 2024, 70% of Sweden's 10,587,710 inhabitants live in bigger cities and smaller cities. The average number of inhabitants in a Swedish municipality is 36,509 (Kolada, 2025). Therefore, Trollhättan is relatively representative of Swedish municipalities as it is only slightly above the threshold of a bigger city of 50,000 inhabitants. Being slightly above the average number of inhabitants comes with the advantage that the municipal organization employs more policymakers working on climate policies compared to a smaller city, allowing for a larger population of policymakers that could potentially be interviewed. Overall, Trollhättan is a municipality close to a typical Swedish city, making it a typical case for Sweden, although not generalizable to other countries.

The Case of Transportation Policies

This thesis focuses on a subfield of climate policy, namely transportation policy. ‘Climate policy’ is a relatively broad term and could easily be understood differently by different respondents. To avoid confusion and limit the scope of this thesis, the focus is on climate policies regarding individual transportation, for two reasons:

Firstly, in Trollhättan, individual transportation is the source of roughly 40% of the residents’ greenhouse gas emissions and about 62% of the territorial greenhouse gas emissions (Jakobsson, 2024). Most respondents also highlighted individual transport as one of the most pressing sustainability challenges in Trollhättan and a crucial policy area for climate change mitigation (Interview 1-2, 4-6).

Secondly, the two most common types of climate policies researched regarding public attitudes are tax-related policies like carbon pricing (See e.g. Fairbrother, 2022; Linder et al., 2024; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019) and transportation (See e.g. Eriksson et al., 2008; Nilsson, Schuitema, et al., 2016; Schuitema et al., 2010). However, while Sweden has a carbon tax in place, decision-making on the introduction and level of carbon tax, like many taxes, is at the national level (Hildingsson & Knaggård, 2022), making it unsuitable for this analysis. Therefore, it seems reasonable to focus on individual transportation within the municipality’s climate policies to avoid confusion, while focusing on a policy field that is locally determined and of high importance for reducing the municipality's emissions.

Methodology

This thesis aims to explore which factors policymakers consider when designing climate policies and to what extent their considerations overlap with those the literature frames as important to citizens. Furthermore, factors relevant for acceptability and acceptance are examined separately to disentangle ex ante and ex post considerations.

The thesis employs a qualitative research approach, specifically semi-structured interviews. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is more suitable for hard-to-define concepts such as acceptability and acceptance, provides more detailed insights than quantitative methods, and allows for an initial investigation that can be later leveraged in quantitative studies (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 15). Semi-structured interviews, sometimes also called ‘semi-structured life world interview’ can be “defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the

described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3). This type of interview falls under the category of respondent interviews, which is an interview style that aims to discover “the individuals’ opinions or experiences regarding a particular activity or event” (Sabee, 2017, p. 1470). Therefore, the individuals interviewed are referred to as ‘respondents’ to avoid confusion with other types of interviews.

While the acceptance and acceptability of climate policies from the citizens’ viewpoint have been extensively studied, little to no research exists on policymakers’ perspectives on the acceptance and acceptability of climate policies. Given this challenge, qualitative research and particularly semi-structured interviews were chosen as they are appropriate for exploratory research (Bryman, 2012, p. 41; Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 173). The method allows for new, unexpected aspects to emerge in a way that other methods might not.

The Respondents

Over the course of five weeks, a total of seven interviews were conducted (see Table 2), including one trial interview after which the interview guide was slightly adjusted. Almost perfect gender parity was reached, with four female and three male respondents. The age distribution was quite diverse, ranging from 28 to 64 years, with an average age of 43 years. The five civil servants and two politicians worked on different political issues, which differed in the intensity with which they focused on climate policies. Two worked on specific climate policies or projects, or climate and sustainability policies in general, but for the remaining five, working on climate policies formed only one part of their work. The division between civil servants and politicians was originally aimed to be more balanced. Still, Trollhättan has only three full-time politicians, which means that civil servants were more inclined to agree to an interview, as they can do it during their work time, whereas it is harder for part-time or free-time politicians. That potentially shifts the results more towards the civil servant viewpoint and limits the perspectives. Conducting interviews with more politicians could have added depth to the analysis, potentially allowing for separate research groups on civil servants and politicians.

Table 2: Overview of Respondents

	Minimum	Average	Maximum		
Average Age	28	43,14	64	Female	4
Interview duration	00:41:49	01:00:51	01:21:52	Male	3
				Civil servant	5
				Politician	2

The Recruitment Approach

The respondents were recruited through a mixture of targeted nominations (by a contact at Trollhättan's municipal organization made through the West Sweden Nexus for Sustainable Development) and chain referral, as in suggestions from the respondents (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 38). Potential respondents were also identified by researching what politicians and civil servants work on climate policies in Trollhättan. A standardized email² was usually sent out as an initial contact, and the consent form² was sent in one of the following emails to allow respondents time to read before the interview. Before the start of the interview, respondents were again informed about the purpose of the study and the principle of informed consent. While the interview guide does not appear to include overly sensitive questions, informed consent, and particularly information about the possibility of refusing answers and withdrawing consent at any time, is a fundamental issue of ethical concern.

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the code of ethics through informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and avoiding any harm to the respondents (Halperin & Heath, 2020). The interview participation was voluntary; all interviewees were informed about their rights in written form and orally before the interview, and they signed a consent form. Interviewees were also informed about anonymity and privacy, as well as how data would be stored and handled. Respondents' responses are referred to throughout this text as Interview 1-7, to ensure anonymity.

Some questions might result in slight short-term discomfort for respondents, as questions were asked about the effectiveness of policies and their strategies. These questions could force respondents to reflect on whether their work has a real impact and potentially cause them to feel short-term emotions, such as anxiety about their work. However, it is assumed that any such effect would be only short-term. Several respondents reported enjoying the opportunity to share insights about their work and contribute to this study. Overall, the benefits of gaining insights into policymakers' considerations were deemed to outweigh the potential harms of conducting the study.

