Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae

Doctoral Thesis No. 2023:93
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences

The ambiguous nature of hope

How a discourse of hope shapes the communicative conditions for exploring challenges in the circular economy transition

Therese Åhlvik

The ambiguous nature of hope

How a discourse of hope shapes the communicative conditions for exploring challenges in the circular economy transition

Therese Åhlvik
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development
Uppsala

SLU
SWEDISH UNIVERSITY
OF AGRICULTURAL
SCIENCES

DOCTORAL THESIS
Uppsala 2023

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae
2023:93

ISSN 1652-6880
ISBN (print version) 978-91-8046-240-2
ISBN (electronic version) 978-91-8046-241-9
https://doi.org/10.54612/a.3gfjdnjflg
© 2023 Therese Åhlvik, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3272-1633
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Department of Urban and Rural Development, Uppsala, Sweden
The summary chapter of this thesis is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/. Other licences or copyright may apply to illustrations and attached articles.
Print: SLU Grafisk service, Uppsala 2023

The ambiguous nature of hope: How a discourse of hope shapes the communicative conditions for exploring challenges in the circular economy transition

Abstract

There is a widespread notion in society that communication about sustainability must be characterised by hope in order to advance the sustainability transition. It is also acknowledged that sustainability issues are complex, contested and involve large-scale collaboration between actors across different sectors with often diverse and conflictual interests and goals. The transition presupposes democratic processes where this complexity is fully appreciated. This requires communicative conditions that allow different interests and perspectives to be explored and disagreement to be expressed. In this dissertation, I investigate the communicative consequences of a discursive norm that favours expressions of hope in meetings about the circular economy, a context where the hope norm is prominent. The circular economy is considered to provide a "win-win" solution to the conflict between economic growth and the environment. However, the transition to a circular economy requires that the challenges inherent in navigating conceptual ambiguity, establishing large-scale collaboration and addressing political obstacles are explored. Using methods of conversation and discourse analysis, I investigate how a hope discourse is expressed in circular economy meetings and how it shapes the communicative conditions for meeting participants to explore challenges, and whether disagreements and a diversity of perspectives are expressed. I identify discursive repertoires that construct a collective of actors that are "stronger together" and create a driving force to bring about "real" change. Exploring these repertoires in more detail, I demonstrate that hope discourse discursively closes down the joint exploration of ambiguities, challenges and disagreements. Furthermore, hope discourse obscures talk about accountability, responsibility and agency. This results in a vague and shallow exploration of problems and challenges. I therefore conclude that the dominant hope discourse prevents actors from developing a richer understanding of the complexity of the sustainability transition.

Keywords: hope, discourse, environmental communication, circular economy, discourse psychology, critical discourse psychology, inspirational meetings, sustainability

Hoppets tvetydiga natur: Hur hoppdiskurs skapar kommunikativa förutsättningar för att utforska utmaningar till omställningen till cirkulär ekonomi

Abstrakt

Det finns en utbredd föreställning i vårt samhälle att kommunikation om hållbarhet måste präglas av hopp för att främja hållbarhetsomställningen. Hållbarhetsfrågor är erkänt komplexa och omtvistade. De inbegriper omfattande samverkan mellan aktörer inom olika sektorer med olika, ibland konfliktfyllda, intressen och mål. Omställningen förutsätter därför demokratiska processer där denna komplexitet tas tillvara. Det kräver i sin tur kommunikativa förutsättningar som möjliggör för olika intressen och perspektiv att utforskas samt oenighet uttryckas. I denna avhandling undersöker jag de kommunikativa konsekvenserna av en diskursiv norm som förespråkar hoppfulla uttryck i möten om cirkulär ekonomi, en hållbarhetskontext där denna hoppnorm är framträdande. Den cirkulära ekonomin anses erbjuda en ”win-win”-lösning på konflikten mellan ekonomisk tillväxt och miljö. Omställningen till en cirkulär ekonomi förutsätter dock att utmaningarna kopplade till begreppets oklarhet hanteras, att svårigheter med samverkan undersöks och att politiska hinder för att åstadkomma samverkan adresseras. Med metoder för samtals- och diskursanalys undersöker jag hur hoppdiskurs kommer till uttryck i cirkulär ekonomimöten och hur diskursen formar de kommunikativa förutsättningarna för mötesdeltagarna att utforska utmaningarna för omställningen på ett sätt som möjliggör meningsskiljaktigheter och en mångfald av perspektiv att komma till uttryck. Jag identifierar diskursiva repertoarer som konstruerar ett kollektiv som är ”starkare tillsammans” och skapar drivkraft för att åstadkomma förändring ”på riktigt”. Genom att utforska dessa repertoarer närmare visar jag att hoppdiskurs stänger ner det gemensamma utforskandet av mångtydigheter, utmaningar och oenigheter. Vidare otydliggör hoppdiskursen frågor om ansvar och agens, vilket resulterar i ett vagt och ytligt utforskande av problem och utmaningar. Jag drar därför slutsatsen att den dominerande hoppdiskursen hindrar aktörer från att utveckla en rikare förståelse för komplexiteten förknippad med hållbarhetsomställningen.

Nyckelord: hopp, diskurs, miljökommunikation, cirkulär ekonomi, diskurs-psykologi, kritisk diskurspsykologi, inspirationsmöten, hållbarhet

Dedication

To Martina, my inner ‘good girl’ who has finally
realised that she’s got nothing to prove

Here’s to Dying well and
leading with Love

Contents

List of publications 9

Abbreviations 11

1. Introduction 13
    - 1.1 From ‘gloom and doom’ to hope for the future 13
    - 1.2 Communicate hope to deal with sustainability challenges? 14
    - 1.3 The circular economy to the rescue? 15
    - 1.4 A complex transition with many challenges 15
    - 1.5 Meetings for exploring the challenges of a circular economy transition . 17
    - 1.6 Communication and discourse as constitutive 18
    - 1.7 Aim and research questions 18
    - 1.8 Analytical procedure 19
    - 1.9 Contribution 20
    - 1.10 Outline of the thesis 20
    - 1.11 Positive meetings on the circular economy – the empirical foundation of my thesis 21

2. Previous research 27
    - 2.1 Hope – a complex and ambiguous concept inherently connected to agency 28
    - 2.2 Hope as intrasubjective and communication as instrumental 30
    - 2.3 Hope as intersubjective and communication as constitutive 33
    - 2.4 Circular economy – a hopeful and ambiguous concept characterised by complexity and uncertainty 36
    - 2.5 Meetings as sites for societal transformation 40
    - 2.6 Environmental communication research on meetings 43

3. Theoretical framework: A pragmatic and constitutive approach to communication 47
    - 3.1 A pragmatic approach to discourse, hope and hope discourse 47
    - 3.2 Three principles of discourse 49
    - 3.3 Communication as constitutive 51
    - 3.4 An agonistic approach to communication 52

4. Research approach and analytical procedure 55
  4.1 A qualitative and interpretative approach to research 55
  4.2 The Circe project 57
  4.3 The material collection process 57
  4.4 The analytical procedure 60
  4.5 Methodological limitations 65

5. The papers 69
  5.1 Paper I: Performing the circular economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings 70
  5.2 Paper II: When hope messages become the discursive norm: How repertoires of hope shape communicative capacity in conversations on the circular economy 72
  5.3 Paper III: Undeniably exciting to follow: How issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in hope discourse 74

6. Discussion 77
  6.1 Synthesis of the papers 77
  6.2 Introduction 79
  6.3 Conceptual ambiguity has the potential to be productive, but is obstructed by consensus-seeking 80
  6.4 Hope discourse fosters a strong rhetoric of togetherness that inhibits the discussion of challenges to collaboration 83
  6.5 Hope discourse enables the exploration of what the circular economy transition entails, but downplays problems and obstacles to the transition 85

7. Conclusions 89
  7.1 Future research 92

References 93

Popular science summary 105

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning 107

Acknowledgements 109

Papers I-III 111

List of publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

I. Rödl, M. B., Åhlvik, T., Bergeå, H., Hallgren, L. & Böhm, S. (2022). Performing the Circular economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings. *Journal of cleaner production*, 360, 132144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.132144

II. Åhlvik, T., Bergeå, H., Rödl, M. B. & Hallgren, L. When hope messages become the discursive norm: How repertoires of hope shape communicative capacity in conversations on the circular economy. *Accepted for publication in Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*.

III. Åhlvik, T. & Bergeå, H. Undeniably exciting to follow: How issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in hope discourse. *Submitted to Frontiers in Communication 23 Aug 2023. Review in progress*.

All papers are reproduced with the permission of the publishers.

The contribution of Therese Åhlvik to the papers included in this thesis was as follows:

I. The idea for the paper was developed by all authors. All authors contributed to methodology and the writing of the original draft. Therese performed formal analysis, investigation and data curation.
II. The idea for the paper was developed by all authors, as well as the design and data curation. Therese was involved in all parts of the research process but especially active in the formal analysis where she performed critical discourse analysis and identified discursive repertoires. She did most of the writing, reviewing and editing of the paper.
III. Both authors developed the idea behind the paper and performed the data collection. Therese performed the data curation and led the process of discursive psychology analysis in collaboration with Hanna Bergeå. She had Hanna's support in the writing process and they reviewed and edited the paper together.

Abbreviations

NGO	Non-Government Organization
IECA	International Environmental Communication Association
EMF	Ellen MacArthur Foundation
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
Circe	Short name for the research project *Communication between hope and ambiguity – coordination in transformation of food systems towards circular economy*

1. Introduction

1.1 From ‘gloom and doom’ to hope for the future

We live in an age of hope and face strong social and cultural pressures to be hopeful about humanity’s chances of solving the environmental crisis (Head, 2016; Chandler, 2019). There has been a shift away from an environmental discourse of ‘gloom and doom’ to one of hope and researchers argue that the apocalyptic discourse that has long characterised the environmental movement fails to promote environmental engagement (Foust and O’Shannon Murphy, 2009; Cassegård and Thörn, 2018; Ettinger et al., 2021). Communication that invokes fear has been found to cause overwhelm, passivity and inaction among individuals and academics therefore argue that it should be abandoned (e.g. O’Neill and Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Feinberg and Willer, 2011; Hornsey and Fielding, 2016).

In response to the limitations of fear-based communication approaches, research has investigated the effects of communication that portrays the future, and the possibilities of solving environmental issues, as hopeful. The majority of such intervention research (see Schneider et al., 2021) concludes that messages of hope are successful in promoting pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (e.g. Chadwick, 2015; Grund and Brock, 2019; Bury et al., 2019). Building on the results of such research, there is a widespread call to communicate on environmental issues in a manner that is considered hopeful (Stern, 2012; Moser, 2007; 2015; Head, 2016; Cassegård and Thörn, 2018). As noted by Head (2016) in her book *Hope and Grief in the Anthropocene: Re-conceptualising human–nature relations*, climate change researchers face “strong social pressures to be optimistic about the future” even when the prospects of combatting climate change seem dire (p. 2).

Environmental communicators are urged to “learn to better hold up a positive future” and thereby provide their audience with “a sense of empowerment” (Moser, 2007, p. 73). This call for hope can be heard in western society at large and reflects an overall cultural and political turn towards hope as the route to address the many uncertainties of contemporary society (Head, 2016; Chandler, 2019; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2019; 2020). As Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen (2019) write in their article on the politics of hope, we find ourselves in an era of “un-ness”, that is, an era of uncertainty, unpredictability and unknowability and hope has become “a mantra reassuring us that all will be well.” (p. 647).

1.2 Communicate hope to deal with sustainability challenges?

It is well known that issues of sustainability are complex, require large-scale collaborations and lack simple solutions. The uncertainty, unpredictability and unknowability that characterise issues of sustainability are why they are often referred to as “’wicked’ problems” with “no ‘solutions’ in the sense of definitive and objective answers” (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 155). Moreover, many stakeholders with different, and maybe even conflicting, interests are to manage this “un-ness”, making it all the more important to recognise “the inherent wickedness” and normativity of these public policy issues (Rittel and Webber, 1973, p. 161).

Previous hope communication research has explored hope in terms of positive emotions or attitudes. It views communication as persuasive and strategic and generally asks questions about how to design communication to promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour. While this research can teach us a lot about hope and individual motivation, it opens up questions about how the promotion of hope messages shapes the communicative conditions for exploring what can be considered negative or difficult issues in regard to sustainability. Does engaging in a discourse of hope enable communicating actors to jointly explore the “un-ness”, the complexity and the challenges of the sustainability transition? Is there a risk that the call, rule or norm to focus on the hopeful side of things is also maintained in situations where actors should jointly investigate different perspectives, problems and disagreements – and utilise the constructive aspects of disagreement and conflict as drivers for social change (Ganesh and Zoller, 2012; Hallgren, 2016)? Even though questions like these have not been academically explored, the argument that society as a whole should use messages of hope to foster large-scale societal transformation is widely endorsed (Moser, 2016; Hornsey and Fielding, 2020; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2020).

1.3 The circular economy to the rescue?

One concept that has been portrayed as a promising approach to accelerate the sustainability transition, and which very much aligns with the mantra of hope, is the circular economy (Corvellec et al., 2020). This concept refers to an economic model that breaks with what are considered linear principles of production and consumption, with the overall objective of designing an economy that is restorative and regenerative (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015; Winans et al., 2017). What is envisioned is an economy that has no net effect on the environment by continuously restoring any damage done in resource extraction, extending the life cycle of products and generating a minimum of waste throughout the production process (Murray et al., 2017). With reference to this vision, the circular economy is argued to bridge the conflict between environmental concerns and economic growth (Korhonen et al., 2017; Ghisellini et al., 2016). Because of this, the discourse surrounding the concept is characterised by a "win-win" narrative (Kovacic et al., 2020), a narrative that deviates from the environmental 'gloom and doom' discourse of "trade-offs and constraints" in favour of "synergies and opportunities" (Völker et al., 2020, p. 116).

1.4 A complex transition with many challenges

The transition to a circular economy is, however, no simple task. Firstly, the circular economy concept itself is highly ambiguous (Korhonen et al., 2018; Merli et al., 2018) and research has identified over 100 definitions (Kircherr et al., 2017). This ambiguity allows for many different interpretations and approaches to be considered 'circular' and there is disagreement among academics and practitioners on what a circular economy transition entails (Corvellec et al., 2020). As Friant et al. (2020) conclude in their literature review on circular economy discourses and the challenges, gaps and limitations they contain, what a circular economy looks like, and what the objectives and forms of implementation are, is "unclear, inconsistent, and contested” (p. 1). Some researchers approach this ambiguity as a problem, arguing that it creates confusion and conflicting goals (e.g. Reike et al., 2018; Borrello et al., 2020). Others embrace it and argue that it promotes the inclusion of a variety of perspectives and provides the foundation for the actors involved to challenge the current understandings of the concept, as well as to explore new ideas and practices (Corvellec et al., 2020; Niskanen et al., 2020; Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017). Either way, the conceptual ambiguity comes with great communicative challenges. It requires communicating actors to develop the capacity to address this ambiguity by acknowledging that there are many different perspectives on what a circular economy is, or should be, as well as clarifying which perspective they adhere to and be able to discuss their differences (Friant et al., 2020; Rödl et al., 2022).

Secondly, the creation of circular flows of production and consumption requires large-scale collaboration, often across multiple sectors. This poses the great challenge of establishing dialogue that manages to address different interests, priorities and disagreements among actors with different goals and ideas (Kovacic et al., 2020; Fadeeva, 2005). In order to establish communication processes that promote democratic and inclusive societal transformation, which some argue should be a central objective of the circular economy transition (Friant et al., 2020; Padilla-Rivera et al., 2020; Valencia et al., 2023), communicating parties must be provided with the opportunity to raise and explore a pluralism of perspectives and ideas. Therefore, in line with Ganesh and Zoller (2012) and Hallgren (2016), I argue that the prospects for creating democratic and inclusive societal transformation largely depend on whether actors are able to engage in a communication process that embraces a pluralism of perspectives and ideas and allow for disagreement and conflict to be expressed (see also e.g. Hansen and Cox, 2015; Peterson et al., 2016; Joosse et al., 2020). This implies that the quality of the communication process is more important than the outcome, and that attending to the conditions of participation “is more critical than sacrosanct solutions” (Christensen et al., 2015, p. 140). The opening up of the discursive space for creating and maintaining pluralism takes precedent over striving to define common ground, find agreement or achieve consensus, which are aspects that by default reduce pluralism (Deetz, 1992; 2007; McClellan, 2011). So, a variety of perspectives on what a circular economy transition entails must be cultivated and established positions must be continuously challenged (cf. Christensen et al., 2015). If collaborating actors are to jointly explore what a transition to a circular economy entails, both for society and their own practice, the communication process must be designed in a way that allows for challenges, ambiguity, contradictions and the distribution of tasks and responsibilities to become explicit and open for joint investigation. How do collaborating actors in the circular economy community deal with these communicative challenges? Do the communicative practices in which they engage allow for the exploration of the unclarity, inconsistency and contestation that characterises the circular economy?

1.5 Meetings for exploring the challenges of a circular economy transition

One practice adopted in the Swedish circular economy community is the arrangement of meetings that serve to promote a circular economy transition. The stated aims of the meetings are to explore the obstacles to and opportunities for a circular economy, to take part in good examples of circular projects and become inspired. The organisers of the meetings emphasise the importance of co-creating knowledge and that all contributions to what the circular economy transition entails are welcome. Observing these meetings, I quickly noticed that participants predominantly professed very positive and hopeful statements regarding the prospects of the circular economy to solve many (if not all) contemporary sustainability issues. I identified a discourse of hope in the ways that the participants talked about the circular economy. It seemed that talking about the future of a circular economy as filled with hope was a way for them to manage the uncertainty, unpredictability and unknowability that characterises the circular economy and issues of sustainability in general. This sparked my curiosity and I began to explore these meetings in more detail. I learned that the meetings aimed to explore what the circular economy is and the potential challenges to implementing it. I then naturally asked the question: does the hope discourse that dominates these meetings allow for such an exploration and, if so, how is this exploration performed? Does hope discourse allow for an opening up of the discursive space (Deetz, 1992) and thereby enable participants to raise a variety of perspectives, ideas and possibilities on the circular economy transition?

1.6 Communication and discourse as constitutive

Turning to research that views hope as a social phenomenon, and as something that is discursively co-created by people in interaction, is a first step in approaching the questions I pose above. Previous research in the field of health care has explored the discursive features of hope discourse and how it is used to perform different social actions. For example, in their study on how hope features in the talk of cancer patients, Eliott and Olver (2007) demonstrate that hope discourse is used by patients to claim responsibility for the progression of their cancer treatment and to portray themselves as active participants with the ability to increase the chances of their recovery (e.g. "I have hope…"). Hope discourse is also used by patients in a manner that portrays them as passive and places responsibility for recovery onto the medical practitioner (e.g. "I hope you…").

When asking questions about what happens to the conditions for communication in meetings where a discourse of hope dominates, it is necessary to build on research that views hope as socially created. Moreover, it is necessary to adopt a view of communication as constitutive, which highlights the co-constructive features of communication (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Craig, 1999). Accordingly, communication is an intricate social process of meaning creation (Cox and Pezzullo, 2016). The constitutive perspective places communication at the centre of societal transformation and views communication as constitutive of all things social. Communication is more than a tool for fulfilling some intention or achieving a certain goal; it is a process of creation and the medium through which society and the individual are created (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). In other words, it is in communication that the circular economy transition is constructed.

1.7 Aim and research questions

The aim of my thesis is to develop understanding of the communicative consequences of hope discourse in circular economy meetings and how it shapes the space to jointly explore what the circular economy entails and the challenges for implementing it. I thereby provide insights into the social role of hope discourse and demonstrate how it shapes communication. By studying hope discourse in this way, I develop an understanding of the intricate social processes in which hope is made sense of and utilised for different purposes in communication – an understanding needed in order to create knowledge on how hope discourse shapes communication in the sustainability transition.

With the intention of examining what happens when hope becomes the norm for how to communicate on issues of the circular economy, I formulated the following research questions:

1. *How is a discourse of hope constructed and managed in circular economy meetings?*
2. *How does hope discourse shape the communicative conditions for jointly exploring challenges to the circular economy transition?*

With these research questions, I shed light on the many ways in which hope is discursively constructed, oriented to and managed in social interaction. I also focus specifically on how this shapes the conditions for communicating on the challenges that a circular economy transition entails. As mentioned above, broadly, three challenges have been highlighted in the circular economy literature: *(i)* the challenge of addressing the great ambiguity of the circular economy concept; *(ii)* the challenge of establishing large-scale collaboration; and *(iii)* the challenge of addressing the more practical or political obstacles to a circular economy. I will return to these challenges in the chapter on previous research as well as the discussion chapter.

1.8 Analytical procedure

In order to fulfil the aim and answer the research questions, I perform analytical work on empirical material that I gathered from recordings of circular economy meetings. I examine how hope discourse is constructed and made consequential in the meetings and adopt a discourse analysis methodology with an overall focus on how discourse is co-constructed by people in interaction. I utilise analytical procedures found in discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992) and critical discursive psychology (Edley, 2001) – both of which maintain a focus on how psychological issues, such as hope, are discursively constructed and managed in social interaction. I accordingly view communication as a dynamic process of creation and negotiation of meaning (Axley, 1984) where speakers respond in turn to each other’s verbal (talk, sounds) and non-verbal actions (text, gestures, images and objects) (Sacks et al., 1978; Mead, 1934). In that way, meaning is socially constructed in a continuous process of speakers interpreting and responding to each other's actions. It is in their response that they demonstrate their interpretation of the previous actions of another. This in turn paves the way for or projects a relevant next action (Schegloff, 2007; Heritage and Clayman, 2010). Moreover, I examine discourse as performative and as language *in use*, that is, how it is used in social interaction and with what consequences. This functional and pragmatic approach to language acknowledges that "words do things" and that they "act upon the world in very concrete ways" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 19; Austin, 1962; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). As a result, talk has a social function and is used to perform different social actions. I treat the meetings as a case of hope discourse in the sustainability transition.

1.9 Contribution

With this thesis, I aim to contribute knowledge about hope discourse that aids the development of reflexive communication in the sustainability transition. This entails a sensitivity to alternative understandings of the role of hope and how it shapes communication on sustainability issues. More specifically, the insights from my research offers practitioners in the circular economy community the opportunity to better understand the variety of functions that hope discourse may have. By highlighting how hope discourse is constructed, managed and what the social implications are for the sustainability transition, I provide opportunities for practitioners to discern when and how to use hope discourse. I thereby also strive to make an important contribution to the field of environmental communication, which is the field in which I position my research. Overall, this field embraces the societal call to favour messages of hope when communicating on issues of the environment (e.g. Moser, 2007; 2015; Kelsey, 2020). My dissertation is an invitation to think twice about the widespread call for hope.

1.10 Outline of the thesis

Before going deeper into the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis I, in the upcoming chapter, explore how previous research relates to my perspective on hope and communication and elaborate on how it has informed my understanding of inspirational meetings, the circular economy, hope discourse and communication. I then outline the theoretical framework, which largely consists of the central concepts *hope*, *discourse* and *communication*. This chapter is followed by the methodology chapter where I outline the process of collecting, coding and analysing the material as well as discuss some methodological limitations. In the subsequent chapter I present the research papers that my thesis builds on and provide a summary of each paper and present their key findings. In the final two chapters I discuss these findings, answer the research questions of the thesis and draw some important conclusions. But before getting into any of that, I provide a detailed description of the meetings on the circular economy that form the empirical basis of my thesis.

1.11 Positive meetings on the circular economy – the empirical foundation of my thesis

The meetings were held by, and primarily for, actors in the Swedish food production sector. In these meetings, the transition to a circular economy was generally talked about in very optimistic and hopeful wording. I use this material in my exploration of hope discourse in the transition to a circular economy to examine how such discourse shapes the communicative conditions for collaborating actors to jointly investigate a wide range of perspectives on what the transition entails and what the challenges are. This empirical setting is a rather typical environmental communication setting where stakeholders with different, and sometimes contradictory, interests gather to address uncertain sustainability futures (Cox and Pezzullo, 2016). Therefore, I treat the case of the circular economy meetings as a relevant example of how issues of sustainability are typically addressed in our society today. In the description below, I focus on the content of the invitations to the meetings, the introductions made by the organisers or moderator and the themes that were generally brought up during the meetings.

The invitations of the meetings were sent out via e-mail and/or announced on the organisers' web page prior to the meeting. Both in the invitations and introductions, it was generally stated that the meeting serve to cultivate a joint exploration of the circular economy concept. They put emphasis on the co-creation of knowledge, encourage all contributions on what a circular economy is or should be and so, in my interpretation, aimed to create an inclusive meeting environment. Furthermore, the organisers stated, in general, that the meetings served to explore the obstacles to and opportunities for realising a circular economy. For example, one organiser said s/he recognises the great challenges that this transition entails and another questioned whether the circular economy should be considered “the future or a utopia” (meeting 21 March 2019). Yet another organiser emphasised the necessity of a transition to a circular economy to deal with contemporary sustainability issues and asked how the transition could be accelerated (meeting 11 December 2020).

One central theme of the meetings was collaboration. For instance, one organiser emphasised that the transition will require collaboration that includes a variety of perspectives and “holistic thinking”, adding “can we manage it?” (meeting 10 June 2020). Collaboration was argued to be a central feature of the circular economy transition and, as one moderator put it: “We believe that together we can make a difference and meet the sustainability challenges” (meeting 21 March 2019). Collaboration was also portrayed as important for the meeting atmosphere, as organisers asked participants to be dedicated to learning about the circular economy from each other. Participants were encouraged to “create new contacts” and “identify obstacles and ways forward together” (meeting 10 June 2020).

Another central theme was inspiration. As stated in the invitations, meeting participants were in general terms invited to “join and become inspired”. The meetings were also generally introduced by the organisers in one way or another stating that one important aim with the gathering was to support the participants by adding value to their work in promoting their circular business and/or a circular economy more broadly.

The final theme was found in the positive atmosphere that the organisers seemed to strive for. The organisers used different metacommunicative tools to indicate that the meetings were not just ordinary (business) encounters, but that the meetings should be light and enjoyable in which jokes were encouraged, and where the participants were supposed to speak “openly and kindly” rather than debate with each other (meeting 3 April 2020). In one meeting (meeting 21 March 2019), the moderator introduced the meeting by making a joke. Rhetorically, she asked the audience what one does when one is about to have a conversation on the circular economy. She then pointed to her hair and said: “Well I decided to get a circular haircut” after which the audience laughed and she responded: “that to me was to go all in”, followed by more laughter. I interpret that this quote not only makes a parody of the level of dedication to realising a circular economy in the circular economy community but demonstrates that this dedication leaves room for fun and can be combined with humour.

Below is a table of all the meetings I observed and analysed during the course of my research project.

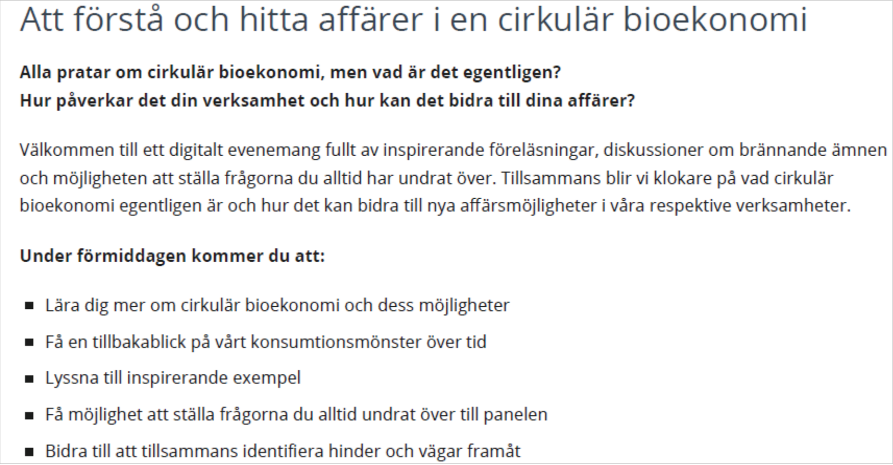
Table of the meetings (Rödl et al., 2022).

Date	Duration	Organiser	Title	Meeting type and availability
21 March 2019	01:02:22	a science and media company focusing on the food of the future	Circular food production — utopia or future?	in-person; youtube: FmnQ4HxILDg
6 March 2020	c. 1.5h	publicly funded seminar series organised by a coalition of a agrifood consultancies, regional innovation hub, and the national federation of farmers	Breakfast Seminar: Possibilities and barriers for a circular bioeconomy	in-person; field notes
3 April 2020	02:04:45	""	To understand and make business in a circular bioeconomy	online; youtube: Um0Qgcmc3HA
2 June 2020	c. 2h	""	Breakfast Seminar: Possibilities and barriers for a circular bioeconomy (same title as the meeting on 6 March)	online; field notes
10 June 2020	01:56:19	""	How can we create business models that work in a circular bioeconomy?	online; youtube: zlWV227JD40
18 Sept. 2020	c. 1.3h	publicly funded seminar series organised by a coalition of a agrifood consultancies, regional innovation hub, and the national federation of farmers	Breakfast Seminar: Circular Bioeconomy – Bio-active Substances	online; field notes
2 Oct. 2020	02:38:00	""	Innovation in a circular bioeconomy — inspiring examples	online; youtube: otA0THzxVxw

Date	Duration	Organiser	Title	Meeting type and availability
27 Nov. 2020	c. 1.5h	""	Breakfast Seminar: Profitability and efficiency	online; field notes
14 Sep. 2020	00:40:23	Swedish branch of a global environmental NGO	Launch of the WWF's Baltic Stewardship Initiative	online; recorded by the organiser, not public
15 Oct. 2020	00:57:57	two Swedish CE networking and consultancy organisations	Parties in parliament are going to set on circular economy this way after Covid-19	online; youtube: HUmkeCBJCEw
10 June 2020	04:31:51	regional energy agency	Digital actor conference on circular economy	online; field notes
26 Febr. 2020	02:12:25	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (A, not the same as the one called B below)	Member's Forum Live 2020 Malmö	in-person; recorded with permission
4 March 2020	02:15:33	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (A, not the same as the one called B below)	Member's Forum Live 2020 Stockholm	in-person; recorded with permission
5 March 2020	c. 2h	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (A, not the same as the one called B below)	Member's Forum Live 2020 Västerås	in-person; notes
1 April 2020	02:08:22	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (A, not the same as the one called B below)	Member's Forum Live 2020	online; recorded with permission
16 Sept. 2020	04:06:03	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (A, not the same as the one called B below)	Academy and Training: Circular Business Model Canvas	online; recorded with permission

Date	Duration	Organiser	Title	Meeting type and availability
3 June 2020	c. 1.5h	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (B, not the same as the one called A above)	Member's Meeting on Circular Design	online; field notes
11 Dec. 2020	00:36:56	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (B, not the same as the one called A above)	How can we accelerate the transition to the CE?	online; youtube: 1zA_w5cjTMQ

Here is an example of an invitation from the meeting held on 3 April 2020, translated into English below.



Att förstå och hitta affärer i en cirkulär bioekonomi

Alla pratar om cirkulär bioekonomi, men vad är det egentligen?
Hur påverkar det din verksamhet och hur kan det bidra till dina affärer?

