



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Business versus sustainability?

A qualitative study focused on Swedish business students' perceptions of business sustainability and its relation to action competence as part of UN's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

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Abstract

Across the world it is recognized that business have to become more sustainable. Different sustainability initiatives have started to emerge in educational settings, but still few educators are able to graduate business students with skills allowing them to manage the complexity of sustainability within businesses. At the same time has Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) been recognized as one key strategy for pursuing sustainable development and the concept is currently used as inspiration for new initiatives. The Swedish 2011 educational reform is one recent reform adjusted for ESD, but still few studies have investigated what effect ESD aspects have had in current learning for Swedish students. As ESD refer to knowledge, attitudes and empowerment at its absolutely core this study have focused on how business students perceive sustainability within business through interviews, and analyzed what effects these perceptions have for students' empowerment. The result was divided into both common aspects and three categories to recognise the general similarities but also internal differences. After analyzing the result with the concepts of ESD, Foucault's power-knowledge, and Robertson's glocalization it is concluded that there is a consistently and uneven understanding of the three aspects of sustainability which hinder the students from getting empowered to act for sustainability within the field of business. It is further recognized that neither of the students could describe what economic sustainability is, and argued that a different teaching approach to economic aspects of sustainability would enable the students to better understand and act for sustainable business.

Key words

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), business education, business sustainability, power/knowledge, Junior Achievement (JA), Ung Företagsamhet (UF), gymnasium, Sweden

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Definitions

Sustainable Development and Sustainability

This study takes its starting point in Sustainable Development, understood as a process of development which aim to cause no harm to the world's future population, and in which economical, ecological and social aspects are seen to be closely interdependent (Brundtland 1987). Even though sustainable development have been used in societies and academic literature, the concept is still widely disputed. In recent years the integration of the three underpinning aspects - ecological, social and economic - have been emphasised for. The term Sustainable Development, and Sustainability is in this thesis used in reference to all these aspects.

UN further describe the three dimensions of Sustainable Development in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) implementation scheme in which each dimension is explained in support with sub-themes.

Ecological sustainability

The environmental dimensions relate to raising awareness of humans' environmental, social and economic activities, and their effects on resources and nature's fragility. Within the ecological dimensions the sub-themes are: (1) natural resources (water, energy, agriculture, and biodiversity); (2) climate change; (3) rural development; (4) sustainable urbanization; and (5) disaster prevention and mitigation.

Economic sustainability

Concern consumption and sensitivity to the potential for and limits of economic growth, with a commitment to social justice, and the environment. Within the economic dimensions the sub-themes are: (6) poverty reduction; (7) corporate responsibility and accountability; and (8) market economy.

Social sustainability

The social dimensions focus on the resolution of differences and on understanding social institutions, democratic, and participatory systems. Within the social dimensions the sub-themes are: (11) gender equality; (12) cultural diversity and intercultural understanding; (13) health; (14)

HIV/AIDS; and (15) governance (Olsson Gericke, Chang Rundgren 2016:178; UNESCO 2006, 2009).

Business

The term business is used synonyme to company and corporation.

Global value chain

The global value chain involve “the full range of activities which are required to bring a product or service from conception, through the different phases of production (involving a combination of physical transformation and the input of various produces services), delivery to final consumers, and final disposal after use” (Kaplinsky and Morris 2001). The concept of governance is central for the approach since some degree of governance is required at each step of the chain. Decisions have to be made regarding everything from what product or service is to be produced, to in which manner, time frame, quantity and price that are accepted, and the global value chain concept brings attention to which activities, and issues, that are kept within the firm and which can be outsourced to other firms (Holste 2015:5-13).

Gymnasium

Gymnasium refers to the Swedish optional, preparatory for higher education or vocational, education in which students enroll for three years during their 10-12th years of schooling (similar to upper secondary school or high school) (Swedish Institute n.d.).

Introduction

“Sustainability is a key issue for organizations in the twenty-first century as they increasingly acknowledge that their policies and practices have social and/or environmental consequences. Accordingly, many companies are implementing elements of sustainability into their business practices. In step with this trend is the increasing recognition that sustainability-related subjects need to be included in the curricula of business courses” (Stubbs and Chocklin 2008).

Meanwhile the establishment of sustainability in business educations is claimed to not yet meet the needs businesses express. In addition to this, the academic debate mainly focus on which position sustainability should have in business education and curriculas, rather than investigating the effect different kinds of sustainability initiatives have had for business students.

Sweden has for a long time been a strong global force pursuing sustainable development. In 1972 Sweden hosted the United Nations' first conference on the human environment which marked a turning point in the development of international environmental politics (United Nations). As a result the international community agreed on UNESCO's *Stockholm declaration* of 1972, in which principle 19 stated the need for environmental education from primary school to adulthood. School curriculums regulating the Swedish primary school have since 1969 emphasised raising awareness about environmental issues in the education. In 1980 the curriculum was adjusted to stress social, cultural, economical and democratic aspects in relation to environmental issues and a national addition was concluded making environmental issues a central notion in all teaching. In 1994 the notion *sustainable development* was introduced along with additional aspects - the historical, the international and the ethical (Strid 2007:11-17). Most recently the reform of the curriculum, concluded in 2011, emphasise sustainable development in many places, both as general and specific objectives inspired by the United Nations' recommendations for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (Sjögren 2016:11). In addition, the 2011 reform aim to establish greater entrepreneurial engagement in the Swedish society, specifically mentioning business' important role for future stability.

While reviewing research about Education for sustainable development in Sweden, it was noticed that very few studies actually aimed to investigate, nor discussed, the effect this most recent reform had had on the educational environment in Sweden. Even less studies were published about the result in terms of how students' perspectives and competence had got influenced after the reform (Olsson et al. 2016). As students' understandings and skills of sustainability is the absolute goal to influence with school reforms, this finding was considered surprising. Considering the long history of sustainability in Swedish schooling and that the 2011 reform was influenced by the United Nation's ESD, Swedish business education should be well prepared to successfully engage sustainability. As this, however has not been appropriately investigated it was clear that studying Swedish business students' views of sustainability would not only fill a research gap concerning the effect of the 2011 reform, but could also acknowledge aspects related to the use of ESD in business education. These aspects were what motivated the decision to focus on Swedish business students and sustainability in this thesis.

Research issue

As it appears to be a research gap concerning the effects of the 2011 school reform, and since that research gap lead to that the academic community and the society can not understand how the 2011 school reform have influenced the students, then academics and the society is also limited in their ability to understand how the future society will be influenced by the reform. If not starting to recognize these effects, the possibilities to make careful adjustments to further

direct the Swedish society in wished course will be limited, meaning that the sustainable development is jeopardized.

Unlike other studies in Sweden, this thesis is targeted to reflect the outcome from the sustainability initiatives, namely by using students themselves as objectives. At the initiating stage of this thesis the intention was to conduct a survey based research in which business students' attitudes to sustainability was measured in frequency, but along with the construction of such a study it emerged that many students did not seem to be very familiar with the sustainability concept at all, certainly not in relation to business. One previous study about people's perception of sustainability in relation to business have been carried out with focus on business teachers teaching (often through a teaching concept called Ung Företagsamhet (UF)) at Swedish gymnasiums. In the attempt to use that result it was discovered that the result was not fully applicable on students taking UF business classes at different gymnasiums in Sweden. This led to difficulties for many students to answer the survey questionnaire appropriately which led to the conclusion that it is far more relevant to research *how* students view sustainability in relation to business.

It was then decided to investigate how UF business students reason about sustainability in relation to business by using a qualitative interview method. The findings were described both generally for all the students, and divided into three separate categories. There after the result was analysed in relation to for example *business sustainability, ecological, social and economical aspects of sustainability, attitudes, action competence and ESD, Foucault's power-knowledge theory, and previous research performed by the Swede Sjögren (2016)*. ESD constitutes the most central aspect of these examples as the study centres around education and sustainability attitudes. The ESD researchers Öhman and Öhman (2008) requests the application of Foucault's power-knowledge theory in Swedish research focusing on ESD, which is in line with what was found suitable for this study after reviewing the findings. Finally, some conclusions and reflections are expressed with the purpose to enable the reader to descry more practical use of the result and analyses in the thesis.

Purpose and research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate how sustainability is understood in relation to business by gymnasium students studying business (UF) at two schools in Gothenburg, from a perspective based on ESD and its role in sustainable development. To be able to study this, the following questions are worded:

- What general patterns can be identified in the students' understanding of business sustainability?

- What different attitudes towards business sustainability can be identified?
- What are the implications of these understandings and attitudes on the students' action competence?

Delimitations

This thesis should not be understood to reflect all UF business students in Sweden, neither should it be understood to show how students in Gothenburg view sustainability in relation to business, as it can only claim to express how the students partaking in the interviews spoke about sustainability in relation to business.