² The standardized initial contact email and the consent form can be found in the appendix.

The Sample Size

Most interview studies have between 5-15 interviews depending on the availability of time and resources (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113). With seven interviews, this study is on the lower end of that range. However, it was not possible to conduct more interviews due to the small research population, which consists of only a limited number of policymakers working on climate and/or transportation policies, as well as the language barrier. That being said, interviews usually have diminishing returns, meaning that the more interviews are conducted, the lesser is the additional knowledge gained from each new interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113), until eventually saturation is reached. The same could be noticed in this interview study and very little additional value was gained by the last interview which could indicate that saturation was possibly reached for the case study of Trollhättan.

The Interviews and Interview Guide

The interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes, with an average duration of an hour. The respondents could choose to be interviewed at home, at their workplace or on Zoom. It was originally planned to conduct all interviews face-to-face to allow for better interpretation of non-verbal communication and avoid technical issues, yet logistical constraint made it necessary to have three interviews on Zoom due to the higher flexibility for timing and location (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019, p. 3068). All interviews took place in English and were recorded through notetaking and a recording device provided by the University of Gothenburg with the respondents' consent.

All interviews followed the same structure provided by the interview guide³, which was developed with the intention of covering the most crucial factors determined in previous research and gathered in the analytical framework. The interview questions were formulated in an appreciative manner, intended to avoid discomfort and unnecessary bias. For example, it was avoided to directly confront the respondents with insufficient policy action, and there was no question directly asking about fairness perceptions and considerations, as this could lead to social desirability bias, where the respondent's answer put them in a favorable perspective (Halperin & Heath, 2020). A selection bias was avoided by interviewing a diversified group of respondents who do not solely work on climate policies (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 278).

The interviews started with a set of warm-up questions to gather insights into respondents' background and their work, allowing to put their answers into context, and aiming

³ The interview guide can be found in the appendix.

to put respondents at ease. According to Magnusson and Marecek (2015), those questions only need to be loosely related to the research so questions about the respondent's background and the work they do were asked.

The following set of main questions was clustered around the two main themes, acceptability and acceptance, and worded openly to minimize influence towards a certain answer and allow for an exploratory approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106). The main question was complemented with more specific guiding questions to clarify if the respondent was unsure about how to understand the main questions, or with follow-up questions if they mentioned something unclear or surprising that required more explanation. The final questions are more general again, including a question on whether the respondent would like to add anything (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 60).

Method of Analysis

After each interview, some time was set aside to take notes on the overall impression and striking aspects of the interview. Each interview was transcribed as soon as possible, and usually before the next interview (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 60). The method of analysis follows a deductive and inductive approach.

The factors gathered in the literature review and analytical framework provide the foundation for the main codes, a form of pre-established 'a priori codes', which were used for the closed coding and the deductive analysis of the interviews (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 380). That way, the analytical framework directed the focus on particular aspects of the respondents' answers in the study and allowed to analyze what *was* mentioned throughout the interviews, but also what *was not* (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 78).

As the thesis also follows an exploratory approach, the transcripts were also openly coded and analyzed inductively in order to remain open to unanticipated findings, which created 'grounded codes' (Halperin & Heath, 2020, p. 380; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 106). However, the lion's share of the analysis focuses on the a priori codes, as these allow for a better comparison of factors considered by policymakers with those in previous research.

Conclusions were drawn from the material using indicators from the analytical framework, which provided examples of how the factors could be observed in the interviews and the overall understanding of the factors, as outlined in the analytical framework. The

importance assigned to the factors is judged by the frequency with which they are mentioned, and by the choice of words and intonation.

Results

The following section presents the study's results and places them into perspective. First, some general findings are introduced, which are essential for interpreting the main findings in context. The main findings related to acceptability and acceptance are then explained in more detail, using the themes identified in the analytical framework as an analytical basis. Finally, some unanticipated findings are briefly highlighted based on the open coding.

General Findings

The interviews revealed that Trollhättan has ambitious goals and numerous implemented policies; however, these policies often target fields that are largely uncontroversial and widely accepted among the population, yet have limited impact so far. For example, it became apparent that policymakers in Trollhättan seem hesitant to implement policies and actions that address the public. Instead, most policies address the municipality of Trollhättan as an organization, its procedures and actions (Interview [hereafter I.] 1, 4, 5). This is a strategic decision to some extent, as those are perceived as 'easier' as the public is not impacted (I.5). This affects the interpretation of the subsequent findings, as some of the anticipated themes for the public needed to be transferred to examples of policies addressing the municipal organization and its employees, as they were more often cited as such.

Findings Related to Acceptability

Acceptability of policy proposals refers to policy attitudes during the proposal phase, before implementation, but after informing the public that the policy is being discussed. It became apparent during the interviews that respondents perceive Trollhättan's citizens as rarely reading policy proposals and being largely unaware of them (I.2, 5). Instead, citizens are perceived as mainly taking notice of a policy only once it is in place and affects them. However, in some cases, respondents mentioned that citizens collect signatures as a negative reaction to policies, although this was less mentioned in the context of climate policies (I.3), which may be due to most policies targeting climate change focus on the municipality as an organization rather than citizens.

Due to the perceived lack of public awareness, acceptability seems to be less considered by policymakers compared to acceptance and the reactions after implementation. Yet, despite

little engagement of the public during the design phase, it is still a highly relevant phase from the policymakers' perspective, as the policy design determines how the policy is later implemented and perceived by the public.