Välkommen till ett digitalt evenemang fullt av inspirerande föreläsningar, diskussioner om brännande ämnen och möjligheten att ställa frågorna du alltid har undrat över. Tillsammans blir vi klokare på vad cirkulär bioekonomi egentligen är och hur det kan bidra till nya affärsmöjligheter i våra respektive verksamheter.

Under förmiddagen kommer du att:

- Lära dig mer om cirkulär bioekonomi och dess möjligheter
- Få en tillbakablick på vårt konsumtionsmönster över tid
- Lyssna till inspirerande exempel
- Få möjlighet att ställa frågorna du alltid undrat över till panelen
- Bidra till att tillsammans identifiera hinder och vägar framåt

To understand and make business in a circular economy

Everybody is talking about circular economy, but what is it really?
How does it affect your business and how can it contribute to your business?

Welcome to a digital event filled with inspiring lectures, discussions about burning topics and the opportunity to ask all the questions you have always wanted to ask. Together we get wiser about what a circular bioeconomy really is and how it can contribute to new business opportunities for our respective businesses.

During the morning you will:

- Learn more about the circular bioeconomy and its opportunities
- Get a retrospective view on our consumption patterns over time
- Listen to inspiring examples
- Get the opportunity to ask the panel the questions you have always wanted to ask
- Contribute to identifying obstacles and paths forward together

2. Previous research

As stated in the introduction chapter, I examine the characteristics and social features of hope discourse and how such discourse shapes communication in the interactional context of circular economy meetings. The concepts and phenomena central to my work are, therefore, *hope*, *discourse*, *communication*, *circular economy* and *meetings*. In this chapter, I outline previous research that engages with these concepts and phenomena in a way that was valuable in formulating my research questions and designing my research. In my reading, I found that previous research approach these concepts in different ways – especially the concept of hope. Some view hope as something that exists inside individuals (*intra*subjective) (e.g. Lie and Monroe, 2019; Merkel et al., 2020), while others view hope as something that exists between individuals (*inter*subjective) (e.g. Weingarten, 2010; Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). Some explore different strategies to evoke hope (e.g. Chadwick, 2015; Feldman and Hart, 2018), while others examine it in naturally occurring settings with no attempts at manipulation (e.g. Larsen et al., 2007; Kirby et al., 2001). Some praise hope for its ability to mobilise action and foster societal transformation (e.g. Barge, 2003; Marlon et al., 2019), and some highlight its limitations and how it may actually stagnate transformation (e.g. Chandler, 2019; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2020).Moreover, in its exploration of hope, this research overall relies on two very different perspectives of communication. Some view communication as a means of persuasion and as something to be strategically employed to achieve predetermined goals (instrumental view), while others view communication as socially constructed action that is oriented towards meaning making and negotiation (constitutive view) (see Moser, 2007; Shoeneborn and Trittin, 2012; Ashcraft et al., 2009). I explore these two broad perspectives on hope and communication research in the upcoming section. I also describe previous research on the circular economy, and the many challenges it encompasses, and review research on meetings as sites for social change. But first of all, I explore the contested concept of hope. While the aim of my thesis is not to define hope, but rather to explore the characteristics of hope as it is discursively constructed in multiple and often implicit ways, I did begin this exploration with an overall idea of what constitutes hope. So, I now attend to the question: *What is hope and how can hope discourse be studied without relying on a clear definition of it?*

2.1 Hope – a complex and ambiguous concept inherently connected to agency

Hope has been understood in many different ways and is considered a complex and ambiguous concept (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). Academics of different disciplines acknowledge the complexity of meanings ascribed to the concept of hope and they have attempted to define its different elements. Disagreement on what those elements are is, however, common (see e.g. Eliott and Olver, 2002 for an overview). Hope has been explored in the field of psychology (e.g. Li and Monroe, 2019; Bury et al., 2020); health care (e.g. Groopman, 2005; Kirby et al., 2021); religion (e.g. Barber, 2017); sociology (e.g. Lueck, 2007; Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015); philosophy (e.g. Rorty, 1979; Grund and Brock, 2019); and political theory (e.g. Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2019). Academics in these fields have their own definitions of what hope is and some have argued that deciding on one single definition is futile (see Herrestad et al., 2014).

Beyond the more apparent or expected elements of hope, such as having a positive outlook on the future or wishing or anticipating that some vision of the future will come true (see e.g. Morse and Doberneck, 1995; Eliott and Olver, 2002), hope involves action, agency and empowered choice. In his book *the Anatomy of hope,* Jerome Groopman (2005) highlights that:

> Hope can arrive only when you recognize that there are real options and that you have genuine choices. Hope can flourish only when you believe that what you do can make a difference, that your actions can bring a future different from the present. To have hope, then, is to acquire a belief in your ability to have some control over your circumstances. You are no longer entirely at the mercy of forces outside yourself. (p. 26)

This emphasis on having genuine options and choice is also made by McGeer (2004) in her article on “the art of good hope” where she emphasises that to hope “is to experience ourselves as agents of potential as well as agents in fact.” (p. 105). Hope is, therefore, intimately connected to the experience of agency and “involves setting concrete goals, finding pathways to achieve those goals, and tapping one’s willpower or agency to move along pathways to the specified goals.” (p. 103). This acknowledgement of a close relationship between hope and agency has also been made in environmental communication research. In her article on the role of crisis communication, Moser (2015) highlights the need for “authentic hope” and argues that such hope “can only be constructed from realistic goals, a clear or at least imaginable path, from doable tasks and a meaningful role in addressing the problems at hand.” (p. 407). Moreover, community is crucial as hope is considered a social accomplishment that “thrives where such arduous work is undertaken together” (p. 407). Also, Marlon et al. (2019), in their study on the effects of different hope appraisals on climate change mobilisation, recognise hope as a social and action-oriented phenomenon and make a distinction between “constructive” and “false” hope. The authors argue that constructive hope comes from witnessing the climate change actions performed by others and from the belief that collective awareness is rising. Constructive hope can then increase support for climate change policy and promote engagement in climate change activism and mobilisation. False hope, on the other hand, is based on the belief that the environmental crisis will be solved by God or by nature without the need for human intervention. Such hope instead decreases policy support and political engagement. This distinction between the constructive and destructive forms of hope messages has also been made by Ojala (2012; 2015) in her environmental psychological research on the relationship between hope and environmental engagement among young students. Ojala argues that constructive hope consists of three components, namely *(i)* positive re-appraisal that puts things into a historical time perspective and thereby highlights the progress that has been made; *(ii)* a trust in sources outside oneself, such as technological advancement and the progress of environmental organisations; and *(iii)* a trust in one’s own ability to act and influence the outcome of environmental issues. Hope based on denial does not have any of these elements and instead negates the seriousness of climate change. Here, there is often a mistrust in science and an assumption that climate change is actually not that big of a problem.

Based on the research of McGeer (2004), Marlon et al. (2019), Moser (2015) and Ojala (2012; 2015), “good”, “authentic” or “constructive” hope is not to be confused with a passive wish for something or an anticipation of a certain outcome. Instead, hope is grounded in agency and must be substantiated by planning and action (Lueck, 2007; Moser, 2007; McGeer, 2004). Therefore, constructive hope discourse involves a certain level of concreteness and, in their “arduous work” (Moser, 2015, p. 407) to achieve such hope, collaborating actors must discursively address issues of planning and action.

Returning to the question of how one can study hope without a clear definition of it, I align with research that assumes a broader or more open conceptualisation of hope (e.g. Groopman, 2005; Moser, 2007; 2015; McGeer, 2004). Accordingly, hope “has no single defining essence or significance, but rather is ascribed multiple meanings, articulations, and implications” (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015, p. 116). Moreover, what we discursively define as hope is highly dependent on the social and interactional context in which it is constructed. Therefore, I study hope as *the outcome* of discursive practices, rather than a precursor or antecedent to what people say. This means I examine how hope is discursively constructed in social interaction and how it emerges in and as part of the discursive practices taking place in circular economy meetings. I elaborate more on this in the upcoming chapter. In the next section I describe how my choice to study hope in this way was prompted by first engaging with the dominant approach of studying hope in communication research, namely hope as intrasubjective and communication as instrumental.

2.2 Hope as intrasubjective and communication as instrumental

One of the most common ways to approach hope is to view it as something that individuals *think* or *feel*, and as something that can be transmitted between individuals via messages of hope (Eliott and Olver, 2002). This approach is largely adopted in environmental intervention based research that investigates the role of hope in communication on environmental issues. Such research adopts quantitative and experimental methodologies and generally asks whether feelings or attitudes of hope motivate individuals to adopt environmentally friendly behaviour and, if so, how communication can be utilised to promote hope (e.g. Ojala, 2015; Chadwick, 2015; Marlon et al., 2019; van Zomeren et al., 2019). Hope is understood as something that exists inside individuals, it is intrasubjective and largely considered a positive emotion or attitude that can be fostered through external stimuli. Communication is one such stimulus that can be strategically employed to promote hope. For example, messages of hope can be specifically designed, more or less effectively, to evoke feelings of hope among individuals and thereby motivate them to engage in climate change action (Chadwick, 2015). Thus, hope communication consists of hopeful messages that can be strategically designed by a sender to create a certain effect in the receiver. Hope messages are used to persuade and to promote a certain goal. This intra-subjective view on hope dominates environmental research and, as noted by Eliott and Olver (2002) in their review of hope literature research, overwhelmingly tends to treat hope as an internal state or entity that can be measured and assessed, as well as created, modified or destroyed.

While some research has found a weak correlation between hope and environmental engagement (e.g. Hornsey and Fielding, 2016; Ettinger et al., 2021), the majority of this research suggests that the transmission of messages or appraisals tailored to evoke hope in individuals has the potential to promote changes in individual environmental attitude, behaviour and choice – and by extension greater societal change (cf. Shove, 2010; Schneider et al., 2021). For example, research in environmental education suggests that communication activities aimed at fostering feelings of hope among students increases their environmental engagement (Ojala, 2012). Research in this field has also specifically explored the factors that affect hope and increase the likelihood of students feeling hopeful. Among those factors are the ability to: make sense of environmental information; perceive that there are meaningful actions that one can take; and to believe that effective actions can be undertaken by societal actors, such as environmental NGOs (Li and Monroe, 2019). The promotion of hope has also been suggested as an effective communication strategy in green business marketing and to “be a better sell” than pessimism (Lee et al., 2017). Moreover, hope is suggested to be a motivational resource and to effectively increase individual support for climate change mobilisation and action (Marlon et al., 2019; Bury et al., 2019; van Zomeren et al., 2019).

It is this dominant view and research on hope that is referred to in the widespread call to focus on hope in environmental research (Stern, 2012; Moser, 2016; Cassegård and Thörn, 2018) and practice (Head, 2016; Vries, 2020) and that lies behind the cultural pressure to focus on hope in contemporary society (Head, 2016; Chandler, 2019). From this view, to have a discourse of hope dominate conversations on issues of sustainability presents opportunities for motivating and engaging meeting participants. Researchers may even suggest different discursive strategies for evoking hope in participants and thereby promote motivation and engagement to make further progress in their various endeavours for sustainability. However, considering that research on hope communication views hope as individual experience, results from such research are limited to individual experience (Shove, 2010). This research overlooks the social nature of hope (Crapanzano, 2003) and does not provide an understanding of the actual situations in which people are engaging in hope communication. So, while this research asks questions about how to design communication to promote pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour, it does not explore the *conditions* for communication about issues of sustainability. The development of such an understanding is necessary, since the complex and contested sustainability transition does not have simple answers and therefore needs to be approached in ways which accommodate dealing with this complexity and contestation. This requires the open and constructive expression of different perspectives and imagined solutions (Christensen et al., 2015), which in turn requires communicative conditions that facilitate the joint investigation of differences in opinion and disagreement (Hallgren et al., 2018). Although the establishment of such conditions is important in achieving societal transformation, far too little is known about it. This is why I shift the current focus on the individual in hope communication research to the social – viewing communication as a social and constitutive practice, and understanding hope as accomplished discursively in social interaction. By doing that, I join academics who view hope as a social activity and as something practised by people in interaction (Lueck, 2007; Moser, 2015; Head, 2016). These academics treat hope as intersubjective and take a pragmatic approach to hope discourse. In the upcoming section, I describe the pragmatic hope research that I draw on in my research.

2.3 Hope as intersubjective and communication as constitutive

The intersubjective and pragmatic view on hope and hope discourse is radically different from the common view of hope as a thought or an emotion. Rather than adopting a definition of hope and exploring where it can be found and increased, hope is studied in terms of how it emerges in different social practices. It is based on real life observations of communication and the goal of analysis is to explore the multiple ideas and interpretations of hope in different social contexts (see Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). This pragmatic approach to hope pays attention to how different conceptions of hope are used in different contexts and with what consequences, as well as what room for action it opens up and closes down (Herrestad et al., 2014). It acknowledges the context dependency of hope discourse and considers relying on a definition of hope as futile (Herrestad et al., 2014; Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). Moreover, while it acknowledges that people may have a hopeful attitude or feel hopeful, the analytical focus lies on how people verbally and non-verbally express that hope in social interaction, and with what consequences (Eliott and Olver, 2002). The aim of such a pragmatic analysis can, for example, be to examine how hope is co-created in therapy sessions, by the therapist and the client, in a way that shifts focus to the client's responsibility for and power over their situation, instead of positioning them as unaccountable and passive (e.g. Larsen et al., 2007; Weingarten, 2010). The analyst can also examine how hope discourse is practised to promote community-building from the bottom up rather than the top down (Barge, 2003) and how it can be harnessed in NGO human rights activism in a way that empowers activists to jointly outline the path forward to reaching their goal (Courville and Piper, 2004).

While environmental research has barely engaged with hope as a social and constitutive phenomenon (see e.g. Lueck, 2007; Moser, 2015; Head, 2016), it is a common topic in health care research. Here, qualitative research has been conducted in order to understand the social dynamics and discursive practices of hope. In this field, Eliott and Olver (2002; 2007; 2009) approach hope discourse as a social and constitutive phenomenon. They study the discursive properties of hope and how hope features in interviews with cancer patients. In their paper *Hope and hoping in the talk of dying cancer patients* (2007), the authors examine the explicit use of the word 'hope' in interviews with patients and the social implications this use has for clinical practice. They found that different grammatical uses of 'hope' perform different social actions. When employed as a noun, for example "there is (no) hope", hope was attributed to the medical situation in which the patient finds themselves. This positioned them as passive in their recovery and as having limited agency. In contrast, hope as a verb, for example "I hope that…", portrayed the patient as active and as having the agency and the ability to influence their recovery. Hope as a verb was also used by patients to avoid moral responsibility. This was evident in how patients tended to end interviews with researchers by saying "I hope it's been a help", which is regarded by the authors as an expression of support that simultaneously allows the patient to renounce responsibility for the outcome of the interview, that is, the extent to which their input is considered valuable for the research. This example also demonstrates how hope discourse is used in a way that "signals goodwill" and to denote solidarity with others (p. 146).

The research presented above demonstrates that in order to explore how hope discourse shapes interactional and communicative conditions, a pragmatic approach to hope discourse is needed. Engaging with this type of research at an early stage of my research, I directed my attention towards the co-constructiveness of hope and how it is practised by people in interaction. When observing the circular economy meetings, I took note of the many ways in which hope is constructed and managed socially. While doing so, I considered how participants oriented to each other's talk rather than how I as the observer may orient to it (Taylor, 2001). Moreover, I observed that hope was constructed when a potentially hopeful account was responded to as hopeful, rather than being constructed by one individual in one single utterance. Building on this notion of hope as co-constructed, I started to ask *how* hope is co-constructed by the participants in the meeting. Such an exploration required that I look closer at the words used as well as how they are used. This required that I looked closer at talk or discourse in interaction. As noted by Barge (2003):

> Hope is a form of discursive practice that involves cocreating discourse with others that generates new images of possibility for social arrangements and mobilizes the moral and affective resources necessary to translate image into action and belief while balancing creativity and constraint. (p. 63)

Thus, hope is a discursive practice through which different social actions are performed. Accordingly, hope is found in interaction, rather than within individuals, and is oriented towards action. Following this discursive hope, I explore how discursive practices of hope shape communication activities. My analytical focus on hope as co-constructed social action thereby complements the dominant perspective on hope communication and increases our understanding of the everyday situations in which people engage in hope discourse. In this way, I complement the instrumental and intrasubjective perspective on hope communication with a constitutive perspective on communication (Hansen and Cox, 2015), viewing hope "as a socially mediated human capacity" and "the result of a complex process of social mediation." (Webb, 2012, p. 398). It is through language, discourse and communication that the inner state of hope is expressed, shared and made consequential. Therefore, rather than starting with a definition of hope, and then examining how it is used, I examine how hope is the outcome of discursive practices. I also acknowledge the ambiguity of the concept of hope and that it can be used for many different interactive purposes (Eliott and Olver, 2002). I align with Petersen and Wilkinson's (2015) view of hope having "no single defining essence or significance, but rather is ascribed multiple meanings, articulations, and implications." (p. 116). This means that I have no ambition to determine whether participants in the circular economy meetings actually feel hopeful or have a hopeful attitude.

I have now described the discursive practice that I empirically explore in this thesis. In the upcoming section, I first present some broad themes explored in circular economy research and then outline the main challenges to a circular economy transition. As described in the introduction chapter, I observed early on in my research that expressions of hope seemed to dominate the circular economy meetings. It is the hope discourse constructed in these meetings that I dedicate this thesis to exploring and I consider these meetings a case of hope discourse as expressed in the sustainability transition at large.

2.4 Circular economy – a hopeful and ambiguous concept characterised by complexity and uncertainty

The concept of the circular economy has over the past decade gained more and more influence and support as a promising approach to sustainable development (Ghisellini et al., 2016; Corvellec et al., 2020). It is widely promoted by academics (e.g. Stahel, 2016), policymakers (e.g. European Commission, 2020), businesses (e.g. Philips, 2014), think-tanks (e.g. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015) and NGOs (e.g. WWF, 2019). The European Union has adopted a circular economy action plan (European Commission, 2020) and countries such as Sweden (Regeringskansliet, 2020) and the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2016) have national strategies for realising a circular economy. There is no question that the circular economy is now widespread and widely endorsed. Although the circular economy has been found to mean "many different things to different people" (Kirchherr et al., 2017, p. 229), it generally refers to "an economy that is restorative and regenerative by design" (EMF, 2019, p. 22). It aims to break with the linear model of production and consumption of neoliberal capitalism and to abandon the extractive 'take-make-use-dispose' economy in favour of circular systems of production and consumption (Genovese et al., 2017; Lieder and Rashid, 2016). A circular economy is argued to foster sustainable consumption by making it easier for consumers to choose products with longer life cycles and environmentally friendly end-of-life disposal (Camacho-Otero et al., 2018). In effect, waste is minimised and reframed as a 'resource' to be re-integrated in circular flows of production (Greyson, 2007). The promise of the circular model is that it will bridge the longstanding conflict between economic growth and sustainability by having no net impact on the environment while simultaneously promoting economic growth (Korhonen et al., 2017; Ghisellini et al., 2016). The model departs from environmental discourse and its vocabulary of 'limitations' and 'reductions' – there is no need to choose between the environment and the economy, as they both can prosper together. As argued by Kovacic et al. (2020), the authors of *The Circular Economy in Europe: Critical Perspectives on Policies and Imaginaries*:

> The transition to a circular economy is a tremendous opportunity to transform our economy and make it more sustainable, contribute to climate goals and the preservation of the world's resources, create local jobs and generate competitive advantages for Europe in a world that is undergoing profound changes. (p. 89)

All in all, the circular economy offers an optimistic outlook on sustainability issues and creates a winning situation for the environment and the economy (Persson, 2015). As stated by one of the government officials that Persson (2015) interviewed in his thesis on discourses on the circular economy in the Swedish public sector:

> What is attractive about circular economy is that there is an optimistic outlook, that it is possible to solve the sustainability issues. In addition this is presented in a very concrete way. (p. 16)

Therefore, the discourse on the circular economy emphasises that the model offers actionable, strategic and concrete ways to address environmental issues and allows businesses to be part of the solution rather than the problem (Elia et al., 2017; Kalmykova et al., 2018). This further contributes to its optimistic and hopeful framing.

The circular economy discourse is not only characterised by hope but also by great ambiguity. In their literature review on circular economy discourses, Friant et al. (2020) contend that "the actual definition, objectives and forms of implementation of the CE [circular economy] are still unclear, inconsistent, and contested." (p. 1). The ambiguity of the circular economy concept has been widely problematised and, while some academics emphasise the benefits of an ambiguous discourse (Christensen et al., 2015), most tend to emphasise the need to agree on a definition of the circular economy (Kirchherr et al., 2017; Borrello et al., 2018; Reike et al., 2020). Friant et al. (2020) argue that too much ambiguity leads to different actors choosing the definition of circular economy which best suits their interests. This means that the ecological, social and political implications of a circular economy are rarely sufficiently examined. However, regardless of one's stance on ambiguity, it does put great demands on the communication situation to investigate the challenges a circular economy transition entails. And while previous research emphasised that ambiguity causes problems, it has not explored how or in what way. So, the question of how a circular economy discourse characterised by hope and ambiguity shapes the communicative conditions for exploring challenges to the transition remains.

Making matters even more complicated, circular economy discourse is also characterised by great complexity and uncertainty (Kovacic et al., 2020). In order to create circular flows of production and consumption, many different actors in different levels of society must collaborate, actors who may have very different ideas on what a desirable future looks like overall, as well as different economic interests and objectives. Moreover, they may have very different ideas on what a circular economy looks like and how to get there, which may lead to a struggle of reconciling different ideas on what circularity is and how to implement it (Elia et al., 2017; Murray et al., 2017; Kovacic et al., 2020).

This, in turn, highlights issues of responsibility and agency: Who is responsible for doing what in the implementation of a circular economy and what kind of agency do they have? What kind of responsibility do researchers have to communicate the complexity and uncertainty of the circular economy in a way that reduces that complexity and uncertainty so that is becomes manageable for policy makers to govern in this context? Questions like these have no simple answers (see Kovacic et al., 2020, p. 179). Issues of responsibility and agency are also important to consider in regards to the relationship between public and private institutions and civil society. As highlighted by Pansera et al. (2021), critics of a circular economy have warned that it…

> … may become yet another instance of neoliberal environmental governance, practiced through the eco-labelling of products and ecological modernisation, where the responsibility for societal change moves not only from public to private institutions, but also to the individual in her role as consumer rather than as citizen. (p. 472)

Consequently, circular economy discourse may reproduce the neo-liberal policy measure of individualising responsibility for environmental issues, thereby reproducing the subject position of "the responsible consumer" (Soneryd and Uggla, 2015, p. 914). Such measures, taken by governmental actors, media, private companies or NGOs, target individuals by informing, guiding and providing products and tools said to enable them to make more 'sustainable consumption choices'. This may be done through communication activities, such as environmental campaigns, eco-labelling of products and providing tools for monitoring household carbon emissions (Thøgersen and Crompton, 2009; Hursh and Henderson, 2011; Soneryd and Uggla, 2015). Focussing on the responsible consumer means taking a highly simplistic view on issues of sustainability, a view that should involve other societal actors and maybe most importantly the actors who can directly shape the institutional conditions of consumption (Maniates, 2001; Terragni et al., 2009; Halkier et al., 2011). It reproduces the dominant paradigm of, what Shove (2010) calls, the "ABC model" in sustainability policy and governance. This model promotes strategies for targeting individual attitude, behaviour and choice to address sustainability issues. It thereby positions citizens as consumers and public and private institutions as "enablers whose role is to induce people to make pro-environmental decisions for themselves and deter them from opting for other, less desired, courses of action." (Shove, 2010, p. 1280). Critics of this model stress that this radically reduces the opportunities to address issues of sustainability, since it prevents discussions of the dynamic processes of social change that are required to promote significant societal transformation (Shove, 2010).

The risk of over-emphasising individual responsibility, and thereby overshadowing the responsibility of governmental actors, media, private companies or NGOs, makes it all the more important to have open and critical discussions about the circular economy and to establish the discursive space and communicative conditions required to do so. If not, the circular economy meetings risk reproducing the status quo of responsibilisation and the criticised ABC model. However, current research on the circular economy tends to focus on topics of environmental sciences, engineering and technology rather than the social dimensions of the transition, including issues of responsibility and agency (Korhonen et al., 2018; Mahanty et al., 2021). Academics who do explore the social dimensions of a circular economy transition, and ask questions about how the transition can be inclusive and socially just (Murray et al., 2017; Padilla-Rivera et al., 2020; Valencia et al., 2023), make no inquiries regarding the communicative conditions required. No previous research has explored how the circular economy challenges of uncertainty, complexity, agency and responsibility are addressed communicatively. This inquiry is, however, necessary in order to take seriously the critics' warning of the circular economy becoming yet another instance of neoliberal environmental governance. It is this inquiry that I adopt in this thesis. In order to do this, I need a better understanding of the interactional context in which the challenges of the circular economy transition are explored, that is the context of informal meetings that aim to promote and inspire large-scale societal transformation. What do we know about this interactional context as sites for social change?

2.5 Meetings as sites for societal transformation

Meetings are specific kinds of focused interaction in which different norms and procedures for how to talk and interact are enacted; they are often very different from everyday talk (Boden, 1994; Heritage and Clayman, 2010). They are planned gatherings that take place at a specific time, in a specific space, interactional setting and context. They usually have a purpose and the participants are (implicitly or explicitly) assigned roles that serve that purpose (Boden, 1994). Meetings are communicative events that typically involve two or more people who gather to achieve a certain goal, to exchange ideas or opinions, solve problems, make decisions, negotiate agreement, develop policy and procedures, formulate recommendations and so on (Schwartzman, 1989). A meeting can have an extensive structure in the form of an agenda, goals, a specific time frame and result in a specific output, and so on. They can be considered formal or they can be unstructured and informal (Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009).

Usually, someone is appointed the task of organising the meeting and managing the interaction. They may achieve that task by directing and controlling the meeting – or they may take the role of moderator and, instead, guide or facilitate the meeting. The moderator has the formal right and responsibility to manage the interaction between participants and do so by, for example, introducing items on the agenda, opening and closing topics and summarising discussions. They also manage contraventions of prevailing procedures for communication by directing participants back to the topic or purpose of the meeting if they digress and letting them know when they have overrun their turn to speak (Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009).

In this thesis, I study formal meetings that aim to inform, engage and inspire participants on the topic of the circular economy. Most of us are probably familiar with such inspirationally styled meetings. They are called breakfast seminars, panel discussions, project releases and the like. They generally differ from meetings that serve to solve problems or make decisions, such as board meetings, policy meetings, conferences, public participation meetings and citizens' dialogues. While such meetings have been well researched (see e.g. Heritage and Clayman, 2010; Wodak et al., 2011), inspirationally styled meetings have not been the object of academic study. Moreover, meeting research tends to ask questions about how to make meetings a more efficient management tool and how to improve meeting procedures accordingly by, for example, having a structured agenda, setting goals, making priorities, setting rules for decision making (which are often consensus-based) and having pre-agreed rules for who can speak, and when, as well as what kind of talk is allowed (Schwartzman, 1989). There is an overall focus on efficiency and macro aspects of professional talk and little is therefore known about what characterises inspirational meetings and what constitutive role they play in society.

In this thesis, I aligned with research that considers meetings as communicative events situated within a specific sociocultural setting (an organisation, a community, a society) and as forms of social organisations constituted by, and constitutive of, social reality (Schwartzman, 1989; Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi, 2012). Meetings are, therefore, both constructed and constructive. They are social and communicative accomplishments performed by people in interaction (Schwartzman, 1989). Viewing meetings in this way, the task of the researcher is to investigate the norms and procedures of communication that are enacted in meetings and how they maintain or uphold certain communication processes, while also considering them as situated within a broader social context or situation. As Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi (2012) write, the task becomes to "develop nuanced and empirically sound understandings of how the social life of groups unfolds in the context of meetings, and how meetings act to create, maintain, or transform group life" (p. 184). In other words, meeting research that views meetings as constructed and constructive social phenomena examines how they are constructed by people in interaction and what the social implications are – both in and beyond the meetings. Such research views meetings as discursive and interactional events and adopts microanalytical approaches to study meeting talk (Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009).

The way that meeting interaction and talk is organised and accomplished is a common topic of investigation in the tradition of conversation analysis, which has an explicit focus on how social interaction is organised (Sacks et al., 1978; Schegloff, 2007; Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009). Conversation analysis aims to uncover the underlying norms and procedures of talk-in-interaction that people in conversation orient to and enact. It focuses on the social actions accomplished in interaction and views communicative activities as joint interactional achievements (Schegloff, 2007; Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009; Sidnell, 2010). It examines how social actions are accomplished through talk and non-verbal resources, such as gestures, eye gaze and body language (Sidnell and Stivers, 2012). These are actions such as greeting someone, performing a (dis)agreement, making a request, complaining, making a promise, paying a compliment, making a decision, justifying something, blaming someone, attributing someone responsibility for something and so on (e.g. Sidnell, 2010; Wiggins, 2017). All of these social actions are performed through words being expressed in a specific way, at a specific time in the interaction and in combination with other non-verbal resources (Schegloff, 1997).

My research is influenced by conversation analysis and I build on the way it approaches interactional settings, such as meetings. However, rather than aiming to understand the interaction itself that is taking place in the meetings, I aim to understand how (hope) discourse is constructed and used by people in interaction and the social actions performed by using discourse in this way. As I mentioned in previous chapter, when observing the circular economy meetings in the early stages of my project, I paid attention to how hope discourse was co-constructed by the meeting participants. Rather than being constructed in a single utterance, it was the response to that utterance which created the hope discourse.

While the question of how hope discourse is co-constructed by people in the interactional context of a meeting has yet to be explored, previous meeting research has asked similar questions regarding emotion discourse. Conversation analytic and discursive psychology research has studied emotions and how they are oriented to and managed in talk-in-interaction (e.g. Edwards, 1999; Nikander, 2007; Ruusuvuori, 2012; Robles and Weatherall, 2021). Research in these related research fields directs our attention to what the verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotions (emotion discourse) accomplishes in social interaction. For example, Edwards (1999) explores what is accomplished by couples in relationship counselling sessions, a formal kind of meeting, when they make reference to how they feel and thus invoke different categories of emotions. In his analysis, Edwards shows how emotion categories, such as anger, upset, fear and surprise, are used by clients to manage accountability for "irrational" behaviour or violence – rather than as evidence of a physiological or cognitive state. For example, by referring to the anger the client Jimmy felt, when he suspected his wife was having an affair, as so intense that he was "boiling with anger", he was able to downplay accountability for his act of violence by portraying it as a result of anger and of "temporary inflammations of the passions" (p. 277). It was a reaction Jimmy had little or no control over.

Therefore, referring to how we feel about an issue *does* something in the interaction rather than simply representing our emotional state.

The performativity or interactional business of emotion discourse is also explored by Nikander (2007) in his study on “concern-talk”, that is, concerns that are expressed in social workers’ staff meetings in elderly care. Nikander examines concern-talk as it is used in the decision-making process of allocating care and time among the elderly. The decision to make more frequent home visits to an elderly client is negotiated, rationalised and justified by the social worker by referencing to the emotional state of being concerned for the elderly client. As Nikander demonstrates through his empirical analysis, “ascription of concern to other people in talk function as a recurrent means of establishing direction for practical decision making” (p. 2). Thus, by referring to their emotional state of being concerned, the social worker is not merely sharing an emotion, s/he is jointly making decisions. Therefore, emotion discourse is action-oriented and can be invoked to direct decision-making.