The study does not either claim to explain how UF's sustainability initiatives influence the students, since the students are rather understood to be formed and influenced by many different aspects of Swedish education and the society they live in. The students' abilities and learning processes are understood to be developed in a complex system where all parts of their livelihood contribute with different parts, forming attitudes towards, and how they view sustainability. The result of this study is limited to tell only about the current and present, at that time, understanding and reflections of the students since the learning process is understood to be constant and evolving.

The result should not either be viewed to explain how business and sustainability relate to each other. Nor should it be understood to reflect how ESD function outside of this specific context. Still the result contribute with interesting views and perspectives which can be useful as inspiration in further research and other analytical processes related to business sustainability and ESD.

Lastly, the thesis makes no attempt to explain, or identify, ideological patterns in the three categories used to explain the students' different attitudes towards business and sustainability. It rather leaves the categories and their tendencies to be analysed as they are in relation to the analytical framework. By actively avoiding this the thesis could instead show how other perspectives, separated from the neoliberal vs ethical debate bring new perspectives in to the debate.

Disposition

In order to understand the empirical and analytical result, the study will first introduce the reader to how education for sustainable development have emerged, is viewed and thought to function by introducing the idea of education for sustainable development (ESD). It is also explained how sustainability is described in the 2011 school reform, and how the teaching concept UF is designed, includes sustainability, and practically functions - partly from the perspective of the

teachers but also the students. Thereafter relevant academic research is introduced which covers both global and local tendencies from the research field within business sustainability in education. Under the theoretical framework different academic perspectives of ESD are presented in relation to Swedish education, and central aspects from Foucault's power-knowledge theory and Robertson's concept of glocalization are described and positioned in relation to the educational context.

Before moving to the empirical result the reader get introduced to methodological aspects which are considered relevant for the design and result of the study. Thereafter, the research context, the construction and role of the interview guide, and details from the interviews is well outlined, enabling the reader to follow how the empirical data was collected and what important decisions that were made. Then, the analytical procedure is declared, in an order which can be reviewed in the later presentation of the empirical result. The key findings are introduced as common aspects and 'three categories'. The analysis is presented in support with ESD, previous research, the power-knowledge theory, and glocalization. It is followed by a conclusion of the study's key findings. And finally, a discussion shortly describe how the thesis have contributed to the field of business sustainability in education and suggest further research approaches emerging from the result in this thesis.

Background

This chapter introduce the reader to the underlying idea of ESD, how education for sustainability and business is managed in Swedish curriculum, how the concept of Ung Företagsamhet (UF) is practically arranged in Swedish gymnasiums, and finally it is outlined how sustainability in business education is discussed in the academic community.

Action competence and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Sustainable Development (SD) is a complex subject area to grasp with much interconnectivity between its different focus areas. Education has been recognized as a crucial part of the sustainability progress since the publication of the Brundtland (1987) report. Policy-makers and researchers have highlighted the need for a special teaching approach called Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to enable teachers to handle the complexity in teaching SD. The method emerged from a concept called action competence introduced in a Danish research project by Soren Breiting, and was later picked up by the international community in the formation of ESD. The action competence concept acknowledge a need to not only inform and raise awareness but also teach influential components in learning, as a method to generate empowerment. Breiting describe students' action competence closely related to an interrelation between *knowledge of action possibilities* (knowingness about the issue), *confidence in having influence* (attitudes and search for normative arguments), and *a wish to act* (behavior and

inclination to act). ESD is considered to be one such approach, where students learn to take actions in complex issues related to SD (Breiting 2009; Olsson et al. 2016:177-182).

[An introduction to education for sustainability and business in Sweden](#)

UNESCO's definition of the three dimensions of sustainable development constitutes an important framework for the ESD implementation plan in Swedish national curriculum (Olsson et al. 2016). In 2011 a major school reform, partly inspired by ideas from ESD (Sjögren 2008), was undertaken in Sweden. Entrepreneurship became a core incitament in the curriculum with the purpose to flourish students' abilities to become engaged citizens, both in business and organisational settings (National Agency of Education 2009; Ung Företagsamhet (1) n.d.). The new curriculum mentions sustainability both as a general and specific objective (Sjögren 2016:11). In Business Economics syllabus following formulation direct the sustainability teaching.

“Teaching in the subject of Business Economics should aim to help students develop an understanding of the role and conditions of business in society from local to global level. This includes the responsibility that companies have for sustainable development.

[...]

Teaching in the subject of Business Economics should give students an opportunity to develop: ... Knowledge of the role of business in social development, in the present and from an historical perspective. The ability to reflect on the responsibility of business for sustainable development and on democratic values, ethics and gender when economic decisions are made“ (National Agency of Education 2011).

[Ung Företagsamhet \(UF\) - Junior Achievement \(JA\)](#)

After enrolling in an introductory class to business economics Swedish gymnasium students are often offered to enroll in classes teaching the educational concept Junior Achievement Sweden, locally called Ung företagsamhet (UF) which will be the term used from here on. From a teacher perspective UF is a complex toolwork allowing them to teach business supported by a national network. The purpose of the concept is to through experienced based learning inspire students to start their own businesses at some point of their career. It is taught as a class covering one school year and is normally enrolled in during one of the last two years of gymnasium. The concept is a complex and well established arrangement allowing the students to officially register and run a business over one year. The students learn about central events in a fiscal business year, including economics, marketing, and annual reporting (Ung Företagsamhet 2011; 2013) but the classes using UF's concept also pledge to teach students sustainability aspects for business as

according to the above cited formulation from the National Agency of Education. What is found in the work with this thesis is that UF's primary method for encouraging students to work with sustainability is through introducing an optional sustainability competition at the beginning of each school year which seeks stimulate students to practically learn about sustainability.

Business education and sustainability - an overview of academic research

In the international academic community, as in Sweden, there are currently ongoing debates about business sustainability in business education. Most researchers agree that business educations have to become more focused on business sustainability as they recognize that it is urgent for business to become more sustainable. The motivations for pursuing business sustainability differ from such as compliance or profit-driven to the welfare of future generations or issues of social justice, but the common ground for most academics is their acknowledgement of the Brundtland report's importance (Fisher & Bonn 2011).

The main areas of debate related to ESD in business educations are centred around how sustainability should be taught and what business sustainability actually is. It often occurs to be an ideological debate where the trust to the free market, and expected level of integration of non traditional economic subjects - like sustainability - in business educations, are the core divisions between the different sides. Those questioning integration of sustainability in business educations mainly criticise the meaning of business sustainability for being unclear to such an extent that business sustainability should not yet have much space in business subjects (Banon Gomis, Guillén Parra, Hoffman, and McNulty 2011). Research promoting sustainability in business education generally does not show much alarm to that concern. Instead, these researcher usually share a consensus about the meaning of business sustainability and have proceeded to more practical issues emerging while introducing sustainability in business syllabus and teaching (Mathison, Stillman-Webb and Bell 2014; Hasslöf 2015). Significant for the academics' shared meaning of business sustainability is that businesses must incorporate sustainability in all its forms - ecological, social and economical - systematically through all levels of the corporation. In order to promote this understanding of business sustainability to students, and enable them to incorporate it in their future business career, many of these academic researchers mean that it is necessary to create a deep attachment between sustainability and businesses through integrating sustainability into all business subjects (Hommel and Painter-Morland 2012, Painter-Morland, Sabet, Molthan-Hill, Goworek and de Leeuw 2014:751, Mathison et al. 2014:59; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou 2013:15).

While searching for academic publications about business sustainability it was difficult to find research focusing on business students' perceptions of sustainability in business. The majority of studies discussed the meaning or definition of sustainability, curriculums, or teaching methods.

Only one study used business students as the object of the research. That study showed that graduated business students at a University in the US could not express that they had developed analytical, nor practical, sustainability competence enabling them to perform a sufficient written analysis of a business' sustainability possibilities, even though they had enrolled in a business program stating that sustainability was integrated in most of the business classes. The reason to this result was, in support of discursive theory, argued to be limited writing skills. They argue that lacking ability to communicate business sustainability will limit student's possibility to promote sustainability in their future workplaces, but also hinder them from consolidating sustainability in their professional identity (Mathison, Stillman-Webb and Bell 2014).

Theoretical framework

Three theoretical concepts are used. These are *ESD*, Foucault's *power-knowledge*, and Robertson's *glocalization*. The two former are used for the role of education. It was here important to use concepts which centralise the role of education and empowerment in order to understand the implications from the students' understandings and attitudes on their action competence in relation to education. ESD highlights the relation between knowledge (education) about sustainability and action competence (empowerment), and Foucault's theory of power-knowledge bring attention to the complexity in the empowerment process. The later theoretical concept (glocalization) is used for highlighting societal and ideological aspects, and bring an additional perspective in to the analysis of the empirical findings. In this section, the theoretical concepts are described both separately and in relation to one another.