Perceived Fairness

Perceived fairness has been determined to be one of the, if not the, most crucial factors for predicting and influencing policy attitudes (e.g. Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; Ejelöv & Nilsson, 2020; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019). However, it does not seem to play a similarly big role in the eyes of the policymakers interviewed, contrary to what was expected in the analytical framework.

As outlined in the literature review and analytical framework, personal costs and, related to that, personal fairness are highly relevant for the proposal phase and acceptability from the individual's point of view. This seems to be reflected in the considerations of policymakers as the concept of personal costs came up in all interviews conducted (I.1-7). The common narrative was that the majority of citizens were in favor of climate policies but only as long as there were no direct negative effects (I.2, 3, 5). In other words, most citizens support climate policies but do not want to pay for them: *“the majority don't have any big problems of accepting it [climate policies] as long as it does not directly affect them in a negative way [...] in their daily life”* (I.5).

The extent to which personal costs affect policymakers' willingness to pass climate policies is well illustrated by the example of the possible removal of parking spaces in the city center. This policy proposal faced a lot of opposition, especially from restaurant and shop owners, who feared that reduced parking would negatively impact their customer numbers (I.1-2). Due to the opposition, the proposal to diminish the parking possibilities in Trollhättan's city center has been put on hold. While this example focuses more strongly on the costs of a few individuals (shop and restaurant owners), it still illustrates the idea that those who are directly affected are opposed to the costs of a policy. The analytical framework assigned personal fairness high importance; however, while most respondents referred to the concept of personal costs, they seemed more inclined to avoid them as much as possible, rather than addressing personal costs by including strategies to offset them in the policy design, which differs from what was anticipated.

The most frequently mentioned consideration of fairness was in the form of the distributional fairness principle of need, as in giving special consideration to vulnerable groups such as children, disabled, and elderly (I.2-5). Besides the general consideration of vulnerable

groups, it was also mentioned that people should be able to emit more greenhouse gas if they have higher needs, i.e. *“all of the people that don't need to use their car shouldn't use their car, and the people that really need to, should use it”* (I.5). The need principle mainly seemed to be applied because *“consider[ing] the most vulnerable groups in society, like children and the elderly, [...] makes the society more adjusted to everyone”* (I.3); however, some groups are protected by law like children (I.2-4). Despite considering the need principle, the respondents did not seem to link those considerations back to acceptability or policy attitudes in general. They appeared to consider more practical aspects, like providing benches for individuals with difficulty walking or allowing vulnerable groups to emit more, rather than actively communicating that policies are fair and considerate of vulnerable groups. Therefore, distributional fairness did not seem to be much considered for acceptability, contrary to the high importance predicted in the analytical framework.

Perceived procedural fairness was mentioned in most interviews (I.1-6), though it was often limited to political participation in the form of answering the citizens' questions (I.2), or investigations and surveys in areas other than climate policies (I.4, 6). Specific efforts for increasing transparency of the decision-making processes were not mentioned, though this seems to possibly be considered a problem as *“it can be difficult [for citizens] to be up to date what the municipality is working on and when a certain perspective needs to be put forward”* (I.3). Instead, respondents highlighted that citizens are often not informed before a policy is passed unless required by law (I.1, 3)

When it comes to climate policies, workshops to work on the policy are usually held internally without inclusion of the public (I.1). However, the need for including the public more regarding transport related questions seems to be relevant, as the policymakers *“have to understand the problem, ‘why are we driving?’ so that [... they] can actually target projects within that area”* (I.5). In line with that, respondents highlighted that some investigation regarding those questions were planned (I.3).

Overall, procedural fairness appears to be considered, but primarily in relation to including employees of the municipality as an organization. Respondents, however, emphasized the need for greater transparency and planned initiatives to increase citizens' involvement and enhance ex ante acceptability. Hence, while some importance was attributed to procedural fairness, policymakers do not consider it as important as one might expect based

on the analytical framework. The lack of reference to systematic inclusion to ensure acceptability hints that this consideration might be considered less important by policymakers.

Environmental justice is, to some extent, related to the distributional fairness principle of need, particularly the higher needs of vulnerable groups, which was frequently mentioned as elaborated above (I.2-5); however, the connection between the higher needs of vulnerable groups and environmental justice was not explicitly made. Environmental justice was oftentimes not raised at all, but when mentioned, it was usually connected to the needs of future generations (I.2, 5, 6). More specifically, it was highlighted that most citizens are rather focused on the short-term and their personal needs, but that the role of a municipality also includes considering future generation: *“we also work for future generations, which is a difference towards private people. [...] the municipality is also responsible for everyone that will ever live in Trollhättan”* (I.5). However, it was not mentioned that environmental justice and the needs of future generations are used to argue in favor of proposal of climate policies, hence the higher importance assigned to this in the analytical framework was not found in the empirical material.

Perceived Effectiveness

Moving from perceived fairness to perceived effectiveness, the concept was mentioned in all interviews and was among the most frequently raised factors in more than half of the interviews (I.3-5, 7), though its role is much more significant for acceptance than acceptability, as outlined below. Nevertheless, it was still mentioned as relevant for acceptability in a few aspects, such as researching beforehand which policies promise the highest effect, and the lack of measurements or setting a measurable goal.