Taking part in research like Edwards (1999) and Nikander (2007) was a real eye opener – so much is going on in meetings to which researchers rarely pay attention (such as how things are said, gaze, gestures and so on), things we would definitely pay attention to if we were a participant in the meeting, but which is not considered in discourse analysis research that views discourse as a resource for explaining what people think or feel about an issue (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Taylor, 2001).

2.6 Environmental communication research on meetings

How environmental issues are addressed by public and private actors in different kinds of participatory processes is a common topic of research in the field of environmental communication (Hansen and Cox, 2015; Cox and Pezzullo, 2016; Joosse et al., 2020). This is the broader theoretical field in which I position my thesis. A central point of departure in this field is to view communication in terms of a process rather than to focus on its substance or outcome (Bartels, 2015). Communication is understood as a situated process in which people construct meaning together, through verbal and non-verbal means, by interpreting themselves, the communication situation and the world (Cox and Pezzullo, 2016; Hansen, 2015). Accordingly, the measure of successful communication lies in whether it promotes democracy and inclusivity, which has the goal of enhancing civic engagement and public dialogue (Brulle, 2010). So far, environmental communication research has, in general, studied formal meetings, such as citizens' dialogue meetings, public participation meetings and collaborative stakeholder meetings. Acknowledging the work of my colleagues from the research group of environmental communication, studies have been conducted exploring how issues of wildlife management (e.g. von Essen and Hansen, 2015; Tickle, 2019), water management (e.g. Hallgren, 2003), land use (e.g. Kløcker Larsen and Raitio, 2022), landscape planning (e.g. Calderon and Butler, 2020) and forestry (e.g. Raitio, 2016; Ångman et al., 2016) are addressed and managed in such meetings. More specifically, this strand of environmental communication research has investigated who is allowed to participate, what limitations and opportunities the context of communication provides for participants and how they communicate with each other, including the words, metaphors, visuals and narratives they use (IECA, 2019). One example of particular relevance to my research is the work by Ångman et al. (2016), who study the role of emotion discourse in natural resource management and how expressions of emotions shape the communicative conditions for deliberation and participation. The authors examine how expressions of emotions are oriented to and managed, how they are highlighted and made legitimate, as well as downplayed and delegitimised in meetings and participatory processes. They show that even though environmental issues actualise emotions, which shape how we act towards our environment, affective arguments are usually overlooked in favour of rational or technical ones. They conclude that the delegitimisation of emotion discourse in natural resource management reduces the quality of the participatory process, since it undermines the legitimacy of people's connections to their environment and, consequently, their knowledge and their visions and ideas for their community are lost (p. 199). Although not based on the interaction of the meetings as such, this research paves the way for studies of how emotions, such as hope, are co-constructed in meeting discourses. The research by Ångman et al. (2016) demonstrates that *who* is allowed to participate and *what* they are allowed to express in what *context* shape environmental communication and management. It also highlights a central analytical focus in environmental communication research, namely the examination of norms on how to communicate in the sense of what are considered legitimate claims and arguments, in different environmental communication processes. It addresses the question of what communicative norms are enacted in a communication situation and how they shape the conditions for participants to jointly examine and understand environmental issues. Rather than asking questions about how meetings can be designed more effectively or to strategically address environmental issues, the aim of this kind of environmental communication research is to examine the communicative conditions that need to be established in order to explore challenges to natural resource management. Those challenges often relate to disagreement and conflict (Cox, 2013), which has also attained research interest widely. Here, important work has been done emphasising the constructive and democratic potential of disagreement and contestation in environmental communication and management (e.g. Hallgren, 2016; Raitio, 2016; Kløcker Larsen and Raitio, 2022).

Hallgren et al. (2018) identify six ways in which disagreement is avoided in dialogue meetings on wildlife management. For example, participants used jokes and irony to *indicate* disagreement but did not actually perform disagreement. Consequently, the joint investigation of the disagreement was closed down. Participants also postponed an initiated disagreement by saying things like "we'll take a look at it" (p. 6). Instead of dealing with the disagreement there and then, it was agreed to be dealt with later, or possibly not at all. The communicative procedures for avoiding disagreement demonstrate that there is an overall preference for avoiding disagreement in favour of consensus. However, as the authors argue, dialogue meetings in environmental management should allow for disagreement to be expressed and explored and provide the communicative conditions required for a pluralism of perspectives to be shared. Then, meeting participants can discover what their similarities and differences are, as well as why they disagree, which will only enrich the dialogue and promote learning. The communicative conditions needed to explore disagreement are, however, rare since there is a general demand for tools to prevent disagreement and conflict in environmental management processes in favour of agreement and consensus (e.g. Raitio, 2016; Hellquist and Westin, 2019; Bergeå and Hallgren, forthcoming). There is a tendency to conceal disagreements and to consider them obstacles or problems to be solved (Johnson et al., 2006; Hallgren et al., 2018). Establishing consensus, however, implies a closing down of discourse, which limits the discursive space for the expression of different, and potentially conflicting, perspectives and ideas (Christensen et al., 2015). This limits the potentially constructive tension between different interests, which can promote learning and creativity (Johnson et al., 2006), and the prospects of acknowledging and exploring the pluralism of perspectives, and contentious or controversial issues, are often left unexplored (Bergeå and Hallgren, forthcoming).

To conclude this chapter, my thesis is closely related to the aforementioned environmental communication research on disagreement and conflict. I ask similar questions about the role of disagreement, tension and contestation and how they shape the communicative conditions for a pluralism of perspectives and opinions to be expressed. However, while this research study communication processes where disagreement and conflicts are pronounced, and sometimes even the purpose of the meeting is to resolve conflict, I study meetings where disagreements are not necessarily obvious. Moreover, I specifically focus on how the three challenges associated with the circular economy transition are oriented to. That is, how meeting participants orient to the challenge of making visible and navigating the conceptual ambiguity of the circular economy; the challenge of establishing large-scale collaboration across diverse sectors; and the challenge of addressing political obstacles, such as the neo-liberal policy measure of individualising responsibility. In the subsequent chapter, I describe the theoretical framework that I adopt in my thesis and how I utilise the concepts of *hope*, *discourse* and *communication* in my exploration of hope discourse, and how it shapes the communicative conditions for exploring challenges to the circular economy transition.

3. Theoretical framework: A pragmatic and constitutive approach to communication

My examination of hope discourse, and how it shapes the communicative conditions for exploring challenges related to the transition to a circular economy requires, that I adopt a theoretical understanding of hope, discourse and communication that emphasises the co-constructive and pragmatic features of these phenomena. For the purpose of my thesis, what is relevant is how hope is verbally expressed and therefore consequential for the discursive practice in the meetings. In order to examine the conditions of communication, and the norms and procedures that a hope discourse fosters, I also need to explore the social actions that are accomplished through discourse. I need to examine the details of discourse and how it is used, and with what consequences for the interaction. Moreover, I need theory that provides support for the assumption that it is imperative that communication about such issues allows the space for a pluralism of perspectives and for disagreements to be expressed. In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework of my thesis, which in consists of the concepts *hope*, *discourse* and *communication*.

3.1 A pragmatic approach to discourse, hope and hope discourse

In order to study the role of hope discourse in circular economy meetings, I examine the details of how hope is co-constructed. I view discourse as situated talk and examine what participants say then and there in the meeting and what is accomplished by their talk. So, while the concept of discourse generally refers to the way that people talk and write about things in the world, I specifically focus on discourse in terms of a discursive practice

(Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). What makes up a discursive practice, and the role it plays in constructing our social world, is, however, something that distinguishes different forms of discourse analysis research. Approaches to theorising discourse can be differentiated by the extent to which discourse is seen as constructed by or constructive of the social world, and whether focus lies on everyday discourse or abstract and larger discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Wiggins, 2017). In order to answer my research questions, I recognise discourse as both constructed and constructive. It is constructed using words, metaphors, phrases, expression, gestures, symbols, etcetera – the building blocks of talk and text. It is constitutive as this construction shapes how phenomena in the world are oriented to, addressed and managed. This construction takes place all the time, in all kinds of social situations, not just in meetings and other formal settings (Wiggins, 2017). Whenever people are interacting, they (re)produce discourse and actively and flexibly use it for different purposes, for accomplishing social actions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992).

Viewing discourse in this way, I align with the pragmatist view that trying to seek consensus on the meaning of hope is futile, since it "has no single defining essence or significance, but rather is ascribed multiple meanings, articulations, and implications" in different social contexts (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015, p. 116). Therefore, hope is highly dependent on the social and interactional context in which it is expressed. Taking a pragmatic approach to hope means exploring the consequences of *how*, *where* and *when* hope is expressed and what room for action it opens up or closes down (Herrestad et al., 2014). In that way, hope can be considered the outcome of discursive practices, rather than a precursor to it. The analytical object is then to examine how hope is discursively constructed in social interaction and how it emerges in and as part of discursive practices.

Consequently, like Herrestad et al. (2014) and Eliott and Olver (2007), I recognise that hope discourse is performative and that it can be used to perform different social actions. This performance is highly dependent on the context in which hope is socially constructed. As Herrestad et al. (2014) explain, an expression of hope "will mean different things in different contexts, and the social practices surrounding these hope statements allow for different rooms for action in each context" (p. 212). Taking a discourse analysis perspective that views discourse as situated talk and as used to accomplish things in social interaction means that I recognise that the way people talk about the circular economy shapes how they address it. I consider the circular economy an ever evolving social construct that is negotiated and (re)produced through discourse, rather than a predetermined or static concept. I also recognise that it is people who actively (albeit unconsciously) construct discourse in various and flexible ways, while also being influenced by existing discourses – they are being shaped by discourses as well as shaping them (Davies and Harré, 1990). I now describe how I approach discourse as constructed in more detail.

3.2 Three principles of discourse

In order to explore how hope discourse is expressed in the social interaction of the meetings, I build on three principles of discourse, principles that make up the foundation of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017) and critical discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998; Edley, 2001). These methodologies, which I use in papers I and II, also share a focus on how psychological issues feature in discourse and "how people make the minds, identities or emotions of others relevant in interaction" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 4). This is especially useful, since I study the psychological concept of hope and how it is discursively expressed. This means that I focus on how hope is described, invoked and consequential in the meeting interaction.

The first principle states that discourse is both constructed and constructive of the world. This builds on the social constructionist notion that people make representations of the world through different modes of interaction (e.g. language, symbols, gestures) and, when making those representations, they are constructing reality rather than representing it 'as it is'. Accordingly, language is a medium of construction rather than representation (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2015). As explained by Burr (2015), knowledge about the world is "a product of […] the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other" (p. 5). Therefore, instead of looking for explanations of social phenomena (such as hope) inside the individual in terms of feelings or cognitions, and viewing them as explanations for what individuals say and do, the principle of discourse as construct*ed/ive* directs us to look for those explanations in the social discursive practices people engage in (Burr, 2015). It directs our attention towards the discursive resources, words, phrases, metaphors, intonation, gestures and so on that speakers use in the construction of various realities (Wiggins, 2017).

According to the second principle, discourse is always situated in a particular social context. The construction of discourse takes place in a specific interactional setting, such as a meeting, a dinner table conversation or a conversation between friends. Each of these interactional settings have their own norms and procedures for how individuals should talk and interact with each other (Angouri, 2012; Wiggins, 2017). Talk is also situated in the turn-by-turn interaction and, as speakers take turns talking, they build on each other's talk. Discourse is, thereby, sequentially organised and must, therefore, be studied and understood in relation to what the previous speaker said and what the talk is a response to (Sacks et al., 1978). In this way, communicative activities are considered joint interactional achievements (Schegloff, 2007; Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009) and social actions are accomplished through verbal as well as non-verbal resources, such as gestures, eye gaze and body language (Sidnell and Stivers, 2012). In short, the second principle states that discourse must be understood in terms of its interactional context and within the turn-taking sequence of interaction.

The third principle postulates that discourse is used to perform different social actions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse is, in other words, action-oriented and used to perform actions, such as greeting someone, making an agreement, making a request, complaining, promising, evaluating, paying a compliment, making a decision, justifying, blaming, denying, attributing someone responsibility for something, and so on (Sidnell, 2010). All of these social actions are performed through words, and other non-verbal resources, being expressed in a specific way, at a specific time in the interaction (Sacks et al., 1978; Schegloff, 1997). As a result, the analytical focus lies on the interactional work that is done in discourse, on what is accomplished by talking in a certain way, in a specific interactional setting and at a certain point in the interaction (Edwards and Potter, 1992). As noted by Potter and Wetherell (1987), text and talk:

> … do not merely reflect or mirror objects, event or categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather they actively construct a version of those things. They do not just describe things; they do things. And being active, they have social and political implications. (p. 6)

This means that language is performative, that people do things with words, and that talk is a medium for action (Austin, 1962; Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

Adopting these three principles, I explore hope discourse as it is constructed in the specific interactional context of circular economy meetings, while recognising that this is also constructive of how the circular economy is understood beyond this context. I examine how hope discourse is constructed by meeting participants, turn by turn, in a manner that accomplishes different social actions. In order to answer my research question, I zoom in on and examine hope discourse in social interaction: How it is constructed/ive, situated and action-oriented. I describe this in more detail in the analytical procedure section in the upcoming chapter. In the next section, I clarify how I theorise communication and the similarities between my view on discourse and the communication as constitutive perspective.

3.3 Communication as constitutive

The view on discourse that I adopt in my thesis is closely positioned to the perspective on communication as constitutive (Craig, 1999; Schoeneborn and Trittin, 2012; Cox, 2013; Hansen, 2015). Communication as constitutive builds on the foundational idea that communication is a process of creation and the medium through which society and the individual is created (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Craig, 1999). As Craig (1999) puts it, communication "is not a secondary phenomenon that can be explained by antecedent psychological, sociological, cultural, or economic factors; rather, communication itself is the primary, constitutive social process that explains all these other factors." (p. 126). In other words, communication is the foundation of society and shapes how we address issues, such as the environment and the circular economy, and act towards them (Cox, 2013). Moreover, communication is considered a situated social practice where people construct knowledge of the world through the use of different modes of communication (verbal as well as non-verbal), such as talk, text, gestures, symbols and images (Burr, 2015; Hansen and Cox, 2015). Thus, this perspective on communication lies close to my view on discourse as constructed/ive, situated and action-oriented. However, in my thesis, the concepts of discourse and communication accomplish different things analytically: In my study of communication as an intricate social process of meaning creation and negotiation (Cox and Pezzullo, 2016), I examine the ways in which hope discourse is used in that process. Hope discourse (among other discourses in the meetings) is used to reach mutual meaning and understanding regarding the circular economy and has consequences for what discursive space is opened up or closed down, and in that way is shapes the process of meaning creation and negotiation (communication). The discourse that prevails and is reproduced in the meetings shapes the opportunities to talk about problems and challenges, examine ambiguities and express disagreement. This way of viewing communication enable me to discuss the consequences of the prevailing discourses, and in that discussion I build on the political and social theory of agonism (Mouffe, 2013; Jones, 2014).

3.4 An agonistic approach to communication

In this thesis, I adopt an agonistic approach to communication and societal transformation. I thereby consider disagreement and social conflict as preconditions for democratic social change processes and societal transformation (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2013). In agonistic processes of communication, diverging perspectives and opinions, disagreements, power relations and conflicts are made explicit and addressed agonistically in the communication situation (Ganesh and Zoller, 2012; Hallgren, 2016). In such processes, "others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7). Accordingly, the existence of disagreement and contestation are not considered problems per se, "but a healthy symptom of a problem requiring attention" (Joosse et al., 2020, p. 10). Thus, they are resources that can help actors identify different perspectives and make interests, tensions and contradictions visible. In that way, the expression of agonism is considered an important driver for democratic processes of social change that centres diversity and pluralism. Disagreement, contestation and conflict are seen as the foundation of a democratic society that embraces a pluralism of ideas, perspectives and beliefs (Mouffe, 2005; Young, 2001). Therefore, conflict "cannot and should not be eradicated" (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7).

However, being in agonistic communication is a tall order considering that norms for social interaction rather tend to promote agreement and, through different interactional procedures, pave the way for affiliative or agreeing responses to social actions such as questions, requests and invitations (Pomerantz, 1984). Performing disagreement takes greater interactional work and there are different ways that people in interaction tend to 'set the stage' for a disagreeing response. For example, a rejection of an invitation is usually designed in a way that "mitigates its disaffiliative impact" (Lindström and Sorjonen, 2012, p. 350). This stage can be set by providing a qualification or account for the rejection, which then "minimizes affront to social solidarity" (Lindström and Sorjonen, 2012). In addition, there is a general communicative norm in environmental management processes to favour agreement and consensus and, consequently, to avoid disagreements (e.g. Raitio, 2016; Hellquist and Westin, 2019; Bergeå and Hallgren, forthcoming). Taking an agonistic approach means problematising the role of agreement and consensus in democratic societal transformation and questioning the possibility of embracing difference and pluralism in consensus-oriented processes (Hallgren et al., 2018). Consensus-oriented processes are never processes in which participants have an equal say, but rather conceal relations of power and that they might participate on highly unequal terms (Mouffe, 2013).

To conclude, I use an agonistic approach to communication to explore the implications of going beyond the common conversational focus of seeking consensus, motivating and inspiring conversation participants, which is the explicit intentions of the circular economy meetings I examine in this thesis. This common conversational focus is part and parcel of the hope discourse that is dominant in these meetings. I use an agonistic approach to discuss the possibilities and limitations of understanding and managing challenges in the sustainability transition. Communication that promotes democratic and inclusive societal transformation is about allowing and cultivating a variety of perspectives, and ensuring that established positions are continuously challenged, rather than defining common ground or securing consensus across different interests (Deetz, 2007). This necessitates the open expression of difference and variety, including a radical acceptance of diverse interpretations of what the circular economy transition entails. The contestation that is inevitably part of this communication is necessary to stimulate creativity in exploring potential solutions.

In the upcoming chapter, I provide a detailed description of the process of collecting, coding and analysing the empirical material of the thesis, as well as discuss some important methodological limitations that my research entails.

4. Research approach and analytical procedure

4.1 A qualitative and interpretative approach to research

In this section, I describe the specific methods I use in my exploration of hope discourse, which follows from my theoretical framework. As stated in the theory chapter, I take a constructionist and pragmatic approach to hope discourse and view communication as constitutive. I also consider communication to have the normative purpose of fostering agonistic pluralism. In other words, communication should enable the expression of disagreement, conflict and other social actions that promote inclusion and the expression of a variety of perspectives in a manner that maintains an open discourse.

In order to answer my research questions, using this normative theoretical lens, I need to attend to discourse in a specific manner and adopt specific methods of data collection and analytical procedure. The field of discourse analysis research primarily studies language in use and how patterns of talk or text (re)produce reality (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002). I take an approach to discourse analysis that put emphasis on the interactive context and how meaning is created through the interaction. The conditions or context of the interaction then both shapes and is shaped by the talk of the interactants (see Taylor, 2001).

Maintaining a focus on the conditions of social interaction in which hope discourse is produced is necessary in order to explore the communicative conditions created in a social context where hope is the norm. It is in the turn by turn interaction that the communicative conditions are created or re-created drawing on already established norms of interaction and discourse (Edley, 2001). In other words, "what we say shapes the context as much as it is dependent on, or produced by, the context" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 13). This in turn means I adopt a method and analytical procedure in which I zoom in on discourse and interaction to look at how discourse is constructed in interaction. Examining discourse in this way implies a focus on naturally occurring talk in interaction. This is why the material of my thesis consists of video recorded meetings while I considered generating data from interviews or written material, such as documents or policies, less appropriate.

I examine hope discourse in my empirical material using qualitative and interpretative methods that allow me to examine the details of interaction and the intricate ways in which meaning is co-constructed by interactants (Silverman, 2015). This is largely an empiricist approach to research where I, as the analyst, continuously stay close to the material and make sure that the results are grounded in the empirical material (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008). Moreover, I generally take an emic approach to analysis, which means I pay attention to the local discourse, terminology, and the interpretations and orientations used by the participants (Silverman, 2015). It is the unfolding of meaning creation by the participants in the circular economy meetings that is my analytical focus and what my findings concern, rather than the meaning I, as an analyst, might impose on their creation.

I start this chapter by describing the broader research project that my thesis and my work is part of. I then describe my empirical material. In the introduction chapter, I thoroughly outlined what characterises the meetings *per se*, that is, the purpose of them and how they were performed. Here, I focus on describing how I gathered and treated the empirical material. This description of the empirical material is followed by an account of my process of collecting it. Finally, I outline the procedures of analysis and describe the different stages of the analytical processes adopted in my research. The collection of empirical material and the initial steps of the analysis were done in collaboration with, or with support from, my colleagues in the Circe research project. Hence, I use the pronoun 'we' when I refer to the work performed in the early stages. I switch the pronoun to 'I' when I describe the later steps of the analysis where I worked more independently, as well as in the succeeding chapters of this thesis.

4.2 The Circe project

My thesis is part of the research project *Communication between hope and ambiguity – coordination in transformation of food systems towards circular economy* (Circe). In Circe, Hanna Bergeå, Lars Hallgren, Malte Rödl and I explore the communicative practices performed in different meetings on the topic of a circular economy in the Swedish food sector. In the project, we argue that the way a circular economy is realised is highly influenced by how practices of communication are organised and performed. Therefore, we investigate how a circular economy is realised as a social and communicative practice and how the concept is discursively constructed and managed. The aim of the project is to investigate how the circular economy is made sense of by actors in the food sector and to provide tools that can facilitate constructive communication between collaborating actors. As explored in the publications of Circe, the ambiguity and hope pertaining to the circular economy are central features of the meetings. My specific area of focus in the Circe project is on hope discourse and I investigate how hope is discursively expressed, constructed and made consequential in the social interaction of the meetings.

4.3 The material collection process

During 2020, my colleagues and I in the Circe research project set out to answer the ethnographic question: *What do actors in the Swedish food sector do when they do circular economy?* We engaged ourselves in the circular economy community by contacting central actors, carrying out interviews, participating in breakfast meetings and by sharing information about our research project. We looked for activities that seemed to be important in the community's work of promoting a circular economy transition and found that the communicative activity of gathering in informal meetings with the purpose of creating knowledge about the concept were common practice. Slightly different words were used by the organisers to describe the meetings, for example, seminar, panel conversation, launch, workshop and breakfast meeting, but typically they emphasised that participants would learn about the circular economy, be provided with good examples of circular practices and get inspired. We decided to focus on these meetings and started to look for them in and around Sweden. We identified the meetings through our contacts in the circular economy community and by conducting internet searches where we simply searched for the words "circular economy + Sweden" (in Swedish). We also received information about upcoming meetings as part of being members of several Swedish circular economy advocacy organisations.

The meetings were arranged by organisations that either had a financial or ideological interest in sustainability in general and in corporate sustainability more specifically. They were facilitated by one or two moderators and typically involved a lecture part and a more interactive part where participants got to ask questions of the speakers or discuss some issue pertaining to the theme of the meeting in smaller groups. The speakers invited were typically providers of knowledge services, some of them representing consultancies that help businesses adopt circular economic principles in their businesses, others representing governmental bodies that serve to implement the Swedish circular economy goal (Regeringskansliet, 2021). Some meetings involved a panel discussion where an invited panel discussed issues regarding the transition to a circular economy. The panels covered topics such as the political willingness to support a circular economy transition, what has slowed down the transition and how it can be accelerated. The participants were largely actors in the Swedish food sector – mainly small or medium-sized enterprises – but also representatives from public authorities, such as municipalities and universities. While we do not know the individual reasons why participants attended the meetings, they were invited to jointly explore how the circular economy can provide solutions for a wide range of sustainability issues. In the invitations, emphasis was put on sharing, inspiring and collaborating as guidelines for meeting interaction (see the introduction chapter). Most meetings were open to the public to attend and free of charge, but registration was required and for the participant to provide their name, organisation and e-mail address.

Most meetings were attended virtually by at least one member of the Circe research project, who observed the meeting and took notes that provided material for joint post-meeting discussions. All meetings were held online via different video communication platforms, with the exception of one in-person meeting held in March 2019 (a recording was made available on YouTube by the organisers). The initial plan was to observe the meetings in person and record the meetings ourselves, but, due to the pandemic starting in early 2020, the meetings were held online. For some meetings, we obtained permission from the organisers and participants to record them ourselves using a screen recorder and to use those recordings in our research. Other meetings were recorded via the video communication platform of choice by the organiser. Most recordings were then made publicly available on YouTube. We gained access and permission to use the non-public recordings upon request. In accordance with Swedish legislation, ethical approval was not required, as no sensitive personal data was collected or processed. However, to protect the privacy of the participants, we pseudonymised their names in the meeting excerpts using letters of the alphabet.

The meetings were between 1 and 2 hours in duration and had approximately 20 participants. In total, we attended 18 meetings, resulting in 35.5 hours of video recordings. Although all the meetings informed the early stages of analysis, we (later) made the decision to focus on instances in which interactivity between moderators, invited speakers, panellists and participants was most pronounced. This decision was grounded in the assumption that these interactive instances would allow us to gain more insight into how participants addressed the different perspectives, interpretations and ideas on the topic of the circular economy – and the potential negotiations and disagreements that may be performed and how the hope discourse is jointly developed. Therefore, we focused our analysis on question and answer sections, group discussions and panel discussions. For this reason, lectures were attended but not included in the analysis. This resulted in 5.5 hours of meeting recordings for analysis.

While I maintained that my primary role was to observe the meetings and keep my interaction with the other meeting participants to a minimum, my presence might have influenced the meetings in a number of ways. In every meeting I participated, I presented myself and the Circe project. I explained that I was a PhD student in environmental communication and briefly described the Circe project and that it seeks to explore how the circular economy is talked about and made sense of in the Swedish food sector. On occasion, I would get questions regarding the circular economy and explain to the participants that my area of expertise is environmental communication and that I aspire to learn about the circular economy from them. This would more often than not make them less inclined to engage with me. While it was easy to ‘fade into the background’ in a larger group, it was harder to take the observer role in a smaller group. Doing so might actually have disturbed the interaction and given the participants the feeling that they were being watched and evaluated (Taylor, 2001). For that reason, I took a slightly more active role in the meeting group discussions when this was needed in order to avoid asymmetries in the situation, mainly by asking the participants to develop their accounts and arguments further, for example: Could you explain more? Could you give an example? Why do you think that is? By asking such developing questions, I stepped out of the background while limiting the extent to which my views and perspectives shaped the conversation.

4.4 The analytical procedure

The initial coding process was a joint effort with my colleagues in the Circe research project. During our coding, we continuously discussed possible interpretations of what was going on in the interaction and what local normative interactive procedures were involved in making this happen. The first step of the coding process was the previously described selection of interactive sequences for further analysis. I transcribed the selected sequences word by word. I then coded these transcripts with the guiding question of how the ambiguity of the circular economy concept was performed in the meetings. We followed an inductive process and identified themes grounded in the material. Based on these themes, we developed a coding scheme of 22 codes, covering themes such as the performance of *agreement, disagreement, collaboration, solution, inspiration, innovation, problem, profitability, system, resource efficiency, rationality* and, finally, of *hope* (see paper 1 appendix table A.3. for the full scheme). Using this coding scheme, we analysed the transcripts in more detail and revised the scheme when necessary. We then made a twofold abstraction of the material. Firstly, we grouped together codes that showed similar patterns of how the ambiguity of the circular economy concept was addressed. Subsequently, we abstracted these patterns into four general norms of communication that were enacted in the meetings, that is, norms for how participants should talk about the circular economy. For example, we grouped the codes *inspiration*, *solution* and *hope* together because they connote an optimistic future orientation and generally cover sequences in which participants portrayed the circular economy as solving future issues of sustainability. Throughout this process, we discussed possible interpretations of the talk. The outcome of the process was the identification of a norm for adopting a framework of circularity; a norm to emphasise the business opportunities that different activities, practices and policies bring; a norm to promote consensus and expressing of agreement; and, finally, a hope norm that shifts focus away from negative or pessimistic orientations to optimistic ones.

The four communication norms were the findings of the first paper of my thesis and I describe them in more detail there. Here, I now elaborate on how I continued to build my research on the hope norm finding and how I developed the hope code.

As identified in the first stages of the coding process, an overall pattern that stood out in the meetings was to describe the circular economy, and features of the meetings, in an overall optimistic or hopeful manner. Examples of such instances where participants referring to the meetings as being energising; to the circular economy as a triple-win; and to a circular economy collective that is going to "do this together". Consequently, in my inclusive approach to coding, I went beyond sequences where the speakers proclaimed that they were hopeful or encouraged others to be hopeful. With this intriguing finding, I returned to the material to develop the hope code and add more nuances to it – with the question of how hope discourse is constructed as my guide. I revisited the material to look for hope again and added more sequences to the original hope code. I now adopted a more pragmatic approach to hope and acknowledged that hope can mean many different things in different contexts and that it could, therefore, be found in the more subtle and complex ways in which people speak about the future (Herrestad et al., 2014). Subsequently, I derived my view of hope and hope discourse from the empirical material. The alternative would have been to let a definition of hope guide my analysis, but this would instead have served the purpose of investigating whether meeting participants felt more hopeful after the meeting or to what extent the meeting design effectively portrayed the circular economy as hopeful.

This resulted in me adding more, and a greater variety of, sequences to the initial collection of the hope code. For example, I included extracts that seemed to counter the hope pattern, sequences in which participants described matters using negative or pessimistic wordings, as a way to learn more about the hope. Such talk was often considered as problematic in some way, either by the speaker themselves or another participant. For example, participants often concluded their negative talk on a positive note, which I saw as possibly orienting towards a norm to be hopeful and why I included such sequences in the collection of hope codes.

The sequences I gathered under the hope code were subsequently transcribed to different extents, as the different research questions in the different papers of this thesis required different levels of detail in transcription. The first paper only required the production of basic transcripts. The second paper required some detail on how talk was delivered, such as the words spoken, turn-taking, words that were emphasised and noticeable pauses. The third paper was transcribed according to the conversation analytics methodology of Jefferson's transcription system (Jefferson, 2004). Accordingly, I transcribed the features of talk that I considered suitable for the level of analysis I was to perform, that is, turn-taking, laughter, emphasis, overlaps and pauses (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008).

The analytical procedure described above laid the foundation for the first paper, a foundation that I then build on in the second and third papers. In **paper I**, I take a performativity perspective (Diedrich et al., 2013; Gond et al., 2016) and study the ambiguous circular economy concept in terms of how it is performed in the meetings. My analytical focus is how the circular economy is talked about and done, rather than what a circular economy is. Building on our coding scheme of the 22 codes (see above) that represent different ways in which the circular economy was talked about in the meetings, I identified four communicative norms enacted by participants. While discourse is generally understood as patterns of talk or text (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002), norms are implicit rules for socially acceptable or appropriate actions (Angouri, 2012). The kind of actions that they primarily concern is what can be said and how, which makes discourse and social norms closely related. I identified these norms by paying attention to how participants communicated about how to communicate, in other words, the meta-communication that is established in the meetings (Craig, 2016). It is through meta-communication that the local communication norms are established. These shape what can be expressed and how, as well as what is considered a valid contribution to the conversation situation (Angouri, 2012). As a result, the four communication norms I identified in the first paper were the implicit rules for how to communicate in the meetings and shaped what was considered a valid contribution to the meeting and to the discourse produced there.