Because of the focus on the role of education in this study, it was not necessary to have a concept centralizing business. In addition, business and sustainability is already widely discussed in a great part of previous academic research, also in relation to ESD. Other perspectives, such as the role of education, could instead bring original stimulating ideas to the current debate. Still, business (by focusing on neoliberalism and UF) is introduced in relation to ESD in order to enable the researcher to locate the study in the greater research context.

ESD

The central aspect of the ESD concept is, as mentioned before, to empower students by giving them the tools to enable their action competence. In further detail this means that students should get a wider understanding (knowledge) of all three aspects related to Sustainable Development, namely ecological aspects, social aspect and economical aspects. ESD does not explicitly explain what this knowledge involve but highlights that the results from the 'knowledge' they gain should be awareness of that there are possibility to act, how to act for sustainable development,

and a wish to act for sustainable development. Within ESD it is believed that knowledge of sustainability is required to create action competence (Kopnina and Meijers 2014:191-192; Olsson et al. 2016:177-182).

After reviewing results from a survey based investigation about how students perceive water consumption after being taught with the ESD approach Benninghaus, Kremer and Sprenger (2017:14) confirm other research which explain that there is an over recognition of the ecological dimensions in the mind of young people. They further recognize that this kind of unequal consideration of the three dimensions of sustainability is insufficient to promote an understanding of sustainable development.

Academic reports focusing on education in Sweden mainly perceive problems with ESD as derived from issues of neoliberalism. Ideland and Malmberg (2013:175-182) argue after reviewing educational content directed to Swedish grade school students, that the discourse around ESD is “impregnated by a neoliberal rationality” in two ways. Firstly by focusing the responsibility to the individual in a way which makes ideological standpoints invisible, and that way hide political aspects of sustainability making it impossible to resist. And secondly, as problems, by referring to statistics, facts and knowledge, become discursively constructed as objective and possible to solve through careful actions. They mean that this way of operating through pastoral power - creating concrete and unquestionable good and bad - is “a way of governing souls into ‘reason’ and adaptation to market economical ideals” (Ibid:181).

One study is certainly interesting for the focus in this thesis. It is one written by Andersson and Öhman (2016) reflecting how eight teachers teaching economics at Gymnasiums, and whom most of them are teaching in support with the UF concept, discussed sustainability within business. They argued that different attitudes to theories on economics, influenced their perception of business sustainability, and mean that the teachers approach to economics and sustainability will influence the direction of the Swedish ESD discourse as the teachers’ views will be transferred to student.

In opposition to these neoliberal perspectives, one study by Sjögren (2016:13-15 & 158-168) have brought attention to the way sustainability is taught in the classroom, meaning that current teaching techniques are insufficient as they only appeal to teacher students (often middle class) who already share values and perceptions close to the teacher instructors’ values and perceptions. The study suggest that ESD has to become more political in order to successfully break through, because different views and angles will increase the variety of receivers, and through that flourish analytical skills among both future teachers and Swedish youth.

Hasslöf (2015:80-84) agree with the importance of political variety within ESD. After studying ESD from a conflict perspective it is stressed that the current approach in teaching sustainable development creates and accentuates educational tensions. The tensions are argued to depend on conflicts within and between different parts of sustainable development, but also since

contemporary living is declared as unsustainable. For example Hasslöf show that consumption is valued differently depending on which perspective - economic, social and environmental - the argument is concentrated to, but also which societal level conflicts are viewed from. It is stressed that the goal can not be to find a universal definition for sustainability, but in order to manage ESD successfully teachers need to bring conflict intersections into focus while teaching.

Power-knowledge

Öhman and Öhman (2008) suggest that Foucault's power-knowledge approach should be used in studies of ESD meaning that it clarifies the consequences of inclusion and exclusion of some ways of thinking and viewing sustainable development.

According to Foucault (in Haugaard 2002:181-204) there is an inseparable relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault is a meaning holist, for whom everything is constructed in relation to everything else. The reality cannot be viewed in isolation from the perception, and the perception itself is a product created by history in reflection of social relations. While knowledge is constructed by man, it is also constructing man, as it forms the way man perceive things.

From a foucauldian perspective knowledge is temporary. It is constructed and it is constructing in a complex interdependence, and the way knowledge construct is a form of power. Meanwhile Foucault does not view power as something possible to possess, but power is performed everywhere, at all times and from different levels. It exists in a mechanism which belong to no one but to everything (man and ideas), and which constantly occur but is temporarily performed. Power is everywhere and depend in its existence on knowledge, in the same way knowledge is everywhere and depend in its existence on power.

In the case of a state, the state does not simply have power over its citizens. States do rather use some attributes of the power mechanism to form people, but they are only able to manage it to the extent as they have knowledge about, and the views (knowledge) is limited to what is considered truth in each specific moment. As the exercised power is constant but temporary it is performed in the social relationships among the people. The way people act is accepted or opposed by the people but as time different behaviors and thoughts change, which constitutes knowledge forming the present. Those thoughts will be transmitted partly through education, and education is thus limited to the knowledge of that specific time. Some might argue that states use education to control its people, but according to Foucault states do not exercise power over its people since they do not manage to control the complex power/knowledge mechanism. Instead education should be seen as a part of the power-knowledge mechanism which states use as a tool to influence the society - a way to govern (Foucault in Haugaard 2002:181-204).

Öhman and Öhman (2008) agree with Foucault's understanding of education as a tool available for governments to use, but emphasise that it is important to remain at the process of governing education to acknowledge challenges with the ESD approach. Öhman and Öhman argue that focusing on power-knowledge in relation to ESD, directs attention towards how certain actions become possible and how others are limited, and to the consequences of educations' 'production' of knowledge.

Glocalization

In order to create better circumstances for analysis of 'globalization' Robertson (1995) suggest application of a concept he name glocalization. He argues that the terms and meanings of 'global' and 'local' are incorrectly understood in opposition to each other, and has been since the creation of the nation-state. Instead of the present perception of global and local, the concept of globalization should be understood as a mixture of constant localities, and localization as a mixture of ideas selectively chosen from other societies implemented in the own. As he understand globalities and localities as variations of the same, it is preferable to replace globalization with the concept glocalisation. According to Robertson the term globalization "constrains us to make our analysis and interpretation of the contemporary world both spatial and temporal, geographical as well as historical" (Ibid:40), but the use of glocalization allow us to understand the process of 'globalization' and 'localization' differently, but more accurately.

Benninghaus et al (2017:15) use glocalization in order to acknowledge students' limited ability to understand the complex relation between global and local aspects of sustainability. According to their study students need to better understand (knowledge) the relations between local activities in their surrounding and effect and activities in other places - localities - in order to become enabled (empowered) to act for sustainability.

With the same explanation as used for ESD, and by Öhman and Öhman (2008), also glocality is viewed in relation to power-knowledge as it direct attention towards consequences of educations' 'production' of knowledge.

Empirical method

Following chapter outline what methodological considerations the study rely upon. It is also explained how the interview guide was constructed, what the context the research are, and how the interviews were conducted and transcribed. Lastly the analytical procedure is declared in three steps highlighting how the interviews were processed in case descriptions, general patterns and three categories.

Methodology

The study has an inductive nature in terms of that the design of the research evolved along with the analytical procedure. Theories were actively avoided in the early stage of the research which allowed explanations to develop by moving from the particular (observation) to the general (theory). This was done based on the idea that studies organized around theories, have inherent methodological problems as the application of theories in that stage might limit the researchers analytical reasoning (de Vaus 2014:9-13).

In order to understand how students perceive sustainability in relation to business it was crucial to use a method which generated an opportunity to take part of how the students view, and reason about, sustainability. While the *quantitative method* is recommended for studies aiming to measure frequency, the *qualitative method* is recommended for research in which persons' conceptions of a phenomenon is ought to be understood (Esaiasson et al. 2009:285). Furthermore, the qualitative interview method "gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves" (McCracken 1988:9). For these reasons using qualitative interviews were decided suitable for this study.

The Interview guide

As the purpose of the interviews was to gather information reflecting the students' perceptions of sustainability in relation to business it was decided to use semi structured interviews. This design mean that the interviews are more concentrated to themes than specific questions, and is considered to allow the respondents to choose areas of interest while it still enables the interviewer to ask questions and lead the conversation in directions relevant for the research aim (Hedin 1996). Another important aspect of the semi structured interview is that the researcher is allowed to ask for further explanation or elaboration if anything is unclear. As the later analysis depended upon how the researcher understand the interviews, it was important that the design of the interviews were of a kind which gave the ability to carefully interrupt to confirm that complex reasoning were correctly understood. Meanwhile it was also important that the interviewer did not manipulate the conversation. In order to prevent that an interview guide was used (Mc Cracken 1988:24-25).