Gathering the knowledge and data, to determine what climate policies seem to promise the best results, helps the policymakers to choose the policies with the highest potential (I.1, 2, 7) and to *“do, what will give the big effect”* (I.2). Thus, gathering knowledge from around the world helps to make the right policy choices, which is a crucial first step in achieving perceived effectiveness of climate policies though that was not explicitly considered in the analytical framework of this thesis. Using this in-depth research and the knowledge gained from similar cases and reliable scientific sources can be used in communicating about planned policies and arguing for the choice of policy instruments. However, this was not raised in any of the interviews, so it cannot be determined with certainty whether this is considered beneficial for acceptability in Trollhättan. On the contrary, it seems that policymakers in Trollhättan are

somehow reluctant to communicate much on policies beforehand to avoid raising uncontrollable expectations:

So if we say we have a policy that also creates expectations, and we can't really control those. So it's much better for us to communicate when change has happened. So we show the results. Not necessarily great expectations of something, I would say. (I.5)

The second problem related to perceived effectiveness and acceptability is the lack of measurable goals, which makes it hard to communicate the effectiveness after implementation (I.1-6). The impact of policies is usually communicated for policies where the effect can be measured, yet not many policies have measurable goals:

I personally feel like one of the problems is that a lot of policies isn't often tied to a measurement. You can't actually measure it. So we can't actually give an answer to the question if it's actually achieving something. (I.3)

Having clear goals may help people envision the benefits that a policy aims to achieve, which could increase acceptability, although this was not explicitly mentioned in the interviews.

The findings overall align with the relatively low importance for acceptability assigned to perceived effectiveness in the analytical framework, and policymakers appear to recognize the importance of having policies with measurable goals. Nevertheless, this knowledge does not seem to be incorporated into the policy design, as respondents emphasized that climate policies often lack measurable goals.

Information and Communication

Information and communication were generally one of the most emphasized factors by policymakers for acceptability and acceptance (I.1-6). Yet the tailoring of communication, so the adjusting of information to a person or a target group's needs and interests (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016, p. 177), was barely addressed directly (I.5) or indirectly (I.3). The role of communication was mentioned a lot (I.1-7), though only little insights were given to what exactly is communicated, which could be because communication work falls outside most respondents' field of responsibilities (it is usually handled by Trollhättan's communication department which could not be included in this study). Another form of tailoring could be seen in "*deliberately hiding information because [...] it's not conducive to what the politicians or what the civil servants want to shield with the policy*" (I.3), which means, in turn, that specific information is highlighted as being beneficial for making a policy more acceptable, while other information is less emphasized. It was mentioned that addressing a specific group, e.g., as part of a project, is more beneficial as people perceive policies differently and targeted communication can ensure highlighting the right information (I.5). However, overall, the

awareness of and importance assigned to tailoring information seems to be lower among policymakers than anticipated in the analytical framework.

There appears to be a bias towards communicating about a policy after implementation and hesitation towards informing the public about policy proposals or ideas, as this “*creates expectations*” (I.5), as mentioned before. Hence, instead of leveraging communication to improve acceptability, policymakers appear to avoid communication before implementation because policymakers fear opposition:

[O]ne reason that we might not have a public dialogue among the climate questions [...] might be that [...] the public might not agree with what we want with climate. And asking the questions will put that in black and white so we can't ignore it anymore. (I.3)

However, policymakers' considerations of that matter appear to be diverting as another respondent argued the opposite: “*I think it's very much how you have presented it [...] if you have talked to the people and had them on board before, then it's easier, I think*” (I.4).

Previous research on citizens' attitudes toward environmental policies has highlighted communication as a helpful tool (Cools et al., 2011; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019), though with a limited effect on policy attitudes compared to other factors (Nilsson, Hansla, et al., 2016). Based on the expectations developed in the theoretical framework, policymakers were expected to focus on providing information that helps citizens understand planned policies. It appears that policymakers prefer to communicate controversial climate policies only during the implementation phase. It would be in line with the analytical framework that communication during the proposal phase is not ascribed high importance; yet, not communicating controversial proposals would contradict expectations based on previous research. However, due to the contradictory statements in this regard, no conclusion can be drawn. Tailoring information was predicted to be considered highly important for increasing acceptability, which did not explicitly manifest in the material.

Choice of Policy Measure

A final aspect discussed in the theory section of this paper was the choice of policy measures. Empirically, policymakers in Trollhättan seem to be aware of citizens' preference for pull measures over push measures (I.2-5). That has the effect that “*the goal will be to always improve things before disadvantaging other things [...] because it's easier for the public to accept*” (I.3). This is reflected in the examples of choices of policy measures and the order in which they are implemented, which respondents highlighted. For example, the traffic in the city center is intended to be reduced. Still, before reducing the lanes of the main street, alternative

routes, including a new bridge were built (I.2). The reduction of lanes of the main street is expected to face a lot of opposition, yet to prepare for this push measure of partially removing car infrastructure, alternative routes around the city center were first built as a pull measure (I.2).

The previous example illustrates that policymakers are aware of people's preference for pull over push measures and the benefits of combining them, yet politicians are often generally hesitant to implement push measures (I.2, 5, 6). Therefore, their focus is on pull measures so far:

We so far haven't really made it more difficult to use the cars. It's more like we try to make the other bicycle [...] more attractive. [...] I think it's difficult for politicians to make it more difficult to use cars. (I.2)

Overall, policymakers appear to ascribe high importance to the choice of policy measures and combining push and pull measures, which is in line with the expectations from the analytical framework and previous research. However, the general reluctance to implement push measures could indicate that policymakers consider other factors, such as the public's dislike of the personal costs associated with push measures, more important than the power of combining push and pull measures to increase the acceptability of controversial climate policies.

Overview of Findings Related to Acceptability

In conclusion, policymakers appear to prioritize acceptance over acceptability, as Trollhättan's citizens are often unaware of policy proposals and mainly notice them after implementation. Perceived fairness was expected to be of high importance for climate policy design, based on the analytical framework; however, policymakers' considerations regarding acceptability did not align with this expectation. Perceived fairness was raised in all interviews, but with a much lower intensity than anticipated. Particularly, environmental justice was rarely mentioned and was not assigned high importance as predicted in the analytical framework.