The analysis in **paper II** builds on the methodology of critical discursive psychology (Edley, 2001). Critical discursive psychology views discourse as the intersection between the everyday and the cultural. It generally asks questions about how discourse is (re)produced in social interaction and what is accomplished by this in the local context, as well as in a large societal context. In this paper, I shift focus away from the general communicative norms enacted in the meetings to how hope discourse is co-constructed in social interaction and what the implications are for the meeting as well as for the circular economy transition overall. I examined what was accomplished in the immediate conversational context of the meeting by using hope discourse and how participants simultaneously engaged with a wider socio-historical context that enabled and constrained what could be said and done. In order to do this, I utilised two analytical concepts from the critical discursive psychology toolbox, namely interpretative repertoires and subject positions (Edley, 2001; Locke and Budds, 2020). Interpretative repertoires are recurrent ways of "characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 149). They are coherent ways of talking or writing about an issue and some of them are more culturally dominant than others (Edley, 2001; Wiggins, 2017). They are considered "'building blocks of conversation'" and discursive resources that speakers can draw upon and use for different purposes in social interaction (Edley, 2001, p. 198). In order to identify interpretative repertoires, I examined the *what, how* and *when* of discourse: What was constructed (the content of discourse), how and when in the interaction? I identified three interpretative repertoires that meeting participants drew on when talking about the circular economy in a hopeful way; *the stronger together*, *the change for real* and *the silver lining* repertoire.

I then moved on to examining the different subject positions (Davies and Harré, 1990) that were made discursively available by the repertoires. This meant that I examined how participants positioned themselves and others, and in addition to the *what, how* and *when* of discourse, I explored a *who,* which pertains to the different 'ways of being' that were produced or made available (Edley, 2001). More specifically, I examined what the subject positions constructed say about what the subject in question *could* or *should* do, in what position they were to act and who was going to do what.

A central finding in the second paper is that the communicative conditions of the meetings never allowed meeting participants to become clear about *who* should do *what* in the transition to a circular economy. In the third paper, I build on this finding and analysed all hope codes again, now looking for how hope discourse relates to issues of accountability, responsibility and agency.

The analysis in **paper III** builds on the methodology of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017) and zoom in even closer on how hope discourse is constructed in interaction. The overall analytical focus lies in what is accomplished in social interaction by using hope discourse in a certain way – how it is used to perform social actions. In the analysis, I adopted the three principles of discursive psychology, which state that discourse is constructed and constructive, situated within a social context and oriented towards action (Wiggins, 2017). Similarly to the analysis in paper two, I examined *what* was constructed in the interactional sequences of the selected hope codes and the words, phrases or categories used to describe it. While doing so, I continuously took into account *how* it was said, that is, how the talk was delivered (prosody) and when in the context of the interaction it was said. After examining the material in such depth, I zoomed in on limited sections of the data at a time and examined how discourse was oriented towards action. More specifically, I examined how hope discourse was used to perform the social actions of claiming or renouncing accountability and responsibility, and how the agency of the speaker was managed within the talk. The analytical tools I used in order to do this come from discursive psychology and are called ‘discursive devices’. These are ways of talking that are recognisable and recurrent across different interactional contexts and that help to perform social actions (Wiggins, 2017). I selected the devices that can be used to manage accountability, responsibility and agency, namely agent-subject distinction, disclaimers, hedging, minimisations and modal verbs. In my presentation of these devices below, I build on the comprehensive list of discursive devices provided by Wiggins (2017, see table 6.1).

- The *agent-subject distinction* device is used to examine how the agency of the speaker or another is portrayed in the meeting. Overall, I examined whether the actor in question is being positioned as either passive or active by hope discourse. This, in turn, can either downplay or emphasise the actors’ responsibility or accountability for events. For example, “I went with them” constructs an active actor, while “they made me go with them” constructs them as passive.

- *Disclaimers* are short phrases that explicitly counter a potentially negative interpretation of the speaker's account and thereby mitigate their accountability for it. For example, "I've nothing against X, but…" acknowledges a negative interpretation and makes it unwarranted.

- The discursive practice of *hedging* marks talk as tentative or conditional on some other events by, for example, using words such as 'suggests', 'would argue', 'I think', 'one could say' or 'sometimes'. It is used to manage accountability and allow the speaker to make their claim unspecific or uncertain and therefore allow it to be softened or retracted in the event of disagreement.

- *Minimising discourse* is discourse in which words such as 'little', 'just' and 'only' are used to portray the object or account as minimal. It thereby downplays the importance of it. It mitigates the extent to which the speaker can be held accountable for the object or account and the extent to which it should be treated as a serious issue.

- *Modal verbs* are verbs such as 'might', 'could',' would', 'should', 'can' and 'must' that imply a certain obligation, ability or intention of the speaker or of others. As a result, they can be used to either downplay or emphasise the accountability or responsibility for one's own or other people's actions.

By using these devices as my analytical tools, along with examining how discourse was constructed and situated, I was able to study how issues of accountability, responsibility and agency were managed in hope discourse.

4.5 Methodological limitations

My chosen research approach allows me to study hope discourse in detail and to examine how it shapes communication in the circular economy meetings. This choice, however, comes with three important limitations, which I reflect on and discuss in this section.

The first limitation concerns my priority to focus on meetings that reflect the widespread call in society to communicate in a hopeful manner about sustainability issues. Since I wanted to study hope discourse and its consequences in depth, I chose meetings on the circular economy, considering that this concept, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, is characterised by great optimism and a win-win narrative (Persson, 2015; Kovacic et al., 2020). I see these meetings first and foremost as a relevant case of hope discourse. I assume that this discourse might not be as prominent in meetings about other sustainability issues, such as the mitigation of climate change or the preservation of biological diversity. However, for me, it was more important to be able to study hope discourse in depth than to study hope discourse in empirical contexts that would be as representative as possible of hope discourse in the sustainability transition overall. Therefore, even if the hope discourse produced in the circular economy meetings might not be *representative* of meetings on all sustainability issues, I argue that my findings highlight important consequences of the societal pressure to express hope for humanity's chances of solving the environmental crisis (Head, 2016; Chandler, 2019).

Moreover, rather than attributing the characteristics of hope discourse to the *topic* of the meetings (the circular economy), I claim it is more reasonable to ascribe it to the meeting *format*. Most likely, not all meetings on the topic of the circular economy are characterised by the hope discourse I identify here and I have no ambition to say anything about these other forms of circular economy meetings. I do think, however, that the format of the meetings I studied, that is meetings that serve to engage participants and facilitate joint learning through inspiring examples and by encouraging open discussions (see introduction chapter), occur quite generally on a number of complex issues (at least in Sweden). Although this has yet to be scientifically explored, I argue that these kinds of meetings are a prominent feature of the way sustainability issues are addressed in society. Therefore, I argue that my findings are relevant beyond the specific meetings I study and that how people talk about the circular economy in the meetings reflects a broader trend in society.

The second limitation concerns my decision to study hope discourse in depth and to focus on discourse as it naturally occurs in the meetings. As mentioned above, my empirical material consists of video recordings of the meetings. This is 'naturally occurring talk', in other words, talk that "would have occurred even if it was not being observed or recorded" (Taylor, 2001, p. 27). Therefore, my analysis is limited to what happens in the meetings and to what I can observe is said and done. Some researchers of talk in interaction would choose to complement this naturally occurring talk with interviews for the purpose of "trying out" their interpretations of the empirical material against the experiences of the participants (Silverman, 2015; Wetherell, 1998). One option for me would then have been to conduct interviews with the organisers of the circular economy meetings and ask probing questions about role of hopeful talk in the meetings and how they view the opportunities to discuss the challenges to a circular economy transition. I could also have interviewed the participants and asked questions about their experiences of the meetings and whether or not they were satisfied with what was discussed. The answers to these questions would deepen my understanding of their experiences of hope discourse in the meetings. However, while I aim to explore *the role of* hope discourse in the meetings, my primary analytical object is hope discourse *per se*. By conducting interviews, I would have gained insight into *the perceived* role of hope discourse in the circular economy transition. I would access people's accounts of social practices rather than the practices themselves (Wiggins, 2017). Moreover, people are seldom aware that they are using discourses in their talk. Even though they use discourse actively and flexibly to perform social actions, they are not necessarily aware of the specific discourses they use (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), and might therefore be satisfied with the hope discourse. I assume that the hope discourse produced in the meetings is rooted in the idea or norm of how the meetings should be performed. In order to maintain a critical examination of hope discourse, and how it shapes the communication in the meetings, I therefore chose to examine the meetings as naturalistic as possible and to focus on exposing the norm reflected in hope discourse, rather than investigate how the participants view it.

The final limitation pertains to the fact that most of the meetings were conducted online and recorded by the organisers themselves, using a screen recorder program. It was therefore not possible for me to decide what would be recorded. If the meetings had been held in a physical space, as was the initial pre-Covid-19 plan for many of them, I would have been able to capture (with permission of course) more of the interaction than just the interaction between participants who were actively speaking. Considering that discourse is constructed as people respond to each other's utterances using more than just words (Schegloff, 2007), there are, potentially, nuances in how hope discourse is constructed that are not included in my analysis. If I had been able to be physically present at the meetings, I would have been able to observe the non-verbal expressions of people other than those who are currently speaking. People in interaction may, for example, express how they feel about an utterance using displays of affect in the form of facial expressions, body language and eye gaze (Ruusuvuori, 2012; Sidnell and Stivers, 2012). In that way, the participants in the meetings might constructed or respond to hope discourse using non-verbal discursive resources. They might, for example, respond in an affiliative manner by smiling or nodding, and with that response they are contributing to the hope discourse. I could have provided deeper knowledge of how hope discourse is constructed in interaction by complementing my analysis with non-verbal expressions of hope.

In the next chapter, I present the research papers that make up the foundation of my thesis in more depth. I provide a summary of each paper, present their key findings and describe how they helped me to answer the research questions.

5. The papers

In this chapter, I outline the papers upon which my thesis builds. I provide a summary of each paper and present their key findings as well as how they aid me in answering my research questions. The first paper outlines some of the main characteristics of the circular economy meetings and investigates how the ambiguous concept of the circular economy is discursively performed. As a result of my analysis, I found that meeting participants manage and maintain the conceptual ambiguity of the circular economy by following four communication norms. One of these four norms, the hope norm, is the point of departure of the second paper. In the second paper, I explore the hope norm in more detail by asking how this norm is co-constructed discursively in the meetings and how it is oriented to and managed interactionally. I identify three interpretative repertoires through which hope discourse is constructed and discuss some of the social implications that these repertoires have for the circular economy transition. In the third paper, I further explore the conclusion drawn in paper two that hope discourse may limit the discursive space for meeting participants to acknowledge and discuss the potential problems and challenges that a circular economy collective faces. In order to do this, I zoom into the interactional features of hope discourse and examine the different ways in which hope discourse shapes the discursive space to raise and address problems and challenges. I specifically focus on how issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed – three interactional issues that are intimately connected to hope discourse.

5.1 Paper I: Performing the circular economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings

In the first paper, I study the circular economy in practice by examining meetings held with the purpose of promoting a circular economy. I take a performativity perspective and explore the performative nature of such meetings, that is, what people actually say and do when they engage in the circular economy practice. More specifically, I ask how participants orientate towards and manage the conceptual ambiguity of the circular economy. The meetings are understood as social practices in which the ambiguous circular economy concept is enacted in different ways and how, in that enactment, it is discursively produced and reproduced. Rather than viewing the circular economy as one thing or as having a specific definition, I explore how circular economy discourse is enacted for a specific purpose in interaction and in a specific social context. Consequently, I examine how the concept is used in naturally occurring talk-in-interaction.

The main finding of the paper is that the concept is bound up in the performance of four specific communication norms: the circularity norm, the business norm, the consensus norm and the hope norm. These norms are implicit rules for how people should talk, reflect, reason and act in the meetings, and so shape how the concept of a circular economy is (re)enacted.

The circularity norm refers to the common terms “circular” and “circularity” that were used by meeting participants in a routine way to describe a wide range of practices. I argue that these terms were employed as ‘floating signifiers’, that is, they denote different and sometimes incoherent ideas about what a circular economy or practice entails. Furthermore, their meaning was not defined by participants, only contrasted against “linear” and “linearity”. What this did was to promote inclusivity and a community of a circular ‘us’ and a linear ‘them’. This makes these floating signifiers productive in the sense that they allow for different perspectives, ideas, interpretations and understandings to co-exist. However, this occurred at the expense of addressing important definitions, potential contradictions as well as the different pathways to implementation.

The business norm concerns businesses and their responsibility for solving a wide range of sustainability issues. Addressing issues of sustainability was spoken about as a collective duty for businesses. The circular economy was argued to provide the framework for that, since it treats the economic aspects of sustainability as “key” and therefore emphasises the importance of businesses in the sustainability transition. Moreover, it was the participants that assigned themselves the responsibility for realising the circular economy transition. The norm also emphasises the business opportunities a circular economy brings, primarily in the form of increased profits, which is assumed to be the main priority and aim of businesses and a central motivation for getting involved in the circular economy. These opportunities are also argued to include “wins” for the environment and for society at large, and thereby suggest that sustainability will naturally follow the realisation of a circular economy. One important implication of the business norm is that even though agreement is professed that a circular economy is the way forward, and that it is beneficial on multiple levels, it is never made clear how the transition is to be made and what businesses are supposed to do.

The consensus norm normalises expressions of agreement while promoting the avoidance of disagreement and potentially contentious topics. The norm, therefore, hinders the potential critique of the circular economy from being expressed. The few violations of the norm can be seen to require hard interactional work in the form of explanations or excuses, which indicates that suggesting anything other than consensus is unwelcomed. The consensus norm was also (re)produced in positive assessments of speakers’ accounts (such as “very interesting”, “fantastic”, “undeniably exciting to follow”), which marked alignment with the account, without getting specific as to what they aligned with or expanding on the account, and so not risking challenging consensus or exposing non-consensus. This resulted in an emphasis on being positive, showing appreciation and seeking concurrence to such an extent that it overshadowed potentially relevant differences.

The hope norm promotes an overall emphasis on the positive aspects of the circular economy. Meeting participants generally expressed positivity and optimism regarding the circular economy’s capacity to solve sustainability issues and such expressions shaped how they interpreted, negotiated and constructed meaning about the circular economy. The norm could be found in expressions of community, such as “doing things together”, “joining arms”, “helping each other out” and expressions of “real change”. These included “we must collaborate for real”, “not just talk”, and “not create just another project”. These accounts suggested the overcoming of obstacles and mutual benefit, creating a sense of community and solidarity. In that way, the norm created expectations of change for the better, while disregarding or downplaying any development that pointed in the opposite direction.

The hope norm was also invoked in the many presentations of “good examples” of circular economy practices, which were generally portrayed as sources of inspiration serving to encourage action. Finally, the norm appeared as claims of the circular economy being an all-in-one solution that addresses several sustainability issues at once, such as environmental sustainability, waste management and the economic struggle of small agricultural businesses. Thus, the circular economy was constructed as a solution to several crises, rendering it a desirable and obvious solution.

Based on these four norms, and the implications that they have, I conclude that the professing of a hopeful future and consensus is prioritised over addressing ambiguity, that is, what a circular economy entails and what actions are needed to implement it and the potential challenges that come with that. The norms instead reproduce ambiguity surrounding the concept and is used to enable the establishment of a shared vision of the future. The circular economy is performed as a diverse and inclusive concept, while clearly positioning it as a positive, ‘business friendly’ approach that can help solve many (if not all) sustainability issues.

5.2 Paper II: When hope messages become the discursive norm: How repertoires of hope shape communicative capacity in conversations on the circular economy

The second paper focuses on the hope norm identified in the first paper. To a greater extent, and in more detail, it explores the discursive construction of this norm in the circular economy meetings. In this paper I adopt the methodology of critical discursive psychology, which combines interactionist analysis with Foucauldian discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998) and identifies the explicit as well as the implicit ways in which hope discourse is constructed. Accordingly, I recognise that while the construction of hope discourse is situated in the interactional context of the meetings, it is also situated in a larger cultural and historical context that shapes the discursive construction of this norm (Wetherell, 1998). Building on this, I examined how participants drew on or invoked broader cultural issues in their discourse in order to accomplish different things in interaction. I examined the social implications of hope discourse – both in the local interactional situation and on a larger societal scale.

As a result of this critical discursive psychology analysis, I identified three interpretative repertoires through which hope discourse was constructed: the *stronger together*, the *change for real* and the *silver lining* repertoire. The stronger together repertoire consists of accounts of a circular economy collective being able to achieve much more than ‘individual’ businesses ever could. It also consists of accounts that emphasise that a circular economy requires wide cross-sectoral collaboration, which is also claimed to be the strength of the circular economy and the reason why it is desirable and successful. This repertoire was used to encourage participants to work together and to establish interpersonal ties and solidarity. The change for real repertoire refers to actors who take responsibility for implementing the circular economy: They are actionable and are going to create ‘real’ change. These actors were often referred to as ‘we’, which is unspecific and inclusive, possibly functioning as a discursive device serving to engage people. However, it was never clarified who these actors were, what their responsibilities were or what they are going to do. Finally, the silver lining repertoire builds on the foundational view that, even though regressions are made, society is continuously making progress and developing in the ‘right’ direction. These regressions are emphasised as opportunities for growth. One common regression participants referred to was the Covid-19 pandemic, which was portrayed as devastating indeed, but as bringing great opportunities for the food sector and the transition to a circular economy.

While the repertoires create a positive meeting experience and solidarity, an abstract discourse was maintained and concrete actions overlooked. Moreover, the challenges with the great collaboration that participants emphasised was never addressed – it was even discursively closed down. Therefore, the emphasis on community and togetherness risks occurring at the expense of constructive conversations about obstacles, differences and disagreement, conversations that are necessary for advancing environmental planning and management. I conclude the paper by suggesting that research recognise the constitutive implications of hope discourse and how it may limit the communicative capacity to address disagreement and challenges, since a focus on the positive and the hopeful is given precedence – a choice that is probably based on research and societal discourse promoting hope messages as an effective tool to foster sustainable behaviour and practice.

5.3 Paper III: Undeniably exciting to follow: How issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in hope discourse

In the third paper, I apply the methodology of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992) to explore hope as a social accomplishment. Discursive psychology maintains an analytical focus on the ways in which talk and writing is oriented towards action, that is, how talk is used in interaction to accomplish different social actions. So, rather than seeing discourse as the expression of an underlying emotion or attitude, the analyst examines discourse in the social context and "as situated occasioned constructions whose precise nature makes sense, to participants and analysts alike, in terms of the actions those descriptions accomplish." (ibid., p. 2). Using the analytical tools of discursive psychology, I zoomed in even more on the hope norm and the different ways in which hope discourse was constructed and oriented towards action in the meetings. More specifically, I analysed how hope discourse was discursively used in different ways to manage issues of accountability, responsibility and agency – three social issues that are traditional analytical themes in the discursive psychology field (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1997) and that previous research has shown to be central features of hope discourse. These issues are also important to address in order to move beyond good intentions and high ambitions in the circular economy community.

I studied hope as an intersubjective and constitutive phenomenon and analysed hope discourse as *(i)* constructed and constructive; *(ii)* as situated within a social context; and *(iii)* orientating towards social action (Wiggins, 2017). In the analysis, I identified different discursive devices that were employed as part of hope discourse and through which issues of accountability, responsibility and agency were managed (see the introduction chapter for a complete list). I found that hope discourse was used by participants in a way that downplayed talk about problems and challenges and effectively mitigated accountability for breaking the hope norm when producing such talk. Hope discourse was also used by participants to assign responsibility to others as well as to personally renounce it, thereby externalising responsibility and construing hope as a passive act. Participants also portrayed themselves and others as active and agentic by claiming responsibility and making unspecific commitments to realise a circular economy. However, they rarely clarified the extent of their responsibility or what actions it encompassed. I conclude that hope discourse is used in a variety of ways that obscure talk about accountability, responsibility and agency. This results in a rather vague and shallow exploration of problems and challenges.

Below is a table that summarises the questions asked in the papers, their respective theory and analytical focus, their main findings and how those findings contribute to the research questions of this thesis. In the upcoming chapter, I build on the papers' contributions to the research questions of my thesis and discuss the consequences of hope discourse in relation to the three major challenges to the circular economy transition; conceptual ambiguity, large-scale collaboration and political obstacles.

Summary of papers.

Paper	Research question	Theory	Analytical focus	Main findings	Contribution research questions
I Performing the circular economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings	How is the ambiguity of the circular economy concept performed in meetings and what are the implications?	A performativity perspective; how the circular economy is enacted and re-enacted by people specifically and contextually; focus on naturally occurring talk-in-interaction.	Discourse as performative; the circular economy is constantly 'becoming'; how it is talked about in a specific context shapes how it is practised, which in turn shapes its meaning.	Four norms of communication are used to manage and maintain the ambiguity of the circular economy, which is productive and not necessarily a sign of failure.	Norms of consensus and hope direct meeting participants to be in agreement and make hopeful claims about the future. They foster ambiguity, whose productive potential is obstructed by consensus-seeking.
II When hope messages become the discursive norm: How repertoires of hope shape communicative capacity in conversations on the circular economy	How is hope discourse constructed and managed in circular economy meetings and what are the social implications?	Critical discursive psychology, which combines an analytical focus on social interaction with how such local discourse is situated in a particular social, cultural and historical setting.	How discourse is constructed, managed and what the social functions and implications are; identify patterns in discourse (interpretative repertoires), which are examined regarding how they are used to accomplish things in interaction.	Hope discourse was constructed in three interpretative repertoires: the stronger together, the change for real and the silver lining, which promoted vagueness and ambiguity regarding what actions to be taken by whom in order to realise the circular economy.	Hope discourse allowed for an exploration of what the circular economy transition entails, but downplays problems and obstacles to the transition.
III Undeniably exciting to follow: How issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in hope discourse	How are issues of accountability, responsibility and agency managed in circular economy meetings dominated by hope discourse?	Discursive psychology; discourse as constructed, constructive, situated and action-orientated.	Social actions that are accomplished in discourse; specifically, the social actions of managing accountability, responsibility and agency.	Hope discourse was used to downplay talk about problems and challenges, which mitigated accountability for breaking the hope norm, and to claim responsibility and agency in a non-committal manner.	Hope discourse fosters a strong rhetoric of 'togetherness', creating an actionable collective, in a way that actually inhibits the joint exploration of the necessary conditions of collaboration and inclusion.

6. Discussion

This chapter is dedicated to discussing the findings of my research and attending to my research questions. First, I provide a synthesis of the main insights of the papers and discuss their implications in relation to previous research. I use these insights to answer my research questions, as well as to highlight and discuss the pieces of the puzzle not covered in the papers.

6.1 Synthesis of the papers

The observation by Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen (2019) that messages of hope have become our modern day mantra is truly reflected in the circular economy meetings that I studied. In my examination of the role of hope discourse in these meetings, I identified a hope norm (paper I), studied how it was discursively expressed (paper II) and zoomed in on three social issues that were central to that expression, namely the management of accountability, responsibility and agency (paper III). As a result of this research, I identified several different ways in which hope discourse is constructed, used and oriented to in the meetings, and what was socially accomplished through such discursive engagement with hope. The finding that hope discourse takes the shape of a discursive norm means that expressions of hope indicate that the circular economy will solve issues of sustainability are generally preferred and that contraventions need to be mitigated in some way. This was manifested as a general focus on opportunities, solutions and win-win scenarios. Talk that countered such hopeful discourse was softened by the speaker or interactionally sanctioned by others. In addition the hope norm worked in conjunction with a consensus norm that strongly encouraged concurrence. The consensus norm consisted of a set of procedures which made agreement among participants appear natural and taken for granted. This then, of course, hindered the exploration of disagreement and points of tension between meeting participants as well as of uncertainties regarding the transition – an exploration that could have opened up claims to be made that counter hope discourse.

While the norms of hope and consensus generally hindered the expression of disagreement, tension and uncertainty, they also reproduced the ambiguity that characterises the circular economy concept. This ambiguity has the *potential* to be productive in that it allows for a diversity of actors to engage with the concept and to join initiatives for the circular economy transition. The norms promoted a positive meeting experience in which concurrence, encouragement and support were cultivated and a hopeful orientation towards the circular economy was maintained. This interactional role of hope discourse, in combination with its reproduction of ambiguity, points towards the *potential* of hope discourse to be productive for the conditions for a joint exploration of the challenges involved in the circular economy transition.

Studying hope discourse in interaction more closely, I identified discursive patterns that were used to perform different social actions. All in all, the repertoires *stronger together*, *change for real* and *the silver lining*, discursively created an actionable circular economy collective that could create ”real” change. The repertoires put emphasis on community and togetherness and, through them, the social acts of encouragement, bonding and of making commitments were performed. This fostered community and shared identity among participants and established interpersonal ties and solidarity. However, such discourse stayed at an abstract and vague level and did not allow space to discuss what this collective was committed to doing more specifically.

Studying hope discourse in interaction and its social function even closer, I found that issues of accountability, responsibility and agency played a central role in the meetings. Making negative claims that countered the hope norm was treated as a delicate interactional issue that required the speaker to mitigate accountability for breaking the norm. This was accomplished by ending negative accounts on a positive note, consequently downplaying it or closing down any response to be made. Hope discourse was also employed in a way that showed support for the progress of the circular economy transition but renounced responsibility for its implementation. It allowed the speakers to position themselves as supportive but passive and to place responsibility on someone else. However, hope discourse was also used to emphasise the responsibility and agency of self, and of other actors within the circular economy, to realise a circular economy. However, this was done in a way that was non-specific and non-committal.

The paper findings confirm, and bring nuance to the consequences of the claim that there are strong social pressures to be hopeful about the future (e.g. Head, 2016). Through my research, I provide a deeper understanding of how hope discourse is constructed and how it features in the management of the sustainability transition. I have shown that hope is enacted as a norm for how to communicate on issues of sustainability and that when hope appears as a norm it obscures the communicative capacity to address problems, obstacles, ambiguities and contestation. It is this last finding that I now unpack and discuss.

6.2 Introduction

As I noted in the synthesis, hope discourse provides *some* space for approaching the challenges that actors may encounter in the transition to a circular economy, but does not allow for a deeper exploration of those challenges. Such an exploration would break the hope norm and, as demonstrated in the analysis of papers II and III, requires that the speaker employ discursive devices that minimise, downplay or soften (negative) discourse, thereby reinforcing the hope norm. Consequently, the potential of hope discourse to promote the expression of a wide variety of perspectives, ideas and interpretations necessary for obtaining a comprehensive view of the challenges for a circular economy transition, is lost. For hope discourse to foster openness and pluralism and allow the joint exploration of challenges in the sustainability transition, it must feature in a form that aligns with the communicative capacity to be in disagreement. In other words, it must be combined with agonism. In what follows, I describe this claim in more detail and discuss how hope discourse shapes the communicative conditions for jointly exploring challenges in the sustainability transition. I do this by focussing on the three areas of challenges raised by previous circular economy research, namely challenges posed by conceptual ambiguity, challenges regarding large-scale collaboration and the more practical and political challenges of realising the transition. I also discuss the wider implications of a hope discourse that promotes pluralism, but discourages agonism.

6.3 Conceptual ambiguity has the potential to be productive, but is obstructed by consensus-seeking

The first challenge I discuss is the challenge of navigating the conceptual ambiguity that characterises the circular economy concept (Kircherr et al., 2017; Friant et al., 2020), an ambiguity that is reproduced in hope discourse. In the first paper of this thesis, I demonstrate that the circular economy is performed as an open-ended, diverse and inclusive concept (Rödl et al., 2022). I demonstrate that it is used as a ‘floating signifier’ (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017) and, therefore, has no exact definition, but is used to denote many different things. The ambiguity of the meaning of the circular economy can stimulate continuous discussion and the open formation of discourse (Kirchherr et al., 2017, p. 229). It can open up the discursive space for the concept to evolve and allow for an open formation that cultivates a variety of understandings (Deetz, 1992; Deetz, 2007). As argued by Christensen et al. (2015) in their article on the conceptual ambiguity of ‘sustainability’, there is a “productive potentiality of seeing sustainability as a constantly evolving phenomenon” where speakers need to establish and maintain open discourse to explore this evolvement (p. 141). Moreover, the discursive openness of the concept allows diverse actors with different interests and institutional languages to gather under the label of the circular economy. This is in itself an important feature, since the circular economy transition is dependent on many actors across different sectors collaborating to enable circular flows of production (Kovacic et al., 2020). The potential of the conceptual ambiguity then lies in enabling diverse actors to share their perspectives on and understanding of the circular economy concept and their ideas for implementing it. They can then share and produce new knowledge on the circular economy and learn about the views and positions of others and learn about their own position. (More about this in section 6.4).

Studying this ambiguity in the meetings, I found that the circular economy concept was reproduced as a vague and ‘floating’ concept, which then permitted a wide range of interpretations on the concept to be professed. The vagueness created a diverse and inclusive concept where no contribution was disregarded and a shared understanding of the concept was assumed (Rödl et al., 2022). This allows the constituency of the circular economy to grow and to include a diversity of actors, which is necessary to establish circular flows of production (Kovacic et al., 2020; Rödl et al., 2022).

In order for the conceptual ambiguity to live up to this productive potential, it, of course, first needs to be acknowledged. The communicative situation needs to provide the discursive space to address the ambiguity and for speakers to discuss their different understandings and interpretations (Christensen et al., 2015; Joosse et al., 2020; Friant et al., 2020). Otherwise, concurrence and mutual understanding will be assumed by the speakers. They will assume that they share the same understanding of the terminology they use to describe the circular economy transition, which may pave the way for misunderstandings down the road (Joosse et al., 2020). However, the hope norm, in conjunction with the consensus norm, close down this discursive exploration. The norms create conditions where critical discussions on proposed solutions to the circular economy challenges and the expression of disagreement are avoided. To maintain hopeful discourse takes precedence over exploring the meaning of concepts, claims and potential disagreements. Concurrence, togetherness and solidarity are prioritised over examining different views, potential contradictions and disagreement. The win-win narrative of the circular economy (Kovacic et al., 2020; Völker et al., 2020) and the expectation that it will" carve out a future where only winners exist" (Lazarevic and Valve, 2017, p. 67) is reproduced. Moreover, the ambiguity may lead to actors choosing the definition of circular economy which best suits their interests (Friant et al., 2020). Consequently, there is a risk that the hope discourse allows the self-interest of actors to overshadow issues of power. This prevents explorations of who benefits from which understandings of the circular economy, and who is then at a disadvantage.

Ambiguous concepts that may appear positive and unproblematic (such as sustainability, the circular economy, democracy, consensus and collaboration) tend to hide tensions, contradictions, disagreements, misunderstandings and unequal relations of power (Corvellec et al., 2020; Niskanen et al., 2020; Joosse et al., 2020). Therefore, in order to support and advance circular economy initiatives, such concepts need to be deconstructed and continuously challenged. Striving for consensus, however, allows very limited space for this and, as noted by Deetz (1992), consensus means that "the continued production of experience is constrained, since the tension of difference is lost." (p. 188). Consensus, therefore, reduces pluralism since it inevitably means closing down discourse in order to agree on a definition. Thereby, it maintains "a particular view of reality at the expense of equally plausible ones, usually to someone's advantage" (Deetz, 1992, p. 188). For an agreement to be made, disagreeing accounts have to be rejected and the question is then who is given the advantage. This limits the continued exploration of different understandings and disagreement and conflict is avoided (Deetz, 1992). However, it is in the exploration of tension and disagreement that societal transformation that goes beyond the status quo can happen, transformation that does not reproduce existing power dynamics and that challenges authority and taken-for-granted realities (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Ganesh and Zoller, 2012). In order to foster pluralist democratic processes of social change, difference, disagreement and conflict must be acknowledged and managed (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Ganesh and Zoller, 2012). This must be the driving force behind the circular economy transition in order to prevent it from becoming "yet another instance of neoliberal environmental governance" (Pansera et al., p. 472) where the main responsibility for realising a sustainable society is placed on the individual in her role as consumer rather than as citizen (Maniates, 2001; Shove, 2010; Soneryd and Uggla, 2015).