The role of an interview guide is also to create the larger structure and objectives of the interview so that the researcher can pay full attention to the respondent at the time of the interview (Ibid). For being able to generate a well functioning interview guide Esaiasson et al (2009:298-301) recommend the guide to start with *simple questions* to generate a climate comfortable for the respondent. Thereafter *theme questions* should be introduced. These should be open and are suppose to be formulated to enable the respondent to speak freely about dimensions of the phenomenon found important by the respondent him/herself. Finally more

specific questions should be asked. These can create more detailed, enriching and explanatory responses.

Most of the interviews was expected to be spent focused on the theme questions since these had to bring attention to the most accurate parts of the students' perceptions of sustainability in relation to business. After reviewing academic literature about sustainability in business it was declared that business sustainability was mainly discussed with focus on either the idea of business or the idea of sustainability. In order to catch reflection about sustainability in business it was decided to introduce the term *business sustainability* as this term, and theme, was considered to open up for differing and individual approaches of sustainability in relation to business. Since the aim of the interview was to capture not just ideas but also related context, it was decided to use *business* and *sustainability* as separate themes. These were considered to allow the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the students' reflections of sustainability in relation to business. As business sustainability was considered to be a mix of the other two, it was decided that *business* was the first theme to become introduced, followed by *sustainability* and then *business sustainability*.

The intention was to create an interview structure which, considerably quickly, created comfortability and was easy to understand and reflect upon. As all the students were studying the UF class, the UF experience was used as an initiating base which the first theme (business) was formed around. Within this, some questions were also more concentrated to business outside of UF. Thereafter the subjects sustainability (Swedish: *hållbarhet*) and sustainable development (Swedish: *hållbar utveckling*) were introduced as general concepts which the students were asked to speak about. The Swedish terms were used in national directives for the Swedish school curriculum, which increased the chance for the respondents to be familiar with them. Finally business sustainability (*hållbart företagande*) was described as a phenomenon for the students to elaborate with, both in relation to their UF experiences and business in general. All these terms - in Swedish - were used by the regional UF office in Gothenburg in their documents about business sustainability during the school year 2016/17, and was therefore considered suitable for the study.

Within each theme additional questions were asked. Some of these questions were, in combination with the theme, designed to catch the idea of the general and other questions the specific. For example, business was interesting because the general idea of business might influence the idea of sustainability, while more direct questions about sustainability can give more narrow responses giving an understanding of what they know about sustainability.

After constructing the interview guide one former UF student from 2015/16 was asked to review the questions. That individual shared with some feedback from which a few adjustments were made. Thereafter one additional former UF student from 2014/15 was interviewed as a test person. This person expressed some insecurity while speaking about sustainability, thus a few

additional changes were done in order to create a better possibility for the future respondents to more easily elaborate with the themes and questions. Finally, one more student, who were studying the UF class during the accurate school year 2016/17 in Gothenburg was interviewed in a more formal setting. This student showed strong difficulties to reflect about all the three themes, certainly about sustainability. The student were clearly nervous and this seemed to hinder much thoughts and aspects from being expressed during the interview. For this reason, it seemed certainly important to generate greater comfortability during the interview. Additional information were added to the introduction, and some extra time (and questions) was decided to be spent on the first theme (*the UF year*), as this was considered to be a concrete learning experience easier to speak about. To enable their ability to speak about sustainability UF's own description for business sustainability was decided to be introduced for all respondents (see appendix).

Research context

The target group for the research was Swedish gymnasium students enrolled in classes teaching the educational concept UF, during the school year 2016/17. These students were about to finish their second or third (last) year of the Swedish gymnasium and usually turned 18 or 19 during the year of the research.

The UF organisation is, in addition to the national central office, divided into 24 regional offices and the total amount of students taking part in the program for the school year 2016/17 was 27 769. The regional offices are supposedly meant to provide students and teachers with similar information and experiences. In the research process it was noted that some regions used slightly different terms than others, such as *CSR and sustainability* instead of only *sustainability*. From a (social) constructivist perspective this kind of difference might influence the respondents differently and it was therefore important to conclude the study within one region. Staying within one region also decreased the risk of additional unwanted influence from regional office directives or other regional differences such as for example political or business climate. The decision of conducting the study in the region called *Gothenburg* was done mainly out of convenience. This decision meant that all schools contacted were located within one hour from Gothenburg city, the second largest city in Sweden.

To be able to reach students in this region, teachers teaching UF classes were contacted. All interviews were held during the month of May, and since that time usually is one of the busiest for the target group which could decrease the interest to part take in the study, it was decided to target whole classes through teachers. Doing so, the teachers managed the planing and the students only had to contribute with time at the day of the interview. One consequence of this decision was that all interviews had to fit within one class of 90 minutes. To be able to do two interviews during this time, each interview could be no longer than 30 minutes, excluding time to

introduce and get settled with the respondents before starting the interviews. The researcher was aware of that 20-30 minutes might be considered too short if urging to 'get into the mind of another person' (McCracken 1988:9) but as the subject of this thesis was not considered as very sensitive, the time frame was not perceived as a major problem even though longer interviews would allow deeper interviews. Still, this circumstance required more from the interview guide and the researcher to generate a comfortable atmosphere at the time of the interviews. One additional aspect to the decision to do 20-30 minutes long interviews was that longer interviews was assumed to be more difficult to find students willing to take part in during this busy time of the year.

UF Gothenburg's (2, n.d.) webpage was used as a source to find relevant gymnasiums to contact. There was a list where all Gymnasiums teaching UF in the Gothenburg region were listed. From this list gymnasiums were randomly contacted by phone. In some cases teachers teaching UF were spoken to directly, in other cases information or an email was forwarded to concerned teachers, and sometimes principals. In total 16 Gymnasiums were contacted, and the aim was to interview 2 students from 4 different classes. To meet students from different classes was considered important because it limited the risk of producing a result which rather reflect the effect of one teacher's work with sustainability.

The first four teachers agreeing to participate were chosen and it happened to be four classes divided only at two Gymnasiums, two at each gymnasium from which one class studied the program *Economics* and the other class studied the program *Handels*. The former program is social science oriented and university preparatory while the later is not university preparatory in its origin and is more practical experience oriented. Each class had separate teachers teaching UF. One teacher, teaching the Economics program, claimed to actively and repeatedly been trying to encourage the students to work with sustainability in their business. The other three told they had tried to emphasise sustainability but did not strongly encourage their students to work with sustainability to a very high extent. All teachers had received the same information about the study.

At the day of the interviews, the researcher shortly introduced the study for each class in person. It was emphasised that no knowledge about sustainability was required to participate, and that the conversation and reflections about the subject was in the centre of the study, to ensure the interviews were not understood as complicated or scary. The teachers asked a few (chosen) students if they were willing to participate. In one class the first two students asked chose to participate, in the other three classes the teacher had to ask a few different students.

The interviews

8 semi structured interviews were conducted. Each interview were between 20 and 35 minutes long. The interviews were held privately in rooms at the two gymnasiums. 7 out of 8 interviews

were held during the time of their regular UF class and 1 out of 8 was held right after the UF class. All interviews were conducted during two days.

In the beginning of the interview all respondents were asked if they agreed to record the interview, which all did. The respondents were also informed about ethical considerations - that the research follows the Swedish research principles and the meaning of that - and that the participation of the interview was voluntary. According to the Swedish research principles participation in research can occur without confirmation from parents as long as the children are over 15 years old, are informed about the research context, understand the meaning of the participation and personally agree to participate (CODEX 2017/08/07). Therefore no confirmation from parents were required.

All respondents were at the start of the interview told very similar information about the researcher, research and interview. The purpose of the interview was described in similarity with "I [the researcher] wish to understand how you [the respondent] perceive sustainability in relation to business". None of the respondents had previous participated in any similar interview situations so they were all briefly informed about the idea of the long interview. It was specifically emphasised that the goal of the interview was to understand how they reason and reflect about business and sustainability, that I [the researcher] did not wish for any specific answers but rather to get inside the mind in order to understand how students like themselves think about the subjects, and that they could speak much about and around anything that came to mind during the interview.

In Sweden the idea of sustainability is highly recognized and can be seen as an ideal advocated to aim for personally by different parts of the society. Qualities of sustainability were from the view of the researcher viewed as qualities of a *good person* among Swedish people. This led to the concern that the respondents might, with much or little awareness, try to manipulate the answers to rather match this commonly recognized good person instead of giving fully accurate answers. With this background it was further highlighted, at the beginning of the interviews, that there were no right or wrong answers, nor that I [the researcher] expected anything but an open conversation from the interviews.

At a few occasions during the interviews this belief was partly confirmed. One student said "*Well I know that this is about sustainability and that you want me to say something about sustainability*" (Interview 8). While the students told something similar to this citation or showed signs of uncomfotability, small comments or actions were done by the researcher hoping to create the needed environment for their thoughts and reflections to come through. Later in the interview the same student said "*it really feels like I just think and speak straight out*" (Ibid), which confirm that the interview still enabled that student to think and speak freely, even though the first comment tended to show something different. Yet, the response was viewed with carefulness in the analytical procedure.