Policymakers appeared to consider perceived effectiveness and communication as moderately important for acceptability, which aligns with the analytical framework. However, policymakers still seem to be working on how to include measurable goals. Furthermore, tailoring information to target groups' concerns was rarely considered, contrary to expectations. Moreover, policymakers seemed to ascribe high importance to combining push and pull measures, which aligns with the analytical framework and previous research.

Findings Related to Acceptance

Turning from acceptability to acceptance, acceptance seemed to be more relevant to consider for climate policies as the public often only hears about a policy after its implementation (I.2, 5). Acceptance concerns policy attitudes after the policy implementation, either in the form of a test phase or as a long-term implementation. Particularly central to respondents' answers regarding acceptance is perceived effectiveness.

Acceptance, just like acceptability, was rarely explicitly mentioned. Yet most respondents agreed that politicians are influenced by public opinion and feel the pressure to perform before the next election (I.1-6). Politicians, who are generally driven by reelection (Bøggild, 2016; Coleman et al., 2023), try to balance effectiveness and acceptance, which can then weaken climate policies, while civil servants are often more focused on effectiveness:

The first proposal we had to change the [parking] cost was actually that it would cost much more than it does today because the politicians didn't want it to be that high, the increase of cost. So they lowered it. We [civil servants] got maybe half the way that we proposed. (I.2)

Perceived Fairness

Personal costs remain relevant after implementation, but they are often offset by the collective benefits. All interviews included considerations of collective benefits in one way or another and came to similar conclusions (I.1-7). People's acceptance of climate policies after their implementation "is about if you have other benefits, like economical and health or other stuff" (I.1). So, while people might be skeptical in the beginning, they are likely to be less reluctant to bear the personal costs when understanding the benefits, which resonates with the expectations formalized in the analytical framework. This was, for example, the case when each administrative department was asked to financially contribute to a project to recycle furniture within the municipal organization:

[E]very 'förvaltning' [administration], [...] have to give money to us so we can do our work [...]. They don't like that we take their money. But I think it was just in the beginning and then they realized that it could be good for the company. (I.7)

The previous example is also, to some extent, in line with the distributive fairness principle of equality, which was discussed in the analytical framework. Acceptance is expected to increase when something is perceived as fair in the sense of distributing costs equally. This appears to be the case in the aforementioned example of the furniture recycling project (I.7). However, the equality principle did not emerge in any of the other interviews, which contradicts

the expectations outlined in the analytical framework, which anticipated that policymakers would also emphasize this principle after implementation.

Perceived procedural fairness was expected to be less relevant for policy attitudes after implementation compared to the proposal phase, though not irrelevant. Nevertheless, it can be expected to still play a role in acceptance after implementation, which manifested in some of the interviews (I.4, 5). It was even claimed once that *“it's when you start working with implementing the policies, that's when it's easier to include the people”* (I.5). For example, if the municipality passed a policy to improve the charging infrastructure for electrical vehicles, it was considered beneficial to include the public once reaching the moment for deciding where to place the electric loading docks according to their needs, and not necessarily when talking the strategic decision of taking action in that field (I.5). This is in line with the expectation that procedural fairness would play a moderate role after implementation, goes beyond providing feedback possibilities but considering other forms of participation to increase acceptance after the implementation.

Environmental justice was only rarely mentioned (I.2, 5, 6), as previously noted, and never more than once per interview, despite being considered the best predictor of whether a policy is accepted and perceived as fair (Schuitema et al., 2011), and being assigned high importance in the analytical framework.

It appears that there is a general awareness of the importance of environmental justice for making policies more acceptable:

We also work for future generations [...] in this question we also have international movement where we know that the planet is not heading in a good direction. That also sort of helps with the acceptance of these types of changes. (I.5)

Yet that knowledge does not seem to be omnipresent in the municipal organization, and it seems not to be used to communicate the urgency of the climate change issue to citizens when arguing why climate policies are necessary. This leads to the impression that policymakers assign only moderate importance to environmental justice, which is contradictory to the expectation in the analytical framework.

Perceived Effectiveness

Perceived effectiveness was a key theme in all the conducted interviews, and the importance of having effective climate policies was consistently emphasized (I.1-7). There seemed to be awareness of the correlation between effectiveness and acceptance: *“it's much*

easier to get acceptance if you do something that immediately get a good result” (I.2). Effectiveness was described as the primary basis on which citizens build their policy attitudes toward a climate policy (I.5), and achieving the targeted effect facilitates it for policymakers to keep a policy (I.4).

The role of measurable effects was already extensively elaborated; however, it is worth mentioning that it still mattered after implementation. Respondents argued that they ascribe high importance to reporting on the impacts of policies but that this is often difficult due to a lack of measurable effects (I.1-6). Having measurable goals is a prerequisite for communicating a policy’s impact which in turn, helps citizens to notice the change a policy brings, especially as often *“one of the biggest challenges with this climate question is that people don’t see results” (I.2) as “it’s a really slow process” (I.1).*

Perceived effectiveness can help change people’s minds about a policy proposal by having them experience the effects a policy can have after implementation. For example, one civil servant raised the issue that many people would oppose reducing parking in the city center (I.3). However, seeing the benefits of temporarily removing parking along the river during the summer influenced some citizens’ views on reducing parking, as it created a more pleasant environment.

A similar effect was noticeable for the furniture recycling project in Trollhättan, which started two years ago. People were initially skeptical, but they were convinced by experiencing the significant savings that could be achieved through internal recycling and reuse of furniture within the municipal organization, which led to the long-term implementation of the project (I.1, 7). This is an excellent example, although unrelated to transportation, of how a project can serve as a trial period before implementing something long-term. Seeing a policy work and experiencing its effectiveness and benefits helps to counteract initial skepticism.