So, while the communicative procedures enacted in the meetings open up a wide range of perspectives to be expressed, they become destructive when there is no discursive space to engage with all these perspectives agonistically, that is, to acknowledge differences in perspectives and underlying power dynamics (Mouffe, 2000). This also results in lost opportunities for learning something new about the circular economy. When participants in conversation discover that they disagree on what the circular economy entails, and are able stay in that disagreement while examining why they disagree, there is great potential for learning from each other and, through that process, learn something new about themselves (Daniels and Walker, 2001; Hallgren et al., 2018). Then, the joint exploration of the circular economy concept is more likely to lead to making informed decisions and finding sustainable solutions – solutions that last because all voices have been heard and potential pitfalls have been taken into account (cf. Hallgren and Bergeå, forthcoming).

6.4 Hope discourse fosters a strong rhetoric of togetherness that inhibits the discussion of challenges to collaboration

The success of the circular economy transition, of creating circular flows of production and consumption, is dependent on the establishment of large-scale collaboration between actors who often come from different sectors with different, sometimes conflicting, interests and ideas about what the transition entails. This requires the organisation of dialogue among these actors to address potential conflicts of interest, different priorities and disagreements (Kovacic et al., 2020). Talk about collaboration is a central feature of the circular economy meetings and, overall, a strong rhetoric of togetherness is constructed. This is most clearly seen in accounts where participants emphasise that a collective 'we', who are in the business of doing "good" in the world, are going to take responsibility and realise a sustainable society, via a circular economy. The repertoires *stronger together* and *change for real* construct talk about the potential of collaboration and responsibility. Such hopeful discourse, in turn, performs the social acts of bonding, encouraging and making commitments. As stated in the first paper, it fosters a "meeting culture that is built on sharing, trust, hope, and consensus" (Rödl et al., 2020, p. 9). Thus, and in line with Eliott and Olver's (2007) finding that hope discourse is used "to indicate and establish solidarity or agreement" and "strengthening interpersonal ties between individuals" (p. 138), hope discourse is produced in accounts of a strong rhetoric of togetherness. Such accounts denote solidarity to fellow circular economy supporters and it is when "coming together" and "joining arms" that they gather their strength. Through such hopeful discourse, an actionable collective is constructed, a collective that holds the key to a successful transition.

While the purpose of the meetings is not to perform collaboration or outline steps to be taken by some specific actor, issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are central features of the meetings – a finding that supports the claim that these issues are central to hope discourse (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). Although promoting a committed and actionable collective that is in the business of "doing good" (see excerpt 3, paper II) may very well encourage others to join the collective, it comes at a cost. The ways in which such accounts are made in the meetings closes down the discursive space to actually explore the terms and conditions of collaboration. Challenges of collaboration are raised but not discussed. For example, in one meeting, a participant in a group discussion raised a number of challenges regarding how the large-scale collaboration should be organised, by whom and how it can be performed so that all collaborating parties benefit. The issues they raised were, however, not elaborated on but simply met by the moderator with an affiliative response, thanking the participant for their valuable contribution to the discussion (see excerpt 2, paper II).

Responsibility was assigned to an unspecific 'we' to implement a circular economy and to solve issues of sustainability. However, the conditions for exploring the challenges this taking of responsibility might entail were not established. The social act of taking responsibility was done in a vague and sweeping manner, which is demonstrated most clearly in accounts such as "we are going to do this together" (excerpt 1, paper II) and "we simply must do something" (excerpt 3, paper III). It remained unclear what 'we' should do, only that we have to do "this" or "something". Making claims like these did not require the speaker to become more specific, nor did it invite questions from the other participants – this vagueness was all in alignment with the hope norm. These examples *imply* that the issue of who is responsible for what, brought on by the large-scale collaboration required in the circular economy transition, has been acknowledged. While this may seem harmless, it runs the risk of actually obscuring the issue of responsibility and hindering the joint exploration of the challenges of responsibility in collaboration. The issue is not that hope discourse prevents the distribution of responsibility *per se*, but suggesting that responsibility is going to be taken (like the quotes above do) may give the impression the issue has already been acknowledged and discussed, rendering the joint exploration of issues regarding responsibility redundant.

Establishing the communicative capacity to explore issues of responsibility in circular economy collaboration is important, since it may otherwise conceal potential conflicts of interest. This requires a capacity to explore the issue of responsibility in a way that enables different interests to become visible, to co-exist and continuously develop in an agonistic relationship (Jones, 2014). Maintaining an open formation of discourse (Deetz, 1992) opens up for imagining alternative, and potentially more sustainable, ways of addressing responsibility and organising collaboration (McClellan, 2011). Through this exploration, it may very well become apparent to the actors that they have different, and maybe even conflicting, interests and views on what a circular economy transition entails. They can then address that early in the process rather than discover it later.

To conclude this section, while the potential challenges to collaboration were raised, they were raised in a way that discursively closed down further exploration of them. The hopeful rhetoric of togetherness therefore becomes a platitude and a discursive closure (Deetz, 1992; Ångman, 2013) that steers conversations away from addressing the challenges of collaboration more deeply. While the explicit purpose of the meetings was not necessarily to create collaboration, or to solve the issue of collaboration, the problems surrounding collaboration were downplayed by accounts that encouraged actors to “come together”, “join arms”, “do this together”, which become an empty rhetoric of collaboration. The explicit goal of the meetings to promote the circular economy and to grow the community was given precedence over the joint investigation of what challenges such a community might face, what different perspectives there were and what they might disagree on. Thus, the communicative conditions for examining the potential differences between collaborating actors in the circular economy community, and how they can be addressed, were lacking.

6.5 Hope discourse enables the exploration of what the circular economy transition entails, but downplays problems and obstacles to the transition

The third challenge pertains to the more practical or political aspects of the circular economy transition and the obstacles standing before the circular economy community. Some of the practical or political challenges mentioned in the meetings were: the struggle of smaller businesses to adopt a circular business model and still be profitable; politics not being progressive enough or not developing the long-term policies and regulations needed for investments in circular infrastructure to be made; the challenge of promoting open innovation and the free sharing of circular solutions; how to increase food production while at the same time transitioning to a circular economy; and that Sweden as a country is lagging behind in the transition. While, there was discursive space to raise challenges like these there was no space to raise them without reservation. They were raised, but their threat to the circular economy transition was downplayed and not investigated. Due to the hope norm, accounts that are potentially controversial, critical of or problematic for the transition cannot stand on their own. Such accounts were smoothed over by platitudes, minimised or downplayed. For example, in one of the meetings, a panel participant spoke about the future in negative terms, claiming that, if the transition to a circular economy was unsuccessful, “we will see what happens”. She softened this negative statement by positing that maybe what we need is “childhood faith” (see excerpt 3, paper II). Later, in the same meeting, a panel participant raised a series of challenges for the food sector in transitioning to a circular economy. She claimed that “we have reached the end of the road” where we are no longer able to feed the growing global population and that taking action is urgent. The moderator replied by summing up her account with the figurative expression “time is ticking” and then moved on to the next question (excerpt 3, paper III). By doing so, the moderator acknowledged her invocation of urgency, but downplayed the seriousness of her account. As a result, there was discursive space for participants to point out controversies and make criticisms, but it required that the speaker, or another participant, minimise the potential threat to the hope norm. Discursive devices, such as hedging, minimising and making disclaimers, allowed the speaker to do just that. This was what the moderator of a panel discussion on the future of a circular economy accomplished by disclaiming that her question of why the circular economy had not been implemented, if it is so great as people say it is, might be a stupid question (excerpt 6, paper III). This question challenged the win-win narrative of the circular economy and broke the hope norm to highlight the possibilities of a circular economy. The moderator mitigated her critical stance by undermining any potentially negative interpretation of her question: If not received well, it was just a moment of stupidity and not to be taken seriously (cf. Condor et al., 2006; Wiggins, 2017). Discursive ‘moves’ like these allowed the speaker to guard against criticism from others that they were violating the hope norm by raising problems or being negative. Another way to express criticism, without violating the hope norm, was for the speakers to make jokes and position themselves as somewhat of a trouble-maker whose questioning of the possibilities for implementing a circular economy should not be taken seriously (see excerpt 4, paper II).

Yet another way of limiting the communicative conditions for jointly exploring problems or challenges was by ending negative talk on a positive note. Ending on a positive note enabled the speaker to make potentially radical statements that they then closed down before receiving feedback

(Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000). Negative talk, or talk about problems and challenges, could even be ended on a positive note by another participant. We see an example of this in a panel discussion on how to realise a circular economy. Here, a panel participant answered a question on how to increase food production while simultaneously transitioning to a circular economy by pointing out that increasing production was not what was going to "save us or whatever we should say from a dramatic perspective" (excerpt 5, paper III). Another panel participant interrupted by highlighting that there is "a lot of fun to do" when it comes to food production – you can produce your own food and it is simple and fun! This claim was backed up by the moderator as "good hands-on advice", who thereby contributed to the hope discourse.

Conversations may run more smoothly by downplaying the seriousness of problems and not engaging in the interactionally challenging acts exploring points of tension or being in disagreement. Such acts are linguistically more demanding and require that the speaker 'set the stage' for a disagreeing response (Pomerantz, 1984; Lindström and Sorjonen, 2012). It may make for more efficient meetings, but what gets lost in that process is the 'bigger picture' and the opportunity to discover something new about the complexity of the circular economy transition. When contrasting and potentially conflicting opinions are downplayed, and therefore disregarded, the pluralism of perspectives and ideas decreases and "the one-sidedness becomes reproduced rather than opened by conflicting representations." (Deetz, 1992, p. 458). This means that discourse that is critical of the great possibilities of a circular economy, that is critical of its ability to "carve out a future where only winners exist", (Lazarevic and Valve, 2017, p. 67) is shut down. This, in turn, reduces sensitivity to new and unexpected issues related to the circular economy transition (cf. Christensen et al., 2015).

Rather than striving for agreement and consensus, communicative conditions where there is a joint capacity to explore challenges allow and cultivate a variety of ideas and perspectives, ensuring that established positions are continuously challenged. Thus increasing the sensitivity to the new and unexpected (Deetz, 2007; Christensen et al., 2015). This implies embracing difference, including what one considers to be problems that need to be addressed before we can get too excited about the possibilities of a circular economy to solve issues of sustainability. The tendency to avoid disagreement in conversations where hope discourse dominates can lead to insensitivity to the unexpected and to the relations of power at play. This can damage the social relations of collaboration, which, as mentioned previously, are particularly important in the implementation of a circular economy (Kovacic et al., 2020). Avoiding disagreement signals that there are things that meeting participants cannot talk about, which is hardly a good foundation for constructive relations and communication about the complex issue of our joint future. This, in turn, may reduce commitment to the circular economy transition, which is more important to the progress of the transition than agreeing or focussing on the possibilities of a circular economy (cf. Christensen et al., 2015). Commitment may, instead, be promoted by engaging in communication that seeks to explore a wide range of possibilities, as well as problems, in a way that very much allows disagreement. This creates the communicative conditions for speakers to share all accounts – even the potentially critical, problematic or negative ones. This, in turn, may increase the commitment of participants in the conversation, as well as in the transition. If a speaker raises concerns or problems and they are received and addressed, it will become evident that there is a wide and permissive discursive space and that such talk can co-exist with the hope discourse.

7. Conclusions

There is a widespread notion that communication about issues of the environment and sustainability should be characterised by hope in order to motivate individuals to adopt pro-environmental behaviour. Issues and challenges related to society's sustainability transition are, however, highly complex and contested. Addressing these issues and challenges requires that actors have the communicative capacity to examine them and explore their different positions, interests and perspectives. The aim of my thesis was to study conversations about society's sustainability transition and how they are shaped by the norm that communication about complex future-oriented issues of sustainability should be characterised by hope. To investigate the consequences of this norm, I studied how a discourse of hope was expressed in meetings about the circular economy, meetings that I treat as an example of how society addresses issues of sustainability. The circular economy is in itself associated with great optimism and has been described as offering a ‘win-win situation’ where the long-standing conflict between continued economic growth and the environment can be resolved.

However, the transition to a circular economy generally involves three major challenges. Firstly, the concept of the circular economy is highly ambiguous and allows for many different interpretations and approaches to be labelled as ‘circular’. The challenge consists of making visible and navigating this ambiguity so that different interpretations can be clarified and misunderstandings avoided. Secondly, the transition to a circular economy requires a large-scale collaboration that often spans across several different sectors. Consequently, it involves actors who may have different interests and goals in realising a circular economy. Here, it is important to create the communicative conditions required to raise any conflicts regarding these interests and goals in a manner that does not seek consensus, but instead provides the communicative capacity for actors to be in disagreement. Finally, the transition itself involves a series of practical and political challenges, such as the political issues of developing the long-term policies and regulations needed for investments in circular infrastructure to be made.

In my thesis, I examined how a discourse of hope shapes the communicative conditions for actors in the circular economy to jointly raise and investigate these three challenges. I have done this based on discourse analysis of video-recorded material from meetings about the circular economy. The main conclusion that I draw from the findings of my research is that hope discourse features as a dominant conversational norm that shapes how problems and challenges in the circular economy transition are managed in the meetings. I conclude that, while the challenges to a circular economy transition are hinted at, they are subsequently minimised, downplayed or smoothed over. Hope discourse, therefore, closes down discourse about challenges. This means that it counteracts the communicative conditions required for speakers to explore these challenges and thereby limits the opportunities to increase understanding about the complexity that the circular economy transition entails. It is in communicative processes that allow for the expression of a pluralism of ideas, perspectives and interpretations, and where the conditions for being in and exploring disagreement are established, that the full complexity of the circular economy transition can be appreciated. This is important considering the extensive ambiguity, inconsistency and contestation that characterises the circular economy (Friant et al., 2020). These must be acknowledged and disagreement, inconsistency and paradoxes must be explored in order to foster creativity and learning to develop new knowledge and explore a diversity of possible paths forward. However, the hope norm and hope discourse limit this exploration. This has important societal implications that I now reflect on.

My thesis demonstrates that the societal norm of relating to and communicating about complex and future-oriented sustainability issues in a hopeful manner limits what is possible to accomplish through communication and damages the communicative conditions required to explore challenges, tensions, disagreements and paradoxes. Although the circular economy meetings are only one example of sustainability meetings, it is reasonable to assume that hope discourse is also made normative in similar meetings on the subject of sustainability and share some of the consequences for how communication is organised and carried out. Building on the assumption that larger societal discourses are produced, reproduced and challenged in social interaction (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002), the way that the circular economy is talked about in these kinds of meetings is both shaped by larger discourses of sustainability and shapes them. How people talk about the circular economy in the less formal setting I study here matters, and it matters what space the communicative situation provides for participants to jointly explore challenges in the circular economy transition. To pervasively favour hopeful talk about the future is a societal and communicative norm that prevents actors from developing a richer and deeper understanding of the complex sustainability challenges facing humanity. What I have done in this thesis is to develop nuanced academic criticism about the quality of communication in meetings that serve to engage and inspire, meetings that I argue are a prominent feature in society's way of addressing sustainability issues.

With this criticism in mind, actors in the circular economy may develop a more reflexive stance towards hope discourse. I encourage reflexivity regarding the widespread societal call for hope and that environmental communication academics and practitioners develop a sensitivity to what hope is, or can be, and how it may constrain or admit constructive commu-nication on environmental issues. By taking part of my research, and the empirical examples I provide in my analysis, they can develop this sensitivity. The knowledge I have produced of how discourse is co-constructed in meetings that serve to facilitate learning, open discussion, exploration and the co-creation of knowledge can be used to inform the organisation of meetings with a similar theme. This knowledge serves to develop practitioners' framework of the different functions hope discourse has and the ability to discern *when* it is useful and *what* it is useful for: When and how can emphasis on possibilities and future solutions be done in a way that opens up discourse for discussion, criticism, learning and creative problem solving – and when may such emphasis have the opposite consequence and instead close down such discourse? By shedding light on hope discourse, and the role it plays in these kinds of meetings, practitioners can make more informed decisions about how to organise meetings so that they foster critical discussions on sustainability. The point is not to avoid hope discourse altogether, but to aid practitioners in developing a critical and reflexive relationship to hope talk, based on the knowledge of what hope discourse *does* – both the constructive aspects of hope discourse and the destructive ones.

7.1 Future research

Given that inspirational styled meetings are a prominent feature in the sustainability transition in general, and that larger discourses on sustainability are (re)produced as well as challenged there, it is important to understand the role that these meetings play in the sustainability transition. However, little is known about them. While I argue that the inspirational meetings are a prominent feature in the sustainability transition, I base this solely on non-scientific observations made by myself and my colleagues. Meeting research tends to contribute knowledge on how to make meetings a more efficient management tool and suggest improvements in meeting procedures (Schwartzman, 1989; Aßmuss and Svennevig, 2009). Therefore, our knowledge on what people do in inspirational meetings, what characterises these communicative events and what constitutive role they play in society, is very limited. While I have made a significant contribution to this, my specific focus on hope leaves out the exploration of other norms for how to communicate that may exist in inspirational meetings. Therefore, I suggest that future research examines whether there are other norms for how to talk about complex future issues in inspiration-oriented meetings. Are there other normative discourses in sustainability meetings that prevent the exploration of challenges and, if so, what are their discursive characteristics and features? Moreover, I suggest that research examines the extent to which my results are applicable in meetings on other topics of sustainability besides the circular economy, such as climate change or biodiversity. Is there a normative hope discourse in these meetings as well and, if so, does the discourse have similar social functions? Is it used to shut down talk about responsibility, challenges and disagreements? Or, can we see that the hope discourse has other social functions and, if so, how do they shape the communicative conditions in the meetings to explore the complexity inherent in future-oriented issues of sustainability? These are important questions for future research to explore and, by answering them, we can gain deeper understanding of the role of inspirational meetings in the sustainability transition.

References

Alvesson, M. & Sköldberg, K. (2008). *Tolkning och reflektion: vetenskapsfilosofi och kvalitativ metod*. 2., [uppdaterade] uppl. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Angouri, J. (2012). Managing disagreement in problem solving meeting talk. *Journal of pragmatics*, 44 (12), 1565–1579. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.06.010

Asmuß, B. & Svennevig, J. (2009). Meeting Talk: An Introduction. *The Journal of business communication (1973)*, 46 (1), 3–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943608326761

Austin, J. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Axley, S.R. (1984). Managerial and Organizational Communication in Terms of the Conduit Metaphor. *The Academy of Management review*, 9 (3), 428–437. https://doi.org/10.2307/258283

Barber, M. (2017). Curating Spaces of Hope: A New Definition and Model of Faith-Based Organisations. *Temple Tract Series*. William Temple Foundation. [Online] Available at: https://williamtemplefoundation. org. uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Matthew-Barber-Spaces-of-Hope. pdf [Accessed 24th August 2023].

Bergeå, H. & Hallgren, L. (forthcoming). Investigating the untapped potential of disagreements. In: Carvalho, A. & Peterson, T. R. (Eds), *Handbook of Environmental Communication*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Boden, D. (1994). *The business of talk. Organizations in action*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Borrello, M., Pascucci, S. & Cembalo, L. (2020). Three Propositions to Unify Circular Economy Research: A Review. *Sustainability*, 12 (10), 4069. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12104069

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Bury, S. M., Wenzel, M. & Woodyatt, L. (2020). Against the odds: Hope as an antecedent of support for climate change action. *British journal of social psychology*, 59 (2), 289–310. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12343

Camacho-Otero, J., Boks, C. & Pettersen, I. (2018). Consumption in the Circular Economy: A Literature Review. *Sustainability*, 10 (8), 2758. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082758

Cassegård, C. & Thörn, H. (2018). Toward a postapocalyptic environmentalism? Responses to loss and visions of the future in climate activism. *Environment* *and planning E, Nature and space* (Print), 1 (4), 561–578. https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618793331

Chadwick, A. E. (2015). Toward a Theory of Persuasive Hope: Effects of Cognitive Appraisals, Hope Appeals, and Hope in the Context of Climate Change. *Health communication*, 30 (6), 598–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2014.916777

Christensen, L. T., Morsing, M. & Thyssen, O. (2015). Discursive closure and discursive openings in sustainability. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 29 (1), 135–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318914563574

Corvellec, H., Böhm, S., Stowell, A. & Valenzuela, F. (2020). Introduction to the special issue on the contested realities of the circular economy. *Culture and Organization*, 26 (2), 97–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2020.1717733

Cox, R. (2013). *Environmental communication and the public sphere*. Sage.

Cox, R. & Pezzullo, P. (2016). *Environmental communication and the public sphere* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Craig, R. T. (2016). Metacommunication. *The international encyclopedia of communication theory and philosophy*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect232

Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication Theory as a Field. *Communication theory*, 9 (2), 119–161. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.x

Daniels, S. & Walker, G. (2001). *Working through environmental conflicts: The collaborative learning approach*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Vries, G. (2020). Public Communication as a Tool to Implement Environmental Policies. *Social issues and policy review*, 14 (1), 244–272. https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12061

Deetz, S. A. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Deetz, S. (2007). Corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, and communication. In: May, S., Cheney, G. & Roper, J. (Eds), *The debate over corporate social responsibility* (pp. 267–278). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Diedrich, A., Eriksson-Zetterquist, U., Ewertsson, L., Hagberg, J., Hallin, A., Laven, F., Lindberg, K., Raviola, E., Rindzeviciute, E. & Walter, L. (2013). Exploring the Performativity Turn in Management Studies (*GRI-Rapport 2013:2*). Gothenburg Research Institute. http://hdl.handle.net/2077/34077

Edley, N. (2001). Analysing masculinity: Interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas and subject positions. In: Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S. J. (Eds), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London: Sage, pp. 189–228.

Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and cognition*. London: Sage.

Edwards, D. & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. London: Sage.

Eliott, J. A. & Olver, I. N. (2002). The Discursive Properties of “Hope”: A Qualitative Analysis of Cancer Patients’ Speech. *Qualitative health research*, 12 (2), 173–193. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230201200204

Eliott, J. A. & Olver, I. N. (2007). Hope and hoping in the talk of dying cancer patients. *Social science & medicine (1982)*, 64 (1), 138–149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.08.029

Eliott, J.A. & Olver, I. N. (2009). Hope, Life, and Death: A Qualitative Analysis of Dying Cancer Patients’ Talk About Hope. *Death studies*, 33 (7), 609–638. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180903011982

Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF) (2019). *Cities and Circular Economy for Food.* http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications

Ettinger, J., Walton, P., Painter, J. & DiBlasi, T. (2021). Climate of hope or doom and gloom? Testing the climate change hope vs. fear communications debate through online videos. *Climatic change*, 164 (1–2). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-02975-8

European Commission (2020). *Leading the way to a global circular economy: State of play and outlook.* https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/31079d7e-3a96-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1

Fadeeva, Z. (2005). Promise of sustainability collaboration—potential fulfilled? *Journal of cleaner production*, 13 (2), 165–174. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-6526(03)00125-2

Feinberg, M. & Willer, R. (2011). Apocalypse Soon? Dire Messages Reduce Belief in Global Warming by Contradicting Just-World Beliefs. *Psychological science*, 22 (1), 34–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797610391911

Foust, C. R. & O’Shannon Murphy, W. (2009). Revealing and Reframing Apocalyptic Tragedy in Global Warming Discourse. *Environmental communication*, 3 (2), 151–167. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524030902916624

Ganesh, S. & Zoller, H. M. (2012). Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change. *Communication theory*, 22 (1), 66–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01396.x

Genovese, A., Acquaye, A. A., Figueroa, A. & Koh, S. C. L. (2017). Sustainable supply chain management and the transition towards a circular economy: Evidence and some applications. *Omega*, 66 (B), 344–357. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.omega.2015.05.015

Gond, J. P., Cabantous, L., Harding, N. & Learmonth, M. (2016). What do we mean by performativity in organizational and management theory? The uses and abuses of performativity. *Int. J. Manag. Rev.* 18 (4), 440–463. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12074.

Greyson, J. (2007). An economic instrument for zero waste, economic growth and sustainability. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 15 (13), 1382–1390. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2006.07.019

Groopman, J. (2005). *The Anatomy of Hope: How People Prevail in the Face of Illness*. Random House Trade.

Grund, J. & Brock, A. (2019). Why We Should Empty Pandora's Box to Create a Sustainable Future: Hope, Sustainability and Its Implications for Education. *Sustainability*, 11 (3), 893. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030893

Halkier, B., Katz-Gerro, T. & Martens, L. (2011). Applying practice theory to the study of consumption: theoretical and methodological considerations. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 11 (1), 3–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540510391765.

Hallgren, L. (2003). *I djupet av ett vattendrag: om konflikt och samverkan vid naturresurshantering. In the depth of a watershed: on conflict and collaboration in natural resource management*. Diss. Uppsala: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

Hallgren, L. & Westberg, L. (2015). Adaptive management? Observations of knowledge coordination in the communication practice of Swedish game management. *Wildlife biology*, 21 (3), 165–174. https://doi.org/10.2981/wlb.00005

Hallgren, L. (2016). Reframing conflict in natural resource management Mutuality, reciprocity and pluralistic agonism as dynamics of community constructivity and destructivity. In: Peterson, T. R., Ljunggren Bergeå, H., Feldpausch-Parker, A. M. & Raitio, K. (Eds), *Environmental Communication and Community: Constructive and destructive dynamics of social transformation*. Routledge, pp. 16–30.

Hallgren, L., Bergeå, H. & Westberg, L. (2018). Communication Problems When Participants Disagree (or Avoid Disagreeing) in Dialogues in Swedish Natural Resource Management—Challenges to Agonism in Practice. *Frontiers in communication*, 3. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2018.00056

Hansen, A. (2015). Communication, media and the social construction of the environment. In: Hansen, A. & Cox, R. (Eds), *The Routledge handbook of environment and communication*. Routledge, pp. 46–58.

Hansen, A. & Cox, R. (2015). Introduction: Environment and communication. In: Hansen, A. & Cox, R. (Eds), *The Routledge handbook of environment and communication*. Routledge, pp. 21–30.

Heritage, J. & Clayman, S. (2010). *Talk in Action: Interactions, Identities, and Institutions*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Herrestad, H., Biong, S., McCormack, B., Borg, M. & Karlsson, B. (2014). A pragmatist approach to the hope discourse in health care research. *Nursing philosophy*, 15 (3), 211–220. https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12053

Hornsey, M. J. & Fielding, K. S. (2016). A cautionary note about messages of hope: Focusing on progress in reducing carbon emissions weakens mitigation motivation. *Global environmental change*, 39, 26–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.04.003

Hornsey, M. J. & Fielding, K. S. (2020). Understanding (and Reducing) Inaction on Climate Change. *Social issues and policy review*, 14 (1), 3–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12058

Hursh, D. & Henderson, J. (2011). Contesting global neoliberalism and creating alternative futures. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32 (2), 171–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.562665

Hutchby, I. & Wooffitt, R. (2008). *Conversation analysis*. Polity.

International Environmental Communication Association (IECA) (2019). *Environmental communication: what it is and why it matters. This One-Planet Talking Point*. https://theieca.org/

Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In: Lerner, G. H. (Ed.), *Conversation Analysis: Studies From the First Generation.* California: John Benjamins, pp. 13–31.

Jørgensen, M. W. & Phillips, L. J. (2002). *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. Sage.

Kelsey, E. (2020). *Hope Matters: why changing the way we think is critical to solving the environmental crisis*. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Kirby, E., Broom, A., MacArtney, J., Lewis, S. & Good, P. (2021). Hopeful dying? The meanings and practice of hope in palliative care family meetings. *Social science & medicine (1982)*, 291, 114471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114471

Kløcker Larsen, R. & Raitio, K. (2023). Protected areas and Indigenous rights in Sápmi: an agonistic reading of conflict and collaboration in land use planning. *Journal of environmental policy & planning*, 25 (3), 342–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2022.2137483

Kirchherr, J., Reike, D. & Hekkert, M. (2017). Conceptualizing the circular economy: an analysis of 114 definitions. *Resour. Conserv. Recycl.* 127, 221–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2017.09.005.

Korhonen, J., Nuur, C., Feldmann, A. & Birkie, S. E. (2018). Circular economy as an essentially contested concept. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 175, 544–552. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.111

Kovacic, Z., Strand, R. & Völker, T. (2020). *The Circular Economy in Europe: Critical Perspectives on Policies and Imaginaries* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061028

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics* (Vol. 8). Verso Books.

Larsen, D., Edey, W. & Lemay, L. (2007). Understanding the role of hope in counselling: Exploring the intentional uses of hope. *Counselling psychology quarterly*, 20 (4), 401–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070701690036

Lazarevic, D. & Valve, H. (2017). Narrating expectations for the circular economy: Towards a common and contested European transition. *Energy research & social science*, 31, 60–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2017.05.006

Lee, Y. K., Chang, C. T. & Chen, P. C. (2017). What sells better in green communications: Fear or hope?: It depends on whether the issue is global or local. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 57 (4), 379–396. https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2017-048

Li, C. J. & Monroe, M. C. (2019). Exploring the essential psychological factors in fostering hope concerning climate change. *Environmental education research*, 25 (6), 936–954. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2017.1367916 23

Lieder, M. & Rashid, A. (2016). Towards circular economy implementation: a comprehensive review in context of manufacturing industry. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 115, 36–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.12.042.

Lindroth, M. & Sinevaara-Niskanen, H. (2019). Politics of hope. *Globalizations*, 16:5, 644–648. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1560694

Lindroth, M. & Sinevaara-Niskanen, H. (2020). Politics of Hope: Transformation or Stagnation? In: Hosseini, S. H., Goodman, J., Motta, S. C. & Gills, B. K. (Eds). *The Routledge handbook of transformative global studies*. Routledge, pp. 230–242.

Lindström, A. & Sorjonen, M. (2012). Affiliation in conversation. In: Stivers, T. & Sidnell, J. (Eds), *The handbook of conversation analysis*. John Wiley & Sons, pp. 250–369.

Mahanty, S., Boons, F., Handl, J. & Batista-Navarro, R. (2021). An investigation of academic perspectives on the 'circular economy' using text mining and a Delphi study. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 319, 128574. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.128574.