Finally the structure of the interview was briefly introduced. The three themes were described and it was told that some questions were prepared in order to support them during the interviews. The themes introduced for the students during the interview were: *the UF year (UF året)*, *sustainability in general (hållbarhet generellt)*, and *sustainability and business (hållbarhet och företagande)*. This was done to make the respondents relaxed. Meanwhile, introducing sustainability before actually speaking about it in the interview might have influenced the result in the study. Choosing not to introduce sustainability could have led to spontaneous reactions from the respondents during the interviews, which in itself could be interesting. As business sustainability had seemed difficult to elaborate with during the test interviews, it was hoped that introducing it earlier would generate greater possibility for them to reflect during the whole interview.

Transcription

All interviews were transcribed during the following five days after the last interview was conducted. For transcription the website otranscribe.com was used. Otranscribe is designed with various tools which enable the researcher to simply go through the material. The soundtracks from the interviews were uploaded, listened to and written down in the exact words used by the respondents.

Analytical procedure

After transcribing the interviews the data was processed in support with analytical guidance. One of the many difficulties with processing qualitative data is the richness of information. Qualitative data rapidly generate a large amount of information in which researchers carefully locate and decide what is and is not significant for the specific research aim (Bryman 2012:566). This means that all decisions influence the final conclusion of the thesis. In order to limit avoidable mistakes, recommendations from Esaiasson et al. (2009:304) were used as guidance. The goal of analysing the material was to see and highlight aspects which were not seen at first sight, nor directly understood by the respondents themselves. Esaiasson et al. recommend the analytical procedure to continue until the material is 'emptied'.

Eventually a three step process was concluded. The first step was to summarise the material in *case descriptions*. Here it was important for the researcher to get familiar with the respondents' individual views. The content in the interviews was scaled down into fragments so the content of the interviews was easier to overview. The second step was to identify *general patterns* in the material, and finally, the third step was to clarify patterns within the general patterns. These are found under the subheading *three categories*.

Since the interviews were held in Swedish, all of the analytical procedure was carried through in Swedish. This hindered that information or other language related aspects were lost in translation which could have affected the analysis. The citations given in the chapter Empirical key findings were translated by the researcher for this text. As the researcher's native language is Swedish, while English is a second language there might be some minor mistakes in the translation of these citations.

Case descriptions

Before summarising, all interviews were closely read through. Notes were spontaneously written in the right margin. The idea of reading through the interviews was to get a first general view of the material. There after the notes were looked through, and compared. Questions such as *'How is sustainability understood?'*, *'Can any difficulties be seen in their reasoning?'*, *'How can each respondent's answers be viewed?'*, *'Are there any patterns between different respondents?'*, and *'Does anything apart from the obvious differ between the students answers?'* were asked to the text. The questions were asked in two layers, one which was tried to be directly related to the words and sentences used by the respondent and one which had rather a character of interpretation. Any interesting thoughts were noted in a separate document.

Thereafter each interview was summarized in case descriptions to clarify what was significant for each respondent. A coding form was designed to ensure continuity in the work. Each form included: interview number, interview question, the answer in short, illustrative quotes and examples, and comments. The illustrative quotes and examples were viewed as certainly important because they project the actual spoken words. As the research aim was to understand *how students view sustainability in relation to business*, a few questions were chosen as basis. These were, *'How is business described'* *'How is sustainability described?'*, *'How is sustainability described in support with the description of the sustainable business competition?'*, *'How is businesses possibility to work with sustainability understood?'*, *'How is business's responsibility in the society elaborated with?'*, and *'How is business sustainability understood?'*. In addition, four aspects were stressed: *ecological, social, and economical sustainability aspects*, and *global value-chain*. These were all seen as central for understanding their views of business sustainability and therefore important not to lose in the summaries.

The summaries were not shown for the respondents and there is therefore a risk of some misinterpretation since the result rely on the researcher's understanding of the interviews. In order to limit that risk the summaries were decided to be of a *manifest* character, meaning that all notes were carefully designed to stay close to the essential content in the respondents' original statements. One technique for doing manifest summaries is called *compromising* (Esaiaasson et al. 2009:305), and the interviews were processed accordingly. Each respondent's answers were

compromised into shorter and more concise descriptions. The summaries were then used for step two and three in order to identify patterns from the material.

General patterns

Two methods were considered for the material, *the Ideal type construction* and the *Väsens method (Väsensmetoden)*. The former is formed to describe typical characteristics related to the ‘person’ through strengthening differences. Ideal types are ought to simplify the reality while still keeping substantial attributes close to the reality (Esaiasson et al. 2009:308), for example by saying that ‘environmentalists (as one ideal type) loves all kinds of animals (typical attribute)’. This was considered as it could clarify important and typical views of sustainability among the business students. Meanwhile the idea was foremost to understand *how* the students view the phenomenon business sustainability, not to identify characteristics of the students, thus ideal type construction was not considered fully suitable for the research aim. Instead of trying to shape ideal types, the Väsens method is set to acknowledge the truly common for one bigger group of people, ignoring the differences (characteristics) within that group. It is designed to clarify one or a combination of central and recurring qualities within a specific group of people (Ibid:308). One central aspect had been identified early in the analytical process and had since been repeatedly affirmed in all interviews. This aspect was considered to support the aim to clarify *how* the students viewed sustainability and Väsensmetoden was used to demonstrate these kinds of general patterns in the findings.

One list was concluded where all common aspects from the interviews were noted. While looking through notes and summaries the central aspect repeatedly appeared both directly in different quotas or indirectly in the respondent’s reasonings, and did also seem to be related to much of the other common aspects of the list.

The use of väsensmetoden allowed the angle to be *from* the general and common *to* the more specific rather than the opposite way around which ideal type construction allow.

Three categories

After recognizing these common similarities, it appeared that some aspects were more common within smaller groups of the respondents. This lead to the construction of three categories, inspired by ideal types, which was found more suitable when trying to identify the differences.

Each category was designed to clarify the distinctive differences between the kind of answers and reasoning the students used while discussing business, sustainability and business sustainability during the interviews. The reflections were comprised into three categories as it seemed to be a suitable number of categories to recognize all accurate distinctions separating one

kind of reasoning from the others. While constructing the categories, the interviews were first divided into groups in which all interviews in each group had similar fundamental attributes. These similarities were then described for each group, first in terms of fundamental similarities and then more specific attributes. Eventually, three categories emerged. The categories were compared with each other, and adjusted to first clearly separate the categories from each other, and thereafter to make sure that they described the result of the study both truly and clearly. First after this last step was the analytical procedure fully concluded.

Empirical key findings

The result of this study show that all students met difficulties while reasoning about sustainable business. Meanwhile the reasons to these difficulties did to some part differ between the students. In this chapter the key findings from the interviews are revealed in two layers. First from a general perspective as common aspects which seek to introduce the reader to aspects significant for all students. Thereafter the three categories, similar to ideal types, are presented with the purpose to pinpoint distinctive aspects found in the interviews.

Common aspects

Independent of which of the categories (described below) the students matched, they all met difficulties while trying to fully combine the idea of business with the idea of sustainability. The idea of sustainable business was for all a rational and positive imagination, but in further reasoning about the phenomenon it appeared that the underlying idea of business existed in isolation from the underlying idea of sustainability, and their ability to reason about business sustainability was clearly hindered.

Some students showed ambitious intentions to discuss businesses from a sustainability perspective but their understanding of what a business is and how a business act, brought them to confusion while trying to describe sustainable business. The following citations show how two students expressed themselves while trying to describe sustainable businesses. *"It is constructed as a business but it does not have the same economical drive"* (Interview 1), implying that a company is something different from a business because of its organisational settings. A different student expressed the same kind of conclusion by saying *"... but hmm then it would rather be an organisation and not a business. I do not know if a business can be fully sustainable, then it would be more of an organisation or something"* (Interview 8). Other students showed less interest in combining business and sustainability as they did not view business sustainability as a necessary phenomenon, even though the idea of sustainable actions within businesses were considered important. While speaking about businesses and sustainability one student commented *"It has to do with what is prioritized. Is it the economics or how the*

work is carried out [referring to sustainability]?” (Interview 6). For these students the idea of business was deliberately separated from sustainability but they still found sustainability to be possible for businesses to work with if desired.