Overall, it appears that policymakers consider effectiveness highly important, which aligns with the analytical framework. They seem to consider communicating the effectiveness more to increase acceptance, although that has not been done often due to the lack of measurable goals. While there is awareness that effectiveness is important, policymakers do not refer to means to increase awareness about effectiveness and seem to let citizens make their own evaluations rather than writing reports and communicating about the outcomes. However, this might be due to communication falling outside most respondents’ field of responsibilities, as mentioned earlier.

Information and Communication

Information was mentioned in all interviews, and it was most often declared the most important factor for acceptance in question 13, regarding possible advice for other policymakers on better-accepted climate policies (I.2-4). One striking narrative was that citizens only need to understand *why* a policy matters to make it more acceptable (I.1-5), although previous research indicates that this is usually insufficient (Bergquist et al., 2022). Nevertheless, policymakers also consider reporting on the policy's effects, as mentioned above.

Tailoring information was rarely mentioned, but the benefit of targeting communication regarding a policy's effect to certain groups appeared to be not entirely new: “[P]olicies impact people differently and that will also impact how they receive them. [...] that is why it's so important with this sort of more targeted communication of a policy” (I.5). The moderate importance assigned to tailoring information after implementation aligns with the expectations in the analytical framework, though the factor was so rarely mentioned that no proper conclusion can be drawn. However, the high importance of communication in policymakers' considerations overlapped with the expectations in the analytical framework.

Choice of Policy Measure

The respondents generally reported a strong correlation between the choice of policy measure and acceptance after implementation, stating that the public is usually indifferent to pull measures, such as new bike lanes, but would oppose push measures, like higher parking prices or reduced car lanes and parking (I.2-6). That is related to the higher personal cost related to push measures: “people would not accept it [banning parking from the city center] because it would affect them so much in their daily life” (I.2). However, there seems also the awareness that people accept it after the initial opposition or rather, disengage with push measures: “I think that after a couple of months this will be just forgotten. Or not forgotten, that's the wrong word. But it will be accepted and it will just be part of how the city is built” (I.2).

Overall, policymakers appear to consider the choice of policy measures less relevant for acceptance, as factors like perceived effectiveness (which is often stronger for push measures) matter more. In other words, policies are not accepted *because* of the choice of policy measure, but *regardless* of it. In this sense, policymakers assign a relatively moderate importance to the choice of policy measures for acceptance, which corresponds with the analytical framework.

Overview of Findings Related to Acceptability

In conclusion, perceived effectiveness was particularly central to respondents' answers about acceptance. In line with the analytical framework, policymakers consider communication, perceived procedural fairness, and perceived effectiveness to be highly important for acceptance, and assign moderate importance to the choice of policy measures, tailoring information, as well as perceived personal and procedural fairness. However, a lack of measurable goals often hinders communicating effectiveness. Furthermore, tailoring information was seldom mentioned, making it difficult to draw conclusions.

It seemed as if policymakers assign only moderate importance to environmental justice, which is contradictory to the expectation in the analytical framework. However, environmental justice, as well as the equality principle, appeared in almost no interviews, contrary to the expectations outlined in the analytical framework, which anticipated that policymakers would stress both after implementation to increase perceived fairness, making it hard to draw reliable conclusions.

Unanticipated Findings

Besides the a priori codes based on the analytical framework, the interview transcripts were also openly coded to allow for unanticipated findings. There were a few often-mentioned factors that influence policy design, including legal requirements (I.1-4), various types of organizational issues (I.1-7), and considerations regarding science or the lack of data (I.1-7). Policymakers also frequently mentioned the influence of habits and norms on policy attitudes (I.1-3, 5-6), which will be explained hereafter.

That climate change is connected with people's behavior and a needed behavioral change is not only a common narrative in previous research, but also known among the respondents, which manifested in considering people's habits (e.g. Linder et al., 2024; I.1-3, 5-6) and the importance of social norms (e.g. Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016; I.1, 5, 6). Trollhättan, for example, has a long history related to cars, as it was formerly the site of the car manufacturer Saab. Respondents cited this as a hindrance to implementing acceptable policies that would restrict the habit and norm of driving a car (I.1-3, 5).

Another factor that was not foreseen in the analytical framework but that respondents highlighted regarding acceptability and acceptance of policies was a certain skepticism about change (I.2, 3, 6):

Every person has a certain reluctance to change. Even if the change has a possibility to be good or even great. [...] We're often comfortable with what we know and change while it might be good, it might also be bad, so we sort of resist it. (I.3)

Nevertheless, respondents also highlighted that citizens usually adapt over time and build new routines (I.1, 2, 6), which eventually become ingrained in new social norms (I.1, 5, 6).

Habits and norms are scientifically known to matter for policy attitudes (e.g., Drews & Van Den Bergh, 2016, Linder et al., 2024), which overlaps with the findings of the interviews. Yet it was not always possible to determine whether policymakers are merely aware of the influence of habits and social norms or whether they also incorporate that knowledge into their policymaking.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore through semi-structured interviews which factors policymakers consider when designing climate policies and how their considerations align with those identified in previous literature as important to citizens. Leveraging interview data with policymakers from Trollhättan as a single case study, it was found that policymakers seem to consider some factors, which overlap with findings from social sciences, like the role of personal cost and collective benefits, the emphasis of effectiveness, and combining push and pull measures; while other factors were rarely or never mentioned.

Perceived fairness was considered to some extent, but was assigned lower importance for acceptability than expected in the analytical framework. Environmental justice, for example, was often not mentioned and not considered as highly important as anticipated. Similarly, procedural fairness for acceptability and the distributional fairness principle of need for acceptance were not considered to the same extent as expected in the analytical framework.

While policymakers considered perceived effectiveness and combining push and pull measures in their policy design, they reported a lack of measurable objectives for many policies, which would help report back measurable effects, and a reluctance to implement push measures, despite being aware that implementing them together with pull measures can make them more acceptable.