Maniates, M. F. (2001). Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World? *Global environmental politics*, 1 (3), 31–52. https://doi.org/10.1162/152638001316881395

Marlon, J. R., Bloodhart, B., Ballew, M. T., Rolfe-Redding, J., Roser-Renouf, C., Leiserowitz, A. & Maibach, E. (2019). How Hope and Doubt Affect Climate Change Mobilization. *Frontiers in communication*, 4. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2019.00020

Jones, M. (2014). Chantal Mouffe's Agonistic Project: Passions and Participation. *Parallax*, 20 (2), 14–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.896546

McGeer, V. (2004). The Art of Good Hope. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 592 (1), 100–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716203261781

Merkel, S. H., Person, A. M., Peppler, R. A. & Melcher, S. M. (2020). Climate Change Communication: Examining the Social and Cognitive Barriers to Productive Environmental Communication. *Social science quarterly*, 101 (5), 2085–2100. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12843

Morris, B. S., Chrysochou, P., Karg, S. T. & Mitkidis, P. (2020). Optimistic vs. pessimistic endings in climate change appeals. *Humanities & social sciences communications*, 7 (1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00574-z

Morse, J. M. & Doberneck, B. (1995). Delineating the concept of hope. *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 27 (4), 277–285. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.1995.tb00888.x

Moser, S. C. (2007). More bad news: The risk of neglecting emotional responses to climate change information. In: Moser, S. C. & Dilling, L. (Eds), *Creating a climate for change: Communicating climate change and facilitating social change*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 64–80. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511535871.006

Moser, S. C. (2015). Whither the heart (-to-heart)? Prospects for a humanistic turn in environmental communication as the world changes darkly. In: Hansen, A. & Cox, R. (Eds), *The Routledge handbook of environment and communication*. Routledge, pp. 422–433.

Moser, S. C. (2016). Reflections on climate change communication research and practice in the second decade of the 21st century: what more is there to say? *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 7 (3), 345–369.

Mouffe, C. (2000). *The democratic paradox*. Verso, London.

Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. Routledge.

Mouffe, C. (2013) *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso.

Murray, A., Skene, K. & Haynes, K. (2017). The circular economy: an interdisciplinary exploration of the concept and application in a global context. *J. Bus. Ethics*, 140 (3), 369–380. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2693-2

Niskanen, J., Anshelm, J. & McLaren, D. (2020). Local conflicts and national consensus: The strange case of circular economy in Sweden. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 261, 121117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121117

Ojala, M. (2012). Hope and climate change: the importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people. *Environmental Education Research*, 18:5, 625–642. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2011.637157

Ojala, M. (2015). Hope in the face of climate change: Associations with environmental engagement and student perceptions of teachers' emotion communication style and future orientation. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 46 (3), 133–148. https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2015.1021662

O'Neill, S. & Nicholson-Cole, S. (2009). Fear Won't Do It: Promoting Positive Engagement With Climate Change Through Visual and Iconic Representations. *Science communication*, 30 (3), 355–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547008329201

Padilla-Rivera, A., Russo-Garrido, S. & Merveille, N. (2020). Addressing the Social Aspects of a Circular Economy: A Systematic Literature Review. *Sustainability*, 12 (19), 7912. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197912

Pansera, M., Genovese, A. & Ripa, M. (2021). Politicising Circular Economy: what can we learn from Responsible Innovation? *Journal of responsible innovation*, 8 (3), 471–477. https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2021.1923315

Persson, O. (2015). What Is Circular Economy?—The Discourse of Circular Economy in the Swedish Public Sector. Master thesis in Sustainable Development. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Petersen, A. & Wilkinson, I. (2015). Editorial introduction: The sociology of hope in contexts of health, medicine, and healthcare. *Health* (1997), 19 (2), 113–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459314555378

Peterson, T. R., Bergeå, H. L., Feldpausch-Parker, A. M., & Raitio, K. (Eds). (2016). *Environmental communication and community: Constructive and destructive dynamics of social transformation*. Routledge.

Philips (2014). Rethinking the Future: Our Transition towards a Circular Economy. Philips. https://www.philips.com/c-dam/corporate/about-philips/company/downloads/circular-economy-brochure.pdf.

Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes. In: Atkinson, J. M. & Heritage, J. (Eds), *Structures of Social Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 57–101.

Potter, J. & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London: Sage.

Regeringskansliet, Sweden (2021). Cirkulär ekonomi – Handlingsplan för omställning av Sverige. https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2021/01/cirkular-ekonomi---handlingsplan-for-omstallning-av-sverige/

Reike, D., Vermeulen, W. J. V. & Witjes, S. (2018). The circular economy: new or refurbished as CE 3.0? — exploring controversies in the conceptualization of the circular economy through a focus on history and resource value retention options. *Resour. Conserv. Recycl.*, 135, 246–264. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2017.08.027.

Robles, J. S. & Weatherall, A. (2021). *How Emotions Are Made in Talk*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. University of Princeton Press, Princeton, New York.

Ruusuvuori, J. (2012). Emotion, affect and conversation. In: Stivers, T. & Sidnell, J. (Eds), *The handbook of conversation analysis*. John Wiley & Sons, pp. 330–349.

Rödl, M. B., Åhlvik, T., Bergeå, H., Hallgren, L. & Böhm, S. (2022). Performing the Circular Economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 360 (12):132144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.132144

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A. & Jefferson, G. (1978). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn taking for conversation. In: Schenkein, J. (Ed.), *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*. Academic Press, pp. 7–55.

Schegloff, E. A. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction. A primer in Conversation analysis*. Volume 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schneider, C. R., Zaval, L. & Markowitz, E. M. (2021). Positive emotions and climate change. *Current opinion in behavioral sciences*, 42, 114–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.04.009 24

Schwartzman, H. B. (1989). *The meeting: Gatherings in organizations and communities*. Springer Science & Business Media.

Sidaway, R. (2013). *Resolving environmental disputes: From conflict to consensus*. London/Sterling: Routledge.

Sidnell, J. (2010). *Conversation analysis: An introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.

Silverman, D. (2015). *Interpreting qualitative data* (5th ed.). London: Sage.

Shove, E. (2010). Beyond the ABC: Climate Change Policy and Theories of Social Change. *Environment and planning A*, 42 (6), 1273–1285. https://doi.org/10.1068/a42282

Soneryd, L. & Uggla, Y. (2015). Green governmentality and responsibilization: new forms of governance and responses to "consumer responsibility." *Environmental politics*, 24 (6), 913–931. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2015.1055885

Stahel, W. R. (2016). The circular economy. *Nature News*, 531 (7595), 435. https://doi.org/10.1038/531435a.

Stern, P. C. (2012). Fear and hope in climate messages. *Nature Climate Change*, 2, 572–573.

Taylor, S. (2001). Locating and conducting discourse analytic research. In: Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. & Yates, S. J. (Eds), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London: Sage, pp. 5–48.

Terragni, L., Torjusen, H. & Vittersø, G. (2009). Can consumers save the world? Everyday food consumption and dilemmas of sustainability. *Anthropology of Food*, September (S5). https://aof.revues.org/6379.

Thøgersen, J. & Crompton, T. (2009). Simple and Painless? The Limitations of Spillover in Environmental Campaigning. *Journal of consumer policy*, 32 (2), 141–163. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10603-009-9101-1

Tickle, L. (2019). The Practice of Hunting as a Way to Transcend Alienation from Nature. *Journal of transdisciplinary environmental studies*, 17 (1), 22–37.

van Zomeren, M., Pauls, I. L. & Cohen-Chen, S. (2019). Is hope good for motivating collective action in the context of climate change? Differentiating hope's emotion- and problem-focused coping functions. *Global environmental change*, 58, 101915. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.04.003

Völker, T., Kovacic, Z. & Strand, R. (2020). Indicator development as a site of collective imagination? The case of European Commission policies on the circular economy. *Culture and organization*, 26 (2), 103–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2019.1699092

Valencia, M., Solíz, M. F. & Yépez, M. (2023). Waste picking as social provisioning: The case for a fair transition to a circular economy. *Journal of cleaner production*, 398, 136646. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.136646

Valenzuela, F. & Böhm, S. (2017). Against wasted politics: A critique of the circular economy. *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 17 (1), 23–60. https://irep.ntu.ac.uk/id/eprint/30441

von Essen, E. & Hansen, H. P. (2015). How Stakeholder Co-management Reproduces Conservation Conflicts: Revealing Rationality Problems in Swedish Wolf Conservation. *Conservation and Society*, 13 (4), 332–344. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26393214

Webb, D. (2012). Pedagogies of Hope. *Studies in philosophy and education*, 32 (4), 397–414. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9336-1

Weingarten, K. (2010). Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports. *Family process*, 49 (1), 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01305.x

Wetherell, M. (1998). Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse & Society*, 9 (3), 387–412. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926598009003005

Wiggins, S. (2017). *Discursive psychology: theory, method and applications*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Wiggins, S., Potter, J. & Wildsmith, A. (2001). Eating your words: Discursive psychology and the reconstruction of eating practices. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 6 (1), 5–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/135910530100600101

Wilkinson, S. & Kitzinger, C. (2000). Thinking differently about thinking positive: a discursive approach to cancer patients' talk. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 50 (6), 797–811. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536 (99)00337-8

Winans, K., Kendall, A. & Deng, H. (2017). The history and current applications of the circular economy concept. *Renew. Sustain. Energy Rev.*, 68, 825–833. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2016.09.123.

Wodak, R., Kwon, W. & Clarke, I. (2011). "Getting people on board": Discursive leadership for consensus building in team meetings. *Discourse & society*, 22 (5), 592–644. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511405410

WWF (2019). *A Circular Economy in Central & Eastern Europe: A Virtual Conference November 26–27*. November 5. https://wwf.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/black_sea_basin/danube_carpathian/?355371/circular-economomy-2019.

Yardley, L. & Murray, M. (2004). Qualitative analysis of talk and text: Discourse and narrative analysis. In: Marks, D. & Yardley, L. (Eds*), Research methods for clinical and health psychology* (chapter 6). London: Sage.

Young, I. M. (2001). Activist challenges to deliberative democracy. *Political Theory*, 29 (5), 670–690.

Popular science summary

In society today, there is a widely endorsed notion that the best way to meet the sustainability challenges is to express hope for the possibility of solving them. This notion is based on the assumption that people become motivated to contribute to sustainability when they feel hopeful. It is perhaps hard to believe that there could be a downside to talking about the future in a hopeful way, but this is precisely the focus of investigation in my thesis. Questions about how sustainable societal transformation is to be achieved are complex. There are a number of different opinions about what the transition entails, what needs to be prioritised and who is responsible. In order to advance the transition, space must be created for those affected to jointly explore and seek to understand ambiguities, disagreements and challenges associated with the transition.

I have studied what happens in conversations where people talk about the future of sustainability in a hopeful manner. I focus on conversations held in meetings about the circular economy, which is an alternative economic model that many believe can solve several sustainability challenges. The circular economy is an ambiguous concept that entails establishing circular flows of production and consumption. The basic principle behind the concept is to recycle and reuse materials to fully utilise resources and minimise waste. It is said that a circular economy creates a "win-win" situation and that the economy can continue to grow while environmental problems can be solved. However, as with all issues related to sustainability, the transition to a circular economy entails a number of challenges. These include exploring the different meanings of the ambiguous concept of the circular economy, how different actors can or should collaborate and what priorities that are needed in society to achieve a circular economy.

In Sweden, actors within the food sector have gathered to talk about the opportunities of a circular economy – both for their own business and for society at large. They met to learn more about this economic model and to discuss the opportunities and obstacles fora circular economy. Observing these meetings, I noticed that they were permeated by the notion that hope should characterise communication about the future. Talking hopefully worked as a social norm that makes it difficult for the participants to raise any doubts about or difficulties in achieving a circular economy. In this thesis, I therefore examined what happens when hope is normative in conversations about the circular economy and what space this gives for participants to jointly investigate the challenges associated with the issue.

Using video recordings from meetings about the circular economy, I studied in detail how the hope discourse was created and what happened in the interaction when participants expressed hope. I analysed the conversations based on different discourse analytical methods and came to the conclusion that the hope norm caused the participants to downplay, smooth over and minimise problems and challenges. The consequence of this joint caution to say anything that would disturb the hopefulness of the conversation was that any doubts and difficulties associated with the transition to a circular economy were downplayed. The unspoken requirement to express hopefulness therefore risks reducing the opportunities to examine and understand different perspectives, challenges and the different opportunities available to deal with them. I therefore conclude that, in order to make greater progress in the sustainability transition, it is important to establish the capacity to communicate about issues that may be considered negative or difficult.

The meetings I studied are an example of meetings on the subject of sustainability that aim to engage and inspire participants. They represent a form of meetings that are common in society, but which have not previously been studied in the way I have here. My thesis is therefore a contribution to work in the sustainability transition and, with it, I call for a critical approach to hope discourse. While I am not arguing that we should stop talking hopefully about the future – nor that we should stop feeling hopeful – we need to talk about difficult future issues in a more conscious way that allows problems, challenges and difficulties to co-exist with hope discourse.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Det finns i dagens samhälle en vedertagen uppfattning om att det bästa sättet att möta hållbarhetsutmaningar på är att prata hoppfullt om möjligheterna att lösa dem. Detta utgår från att människor blir motiverade att bidra till hållbarhetsarbetet när de känner hopp. Det är kanske svårt att tro att det skulle finnas en baksida med att prata om framtidsproblem på ett hoppfullt sätt, men just detta är fokus för undersökningen i min avhandling. Frågor om hur hållbar samhällsomställning ska åstadkommas är komplexa. Det finns en rad olika åsikter om vad omställningen innebär, vad som behöver prioriteras och vem som är ansvarig. För att komma vidare i omställningsarbetet är det viktigt att skapa utrymme för de som berörs att tillsammans undersöka och förstå mångtydigheter, oenigheter och utmaningar förknippade med omställningsarbetet.

I min avhandling har jag studerat vad som händer i samtal där människor pratar hoppfullt om framtiden och hållbarhet. Jag har fokuserat på samtal som hålls i möten om cirkulär ekonomi, vilket är en alternativ ekonomisk modell som många menar kan lösa flera av hållbarhetsutmaningarna. Cirkulär ekonomi är ett mångtydigt begrepp som innebär att etablera cirkulära flöden inom produktion och konsumtion. Grundprincipen är att återvinna och återanvända material för att ta vara på resurser och minimera avfall. Det sägs att med en cirkulär ekonomi skapas en ”win-win”-situation då ekonomin kan fortsätta att växa samtidigt som miljöproblemen kan lösas. Liksom alla problem relaterade till hållbarhet, rymmer dock omställningen till cirkulär ekonomi en rad svåra frågor. De handlar bland annat om vad det mångtydiga begreppet cirkulär ekonomi innebär, hur olika aktörer kan eller bör samverka och vilka prioriteringar som behöver göras i samhället i stort för att åstadkomma en cirkulär ekonomi.

I Sverige har aktörer inom den svenska livsmedelssektorn samlats för att prata om möjligheterna med en cirkulär ekonomi – både för sin egen verksamhet och för samhället i stort. De har träffats för att lära sig mer om denna ekonomiska modell och för att diskutera möjligheter och hinder för en cirkulär ekonomi. I min observation av dessa möten har jag sett att de genomsyras av uppfattningen att hoppdiskurs bör karaktärisera kommunikation om framtiden. Att prata hoppfullt fungerar här som en social norm som gör det svårt för deltagarna att lyfta eventuella tvivel på eller svårigheter med att åstadkomma en cirkulär ekonomi. I den här avhandlingen undersöker jag därför närmare vad som händer när hopp-prat är normerande i samtal om cirkulär ekonomi och vilket utrymme det ger för deltagarna att gemensamt undersöka de utmaningar som är förknippade med frågan.

I videoinspelningar från möten om cirkulär ekonomi har jag i detalj studerat hur hopp-pratet skapas och vad som händer i samspelet när deltagarna pratar hoppfullt. Jag har analyserat samtalen utifrån olika diskursanalytiska metoder och kommit fram till att normen att prata hoppfullt gör att deltagarna tonar ner, slätar över och minimerar problem och utmaningar, för att inte överskrida hoppnormen. Konsekvensen av denna gemensamma försiktighet med att säga sådant som stör hoppfullheten är att eventuella tvivel och svårigheter förknippade med omställningen till en cirkulär ekonomi tonas ner. Det outtalade kravet på att uttrycka hoppfullhet riskerar därför att minska utrymmet för att undersöka och förstå olika perspektiv och utmaningar och de möjligheter som finns att hantera dem. Jag drar därför slutsatsen att det är viktigt att främja en kapacitet att kommunicera om det som kan tyckas negativt och svårt för att arbetet för hållbarhet ska göra större framsteg.

De möten jag studerat är exempel på möten på temat hållbarhet som syftar till att engagera och inspirera deltagarna. De utgör en form av möten som är vanligt förekommande i samhället, men som tidigare inte studerats på det sätt jag gör här. Min avhandling är därför ett bidrag till arbetet för hållbarhetsomställningen och med den vill jag uppmana till ett kritiskt förhållningssätt till hopp-prat. Jag menar inte att vi ska sluta prata hoppfullt om framtiden – inte heller att vi ska sluta känna oss hoppfulla – utan att vi behöver prata om svåra framtidsfrågor på ett mer medvetet sätt som tillåter problem, utmaningar och svårigheter att samexistera med hoppet.

Acknowledgements

I want to express gratitude to my colleagues at the division of *Environmental Communication*. I have enjoyed working with you and appreciate all the support you have given me. I especially want to thank *Ann Grubbström* for taking good care of the doctoral students. You have been such a friendly and genuine presence in the hallways of SLU. I am grateful to my fellow doctoral students who have made my time at SLU so much lighter – in both senses of the word. Sharing this time with you have made my journey so much easier and filled with more light. Being a doctoral student is tough and I have been very expressive about that. I am not one to silently push through times of struggle or to get caught up in 'hustle culture'. I appreciate you for allowing me to share my experience and I hope (!) that I have inspired you to respect your limits and to listen to your body.

I could not have undertaken this journey without my colleagues in the Circe project: *Hanna Bergeå*, *Lars Hallgren* and *Malte Rödl*. Working with you has been deeply rewarding and I have enjoyed so much laughter with you all. Thank you for allowing me the space to grow, not only as a student but as an individual. I want to thank *Lotten Westberg*, my main supervisor, for supporting me emotionally in the ups and downs of my studies. I especially appreciate your candidness and 'no bullshit' attitude! You have inspired me to stop overexplaining and excusing myself, which has been immensely healing.

I have also received great support from *Sally Wiggins* and *Leah Sprain*. Thank you Sally for being such an important influence in early stages of my studies and providing great guidance as my opponent for the half time seminar. Thank you Leah, my opponent the final time seminar, for reminding me just how interesting and important my work is.

I want to thank the organisations *Foodhills*, *CirEko* and *Cradlenet* for generously sharing your knowledge and experience. You helped me in my early exploration of the circular economy in the Swedish food sector. I also want to acknowledge the organisers of the circular economy meetings that I have observed, as part of my research, who kindly allowed me to be part of their meetings. Thank you for your trust. My PhD project would not have been possible without funding from *FORMAS*, Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development (grant number 2018-01874).

Finally, I want to acknowledge *Johan Lundsten*. I am eternally grateful for your unconditional love and support. You have seen me grow from Maiden into Mother, and now into Queen. I am pretty certain you will witness me stepping into Crone – and with my new fancy doctoral title I think I am actually one step closer.

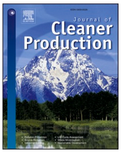
Papers I-III

Journal of Cleaner Production 360 (2022) 132144

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Cleaner Production

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jclepro



Performing the Circular economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings

Malte B. Rödl[a,*], Therese Åhlvik[a], Hanna Bergeå[a], Lars Hallgren[a], Steffen Böhm[b]

[a] *Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Division of Environmental Communiation, Box 7012, 75007, Uppsala, Sweden*
[b] *University of Exeter Business School, University of Exeter, G11, SERSF, Penryn Campus, TR10 9EZ, Cornwall, United Kingdom*

ARTICLE INFO

Handling editor: Dr. Govindan Kannan

Keywords:
Circular economy
Performativity
Metacommunication
Ambiguity
Discourse
Floating signifier
Communication norm

ABSTRACT

The circular economy (CE) is seen as a structural solution to society's sustainability problems. But with a large diversity of definitions, CE is also often portrayed as immature or in need of conceptual synthesis. Rather than treating the bemoaned ambiguity as a problem, in this article we analyse its implications on CE practice at the example of meetings aimed at popularising CE to businesspeople. To this end, we build on a grounded theory approach to analyse ethnographic and participant observations of CE meetings in Sweden from a performativity perspective. We identify four major communication norms that are enabled by ambiguity in the observed meetings, and simultaneously manage and maintain this ambiguity. The communication norms consist of implicit standards for how people ought to act, talk, respond, and reflect in the meetings. We contribute to CE scholarship by showing how ambiguity is not a sign of failure or immaturity, but an integral and productive part of CE discourse, as it enables diverse actors to congregate around shared aims. Our findings may help CE practitioners and scholars to make explicit the ambiguity of the CE concept in meetings, and ultimately to navigate in debates about what society and economy we want to live in.

1. Introduction

The discourse of the circular economy (CE) has steadily gained ground over the past decade, being promoted by many academics (e.g. Stahel, 2016), policymakers (e.g. European Commission, 2020), consultancies (e.g. Dobbs et al., 2011), businesses (e.g. Philips, 2014), think tanks (e.g. Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013), or NGO activists (e.g. WWF, 2019). The core idea of the CE is expressed as a move away from an extractive so-called 'take-make-use-dispose' economy, transitioning towards more regenerative and restorative business practices that keep the value of materials for much longer (Lieder and Rashid, 2016).

While the historical precursors of the CE discourse arguably go back more than 50 years (Winans et al., 2017), the concept remains contested (Corvellec et al., 2021b; Calisto Friant et al., 2020; Korhonen et al., 2018) and ambiguous (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Millar et al., 2019; Schöggl et al., 2020), being defined in multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways (Kirchherr et al., 2017). This ambiguity is often understood as an indication that the CE field has not 'matured' yet (Geisendorf and Pietrulla, 2018; Homrich et al., 2018; Kirchherr et al., 2017). Some scholars even worry that continued ambiguity of the CE concept may lead to its "collapse or … deadlock" (Kirchherr et al., 2017, p. 228) or at least limit its translatability into practice (Borrello et al., 2020).

This article is concerned with the practical implications of the conceptual ambiguity of the CE. We depart from the assumption that there is, or ought to be, a single or fixed meaning of 'Circular Economy', which would imply that CE can be defined or implemented in one (best) way. Instead, we take a non-essentialist approach (cf. Corvellec et al., 2021a) and understand CE as a so-called 'floating signifier' (Corvellec et al., 2020; Niskanen et al., 2020; Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017), which suggests that meaning and signification of the CE concept are understood differently in various contexts and by various involved actors. Thus, CE is inevitably defined and implemented in a variety of ways. 'Floating signifiers' in CE and the sustainability arena have been suggested to depoliticise an issue (Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017): they increase actors' ability to agree with each other whilst silencing disagreement (Niskanen et al., 2020), allow for agreeable—but limited—implementation (Koegl

---

Abbreviations: CE, circular economy.

[*] Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: malte.rodl@slu.se (M.B. Rödl), therese.ahlvik@slu.se (T. Åhlvik), hanna.bergea@slu.se (H. Bergeå), lars.hallgren@slu.se (L. Hallgren), s.boehm@exeter.ac.uk (S. Böhm).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.132144
Received 29 July 2021; Received in revised form 21 March 2022; Accepted 6 May 2022
Available online 15 May 2022
0959-6526/© 2022 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

and Kurze, 2013), and enable commitment to an issue despite business-as-usual conduct (Methmann, 2010).

To study the conceptual ambiguity of CE in practical settings, we chose public meetings and seminars in Sweden that were mostly organised by management consultants to promote the concept of CE to businesspeople but were also attended by the wider public. If we assumed that CE had a fixed meaning that can be defined independent of these meetings, we might investigate inhowfar meeting design and procedure are efficient in transmitting the idea of CE, or evaluate how much change a specific meeting can induce. However, following the idea of CE being a 'floating signifier', we, instead, propose that CE is produced and reproduced in communication. That is, the concept is not fixed, but rather emergent and contingent within the meeting, as it is shaped by the context, communicative procedures, and power relations embedded in communication processes between the meeting participants. Accordingly, it is important to study how the concept is used in naturally occurring talk-in-interaction.

In line with previous research on how social structures such as organisations and network meetings are performed through talk-in-interaction (e.g. Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010; Schegloff, 1997; Taylor, 1995), our analysis of these meetings employs an inductive approach, allowing us to conduct an in-depth study of these. Specifically, our analysis of these meetings builds on an approach inspired by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Furthermore, we make use of a performativity perspective (Diedrich et al., 2013; Gond et al., 2016; Law and Singleton, 2000; Nash, 2000), which allows us to disregard CE as a fixed concept, such as an explicitly set and attainable goal for economic restructuring that comprises definitions and rational decision-making frameworks. Instead, our approach understands CE as a set of discourses and practices that are continuously enacted and re-enacted (Wickert and Schaefer, 2015) in concrete socio-material settings in which the CE is negotiated, filtered, valued and solidified.

Contrary to most CE scholarship, we argue that ambiguity is constitutive of the CE discourse (Leitch and Davenport, 2007; Mény and Surel, 2002), which implies that what is being said and done in such meetings, by whom and how, are important for the way CE is performed in practice. To the CE field we hence contribute the performativity perspective, which shifts the focus of analysis from 'what is CE' to 'how is CE talked about and done'. Concretely, we inquire *how the ambiguity of CE is performed in CE meetings?* In response, we identify four communication norms, which result in the meetings becoming an inclusive, hopeful, and conflict-free environment in which CE is promoted to businesses. We contribute to CE scholarship by showing how ambiguity is a central organising principle within CE discourse, and not a sign of failure or immaturity of the field (see e.g. Kirchherr et al., 2017) and outline the implications of this.

This article now proceeds as follows. First, we review the CE and performativity literatures, constructing our conceptual framework. We will then introduce our methods for studying the performances of CE meetings in Sweden. The Results section will then outline the analytical findings of our study, followed by Discussion and Conclusion sections, which detail our main contributions to CE scholarship.

2. Literature review

2.1. Circular economy: an ambiguous discourse

CE discourses in policy, academia and government have been fast expanding in the last decade. The vast majority of this research is focused on the environmental sciences, engineering, and technological issues to do with resources, waste recovery, remanufacturing, reuse, and recycling (Mahanty et al., 2021). This is because the core idea of the CE is to transition away from the so-called 'take-make-use-dispose' economy towards practices that keep the value of materials for much longer (Lieder and Rashid, 2016). Circular approaches such as "zero waste manufacturing" are being promoted to "eliminate waste across entire value chains to the fullest extent possible" (Kerdlap et al., 2019, p. 2).

The growing, multidisciplinary CE scholarship has engaged with and integrated various precursor concepts, such as industrial symbiosis, industrial ecology, performance economy, natural capitalism, cradle-to-cradle, biomimicry and blue economy (Borrello et al., 2020), and additionally also engages with issues such as policies or business models for a CE (Mahanty et al., 2021). Precisely because of the fractured history, present, and future of the CE concept, it should not be surprising that there is disagreement over what CE actually means and entails. Kirchherr et al. (2017) have identified more than one hundred definitions, offering multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways of conceptualising the CE. This diversity and multiplicity is often seen as a problem, (see Table 1): it has been variously suggested, that the field of CE has not 'matured' yet (Geisendorf and Pietrulla, 2018; Homrich et al., 2018; Kirchherr et al., 2017), with the diversity risking deadlock and potentially collapse of the field (Kirchherr et al., 2017), hampering the realisation of CE's potential (Reike et al., 2018) or impairing its implementation (Borrello et al., 2020). Others, however, treat CE's ambiguity less as a problem but more as part of CE discourse, for example as an 'umbrella concept' (Homrich et al., 2018), implying that there is no absolute need for scholars to agree on one unifying, integrating definition of the CE (Prieto-Sandoval et al., 2018; Reike et al., 2018).

Perhaps, what this conceptual confusion indicates is that CE can be understood as an 'empty signifier' or 'floating signifier' (Corvellec et al., 2020; Niskanen et al., 2020; Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017), which means that there are ongoing struggles and conflicts over its meaning and practice. This perspective stems from the view that social reality is not pre-given or stable and would consider ambiguity a phenomenon to study and engage with (Corvellec et al., 2020; Niskanen et al., 2020; see again Table 1). In line with constructionist thinking (Burr, 2015), the past, present, and future are seen as something that is constantly re-imagined and recreated in different ways. It implies that there is not one reality of CE, but multiple, and context here matters more than anything, given that in different places different cultural, political, economic and social conditions, and traditions apply. Core to this idea is that 'the economy' is embattled and hence a conflictual process,

Table 1
Selection of CE literature engaging with definitions, roots, and the resulting ambiguity.

Authors	analysis of CE	implications for CE's ambiguity
ambiguity as a problem to solve		
Kirchherr et al. (2017)	identified, coded, and compared 114 definitions of CE along 17 dimensions	heavily different definitions may cause the CE concept to "collapse"
Reike et al. (2018)	using literature reviews: outlining the intellectual trajectory of CE; summarising key developments but also problems	there is paradigmatic ambiguity in definitions of CE; to reach its full potential, CE needs to employ more coherent use of key concepts
Borrello et al. (2020)		CE's ambiguity was successful for its popularisation but may be an issue in implementation
ambiguity as a phenomenon to study		
Valenzuela and Böhm (2017)	discursive-material analysis of CE discourse looking at CE as a concept connecting different ideas	the CE concept has been filled with meaning by various actors, leaving it to be an uncontested and depoliticised 'floating signifier'
Corvellec et al. (2020)	editorial interrogating CE as a concept, discourse, rhetorical principle, and field of practice	ambiguity needs to be problematised, and any attempts to clarification should be questioned and interrogated
Niskanen et al. (2020)	analysis of press material on CE from various sides of the political spectrum	ambiguity leads to rhetorical agreement of key actors in the debate, while silencing and disempowering local conflicts around environmental issues; research needs to interrogate how CE is performed

involving a wide array of politics and power relationships (Kennedy, 2016; Rancière, 1999).

While Niskanen et al. (2020) show how CE, as a ‘floating signifier’, leads to ambiguity, which even has strategic purposes, we suggest that it is important to focus on what people in their daily conduct actually do when they engage in CE practices. This practice-based view has gained momentum in recent years, as scholars increasingly focus on how CE is adopted and implemented in organisational settings, studying employees’ and managers’ practices in a variety of different settings (Barreiro-Gen and Lozano, 2020; Cramer, 2020; Hobson et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2019). More concretely, the emphasis of practices is important as it moves us away from the ambiguity of CE definitions, instead highlighting its social dimension (Murray et al., 2017) and context specificities (Schulz et al., 2019); it thereby responds directly to concerns about stifled potential and hampered implementations in the wake of ambiguous definitions (Borrello et al., 2020; Reike et al., 2018). In other words, CE and its ambiguity is performed. In Table 2, we illustrate the implications of various approaches to engage with the ambiguity of CE; in the following section, we explore the performativity perspective in detail.

2.2. A performativity perspective of circular economy

Following the considerations about the actual doing of circular economy, our article adheres to a performativity perspective. Performativity perspectives in the social sciences take an ontological position where reality—for example in the form of concepts such as CE—is constantly ‘becoming’ (Diedrich et al., 2013). This ‘becoming’ is often understood as an iterative and self-referential process, which draws on whatever has previously been performed (Gond et al., 2016). As such, the performed ‘concept’ is never stable, but, instead, is subject to constant re-enactment that is bound but not determined by materialities that are results of previous enactments (Callon, 2007; Law and Singleton, 2000). In economic sociology, for example, this insight has been used to demonstrate how scholarly thinking, such as in economics, shapes economic reality as such (Callon, 1998).