For all students sustainability was viewed as a highly important area for the future of mankind. Likewise was business, but statements like *“We have not even prioritized to speak about sustainability because it did not seem relevant”* (Interview 7), and *“We are new in learning to run a business and then it [sustainability] is not necessary”* (Interview 8) show that sustainability was not viewed as a natural or inherent part for businesses to work with. The natural responsibility of a business was rather foremost to be profit oriented and contribute with (local, hence Swedish in particular) economic growth. Any initiatives limiting that purpose was viewed as legit reasons for choosing not to work with that initiative, and sustainability was often viewed as one such initiative, limiting companies’ financial return. One student explained that *“If businesses work in a sustainable way there is always a high risk of decreasing the profit, which would otherwise been possible to get (...) and businesses like money, most of them, and that is what motivates them. They always need to sell more than then spend. They always have to keep that in mind”* (Interview 2).

While speaking about sustainability, two additional factors were brought to the light. First, in relation to business, sustainability was seen as a complex, difficult, time consuming and expensive task to work with. One student described this clearly by saying: *“What sustainable business is, is difficult and big, and I believe a lot of people know very little about it. It takes a lot of time and money to learn before being able to act sustainable in business”* (Interview 2). This underlying understanding of sustainability in relation to business made sustainability a both peripheral and optional aspect for businesses to work with. Despite that, sustainability was viewed as an interesting area for businesses to work with, partly because the trend surrounding sustainability could increase sales but also because of the students’ own awareness about common challenges to tackle in the world. Nevertheless, their arguments and reflections constantly returned to the basic idea of business as profit oriented in which the responsibility of a business did not include to work for sustainability. The following statement show how profit and growth is understood to deprive sustainability, *“That is what is stupid. It is always economics against environment, or economics against social aspects. Because there is always an interest of earning as much money as possible and then the other [sustainability] is caught in between”* (Interview 1). Meanwhile other students did not highlight the same issue but rather stayed with the conclusion *“that [sustainability] is what sell today and businesses need to make a lot of money. To make a lot of money from something environmentally friendly, then you can say you earned from something good”* (Interview 4).

The second factor which got clear was how they understood the term sustainability. Spontaneously sustainability mainly included *ecological aspects*, or with their words *the environment* (in Swedish: miljön). This aspect was simple for them to reason about, and

examples often engaged various kinds of climate actions which businesses could work with. While discussing ecological aspects they showed abilities to conclude local but also global effects from business initiatives. *“Everything does not have to be big, even small stuff like paper and recycling matters. [...] We can not be selfish, we have to think of how it will affect the rest of the world”* (Interview 7).

Social aspects of sustainability were slightly more difficult for them to reason about. They did show awareness about its relation to the term sustainability, some more deliberately than others, but their reflections were either limited to local *or* global situations. For example one student reasoned about how businesses could affect the people in Sweden “and make them get better mentally both in products and as employers” (Interview 4) and then later mentioning how business could “donate money and do sustainable things globally that way” (Ibid). Few reflected on the relation between local business activities in Sweden and its effect on social aspects outside of the border. In those cases where global effects were considered it was discussed as an optional responsibility for business, since the responsibility for such aspects were not considered to be naturally integrated to the idea of business. One student argued that businesses could influence others both locally and globally, and one other said that *“Businesses do not have to, it is not their responsibility but they can inspire other to do better as well if they do so”* (Interview 6). Unlike the ecological aspects, social aspects were more difficult to exemplify and the students needed more time before starting to reflect about social sustainability. While introducing the first questions about sustainability it was common that the students asked if it could be something different from ecological aspects. One student said *“Do you mean the environment? I can not really think of anything else”* (Interview 5). Later during that same interview that same students explained that *“Businesses should try not to use too much resources”* (Ibid), and then eventually reflecting on social matters by highlighting that *“It is also important not to buy things from the wrong place, like where child labour is used and stuff like that. [...] and everyone should be well treated, all from people in production to sales persons in stores”* (Ibid).

While ecological (and social) aspects of sustainability were comparatively simple for most of the students to speak about, all students met difficulties while trying to reason about *economic aspects* of sustainability. They expressed clear and honest hesitation while trying to discuss economical sustainability, and their reasoning was comprised by both insecurity and confusion. Everyone, apart from one student, who did try to speak about economic sustainability, reflected only about that each business has to make sure that the income and expenditures in a business needs to even out. The following citation give an example of how these students responded when they were asked to reason about economic sustainability. *“Economic sustainability, from a business perspective, then the business have to make sure to have more revenue than expenses. Well that is what I can think of. I am not very familiar with economic sustainability”* (Interview 2). The other student reflected about economic effects outside of the business itself by saying that *“economic [sustainability] could maybe be money. That it should nationally function, domestically”* (Interview 6). Yet, economic stability was, by a few students

discussed in relation to business responsibility but there were no conclusions about relations between global economic stability and economic sustainability.

Finally, at the end of the interview six of the students shared that they had never reasoned, nor thought, about business in terms of a concept of sustainable business before the interview. The other two students told that the UF year had got them to think about business sustainability to some extent throughout the two latest semesters. These two quotes give an idea of how these students expressed themselves. *“I do not think it has ever crossed my mind to think of what sustainable business is. If it might have happened, I am sure it was only about the environment in that case”* (Interview 6) and *“Before the UF year, business sustainability was the last thing I thought of”* (Interview 2).

Three categories

As mentioned earlier, the categories were designed to describe the ways and about what the students reflected during the interviews. The categories were titled *Those who show ambitious intentions to reason about business sustainability (category 1)*, *Those who emphasise sustainability initiatives and are strongly profit and growth oriented (category 2)* and *Those who find sustainability only as a secondary and optional part of business (category 3)*, and the greatest difference between these three categories was the fundamental view of sustainability and business. This could be explained as the ways in which sustainability issues could and should be dealt with, and the ability to describe sustainability. Students primarily recognized in *category 1* tended to discuss the *idea* of business and the *idea* of sustainability, have a complex ability to describe and reason about sustainability, and also expressed doubt for the idea of sustainable business. These students reasoned about how businesses influence other parts of society and viewed businesses as a liable and major actor in sustainability matters. Students primarily recognized in *category 2* rather focused on economical aspects of both business and sustainability. They tended to describe sustainability in simple terms, briefly and with many practical examples. Technical innovations were viewed as the solution for issues relating to sustainability. The consumer was seen as the responsible actor for businesses actions and the sustainable development because of the supply and demand relation. And finally, students primarily recognized in *category 3* did not show much alarm to the sustainability issue. These students expressed little understanding of sustainability and saw little relation between businesses and sustainability. Businesses actions were put in relation to local circumstances and meant that businesses have few, if any, obligations or responsibilities apart from economical. *(For overview see table 1).*

Category 1

Those who show ambitious intentions to reason about business sustainability
(2 students)

· Showed complex ability to describe and reason about sustainability

- Highlighted sustainability as one, if not the, most important challenges in the world
- At times discussed businesses purpose partly from a "solve a societal issue" view
- Stressed that all companies could and should work for sustainability
- Discussed the *idea* of business and the *idea* of sustainability, and tried to combine these two
- Reason about level of sustainability in businesses sustainability actions – relative sustainability
- Reason about how businesses influence other parts of the society

Category 2

Those who emphasise sustainability initiatives and are strongly profit oriented

(2 students)

- Sustainability was explained briefly in simple terms, and with much practical examples
- Showed a strong believe to technical innovations and exemplified with concrete and existing solutions from other businesses and spoke with many economic terms
- Put the responsibility to act for sustainability on the consumers
- Were satisfied with small sustainability initiatives, such as bag in eco marked paper
- Businesses purpose was foremost discussed from a individual profit perspective. Own profit and success was central, national or global economic aspects were left in the periphery.

Category 3

Those who find sustainability only as a secondary and optional part of business

(4 students)

- Expressed limited knowledge about sustainability
- Tended to have difficulties while trying to reason about how business can work with sustainability or what a sustainable business is
- Saw little relation between business and sustainability
- Meant that running a business bring little, if any, obligations or responsibilities apart from economic
- Governmental initiatives and regulations are enough for businesses to adjust to

Generally speaking, one student's reflections normally matched the concept of especially one of these three categories. With that said, it did not necessary exclude all aspects listed in the other two categories. For example one student's way to reason clearly matched the aspects listed in category 3, but that same student did also at times speak about one aspect listed in category 1 and one aspect listed in category 2.

Empirical analysis

In this chapter the theoretical framework is applied on the empirical key findings. ESD and power-knowledge is used to analyse the common aspects and the three categories. Thereafter glocalization is used to explain the dilemma concerning global and local aspects seen among the students.

Common aspects

There seem to be several conflicting aspects of ideological character circulating within the Swedish school system, leading to an ideological conflict in which *business sustainability* can be

viewed at the centre. During the interviews the students expressed both confusion about - and deliberate exclusion of - sustainability in business as they faced a dilemma where business and sustainability were more or less viewed as incompatible. Both business and sustainability were recognized as accurate and central for future stability, in Sweden as in the rest of the world. Business was seen as vital to stability in terms of economic growth where business was considered a part of the core, and sustainability was important in terms of the survival of the earth and humankind. Yet, the students' understanding of the two phenomenon did not enable them to successfully combine the two areas into something which could be called business sustainability.