Most policymakers seemed to believe that communication and explaining why a climate policy matters are sufficient to make it accepted, despite previous research finding that perceived fairness and effectiveness are the most crucial factors influencing policy attitudes

(Bergquist et al., 2022). Furthermore, tailoring information to target groups' concerns was rarely considered, contrary to expectations, making it difficult to draw conclusions but indicating a low importance assigned. Assigning high importance to communication for acceptance aligns with the analytical framework. However, respondents did not explicitly consider how to communicate the fairness of a policy to increase its acceptability or how to demonstrate its effectiveness to increase acceptance. This could be because communication work falls outside most respondents' field of responsibility. Therefore, further research could include municipalities' communication departments when conducting a study with a similar aim.

While this thesis contributes to previous research by providing insights into policymakers' considerations on citizens' willingness to accept climate policies, it is not without shortcomings. First, this thesis is limited to the single case of the municipality of Trollhättan. Trollhättan is close to a typical Swedish municipality, which makes it a typical case for Sweden; yet, conclusions are not generalizable to other countries with possibly significantly different values and political setups. While findings are expected to be similar in other Swedish municipalities, further research would be needed to confirm the generalizability, either in form of replications of the same research design with other cases or through a quantitative study testing the conclusions drawn above.

Additionally, while saturation for the case of Trollhättan seemed to be achieved as the last interview added little to no new insights, the underlying sample of interview participants remains small at seven participants. It is possible that a larger pool of respondents, and particularly politicians, would have added more insights and nuance to the study. Future research should hence invest in systematically recruiting and investigating the considerations of politicians, which, due to time and sample restrictions, was not possible in this study.

Furthermore, it could be interesting to replicate the study using Swedish as the interview language, or without taking transportation policies as an example. Respondents might have been limited by conducting the interviews in English rather than their native language; however, that can only be determined with certainty through replicating the study in Swedish. Moreover, individual transportation was chosen as an example for climate policies, which seemed reasonable considering it being a common example in previous research and the largest source of emissions in Trollhättan. However, it turned out that not many climate policies have been passed regarding individual transportation so far, and that most climate policies are internal

rather than targeting the public. Therefore, the conversation often deviated from transportation policies to other fields or climate policies in general. Hence, replicating the study using different types of climate policies or repeating it in a few years, once further transportation policies are implemented, could yield different results.

Unanticipated findings included a few often-mentioned factors that influence policy design, such as habits and norms, legal requirements, organizational issues, and considerations regarding science or missing data. Future research should explore these further.

Finally, the findings of this study hint at a potential gap between research on citizens' attitudes and willingness to accept climate policies and policymakers' considerations. However, it cannot be established whether this apparent gap empirically manifests in a lack of citizens' acceptance and acceptability, or rather is due to policymakers not consciously drawing on these considerations. Future research should explore this issue more systematically and investigate whether and how a potential research-implementation gap could be decreased.

Beyond making contributions to research, this thesis also has the potential to affect policymaking: As outlined above, there seems to be a gap between the insights generated by research and policymakers' considerations. While it may be beneficial for policymakers to consider social science research findings more actively, similar to how they often do with findings from natural science, it also depends on social scientists making an effort to collaborate with policymakers to effectively communicate the findings of their research. Further research could explore how this could be done.

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Appendix

Interview guide

The following interview Guide was used for all interviews and was slightly adjusted after the trial interview. Question 3 had one additional guiding questions which was only intended for interviews with politicians, and question 12 was skipped when the interview already lasted close to or over an hour at that point.

Interview Guide

Interview Guide for Policymakers in Trollhättan - Duration: 40-60 minutes

Introduction

- **Thank you:** Thank you for taking the time today for this interview.
- **Duration:** The interview is planned to last between 40 and 60 minutes.
- **Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to learn what policymakers consider when they design climate policies targeting transportation.
- **Reassurance**
 - **Right/Wrong:** There are neither right nor wrong answers. This is solely to get your perspective and understanding.
 - **English/Swedish:** It is okay if English is not your native language, nor is it mine 😊
You can ask for clarification whenever a word is unclear.
If you lack a word at any point, you can simply use the Swedish word, and I will either understand it or figure it out afterward from the recording.
- **Confidentiality:** All interview respondents are anonymized or referred to by a pseudonym (e.g., Interviewee 2), and no personal data will be published in the thesis.
- **Voluntarily:** Participation in this interview is voluntary. You can end the interview at any point without giving a reason, and you can refuse to answer questions.
- **Recording:** May I record the interview? (Then I will start the recording now)
- Do you have any questions so far?

→ The main questions (in **bold**) can be followed up by guiding questions (in *italics*).

Section 1: The interviewee

1. **Can you tell me a little about yourself and what your work looks like?**
 - *How are you involved in designing (or implementing) climate policies?*
 - *Have you worked on any specific policies, like regulations, taxes, subsidies, or information campaigns? Can you give an example?*
2. **What do you think are the biggest sustainability challenges in Trollhättan? Why?**
 - *What are the biggest challenges in transport?*