For Butler (1993), performativity suggests that references to specific things, words or ideas re-enact the entities they point at (so-called *citation*). For this to happen, such an entity needs to be codified—so that it can be identified by others—, referred to, and repetitively re-enacted. This also suggests the possibility that such stabilised entities are remixed, counterfeited, or pretended (Nakassis, 2012). Crucially, it is not only humans who perform (Callon, 2007; Mol, 2002). Instead, performativity should be understood as distributed agency—human, non-human, technical—performing reality in verbal and non-verbal ways. Applied to the example of economics enacting the economy, this suggests that the economy is performed through an interplay of economic language, theories, and measurements (Cochoy et al., 2010).

Table 2
Overview of how a selection of social science approaches and perspectives might engage with the asserted ambiguity in CE. The final approach, focusing on performativity, is the starting point for this article.

Approach	Assumptions	Implications for Ambiguity
ambiguity as a problem to solve		
essentialist	CE has intrinsic qualities so that there is only one ‘right’ understanding of CE	ambiguity should not exist (see the critique by Corvellec et al., 2021a)
descriptive	CE can be described differently by different actors; they all refer to an identifiable, ‘right’ CE	different definitions can be identified, counted, and compared; ambiguity should be minimised (e.g. Kirchherr et al., 2017)
ambiguity as a phenomenon to study		
constructionist	CE is not a single, static ‘thing’ but is negotiated and agreed upon by various actors	ambiguity exists and is unavoidable (e.g. Johansson and Henriksson, 2020)
discursive	CE is a concept which builds on and integrates with other ideas and discourses, depending on who uses it and where it is used	ambiguity exists and is identifiable through analysing concept use in context (e.g. Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017)
practice-based	CE is what people say and do in relation to CE	ambiguity manifests itself in different community-specific practices (e.g. Schulz et al., 2019)
performative	what people say and do in relation to CE creates specific outcomes, which in turn shapes how CE is understood and thus talked about	how CE is talked about, understood, and implemented produces and is produced by ambiguity *(the starting point for our article)*

In the same way, we suggest that CE is not a meaningful framework, discourse, or organising principle of the economy in itself, and neither a static concept, but it is enacted and performed specifically and contextually (see again Table 2). This has two major implications: Firstly, CE is a constructed and enacted entity. It becomes meaningful through its iterative enactment in making, doing, saying, referring, contextualising, and identifying. These enactments may correspond to pre-existing understandings of CE, but may also extend the boundaries of the term, apply it in new contexts, or (ab)use its reputation. Secondly, what is identified as CE is enacted by the whole socio-technical apparatus that defines, regulates, implements, measures and discusses CE. To a significant degree, this includes universities (Nunes et al., 2018) and, of course, also the authors of this article. Given the conceptual ambiguity identified above, it is clear that CE is performed differently in a variety of contexts. Yet, we suggest that such conceptual dilemmas are in themselves productive, and the CE, as concept, should hence be understood ‘in action’ (Chimenti, 2020; Richardson, 2015).

Following concerns in the literature about the role of ambiguity in the implementation, we identified public, business-oriented meetings at one place where CE is performed. Meetings are suggested to synchronise dispersed activities of a community, including organising and mobilising individuals (Haug, 2013). In the meetings we observed, various understandings of CE are explained and popularised by some invited speakers for their audiences, usually businesspeople. As meetings strategically dispose and negotiate individual identities (Clifton and Van De Mieroop, 2010), and potentially resulting in collective identities (McComas et al., 2010), we want to draw attention to two professional groups that strongly contribute to the meeting: firstly, consultants, and secondly moderators and facilitators.

Consultants, who are frequent organisers and panellists of the observed meetings, are well-known for their roles in disseminating management knowledge (Böhm, 2006). Hence, it is to be expected that CE ideas are often integrated with, or derived from, traditional management approaches, such as resource efficiency (Fineman, 2001). Scholars have identified that, on the one hand, consultants often focus on rational, reasonable and profitable management approaches, yet, on the other, they also respond to normative, ethical and pragmatic ideals (Berglund and Werr, 2000). The work of consultants also involves storytelling (Clark and Salaman, 1996), whereby a specific and selective present *and* future is presented (Boje, 1991). In this way, consultants can be seen as ‘promissory organisations’, as they provide definitions, assessments, and visions to be consumed and interpreted by others (Pollock and Williams, 2010).

Moderators and facilitators tend to act as ‘discursive stewards’ of meetings, as they create spaces for participation, align dialogues, manage stories, and ultimately translate outcomes (Escobar, 2019), while also upholding order, as they manage turn-taking and act as gatekeepers of a civilised conversation (Habibi et al., 2020). Since most of the observed meetings happened online, their influence is even larger, making them responsible to “troubleshoot [technical problems], call upon [participants], and move the discussion along” (Earnshaw, 2017, p. 315), as well as to avoid unintended silence, and participants talking over each other (Seuren et al., 2021).

All participants, consultants, moderators, and facilitators as well as their professional identities, interact, coordinate, and converse. Taking

Table 3
Overview of the meetings analysed for this article.

Date	Organiser	Meeting Title[a]	Format	Target Audience[b]	Analysed Sections
21 Mar 2019	A science and media company focusing on the food of the future	Circular food production — utopia or future?	In person event; brief introductions, long panel conversation,[c] and a few plenary questions	"All actors in the food system: producers, processors, distribution, retail, consumers"	All (58 min)
3 Apr 2020	Publicly funded seminar series, organised by a coalition of a agrifood consultancies, regional innovation hub, and the national federation of farmers	To understand and find companies in a circular bioeconomy[d]	Online event; presentations followed by a panel conversation	Those that lead, decide in, or develop businesses and could be interested in CBE; the project of which the seminars are part is concerned with "new business models and innovation in a CBE"	Panel conversation (33 min)
10 Jun 2020		How can we create business models that work in a circular bioeconomy (CBE)?	Online event; presentations followed by a group conversations and a plenary conversation		Plenary conversation (28 min)
2 Oct 2020		Innovation in a circular bioeconomy — inspiring examples	Online event; presentations followed by a panel conversation		Panel conversation (43 min)
10 Jun 2020	Regional energy agency	Digital actor conference on circular economy	Whole day online event; presentations in the mornings, group conversations in the afternoon	Those interested in becoming "a part of circular society in [the region]"; discussions with "representatives from the public sector, industry, and academia"	Afternoon group conversations (c. 90 min); analysis based on extensive notes only
14 Sep 2020	Swedish branch of a global environmental NGO	Launch of the WWF's Baltic Stewardship Initiative[e]	Online event; brief presentations and extensive moderation	Project concerns "actors in the whole food production chain in countries around the Baltic Sea"	All (40 min)
15 Oct 2020	Two Swedish CE networking and consultancy organisations	This is how political parties want to focus [on CE] after COVID-19	Online event; panel conversation, interspersed with brief presentations; this is the only of the analysed meetings in which politicians feature as speakers	Not specified; invitation hints at "an enormous potential for … a competitive industry in balance with climate and nature"	All (58 min)

[a] Translations from Swedish by the authors.
[b] Target audience according to the meeting invitation.
[c] We use the term panel conversation here, because this is the best equivalent to the Swedish word 'panelsamtal' used in the respective meetings. This can be understood as a reference to the consensus norm that will be described later.
[d] This title was on the invitation; on YouTube it is titled: "Circular bioeconomy — what, why, and how?"
[e] Despite the lack of CE in the title, circularity was a key concept in this meeting.

this starting point, our article is based in a long tradition of investigating social and conversational processes (Heritage, 1998; Schegloff, 1992): As such, we understand meetings as a specific time and place where ideas are discussed. We consider meetings as ritualised spaces (McComas et al., 2010) with implicit and explicit rules, including who is allowed to speak, when, and in response to whom (Larrue and Trognon, 1993). In these, conversations are managed and navigated by all participants through metacommunication, which is communication about communication through non-verbal signals as well as verbal engagement with the communication situation (Craig, 2016). Metacommunication may, for example, indicate when a speech act is concluded (e.g. "I stop here", by change of tone, by turning the microphone off), or how a speech act is to be interpreted or understood (e.g. "I agree with …", "My opinion is … because I am an expert in this topic"; for more examples, see the some metacommunication observed in our data in Appendix Table A3).

Present in all meetings, metacommunication establishes, displays, and applies locally defined and community-specific communication norms and coordination procedures that shape content and format of the meetings (Angouri, 2012). These communication norms support the creation of shared understanding, socially coherent behaviour, and ultimately collective action, in that they not only influence language use, but also shape what are considered to be valid inferences, interpretations, and perceptions of a situation (Ghosh et al., 2004; Weigand and de Moor, 2003). In this article, we identify communication norms that allow practitioners to manage and maintain the ambiguity of CE.

3. Methodology

A performativity perspective suggests that reality is constantly 'becoming' (Diedrich et al., 2013), which means it is enacted by people in specific contexts, and thereby attains its meaning. Following our discursive, grounded theory approach, we have thus analysed how CE is performed in public, business-oriented meetings, specifically aiming to understand how the CE intended to inform and inspire audiences through the explaining, illustrating, and discussing of the concept. As such, our research builds on a deep engagement of the social sciences with the CE concept (Corvellec et al., 2021b; Hobson et al., 2018; Kovacic et al., 2019). Concretely, we ask the following research question: *How is the ambiguity of CE performed in CE meetings?* To respond to this, we have conducted qualitative research—drawing on ethnographic approaches and participant observation (Gans, 1999; Jorgensen, 2015)—analysing our data through an inductive approach inspired by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Such a methodological approach enables an in-depth analysis of the norms, procedures, and formal and informal rules of these CE meetings, understanding their cultural micro-mechanisms, power relations and everyday practices (Gioia et al., 2013). This grounded approach provides for richer, in-depth understandings that are normally not feasible with a quantitative methodology (Murphy et al., 2017).

Accordingly, throughout 2020, we identified business-oriented meetings in Sweden that mentioned CE in their title or invitation text with the help of mailing lists, personal contacts, internet searches, and our membership of CE advocacy organisations. Most meetings were free and open to attend, but some were members-only meetings or paid-for workshops. Many meetings were focused on food systems, sometimes labelled as 'circular bioeconomy'. As a result of a targeted search on the video platform YouTube, we added one further meeting on the 'circular bioeconomy' from 2019 to our corpus.[1] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic

---

[1] We did not include a number of meetings and presentations which focused on CE but did not do so from an agri-food perspective.

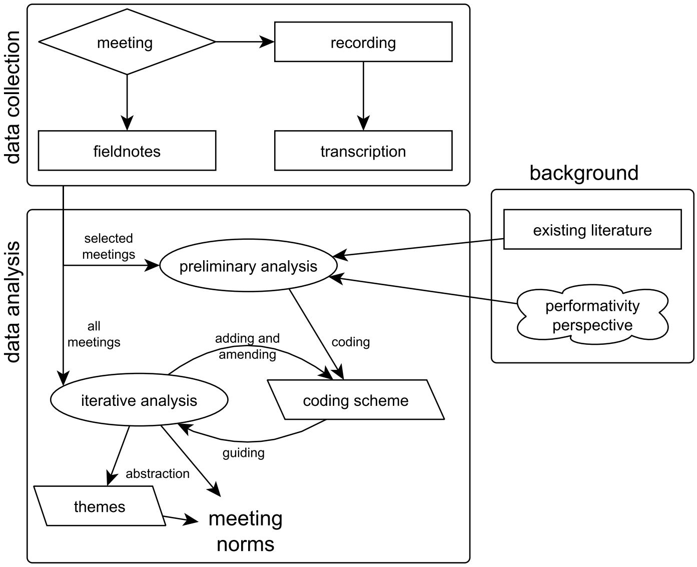


Fig. 1. Overview of the data analysis process.

starting in early 2020, many observed meetings happened online. Most meetings were attended by at least one team member, taking extensive research notes and sensitising ourselves to the CE community of practice.

Overall, we attended 18 meetings with a total duration of around 35.5 h (see Appendix Table A1). Although all attended meetings informed our understanding, we analysed 5.5 h of 7 meetings in more depth, for which we either obtained permission to record, or they were recorded and shared by the organisers, or we made extensive field notes. These analysed parts of meetings stood out because of their interactivity between panellists, speakers and participants. We assumed that interactivity would allow more insights into variations in interpretations of, and negotiations about, the nature and definition of CE. An overview of the meetings analysed is presented in Table 3.

As already mentioned, to analyse our data we employed a data exploration approach broadly inspired by grounded theory. While grounded theory is sometimes critiqued for not being able to uncover causality or establish generalisability (El Hussein et al., 2014), the strength of this approach is its aptness for exploring connections in the data to develop theoretical concepts (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The approach, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), has become a popular methodological approach in the social sciences (e.g. Gioia et al., 2013; Glaser et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2017) to formulate theory, particularly using qualitative data. While qualitative data tends to be highly contextual, the thorough process of coding and abstraction enables the researcher to develop higher level concepts that can be transferred to and applied in other contexts. Hence, proponents of grounded theory argue that the approach clearly shows how, grounded in the data, theory was developed and analytical insights derived.

In applying a grounded theory methodology, researchers develop codes inductively based on their data; as they code and review more data, codes are increasingly aggregated and abstracted to form new insights or ‘theory’ (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Specifically, we have performed our analysis as follows (see also Fig. 1): Based on our fieldnotes, methodological assumptions, existing literature, and in-depth re-watching[2] of three of the meeting excerpts, we developed codes and thereafter a coding scheme to analyse the meetings, whereby we associated relevant sequences with all matching codes. Using this, we analysed all chosen meeting excerpts in detail, adding and amending our coding as necessary (see Appendix Table A3 for the final codes with examples) whilst continuously discussing emerging insights. Taking advantage of the diverse skills of our research team—including variegated prior experience in analysing the CE, meetings, interaction, or communication more broadly—, we have conducted two stages of abstraction: firstly, each of us individually developed an outline of 3–7 themes in the data. Secondly, through discussion and constant interaction with the data, we abstracted these themes into four overall communication norms of CE performativity in meetings, which are discussed in the next section.

4. Results

A typical CE meeting involves an invitation which is disseminated online via mailing lists, newsletters, or social media, an associated website for further information, and a registration website where one is asked to provide name, organisation, and email address. Meetings are often framed as “inspiration meeting”, “breakfast mingle”, or “trend-spotting” and are said to serve purposes of “networking”, “becoming inspired”, “learning”, or “being informed.” The meetings are all arranged by organisations with a financial or ideological interest in corporate sustainability, and most meetings did not touch upon other concepts related to CE or corporate sustainability, such as industrial symbiosis, cradle-to-cradle, or blue economy. Providers of knowledge services, including but not limited to management consultants, are prominent invited speakers. The meetings we observed are largely industry-focused—many specifically focused on the food industry—with meeting invitations seeming to appeal to businesses (especially small-

---

[2] Even though we made transcripts for the meetings, throughout the analysis leading to this article, we stuck as close to the audiovisual recording as possible.

and medium-sized enterprises) as well as public authorities, and universities. The meetings are commonly facilitated by one or two moderators acting impartially; however, in some meetings they[3] may appear self-interested or would consider themselves an expert on the topic. Towards the end of the meeting, the moderator usually summarises the meeting. At the end, participants are occasionally asked to join other meetings, a network, a newsletter, or a Facebook group. Official follow-up communication, if any, disseminated links to the recordings or flag up future events. We will now turn to four specific communication norms of CE performativity that we repeatedly identified in the meetings we observed and participated in.

4.1. The circularity norm

Many meetings start by explaining and elaborating the CE concept. Even though audiences may have some subject knowledge, CE is often presented as a unique and transformative idea. This is often done through the variegated use of the terms "circular" and to a lesser extent "circularity" as well as through the use of CE examples. Some of the most peculiar or metaphorical uses of the idea of circularity, we found in an ice-breaker by a moderator professing to have got "a circular haircut" or in a participant's assertion that circularity could be "tied" like a knot. While certainly an exception, the ubiquitous, sometimes playful and occasionally Kafkaesque engagement with circularity was deconstructed by one participant acknowledging that "one speaks circularity" in these meetings, implying that meeting and participants congregate around this word, regardless of its meaning. Despite the breadth of ideas, we could not observe targeted attempts to bring clarity to the variegated use of "circular" and "circularity."

In these meetings, "linearity" is always quickly set up as the main enemy. The idea of "linearity" denotes a state of organising the economy that is seen as outdated, but still dominant outside the meeting space. As one panellist noted:

> "then [in the industrialisation] cheap food was needed, and then similarly [they] looked at how they could effectivise food production in linear flows, one views everything as linear, that is why we are where we are … and this is something we have to reckon with."

Setting up "circularity" as the successor to "linearity" establishes a dichotomy of old and wrong vs. new and right—or to say it in the words of one panellist: "in fact, CE is about doing good", opposing the destruction attributed to the linear economy. Supported by a sense of urgency and hope (both discussed below), references to systems thinking, actor collaboration, and the responsibility of businesses to be proactive, meeting participants are forged into an identity construction that opposes 'us' (circular) and 'them' (linear).

"Circularity" is also used to denote a vision that can be created, reached and worked towards, but mostly in an ideal-type, future-scenario way. The concept acts as a target marker that is left undiscussed, and yet often appears to imply by default 'sustainability' and a solution to the urgent social and environmental problems faced by the world. Circularity appears not simply as a tweaked version of the current economy with more circular flows but, instead, signals a new and completely rethought economic and social system.

Another use of "circularity" enables speakers to rhetorically measure, compare, or qualify progress. Participants suggest that something can become and should be "more and more circular"; and more than one moderator wondered: "How circular is Sweden today?" Understanding circularity on a scale may blur the aforementioned dichotomy between linearity and circularity. And yet, a scale makes plausible what has been called "encompassing" or "total" circularity by meeting participants, suggesting there are different degrees of circularity. Furthermore, this scale acknowledges the progress actors have made on their journey towards the ideal state of circularity. Circularity-as-process thus makes it easy to identify with the 'we-circular' identity, even for those who are still more on the "linear" side. In one meeting we attended but not analysed, "linear companies" were allowed to join with the explicit hope that they might become more circular.

Reflecting on the variegated uses of "circular" and "circularity", we can say that these terms act as 'floating signifiers' because they denote different and sometimes incoherent ideas. Yet, they are productive because they are used to bringing different understandings, interpretations, and ideas together, forging shared identities. That is, "circularity" is performed as sufficiently ambiguous, allowing all participants to join the journey, also because there is an implicit assumption that circularity will solve current, urgent problems. Hence, circularity is a future, ideal state, but also something that is situated in the meetings. Talking about circularity in these different registers is thus an identity-forging process.

We suggest that in the meetings the multiple understandings of circularity are integrated through "good examples" for CE, which are frequently used to illustrate the concept (see Appendix Table A2 for a few illustrations). While the 'butterfly model', made popular by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, is reproduced and discussed as a framework for circularity-as-state, narrated examples are normally used to acknowledge that things are not quite perfect yet, thus representing circularity-as-process. Thus, in the observed meetings CE is not understood as a monolithic concept, but rather as something that can be flexibly interpreted, exemplified, and illustrated on an unclear scale towards an undefined vision of "total circularity." Any contribution is accepted as circular and thus potentially meaningful, and all participants are part of a visionary community striving towards circularity, even though they may disagree on the execution and pathways there. An overall hopeful and collaborative atmosphere renders all contributions productive in that they offer an illustration of what circularity might be, whilst simultaneously granting the speaker the status of an active and creative follower of CE and being a source of inspiration for other participants. The next section will deal with this hope norm.

4.2. The hope norm

Throughout the meetings, participants variously express attitudes of optimism about the present and hope for the future. Such expressions are central to not only the interpretation, negotiation, and shared meaning-making of CE. We argue that this manifests in a hope norm: it sets a standard for how people ought to act, talk, respond, and reflect in the meetings. Just like with norms in general, this is never explicitly expressed or pronounced by anyone in the meetings, but still aligned with, with few exceptions.

A hope norm is invoked, for example, when collaboration is argued to be crucial in achieving the CE. Collaboration is frequently argued to be essential for the progress of businesses, particularly those that are struggling due to legislations and standards that are "lagging behind", and consequently "prevents circular business models from being implemented." Through phrases such as "doing things together", "joining arms", and "helping each other out", actors are suggested to be able to overcome obstacles, creating a sense of community and solidarity. One of the observed meetings was closed by the moderator saying: "so, in conclusion, we will do this *together*." Yet, this collaborating community also remains unspecified. Participants argue that "we must collaborate for real", "not just talk", "not create just another project", and that collaboration should result in something that is beneficial for all parties. Furthermore, collaboration should be authentic, building on mutual trust, talking, and also listening and mutual understanding. The hope norm thus creates expectations of change for the better, not only for economy and environment but also the actual workings of businesses.

---

[3] Since gender performativity was not part of our analysis, we use the gender-neutral pronouns they/them/their to refer to any singular person in addition to the use of these as plural pronouns.

The aforementioned “good examples” of CE initiatives also contribute to the construction of the hope norm. One example of this is a “circular project” as described in a brief talk, where fish is produced using insects that are reared on food waste. After the stages of production are described in detail, it is emphasised that in comparison to normally-fed fish, expert chefs gave it “a tremendously good taste evaluation, there was more wild-fish-taste and better texture in the insect-fish.” The moderator concludes that the project is “undeniably exciting to follow”—a metacommunicative phrase that we observed several times in our corpus of meetings—, and that the presenter will come back with more “exciting projects.” This affirmation implies that positive outcomes can be expected and there is reason to be hopeful about the potential of this (and other) circular projects.

In addition to being marked as exciting, “good examples” are also referred to as sources of inspiration that spur others into action. Yet, they present a wide variety of circularity approaches, and their feasibility and potential for inspiration is rather assumed. Here, CE appears as if it could be achieved in multiple and even contrasting ways; for example, while one panellist mentions technical solutions, such as to “create food out of thin air”, another panellist in a different meeting emphasises the need “to go back to basics”, applying the same thinking as in “the old peasant society.” Both, the absence of explicit counterexamples and the affirmation of nearly all mentioned examples by the moderator or other meeting participants, support the idea of the hope norm which renders circularity attainable, possible for everyone to achieve. The underlying critical question whether all these separate solutions are enough to reach sustainability is however not raised.

The hope norm can also be observed in claims or promises about the issues that CE is said to be able to address. These issues include several global and local issues simultaneously, such as environmental sustainability, waste management and the struggle of smaller agricultural businesses to be profitable. One moderator, for example, describes circular food production as a “triple-win”, an upgrade of the cultural expression of a win-win situation. Here, the three “wins” are suggested to be increased food production, “great” benefits for the environment, and the opportunity to make profit from waste. This list is followed by a question to the panel: “why haven’t we always done this [circular food production]?” The following silence is then met with lauding the ideas as this “seems to be so great”, and an attempted response by a panellist is interrupted by the moderator with a rhetorical question “why doesn’t everyone do this?” Hence, CE is construed as a hopeful solution to multiple crises, which renders CE as a desirable, obvious, and probably inevitable solution.

Furthering the performed ability of CE meetings to draw hope from dire situations, the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused many meetings to be held online, is described as devastating in many ways, yet several examples of positive changes are provided, including an improvement in air quality, reduction of climate impact, and “new lifestyles at the individual level.” Especially stockpiling and worries of supply chain disruptions in the beginning of the pandemic in spring 2020 lead “insights to sink in for us all” that without food we cannot survive, thus strengthening the case for more resilient, local or national food systems. The strong expectation of a positive post-pandemic recovery, the ability to “rearrange society very quickly” in the face of existential threats, also contributes to the construction of a hope norm. In line with this, one meeting was titled “this is how political parties want to implement [the CE] after COVID-19”, suggesting that the question is not whether CE is a meaningful solution but how to get there. This focus on consensus will be elaborated next.

4.3. *The consensus norm*

CE meeting participants tend to agree with each other, with few exceptions. This specifically concerns the norm of being hopeful, as described in the previous section, but can also be seen in the lack of challenges towards CE and its positive framing. This is done by all types of participants: moderators, speakers, and people participating in discussions or commenting on what has been said. Therefore, we argue that a norm of consensus is enacted.

As part of this norm, participants are inclusive when relating to CE. The invitations often express that the meeting is open for everyone to join and aims for participants to “be inspired” by whatever they will encounter in the meeting. In that way, there is a missionary ambition pronounced to get more people on board. Whether the participants share the exact same idea of what CE means is not made clear, but they nevertheless co-construct the standpoint that CE is something desirable without emphasising potentially problematic differences. All understandings, even potentially conflicting ones, appear to be actively embraced and thus add to a rich and variegated picture of what CE means, for example, when in one meeting the panellists are asked to describe what CE “means to you.” This firstly acknowledges that there can be several ways of understanding CE without making this a problem, and secondly renders viewpoints subjective and thus preemptively disarms challenges from other participants. In this way, CE is purposefully left to be a ‘floating signifier’, with audiences that feel included in their own understandings of CE.

We find that metacommunication is fundamental for creating the consensus norm. Here, the moderator often acknowledges what has been said by indicating the end of the contribution by thanking the contributor, and addressing and assessing the contribution, which is usually done by providing a positive evaluation or agreement to it (see also the previous section). These usually consist of a short “thank you”, or an affirmative “interesting” or “exciting.” A rather long example from a moderator consisted of four such statements: “Thanks. Very good presentation, I think. To me it was crystal clear. Fantastic.” Such positive assessments function as a transition between what has been and the next activity or speaker. Especially in open or panel conversations, speakers acknowledge the previous speaker by agreement, signalling that they align with the statement, but without expanding or concretising what they agree with. Indeed, as mentioned before, the CE examples provided by different speakers often contradict each other. Nevertheless, agreement with other speakers is still professed. The expression “I agree” thus seems to fill a more general metacommunicative function in showing that what is said or will be said is connected to what has previously been said. We interpret this as another example of how the participants align with the consensus norm: being positive, showing appreciation, and emphasising that everyone is on the same page to such an extent that it overshadows potentially relevant differences.

One noteworthy exception can be found in a debate where a panellist challenges whether CE really differs so much from the closed-loop thinking of the late 20th century (swedish: *kretslopp*, see quote below), expressing pessimism about how previous and current efforts are able to address the aforementioned global problems. The panellist here violates the norm of not questioning CE. By surrounding their contribution with assertions of being “the cranky” one, the panellist acknowledges they are doing something unappreciated in this situation, as they break with the consensus norm:

> “I’ll probably be a little cranky here today and sit here and be such an old man who has already seen everything, and I often wonder […] how many of you remember how revolutionary the kretslopp delegation became in your lives and for Swedish concerns […] so when politicians get tired of an old concept like waste then they create a new concept and then think “shit, this feels fresh and energising” […] So there is reason to be a little bit cranky and sad in the face of all delegations.”

The panellist then goes on to say that “you can shut off my mic.” In doing so, the dominance of the consensus norm—and also the hope norm—are acknowledged as the way in which panellists are supposed to communicate. By making the transgression and potential sanctions explicit, the panellist emphasises that they are aware of these norms as implicit yet overarching meeting rules. Slightly later, another panellist openly expresses their disagreement to this view, reiterating that CE is indeed a new concept. We believe that this unusual disagreement is made with the purpose of justifying CE and thus re-establishing the positive attitude to it. So, the consensus norm is temporarily suspended in order to reassert that CE is something positive:

> “I want to say this with circular economy and kretslopp, some say that this has existed for 30 years, I don’t really agree with the analogy there and […] the difference between circular economy and kretslopp thinking is that one has taken in the economic aspect, this is after all called circular economy and there is a tendency to forget this.”

This statement serves to repair the hope and consensus norms, which have been temporarily violated by one of the participants. The focus on the economy and profitability is what the next section is concerned with.

4.4. The business norm

Despite the consensus norm discussed above, it was self-evident in the meetings that many businesspeople were happy that, finally, a sustainability management approach emerged with business at its centre, as the last-quoted panellist emphasises. As most observed meetings focus on businesspeople, their self-conceptions and expectations shape another norm of these meetings, which was clearly focused on identifying businesses as both responsible for solving societal problems and creating profitability (Berglund and Werr, 2000). Together, responsibility and profitability act as the main norm and boundaries, within which meeting participants can and do voice their thoughts.

Recognising the multiple, complex and accelerating crises the world is facing, in the meetings a collective duty for businesses is identified. In order to achieve this, external stakeholders, such as universities, are drawn upon to legitimate an argument or a speaker’s attendance. For example, Wageningen University and Research is “one of the world’s best agricultural universities, if not the best, and they have several ongoing projects about circular food production.” Aligning with this understanding of collective duty, many participants introduce themselves with their organisational affiliation and what they are “already doing” about CE. Conversely, consumers are—if mentioned at all—reduced to trends, numbers, and passive actors that need to be convinced of something, even though one researcher-panellist questions “how much information can really create change for consumption.” Only in the politicians’ debate are actors outside or beyond the economy seriously considered to be able to contribute to solutions. In other debates, laws or municipalities are often called for to enable and support specific aspects of a CE, specifically by deregulating or re-regulating, as well as by providing funding and “match making” for businesses. There is a rhetoric limitation of agency for public and civil society actors, which follows and affirms longer-term developments in Swedish sustainability approaches, which have shifted from a government-led closed-loop economy (swedish: *kretsloppsekonomi*) in the late 20th century towards the business-led CE more recently (Johansson and Henriksson, 2020). Meeting participants thus render their own and other businesses as those responsible for tackling these issues, suggesting a normative responsibility for action in which business conduct becomes an opportunity for society, providing a fertile space for (unchallenged) calls for de- and re-regulation.

Recognising this normative responsibility is, however, not sufficient for action. We observed a normative expectation of CE’s profitability, whose fulfilment is assumed to be a precondition to make businesses act. This profitability is often conceptualised as improved resource efficiency which “makes more from less”, leading to double, “triple” or “multiple wins”—not only to businesses but also to environment and society (see above), thereby suggesting that sustainability will be automatically achieved through CE. Emphasising this norm, some meeting participants voice their frustration that their efforts for building a circular business have not been acknowledged by financial gains. For example, a participant bemoans that the CE activities they have engaged in over the last 10 years are still not profitable.

Table 4
Summary of the identified norms and their observed implications for the meeting.

Norm	Brief description	Implications on the meeting
circularity norm	Variegated use of the words “circular” and “circularity”, enacted as ‘floating signifiers’. They are flexibly interpreted; contrasted against “linear” and “linearity” but not specified further.	● any initiative can be considered circular and as adhering to CE principles ● definitions of CE are not touched upon, limiting the possibility of (sharp) boundaries between circularity and linearity ● creation of an inclusive CE community is foregrounded as definitions, implementation, and pathways are not discussed
hope norm	Expressions of optimism about the present and hope for the future. They shift focus from the negative to the positive.	● creates a preference for expressions of hope ● positivity and hope expressed at these meetings fosters a sense of community and of shared identity among the participants ● the norm makes it difficult to point towards and actively solve uncertainties and challenges, with the implication of a lack of discussions of the sufficiency of proposed solutions
consensus norm	An aim for consensus and inclusiveness through the avoidance of disagreement and of potentially difficult topics, among others limiting critical discussion about CE itself.	● normalises expressions of agreement and the avoidance of disagreement ● enables motivating action without clearly describing what such action entails ● violating the norm requires explanations and excuses as to why the norm is being violated to avoid sanctions ● limits negotiation and the exploration of disagreement, tensions, uncertainties and challenges concerning the CE
business norm	Businesses and business opportunities as the central focus of the meetings. Profitability is assumed to be a precondition for businesses to transition to a CE.	● creates an assumption that participants have the same aim and objective of profitability ● participants assign themselves responsibility for a societal transition to a CE ● limits serious contributions of non-business actors, e.g. consumers as trends not as active participants

And yet, while there is agreement on why CE should be implemented and what it should deliver, it is less clear how exactly CE is to be implemented. The “good examples” are a common way to talk about this within narratives, but more generalised claims about what is missing or needed for a transition to a CE are absent. For example, one moderator noted that “we speak quite a lot about technology in all areas, [but] we hardly speak about this in this transformation [to CE].” Nonetheless, technological development appears to serve particular speakers’ business interests or their futuristic fantasies. For example, in response to the above remark, a panellist mentions as an “immensely exciting” example the possibility to use fungi as biomass or to “create food out of thin air.”