While reviewing the common aspects in the result section, it seemed clear that the status of business and the status of sustainability was hierarchically ordered. Indeed, both areas seemed to have important positions in the students' worldview, but as all students came back to that sustainability did not fully fit into the idea of business, it seemed like business was understood to have a higher status than sustainability. If they would rather have argued that business does not fit into the idea of sustainability instead of saying for example "*We have not even prioritized to speak about sustainability because it did not seem relevant*" (Interview 7), then sustainability would have possessed a higher status than business. This is not an attempt to claim that sustainability should be above business in the hierarchy. The example is rather an attempt to clarify the conflict and hierarchical nature of these two concepts' relation.

Some might argue that the students' way to speak rather reflects the structure of the interviews than the students' worldviews. There could of course be some risk for such limitations in the study, but as it was clear that only one student managed to speak about economic aspects of sustainability although with insecurity and confusion, it still remains likely that the knowledge gap concerning sustainability is a greater reason to why the rest of the students were unable to discuss sustainability in relation to business.

The students did express honest difficulties while trying to describe the three aspects of sustainability, also in isolation from business. Ecological aspects were easiest to describe, social aspects were possible to reason about for most of them, even though there were difficulties to connect the local and global relations and effects from different social initiatives, but economic aspects were highly problematic and most students did not manage any kind of analytical conclusions in relation to economic aspects of sustainability. This seen in relation to that business was understood to be strongly economic, could explain why the students had difficulties when reasoning about business sustainability.

The findings clarify the effects from the intersection in which business and sustainability meet and conflict, and the conflict appears as an issue limiting students from becoming empowered to act for sustainable development. Since empowerment for sustainable development is the very bottom of the concept of ESD, students' abilities to learn from ESD become limited by the current way of teaching business as they get forced into the dilemma in which sustainability is positioned against business (economy). Even though ESD does not specify what

knowledge about the three aspects of sustainability that are necessary for empowerment, it is still clear that the gained knowledge is not enough for initiating full action competence within business sustainability. The students lacking the ability to recognize what sustainability is, show that they are not enabled to acknowledge their abilities to act for sustainability within business, which ESD explain should be the result of the knowledge gained from activities creating action competence.

Hence, the findings tell that the students themselves do not seem to be allowed to understand the conflicting issues, nor all three dimensions of sustainability, well enough to reflect upon business sustainability. By allowing this issue to exist, the Swedish government could be argued to prevent these students from the empowerment they should be entitled to in the democratic society they live in, and especially as the 2011 school reform was inspired by the ESD model.

As Foucault (in Haugaard 2002) states, power and knowledge exist in an intertwined relationship, in which what is taught will form thinking while thinking also will form what is taught. In order to become enabled to reason about business sustainability the students first need to better learn the economic aspects of sustainability, because if they do not know how economic sustainability is understood, then they are not going to get empowered to act for economic aspects of sustainability, nor rethink or analyse business sustainability. Since business is a tool promoted by the Swedish government, which is expected to be used in favor of the sustainable development, the education about economical sustainability becomes central in order to pursue business sustainability.

Meanwhile, as the field of business sustainability is continually debated, it might be argued from a liberal perspective that economic sustainability should be managed with carefulness, and therefore should not be taught in grade school. Opposition to this kind of argument can be supported by Foucault's (Ibid) ideas on power-knowledge as the exclusion of economic sustainability and business sustainability, have led and will lead to continual ignorance on that subject in society since the current worldview and educational content does not enable students to initiate much discussions about business sustainability. Yet, the global community have managed to establish the concept of sustainable development, even within the existence of a neoliberal hegemony. And as Foucault argue that the process of power-knowledge is constantly ongoing everywhere, the educational system is not and should not be viewed as the only source for progress of sustainable development, neither for progress within the business sustainability field.

Still, the Swedish curriculum, and the concept of UF, emphasise sustainability within all sections of Swedish society, including business, and in order to support the students to manage the appearing conflict between business and sustainability, the economical aspect of sustainability become important to handle differently. Currently, the students seem to be caught in the conflict, where economical aspects of sustainability is debated and questioned, to such an extent that business sustainability can not be sufficiently taught.

Three categories

The three categories presented in the result suggest that there was a correlation between students' expressed abilities to describe what sustainability is, and the imagined space for change related to sustainability. If viewing this in relation to ESD - fixing action competence to knowledge level of sustainability - it appears that higher knowledge level about sustainability enable students to see space to act which they ascribe to either individuals or businesses.

From a sustainability perspective the attitudes represented in the first category (1) will bring prospects to the sustainable development while the attitudes represented in the two other categories (2 and 3) raise worries for the future development of sustainability within business. In similarity with the common aspects, a hierarchical order can be reflected also in the three categories, but what become more clear when viewing the hierarchy in the three types of categories is that the gap between business and sustainability increase in relation to the expressed knowledge level for sustainability.

As it seems as the expressed knowledge level influence the student's ability to recognize action prospects it is here argued that education in Sweden have to generate change of this hierarchical ordering of business over sustainability, to increase the action competence ESD is designed to stimulate. Within academic research, different researchers suggest different strategies to change education for sustainability. Mathison et al. (2014) draw attention to communicative sustainability skills, Hasslöf (2015) bring the perspectives sustainability is discussed from into focus, Andersson and Öhman (2016) bring attention to the teachers' personal ideological position, and Sjögren (2016) turns to the relation between values, perceptions, and sustainability meaning that ESD teaching have to become more politically nuanced to break through more effectively. All these views raise important issues but in reference to the result in this study, the way Sjögren (2016) discuss availability of sustainability, based on its relation to values, appears most relevant.

If reviewing the three categories, their different fundamental ideas and values of sustainability was key to their larger differences. As Sjögren (2016) highlights that different views and angles will increase the variety of receivers among teacher students, it is easy to imagine that also those gymnasium students who perceive the world based on one kind of values (for example economic liberal) are less receptive to teaching of sustainability emphasising other fundamental values (for example ethical). In order to enable those students, whose attitudes are reflected in category 2 and 3, to embrace sustainability it is necessary to address this issue in current ESD teaching approaches.

Increasing students' awareness about economic sustainability, would not only enable them to discuss sustainability in relation to business, but it would also make the concepts of sustainability more available to them since they get the opportunity to view sustainability from

angles more closely related to their own ideas. As economic aspects of sustainability are assumed to be closely related to economic aspects of business sustainability, such initiatives would also empower the students to reason about, and act for sustainability within business.

If also viewing the difficulties concerning economic aspects in relation to the previous discussion, concerning the absence of descriptions and reflections related to economic aspects of sustainability in the interviews, it appears that changing the teaching approach to economic aspects of sustainability could be one key strategy for not only reaching the students reflected in category 2 and 3, but could also decrease the hierarchical gap between business and sustainability as the more students would get empowered to elaborate with both of the ideas.

Global versus local

Meanwhile it has repeatedly been seen that the students had difficulties to realize the relation between businesses' (local) actions and (global) effects in other areas. Even though the term global value chain was used by UF in their descriptions it was difficult for the students to actually grasp and explain how a global value chain can be related to in relation to business and sustainability. In support with *glocalization*, it appears that the students remained at either one 'locality' or another, while trying to speak about global effects, and hence were hindered from viewing the full complexity of sustainability issues.

Global effects from consumption or economic transactions were not considered related to social aspects of sustainability, and were not positioned in relation to any correlation between local and global value chain. As the ecological aspects were simple to relate to both local and global effects it seems clear that these fit within the (economic) ideological spectrum the students are exposed to, but social aspects appeared not to. Ecological aspects of sustainability can easily be explained by a biological and mathematical references, which can be argued to be compatible with the economic hegemony, as Ideland and Malmberg (2013:181) have explained in relation to sustainability and education in Sweden, but the social aspects of sustainability seem to have a character which was less compatible with the present economic hegemony, or as in this case economic hierarchy. It seemed like the economic aspects constrained their ability to reason about local and global correlations, since it seemed to be filtered through whether it was economic profitable for the business or an issue related to local circumstances.

But the glocality concept provides another perspective to this issue, namely that the global value chain is difficult to see when something local and global is viewed separately. Since ecological aspects are generally framed as glocal - through clearly declaring how local and global aspects correlate to each other - rendering the global dimensions more easily understood. If economic and social aspects could be framed more clearly within the glocality discourse the students might get enabled to reflect upon the local/global consequences in terms of social and economical aspects too.

If considering Robertson's (1995) thoughts about locality and nation states it appears that what might be noticed is not only characteristics of economic aspects but also tendencies of a nation-state ideology. As he frames it, the understanding of local in opposition to global, which is viewed in the findings, is significant for the creation of the nation-state and this view of the world constrain us to make our analysis and interpretations of the contemporary world spatial. Considering that many students tended to speak about sustainability in business mainly in relation to Swedish circumstances it seems like it is also needed to recognize and discuss the nation-state in relation to glocality in order to create a deeper understanding of social and economical aspects.