Section 2: Policy Design and Proposal/ Acceptability Focus

3. **Can you walk me through the process of designing a new climate policy in Trollhättan, let's say a policy related to transport?**
 - *Do you have a specific policy in mind? If so, which one?*
 - *What are the most important things you and your colleagues think about when designing a policy?*
 - *(POLITICIANS: In what way do you work together with the civil servants of the city of Trollhättan?)*
 - *Do the same things apply to transport policies?*
4. **How does public opinion affect the design of transport policy proposals?**
 - *What makes people more or less likely to accept a policy or not?*
 - *Can you think of a time when public opinion influenced a policy proposal?*
5. **Are there any ways that citizens can give input before a policy is decided?**
 - *Can you share an example?*
 - *Do you think this also applies to transport policies?*
6. **What role do personal costs (like money or lifestyle changes) play in whether people accept policies? How do these affect the policy design?**
 - *Do you think this also applies to transport policies?*
 - *Are there certain groups you focus on more when designing policies? If so, which ones and how?*
7. **What role do you think collective benefits (like improved air quality or less traffic) play in whether people accept policies?**
 - *Is this something you consider when designing? Why?*
 - *Can you share an example of a policy with high collective benefits?*
8. **What role does communication play when introducing a new policy?**
 - *Can you think of an example (of a transport policy)?*
 - *How do you decide what information to highlight when presenting a new policy to the public? Why?*

Section 3: Policy Implementation/ Acceptance Focus

9. **What do you believe makes people accept or reject a climate policy after it is implemented? Why?**
 - *Can you think of an example? Do you think this also applies to transport policies?*
 - *Has there been a policy that people did not like at first but later accepted? What changed?*
10. **In your opinion, how important is it for people to see that a policy achieves its goals after implementation?**
 - *In what ways do you communicate effectiveness back to the citizens?*
 - *Have you noticed people changing their opinions based on how well a policy works?*
 - *Can you give an example of a policy with a clear goal?*
11. **How do you balance incentives (e.g., subsidies) with stricter regulations (e.g., restrictions, taxes)?**
 - *Have you noticed differences in public response to these different approaches?*

Section 4: Reflection and Future Considerations

12. Overall, what would you say is the biggest challenge when designing and implementing climate policies?

- *Have you encountered situations where acceptability and effectiveness conflicted?*
- *How did you handle those challenges?*

13. What advice would you give to policymakers who want their climate policies to be better accepted? Why?

- *What strategies could help increase public support for future climate policy?*
- *Have you seen successful ideas in other cities that could work in Trollhättan?*

14. Is there anything you would like to add that we have not talked about?

Conclusion

- That would be all from my side. Thank you so much for your time and insights.
- Feel free to reach out to me via email if anything else comes to your mind in the future that you would like to add or if questions come up.
→ This also applies to recommendations of people that you think would be interesting to interview.
- If you want to read the final thesis, I can send it to you.

Consent form

Information on the processing of personal data for educational purposes at the University of Gothenburg and consent to participation in the work

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires that you are informed about how your personal data is processed. This text describes the purpose of the study you are participating in and what rights you have as a participant.

The University of Gothenburg is responsible for the processing of personal data carried out by students within the framework of their studies. If you have questions about the processing, you can contact the student who carries out the study.

Course code	SK2532
Title/title of student's work	What's Acceptable? Policymakers Considerations When Designing Climate Policies
Student's name	Leoni Anna Axmann
Student's e-mail	gusaxmle@student.gu.se

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate which considerations policymakers have regarding citizens' acceptance of policies when designing climate policies targeting

transportation. I am interested in understanding how policymakers aim to make policies more acceptable for citizens, at both the design and implementation stage.

All responses by interview respondents will be anonymised or pseudonymised, and no data on political attitudes or other sensitive information will be collected as part of this investigation. Immediately after recording the interview, data will be encoded in a manner that makes it impossible to trace the individual interview partner's identity, and in the final manuscript, respondents will only be referred to by a pseudonym (e.g. Interviewee 2).

Only those persons who are involved in the work that the student performs for educational purposes at the University of Gothenburg are able to access your personal data (the student himself/herself and the supervisor/examiner).

Your personal data will only be processed for the duration of the student's work for educational purposes. After the work has been completed, the student will delete the personal data. This means that your personal data cannot be requested as a public document.

If you want to read a more detailed description of your rights under the GDPR and find contact details for the University's Data Protection Officer and the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection, please visit [Processing personal data | University of Gothenburg](#)

Your participation in the student's work is voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any time until the work has been submitted. Consent is given by participating in the interview. With further questions, you can also contact my supervisor, Jana Schwenk (jana.schwenk@gu.se), or the director of the study program, Frida Boräng (frida.boräng@pol.gu.se).

Place, date, name

Signature

Date

Name clarification

Contact details (e-mail and/or telephone number)

Standardized Initial Contact Email

Most of the following email, which was sent as an initial contact, was standardized except for the second paragraph, which was personalized depending on who recommended reaching out to that person (if applicable) and why the person seemed to be a good fit for the interview study:

Hej [*name*],

I am a master's student in the program 'Political Science: Environmental Governance and Behavior' at the University of Gothenburg. For my master's thesis, I am conducting an interview study to research what policymakers consider when they design climate policies targeting individual transportation.

[*Name of previous respondent*] recommended that I get in contact with you. I would be thrilled to get your insights as [*position*] and [*explanation why I believe the person to be a good fit for the study*].

Would you be available to meet next week for an interview? The interviews will be held in English and are planned to last around 45-60 minutes. I am based in Gothenburg, but I would be happy to come to Trollhättan. Otherwise, we could talk on Zoom.

All interviews are anonymized or pseudonymized, which means no personal data will be published in the thesis. There are no right or wrong answers - the interviews are solely to get your perspective and understanding.

My master's thesis forms part of the **research project 'Societal acceptance for transition' which is hosted by the City of Trollhättan**. It is part of the 'Thesis Cluster for Sustainable Transition' organized by the West Sweden Nexus for Sustainable Development (Wexsus) - a project run by the University of Gothenburg, Chalmers University of Technology, and the University West. For more information on that cooperation, please contact Maria Jakobsson.

Please let me know if you have any questions or input. I genuinely appreciate your help.

Best regards,

Leoni Axmann

(*She/her*)

Master's student in *Political Science: Environmental Governance and Behavior* at the University of Gothenburg