The separation of different localities appears to be an additional problem which hinder the students from getting fully empowered to act for sustainability. Since their view of the world is not inherently glocal it could be argued that they will remain hindered from directly, and simply, identifying the relations between one (local) action and related (global) effects. Thus they are hindered from reconsidering the idea of what business responsibility could be. A solution could then be to implement glocality in ESD as the students then would become enabled to reason about how sustainability actions will affect different 'localities'.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how sustainability was understood in relation to business by gymnasium students studying business in Gothenburg, from a perspective based on ESD and its role in sustainable development. Since the following research questions have been answered, based on the concluded interviews and careful analysis in support from previous research and academic theories, it is argued that this aim has been achieved. How the research questions have been answered is shortly declared in this section.

- What general patterns can be identified in the students' understanding of business sustainability?

Of course all students did not view business sustainability identically but there were some key aspects seen in the reflections from all of the interviewed students. The most central finding was that sustainability was not understood to fully function within the concept of business, even though all the students recognized both sustainability and business as highly important for future stability. Business was considered to be naturally economically oriented and as sustainability was understood to be complex, difficult and costly, sustainability was considered to be optional for businesses to work with.

In addition, the meaning of the different aspects of sustainability - ecological, social and economical - were unequally available for the students to reason about. This was reflected in the

students' abilities to understand the different parts of sustainability in relation to business. Very limited knowledge about for example economic sustainability hindered the students from reasoning about economic aspects of sustainability in relation to business. The result was, in this case, confusion since they did not understand how economic sustainability and business could relate to each other.

- What different attitudes towards business sustainability can be identified?

Three different categories were formed to describe the differences between the students, and their attitudes to sustainability. Relevant to recognize, in addition to the following characteristics, is that the more responsibility the category tied to businesses, the more expressed knowledge about sustainability they had shown. Central for *category 1* is that they highlight that businesses affect and influence the society and therefore have a big responsibility to engage in sustainability, but also that they believe and think that all companies can work with sustainability. In contrast, *Category 2* reflect that some students find that the responsibility for sustainable development in businesses belongs to the customers as the consumer is considered to have the power in the supply and demand relation. There is also a high trust in technical innovations to solve different issues related to sustainability and small sustainability initiatives (such as eco marked papers) are considered to be good enough. Significant for *category 3* is their recognition of governmental initiatives as suitable enough for businesses to adjust to in their sustainability work. The relation between business and sustainability is viewed as limited, and they mean that running a business brings few, if any, obligations or responsibilities apart from economic.

- What are the implications of these understandings and attitudes on the students' action competence?

After reviewing the result in relation to action competence and ESD, Foucault, and glocality the analysis show that the implication of these understandings and attitudes limit the students ability to act for sustainable development. The idea of ESD, and the 2011 school reform in Sweden, is to empower students to act for sustainability through enabling them to recognize space to act within. Still, the result show that the students were unable to understand what sustainability in business can be in the context of sustainable development, and it is therefore argued that they are hindered from developing necessary action competence enabling actions in a field of business sustainability.

The absence of understanding for economic aspects of sustainability is clearly demonstrated as especially relevant for their lacking ability to understand the relation between business and sustainability. In similarity, the students' tendencies to recognise effects from businesses' actions as related to different 'localities' is highlighted as it seem to hinder their ability to recognize the global value chain of businesses' actions. It is therefore argued that

inclusion of the glocalization concept in ESD would better position businesses in relation to sustainability.

In order to make the world more sustainable, businesses must, as mentioned in the introduction, become more sustainable. And, in order to successfully implement the idea of sustainability at all levels of a company, it is required to develop greater abilities to reason about business sustainability. That, as is described by Sjögren (2016), strongly depend on individuals' values and attitudes to sustainability, and therefore business educators have to better implement sustainability in educations, partly through establishing traditions of speaking about economic aspects of sustainability in relation to business, and partly by increasing the ability to recognize a global value chain in terms of a glocality - to make sure that ESD become available for all students.

Discussion

After focusing on those who are the subject of ESD - students - this study recognize for the academic community what impacts the current ESD approach have had for the participating students. It confirms what has already been told partly by Benninghaus et al. (2017), namely that an unequal consideration of the three dimensions of sustainability - ecological, social, and economic - led to insufficiency in promoting sustainability. In similarity to Benninghaus et al.'s German students, the students in this study managed the ecological aspect considerably well. What also was found was that their ability to reason about social aspects of sustainability was low, but most interesting was that they expressed major difficulties while trying to explain and consider economic aspects of sustainability. The reason to why this is particularly interesting is because of the very close relation between business and economics/economy. If the students are unable to reason about economic aspects of sustainability, how are they then suppose to be able to reason about sustainability in business? And how are they then supposed to contribute to sustainable development in any decisions related to businesses' economic effects - in professional but also in private settings? It was also found that the expressed attitudes towards sustainability seemed to be linked to the knowledge level which is important as negative attitudes towards sustainability is absolutely detrimental to future hopes of improvement. How should a student with less knowledge about sustainability be motivated to still strive for sustainability in business? And can we make students with a negative attitude towards sustainability more receptive towards sustainability teaching?

Raising these questions is the greatest contribution to current research. Because this issue is crucial to investigate further if urging to contribute with research strengthening ESD in business. First it is needed to confirm if the result in this study can be reflected in any other context in Sweden, and there after it is needed to understand how established this issue is. If it

emerges that the result seen in this study is seen also in other business educations, and possibly also in Swedish educations in general, it is necessary to investigate how this issue can be managed within the educational sector. Glocality is another dimension which is important to consider while trying to understand how ESD could be further developed. Not only does glocalization recognize the inability to understand the deep attachment between the local and global, but it does also raise questions about the creation of the nation-state. It is especially interesting in relation to ‘the other’ (see for example orientalism by Edward Said (1993)), which the current form of ‘localities’ versus other ‘localities’ contribute to, and where the nation-state has an apparent self-preservation interest. Thus, in order to enable students to unimpededly reflect upon consequences from one locality to one another, they have to learn to naturally and freely include the effects one action have to each different locality. And this might be possible to enable through the use of glocalization in ESD. But in order to create the right circumstances it is needed to generate research considering how glocality can be involved in ESD.

If going back to the field of business sustainability I would like to further recognize that this paper have highlighted the need to teach ‘knowledge’ which ascribe power to the students. They need to learn the kind of knowledge enabling them to reflect upon sustainability in business within all sections of sustainability, otherwise they will not get empowered to act for sustainable development. To generate this, I insist that it must be investigated what kind of knowledge is needed in order to create such circumstances which allow the students themselves to understand and reflect about economic aspects of sustainability. Only when this is achieved can the students get empowered to develop business sustainability and pursue sustainable development.

I believe that the research community has to investigate how economic aspects of sustainability and glocality can be included in business education in order to create conditions in which students are actually empowered to consider, reconsider and act for sustainability within the field of business.

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CSR Hållbart företagande – UF Göteborg

Deadline - 25 januari 2017 kl. 12.00.

Alla UF-företag får delta i CSR Hållbart företagande. Vinnaren kvalificerar sig till SM i Ung Företagsamhet.

Syftet med tävlingen är att UF-företaget ska förstå sambandet mellan entreprenörskap och hållbart företagande (CSR) för att med företagande som verktyg och metod kunna bidra till ett mer hållbart samhälle. Ett hållbart företag kombinerar affärs- och samhällsnytta, dvs. balanserar miljömässiga, sociala och ekonomiska aspekter samtidigt som det skapar nytta/värde för kunden, den egna verksamheten och samhället i stort. Genom att ex. hitta möjligheter till resurseffektiviseringar kan företaget optimera sitt resultat för både plånbok och planet. Likaså kan ett starkt samhällsengagemang skapa stolthet, stärka varumärket och öka försäljningen. Det hållbara företaget tänker och agerar även långsiktigt samt är mån om att vara lönsamt så att verksamheten även i fortsättningen kan göra skillnad, globalt och lokalt.

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 - Tävlingsbidraget ska bestå av en skriftlig beskrivning på max 2 A4-sidor inklusive bilder.
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 - **Kommunikation** – Beskriv hur företaget har kommunicerat sitt hållbarhetsarbete till ex. kunder eller samarbetspartners. Länka gärna till hemsida och sociala medier.
-

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- Hur planerar företaget att bli lönsamt dvs. hur ska man generera ett ekonomiskt överskott?
- Hur arbetar företaget för att minimera företagets effekt på miljön?
- Hur främjar företaget god livskvalitet och socialt ansvar?
- Kommunicerar företaget sitt hållbarhetsarbete till omvärlden, för att inspirera och påverka andra?