However, innovation and progress are also understood to be about how things are done and not what is done, which often refer to assumptions of increased coordination and collaboration among diverse actors (as discussed above), as well as by invoking a systems perspective. While remaining vague, an invocation of either of these appears to mark speakers’ understanding of themselves as a potential collaborator with deep insight into the problem. This is also sometimes accompanied by a strong normative call that “something needs to be done differently”,

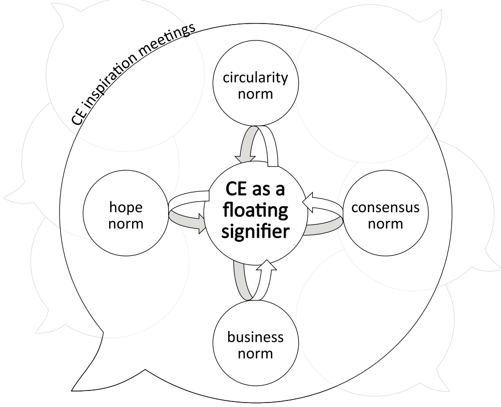


Fig. 2. In CE inspiration meetings, the concept CE appears as a floating signifier interacting with four communication norms. These communication norms enable and are enabled by the ambiguity of the CE discourse.

which reinforces the aforementioned identity-forming opposition to the linear economy in favour of more circularity.

5. Discussion

In this research, we have asked our corpus how the ambiguity of CE is performed in CE meetings. To this end, we identified four communication norms (summarised in Table 4) that prescribe (a) variegate understandings of "circularity"; (b) a preference for hopeful and optimistic expressions; (c) consensus and inclusiveness; and (d) an emphasis on both business responsibility and profitability within a CE. While they are usually not made explicit by meeting participants, they shape interactions as whatever is brought into CE inspiration meetings, such as initiative, knowledge, suggestions, themes, examples, or interests, tends to adhere to these norms and is understood to do so. This shapes what a CE meeting and in turn CE is understood to be. We contend that within CE meetings, these four communication norms simultaneously enable and are enabled by the ambiguity of CE[4] as illustrated in Fig. 2.

The identified communication norms allow conducting the CE meetings in a way that virtually no identity or contribution is challenged or disregarded because it is outside the scope of the meeting or the CE. Accordingly, features of meetings that may be expected from their informational, inspirational, or networking-oriented framing and in light of the asserted ambiguity are not necessarily achieved: there is a stunning lack of clarifications of the terminology, guidelines on how to implement CE, and attempts to increase the general action capacity and motivation of relevant actors. Instead, the observed meetings—just like any other meeting (Angouri, 2012)—primarily perform themselves: What is done and considered by participants in these meetings is mainly motivated by the goal to successfully perform the meeting and to follow the norms and procedures which indicate a successful meeting. Here, 'success' is mainly defined by the identified communication norms: forming an inclusive group of meeting participants working towards circularity, giving participants enthusiasm to continue their exploration, not alienating anyone through disagreement or open conflict, and highlighting business responsibility and profitability.

Interaction, meeting culture, and the identified communication norms establish and draw on a shared interpretative repertoire (cf. Charlebois, 2015), constituting that CE is to be understood as a collective project of all interested businesses. Within this context, the identified communication norms reduce resistance in the meeting procedure, as they avoid discussion of disagreement and misunderstanding—including what CE is or is not—, and thus shape, direct, and constrain participation towards achieving the meeting outcomes: a successful performance of the meeting. The thereby enabled participation makes sure that everyone has been able to contribute or to receive something aligned with the promises of the meeting.

In the concrete contexts of the meetings, the identified communication norms thus mirror and reproduce and what others have suggested about CE: the ambiguity makes it agreeable (Valenzuela and Böhm, 2017), conflict-free (Niskanen et al., 2020), and enables popularisation (Borrello et al., 2020). Concretely, the observed meetings offer a collective identity (McComas et al., 2010) as they enable all participants to consider themselves as part of a bigger 'movement'—even if they have only just started or are merely curious about engaging more with CE. Enabled, managed, and maintained by metacommunication by the moderators, the positivity and hope expressed at these meetings creates a sense of shared identity, which is also enabled by the 'we-circular' vs. 'them-linear' dichotomy. Building on our observation, this CE 'movement' is trusting and inclusive: trust is, for example, expressed by the rather generous atmosphere of sharing examples, attitudes and approaches by invited speakers, panellists, and participants. This means, that there are few, if any, signs of competition or business secrets that stand in the way of the sharing economy performed in the meetings. And the emphasis of the "circularity" of Sweden—and not, for example, its economy or businesses—suggests a collective and inclusive target, which fuels an understanding that CE can be achieved better when more businesses align with it.

Such sharing and, to some extent, egalitarian spirit is only occasionally interrupted when consultancy services are offered in response to participants pitching business ideas. These offers signal, or possibly remind, participants that there still are key competences potentially needed to push for CE, which are not for free. The understanding that consultants are key elements of many observed meetings—either as organisers or as panellists—makes CE sometimes appear like a 'management fashion', or like a 'knowledge product' to be promoted, sold, and made enticing by drawing on traditional ideas of organisational management, such as resource efficiency (see e.g. Fineman, 2001; Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005). However, moderators and facilitators, with their responsibility of moving the discussion along (Earnshaw, 2017) appear to make sure that this rather instrumental aspect does not take over the general meeting procedure, not allowing to interrupt the wider meeting culture that is built on sharing, trust, hope, and consensus.

Our analysis, hence, strongly suggests that expressions of shared motivation and identity deriving from successful meeting participation are central to the performance of CE meetings. Within these meetings, it becomes difficult to express disagreement without violating the hope and consensus norms. Instead, the inconsistent and sometimes playful uses of "circular" and "circularity" are creating, seemingly deliberately, a 'floating signifier' (Niskanen et al., 2020). Definitional arguments, sharp boundaries between circularity and linearity, or the questioning of the use and purpose of CE would constrain the fluidity of CE as a 'floating signifier'.

The CE literature appears to share similar observations to ours in variegated contexts: CE policy discourse was shown to exhibit such hopeful, collaborative, and consensus-oriented features (Kovacic et al., 2019). Equally, newspaper discourse about CE appears to be inclusive and conflict-avoiding (Niskanen et al., 2020). These are indications leading us to propose that the identified communication norms may be applicable beyond the context of the collected empirical material. Instead, it is plausible that these communication norms are symptomatic for CE discourse, and merely re-enact this 'floating signifier' in the

---

[4] Establishing causality is not possible within a performativity perspective. The concepts thus remain in a dialectic relationship where ambiguity and communication norms are mutually constituted by each other.

Table 5
Limitations of meetings imposed by the identified communication norms, and some ideas for experimentation by meeting organisers based on our observations of the meetings.

Norm	Limits the meeting by …	Ideas for experimentation by meeting organisers and moderators
circularity norm	… hiding debates about wider economic and social desirability of proposed developments and visions.	● highlighting the difference between the ideal state of a circular economy and isolated circular material flows or businesses within the existing economy ● expanding business responsibility towards holistic engagement with environmental and social systems
hope norm	… making it difficult to point towards and actively solve uncertainties and challenges, which also leads to misapprehension of the actual sufficiency of proposed solutions.	● questioning the extent to which proposed solutions are sufficient for system change ● providing guidance on how to collaborate meaningfully towards a CE, including a need to actively agree on procedures
consensus norm	… denying the ability to negotiation, correction, disagreement, and conflict about aspects of any of the other communication norms.	● inviting speakers from organisations underrepresented in these meetings, such as public authorities and NGOs ● emphasise that there is disagreement within the community or across different actors, and that this may also be mirrored in the meeting
business norm	… prohibiting serious contributions of non-business actors.	● inviting speakers and contributions from non-business actors ● questioning the suitability of self-regulation and non-binding targets

context of the observed meetings.

Reducing the ambiguity of the CE concept—as has been called for extensively (e.g. Kirchherr et al., 2017)—would require precision and detail which emphasises differences between interpretations. This would demand a communicative capacity to acknowledge, deal with, and contain disagreement and doubts. We have not seen this capacity being expressed in the observed meetings. Instead, keeping CE vague and ‘floating’ serves the purpose of allowing broad perspectives and backgrounds to participate in the CE discourse. While it may be argued that such integrating capacity now hampers the ability of professionals and scholars to make use of the full potential of CE (Borrello et al., 2020; Kirchherr et al., 2017; Reike et al., 2018), in the observed meetings the otherwise bemoaned ambiguity is essential to grow the constituency of CE. From this perspective, the ambiguity of CE is not only managed and maintained through meetings by the identified communication norms, but it is also productive.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we analysed the ambiguity of the CE concept in practice by studying CE meetings and seminars in Sweden that largely targeted businesspeople. We found that these meetings adhere to existing business norms of recognising potential for action and profitability, and expressing hope that CE is *the* solution to society’s sustainability challenges. The meetings we observed were driven by consensus and avoidance of difficult topics. Equally, “circularity” is expressed as a future state and vision of an economy to come, creating a shared identity amongst meeting participants and motivating action, without clearly outlining what such action would look like. This emphasis on positive messages, consensus and hope masks a clear ambiguity in terms of what CE actually entails and what precise pathways are needed to implement it.

Our findings provide a counterargument to existing academic literature, which often finds it problematic that CE is such a variegated concept (Geisendorf and Pietrulla, 2018; Homrich et al., 2018; Kirchherr et al., 2017). Instead, our findings suggest that within the meetings we observed, the ambiguity around the CE concept was productive and performative. By keeping things fairly vague, but, at the same time, highlighting its hopeful nature, feasibility, desirability and profitability, the CE concept enabled the establishment of a shared vision of an economy to come, and offered a shared identity for those working towards this vision. CE was hence presented and performed as a very diverse and inclusive concept, while clearly positioning it as a positive, ‘business friendly’ approach that can help solve the grand challenges we face on this planet. This has led us to conceptualising the definitional ambiguity of the CE as a ‘floating signifier’. This contributes to CE scholarship by showing that the concept’s ambiguity is performative and constitutive. Since results appear mirrored in other CE contexts, we proposed that ambiguity is part of CE discourse. Nevertheless, while within the observed meetings this appeared desirable, we can not reject claims that for established CE scholars or professionals less ambiguity may be even more productive (Borrello et al., 2020).

While we have shown that ambiguity is productive in the context studied, we do not intend to answer the question whether unifying definitions, embrace and maintain ambiguity, or emphasise disagreement is to be preferred if the goal is to create a better society with less negative environmental impact. This is a normative question. What we can, however, conclude is that the way CE meetings are run, who is allowed to speak, and what debates are given room really matters, as all these have implications on how CE is understood. CE meeting organisers and participants should be conscious about these dynamics.

Accordingly, the insights from this research can be usefully adapted for CE meetings: Based on our observations relating to the identified communication norms, in Table 5 we outline ideas for experimentation, especially for meeting organisers and moderators but also for other interested CE practitioners and scholars who wish to address ambiguity. We hope that these ideas may encourage a critical engagement with the communication norms and reflections about the limitations they impose on meetings and on CE—regardless of what perspective on CE is taken. For example, in the meetings we found entirely missing questions about the overall desirability of a business-led change towards CE, and despite plentiful talk about collaboration we could not observe concrete guidelines for implementation. Providing responses to either of these questions necessitates open, reflexive, and sometimes uncomfortable debates as well as disagreements about what society and economy we want to live in, and how we can get there.

Apart from these practical implications, our analysis raises a number of further academic questions. We suggest, for example, that our research could be replicated in different cultural, social, economic and technological contexts, providing opportunities for comparison, which includes differences between online and offline meetings, between Sweden and another country, or between CE in the agri-food industry and other economic sectors. Equally, going beyond our focus on meetings, one could explore how other CE practices are performed. The role of management consultants and other CE experts, including activists, could be analysed in more detail. A focus on boundary work could be of interest, given that CE is seldom performed within one firm or institution alone. More in-depth explorations of how metacommunication construes identities and consensus within the CE context would also be valuable. Lastly, we suggest further exploration of the hope and the consensus norm, as well as the need to better understand what the practical discourses of “circular” and “circularity” enable and conceal.

CRediT statement

All Authors: Methodology, Writing – Original Draft. In addition: Malte Rödl: Conceptualisation, Formal Analysis, Data Curation, Writing

– Review & Editing; Therese Åhlvik: Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation; Hanna Bergeå: Conceptualisation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition; Lars Hallgren: Conceptualisation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Funding Acquisition; Steffen Böhm: Conceptualisation, Writing – Review & Editing, Funding Acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of many event organisers who kindly allowed us to record their meetings. We are grateful for the financial support by FORMAS, Swedish Research Council for Sustainable Development, grant number 2018–01874, and by SLU Future Food. We also wish to thank the participants of the Uppsala STS Seminarium for feedback on an earlier draft of this paper, and the three anonymous reviewers whose comments helped us sharpen our argument.

Appendix

Table A.1
Overview of the meetings observed during our fieldwork including those that were part of the fieldwork.

Date	Duration	Organiser	Title	Meeting Type and Availability
21 Mar 2019	01:02:22	a science and media company focusing on the food of the future	Circular food production — utopia or future?	in-person; youtube: FmnQ4HxILDg
6 Mar 2020	c. 1.5h	publicly funded seminar series organised by a coalition of a agrifood consultancies, regional innovation hub, and the national federation of farmers	Breakfast Seminar: Possibilities and barriers for a circular bioeconomy	in-person; field notes
3 Apr 2020	02:04:45		To understand and make business in a circular bioeconomy	online; youtube: Um0Qgcmc3HA
2 Jun 2020	c. 2h		Breakfast Seminar: Possibilities and barriers for a circular bioeconomy (same title as the meeting on 6 March)	online; field notes
10 Jun 2020	01:56:19		How can we create business models that work in a circular bioeconomy?	online; youtube: zlWV227JD40
18 Sep 2020	c. 1.3h		Breakfast Seminar: Circular Bioeconomy – Bio-active Substances	online; field notes
2 Oct 2020	02:38:00		Innovation in a circular bioeconomy — inspiring examples	online; youtube: otA0THzxVxw
27 Nov 2020	c. 1.5h		Breakfast Seminar: Profitability and efficiency	online; field notes
14 Sep 2020	00:40:23	Swedish branch of a global environmental NGO	Launch of the WWF's Baltic Stewardship Initiative	online; recorded by the organiser, not public
15 Oct 2020	00:57:57	two Swedish CE networking and consultancy organisations	Parties in parliament are going to set on circular economy this way after covid-19	online; youtube:HUmkeCBJCEw
10 Jun 2020	04:31:51	regional energy agency	Digital actor conference on circular economy	online; field notes
26 Feb 2020	02:12:25	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (A, not the same as the one called B below)	Member's Forum Live 2020 Malmö	in-person; recorded with permission
4 Mar 2020	02:15:33		Member's Forum Live 2020 Stockholm	in-person; recorded with permission
5 Mar 2020	c. 2h		Member's Forum Live 2020 Västerås	in-person; notes
1 Apr 2020	02:08:22		Member's Forum Live 2020	online; recorded with permission
16 Sep 2020	04:06:03		Academy and Training: Circular Business Model Canvas	online; recorded with permission
3 Jun 2020	c. 1.5h	a circular economy networking organisation and consultancy (B, not the same as the one called A above)	Member's Meeting on Circular Design	online; field notes
11 Dec 2020	00:36:56		How can we accelerate the transition to the CE?	online; youtube: 1zA_w5cjTMQ

Table A.2
An illustrative selection of some "good examples" mentioned in the observed meetings.

Speaker	Situation/Context	What is the example?
invited presenter; participant	A virtual guided tour of an example, which is picked up by a participant in a plenary discussion.	'ReTuna' is Eskiltuna municipality's recycling- and upcycling-only shopping mall; it is picked up again with a participant noticing that what has been successful here is that a business model was connected with the extension of product life spans, and was concluded with "but this is just one example."
presenter affiliated with the organiser	A brief presentation introducing a few "circular projects"; commented on by the moderator as "undeniably exciting to follow" and that the presenter will return with more "exciting projects"	A research-supported project where fish is fed with insects; the insects are reared using vegetable and bread waste; the production stages are described in detail, and it is emphasised that in a taste test trial the insect-fed fish was evaluated more positively than conventionally farmed fish by an expert panel.
panellist	In a panel conversation on CBE, the moderator notes that "we speak quite a lot about technology in all areas, [but] we hardly speak about this in this transformation [to CE]"; the example is concluded by the moderator with an "Interesting!"	A Swedish company working with mycoprotein (protein from fungal fermentation) which can use "waste flows", and through mutation of the fungi can the applied biomass be increased significantly; this is concluded with "This is *one* such an example." The panellist then mentions "another [example]", a Finnish company that "imagines that they could create food out of the thin air; but with solar

(*continued on next page*)

Table A.2 (*continued*)

Speaker	Situation/Context	What is the example?
		energy" which so far exists only on a lab-scale. The speaker concludes that "this is mind boggling; new technology; but immensely exciting" whereas they do "not believe artificial intelligence and similar is important."
panellist	The moderator asks a lengthy and difficult to comprehend question about innovation and its implementation for a CBE with the illustrative metaphor of letting "a thousand flowers bloom." Both responding panellists call this a difficult question. Their answers highlight the role of methods of implementation and coordination, including dialogue, but there is no clear recipe for success.	The example concerns the role of each speaker's own experiences of identifying useful methods and procedures to make implementation of and collaboration within CE projects successful. The first responding panellist suggests to enter "close dialogue", to "lift those residual flows", and to identify opportunities for using those. The answer remains quite vague and is exclusively based on the respondent's own business activity: "I just want to say spontaneously, that we have a perhaps not exact answer to the question of how we do it. It is a very complex and quite difficult topic. This is something we have identified, but what I think is the most important thing to solve, is to work together on that issue. If you just look at our entire supplier side, for example, to have a close dialogue with them and also to actually lift up these residual flows and see opportunities within them. What products can this lead to? How do we take care of this so that it is not just thrown away, and so on, and to constantly have a close dialogue and together simply create methods to start somewhere too, I think. This is a bit of a broad answer perhaps. But we must work together on that issue, it really is about knowledge as well." Shortly thereafter, another panellist takes this forward by illustrating a similar response, again based on an example from their own business activity: "We do not know what—it is difficult to say, what is the solution, I would say. We have a project now that is based on one of our companies that I have worked with … I do not think we will find the solution but I think we will find a solution maybe that we can pilot test and work on. Therefore, I think it's about finding a method to let a thousand flowers bloom. That's what it's about, I would say."
participant; panellist	In the chat function of the video conferencing software, a participant mentions their own business activity with industrial hemp production, which is then taken up by a panellist in the conversation.	The participant writes in the chat: "Industrial hemp contains 30–50 [percent] plant-based protein, and the cold-pressed hemp seed oil contains omega 3, omega 6, omega 9. The peeled seeds also contain fiber, protein, iron, zinc etc …. I'm very curious about [this panellist]'s view of industrial hemp as a "stakeholder" in what they work with?" A few minutes later the panellist remarks: "I want to make an addition to what [the participant] has put in the chat about industrial hemp. And this is something that I think is an incredibly interesting product that can give us fibre, that can give us protein, that can give us a lot of products for different areas, both in food and industry. I think it is a super unused product that we can produce in Sweden, that can replace a lot of cotton fabrics fantastically. That I wanted to take the opportunity and say."

Table A.3
Overview of the codes and illustrative examples. Most sequences including those listed as examples were identified to belong to several codes.

Code	Brief Summary	Examples with descriptions and/or quotes
agreement	Covers sequences where speakers express that firstly, they agree with another specific or previous speaker, a specific statement, or a more general idea; secondly, that they hope, believe, or assume that other participants or a general but unidentified group agree with what the speaker has said; or thirdly they make a general statement on the importance of agreeing.	● A moderator thanks a speaker through agreement, such as "Very good, thanks!" or "Agreed, super important really." ● A participant reports back from their group conversation: "But it's probably a bit of the same thing that we've all concluded here." ● A moderator concludes a participant's statement: "Great, thank you. So to find common denominators is what we take out of this." ● A panellist agreeing with a previous one: "No, so I agree with that there is a big problem." ● A moderator moves the discussion along by asking for agreement: "[name] and [name], do you agree with this now, is it so that …"
circular	Covers all speech that relates to 'cirkulär' (en. circular) or 'linjär' (en. linear), their inflections, and related nouns; we could not find related verbs. Linearity is usually referred to as the past or previous means of production or organising the economy, but can also be attached to "mindsets." Circularity is acknowledged as a word, concept, or metaphor, as part of a change process (e.g. building circularity, or becoming more circular), and as a future state.	● One of the hosts leaves the word to their co-moderator to discuss more about the background and motivation of the meeting by saying: "But [name], how circular is Sweden today then in relation to Covid-19?" ● Talking about sustainable consumption and things that need to change in relation to food beyond the economy, one panellist finds that "I also think highly of this place-based circularity and that partly you also have to see [this] in your own household. What can I use instead of dumping, or what can you do if someone else has a benefit from what I have in my hand." Briefly afterwards, another speaker appeals to the same topics as "Think of it like any new circular concept. It is not enough for future generations, and we have to solve the social problems here and now." ● Talking about transition pathways one politician-panellist suggests that to stay within the planet's boundaries "we have to reduce consumption and we have to set up all possible means of control to change from the linear to the circular."
Collaboration		

(*continued on next page*)

Table A.3 (*continued*)

Code	Brief Summary	Examples with descriptions and/or quotes
	Covers when collaboration is mentioned or, more often, implied in an utterance. This includes similar words such as dialogue, teamwork, or joint work. However, they talk very superficially about what collaboration actually is or means.	● A moderator introduces the meeting and the organiser's role in this: "And we need to increase the dialogue between the different parts of the system. We believe that together we can make a difference and meet those challenges ahead." ● A plenary conversation is summarised by a moderator: "There were a few words that came back and they were system perspective, collaboration, communication, resource management with examples of phosphorus and other resources. The need for security, forecasting, profitability, need for trust." ● A panellist when asked for their closing statement: "Again, hook your arms with those who can [do what you need]. You can not know everything." ● A moderator concludes: "That is the core of [our project], and our idea is then, again, that we can achieve much more if we hook arms in with each other. It is both about what we can do in our own industry, but also how we can influence the political field. And not the least, be inspired and learn from each other."
Consumption	Covers instances where consumption, consumers, customers, or similar are mentioned. This includes among others what consumers should do, what they need to learn or misunderstand, but also consumption trends, and that current consumption levels are unsustainable.	● An audience question interpreted by the moderator: "that is, which consumer trends are driving this [transition to CBE]?" ● A politician panellist: "Politicians will never be the best ones to drive this type of development. … then a great deal of consumer power is needed as well" ● A panellist: "we have a project … which deals with circularity and for us this is from soil to soil and all have to be part of this and therefore we have to work with everyone; that includes the municipalities because one has to take care of residual flows and this includes knowledge because one has to educate consumers."
Coordination	Covers sequences that discuss how to work together, especially the practicalities of teamwork between different partners. This includes for example dialogue, meeting places or platforms, brokers and intermediaries, or shared visions. The utterances largely focus on why coordination is important, or how coordination can be enhanced or fostered.	● An invited speaker talks about where to find contacts: "We also have Sweden food arena which is a kind of meeting place for companies in Swedish food innovation." ● A moderator considers coordination mechanisms within risk and innovation in the food value chain: "Then the question is whether you experience risks in relation to innovations and develop them, because it is heavy on smaller players or individuals. How can the risks, economic risks be spread or shared throughout the food value chain?" ● A politician panellist wonders about what a successful transformation could mean: "I also think it is important that we stick to some form of common picture of what is this circular society that we want to achieve. What do we mean when we talk about a successful circular society? I think we need a better consensus on that so that we can set clear goals for getting there."
despair	Covers talk about problems or obstacles, either for CE transition or sustainability in general, often with some emotion associated with it. Some of these sequences seem to be characterised by hopelessness.	● The moderator summarises the message of a panelist saying: "Time is ticking, [the panelist] claims!" ● A politician panellist: "We cannot continue to increase the material consumption decade after decade." ● A panellist talking about the challenges for new and small companies in the food industry: "… but it is more about getting small investment to be able to test the market as soon as possible, to get out and learn as fast as possible. There is no solution and there seems to be no way out. … I cannot define the way out but it depends on the challenge."
Disagreement	Covers sequences in which the speakers explicitly or more often implicitly express that they disagree with someone about something, as well as statements or expressions of doubt about general ideas, suggestions, goals or validity claims.	● An invited speaker explicitly disagrees with the meeting host: "When it comes to the beginning, [the moderator] said in the beginning, said that we have become a little more circular, I doubt it." ● A panellist is not quite happy with what has been said and in recognition of some hypothetical counterposition 'sharpens' an argument: "I think that I build on, that I agree with what has been said and then sharpen it a bit further, for me it is not innovation, innovation if there is no application. Then it is only a discovery. So far it is only when it reaches an application that it is an innovation, and then I think what comes is exciting." ● A politician recognises and disagrees with an external position: "It is no secret that we want the forest to phase out fossils and I think that is part of this. But it is clear that we need a holistic view, even if the resources end up in the right place. What I think is very dangerous is if we go in and say that product X or Y must not be used from forest resources, I think that would be a dead end."
emotion	Covers verbal expressions of emotions or emotional states, including feelings, trust, security, courage, worries, or related metaphors. This is often accompanied by displays of affect.	● A panellist discusses a 'feeling' in the industry that something is changing: "I can only agree with what has been [mentioned] that there is change happening, the feeling that the industry or some industries actually want to do something different." ● A politician panelist calls for reassessing responsibility: "Producers need to take greater responsibility for the products on the market, that, I think, is important. It feels like we are starting to slip a bit away from that which I find worrying …" ● A panellist reflects on the opportunities of exploiting solar energy better for food production: "I just don't believe, maybe, that right now this is what's going to save us or what we should say from some dramatic perspective."
Hope	Covers when something is implicitly or explicitly voicing hope in the situation, often in relation to CE. This can relate to opportunities and that we	● Generic interjection: "I hope so!" ● An invited speaker connects their thoughts with the project whose event

(*continued on next page*)

Table A.3 (*continued*)

Code	Brief Summary	Examples with descriptions and/or quotes
	already see positive changes. This includes talk about making “real” changes and that we are “stronger together.”	they have been invited to speak at: “But there are very clear connections from this larger scale to how to implement this, which I hope that this project can contribute to.” ● A panellist talks about the promises and hopeful nature of the CE: “Circular economy is actually about doing good, and it is not that … so that the aspect that makes this get a spin, that there is an economic pitch in circular business models, that makes businesses see that this has an economic value in that there is a business case, as it is called in business language, around this. And that is what can be the key to this actually becoming a reality.” ● An invited speaker identifies some hope in the collaborative aspect: “Even if we have slightly different starting points to these issues, when we work together then we get common problems … and that I should say is a prerequisite for actually moving forward with this.”
identity	Covers statements in which identities are expressed, either of the speaker, or of other persons or stereotypical groups. One important identity construction in these meetings appears to be the construction of ‘us-circular’ and ‘them-linear’. There are also occasions in which identity constructions are used to differentiate the speaker from some other participants or the meeting in general. When identities are constructed using ‘we’, then this can mean a lot of different things such as referring to all participants, all those caring about CE, or all those interested in food and agriculture. With the exception of the politicians’ debate, identities in the meeting are seldom opposed but opposed identities refer to non-present others.	● A panellist construing the company’s identity in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ‘consumer’ as a third identity: “When it comes to Covid-19, I want to share the insights we have made [at my workplace]. We have done quite a lot of insight work on how it affects us in large and small. We are an industry that is doing quite well in a crisis. Everyone needs food more or less but just this with customer needs and change.” ● A moderator identifies the Swedish delegation for circular economy and suggests that both moderators are part of the reference group: “The delegation for circular economy is the government’s advisory body with the task to be a knowledge centre and coordination force for the industry’s transformation to circular economy. … there are both [the other moderator] and I in the reference group.” ● A moderator inserts a comment prior to the upcoming statement of a politician: “I also want to say that you are from the [party].” ● A panellist creating a rhetoric identity: “We others who are engaged in circular food production …”
innovation	Covers emic mentions of ‘innovation’ (usually technological), or speech where new things (technological or organisational) are discussed. This includes both, calls for more innovation, but also that there is already enough good technology, and instead how things are done has to change.	● The moderator in a panel discussion moves a thought further: “Another thought … is about needs versus product service …, how does a need match, is the need large or small in the customer group? And often I start an idea based on a need in someone else. It is an idea that exists among them that creates ideas. And Henry Ford said a rather interesting thing when it comes to this: if we had asked the consumer what they wanted, everyone would have said a faster horse carriage.” ● An invited speaker reflects upon what CE needs: “From a technological perspective, we can find many solutions available and it is tremendously much about getting the economic incentives right so that it becomes profitable for those who will implement the changes to the measures.” ● A panellist on regional contexts in relation to CBE: “If we look at the industry in Sweden, you need to know more about what is suitable for the Swedish or Nordic conditions so that [you know what] technological development is needed.”
inspiration	Covers when we consider that a speaker voices their own excitement or being inspired, or when the speaker aims at making others feel inspired or excited. This was motivated by many of the invitations using the word inspiration, but the word was less common in the actual meetings.	● A generic interjection: “Exciting! That is something we bring from this, everyone.” ● The moderator summarises the panel conversation: “Herewith, I want to thank the panel both for very good and inspiring presentations during the day, or in the morning, and thank you for a very good panel conversation with you!” ● A panellist suggests where to find opportunities for engagement: “Because here [in collaboration across the value chain] is an opportunity to get involved and find these solutions that we know exist.” ● The moderator introduces a panellist: “You will be a leader in Europe in circular food production, [name]!“, whereupon the person replies “Yes, absolutely!”
‘kretslopp’	Covers all mentions of the Swedish word ‘kretslopp’ (closed-loop thinking), which is a Swedish sustainability policy approach of the late 20th century with very different assumptions to the CE (Johansson & Henriksson, 2020). However, in the analysed meetings, ‘kretslopp’ is in most cases used in its more colloquial use as any ‘circular flow’ within the CE, as opposed to a contrasting concept.	● An expert colleague of the moderator replies to an inquiry that “you also do something exciting with fish and kretslopp” — “Yes, we do that because the kretslopp has to be closed, we have to really start with circular productions, we have to be more resource efficient.” ● A panellist refers to the long history of ‘kretslopp’ in Sweden and that existing knowledge seems to be not appreciated in the CE: “And this here is problematic concerning kretslopp, that we don’t get any respect for our kretslopp-knowledge, whether it is called kretslopp or CE or innovative blah, it is always called so different things and I am here with a 30 year old definition then what the cycles are …”
Legitimation	Covers the mentioning of third parties to legitimise among others, statements, the speaker’s presence, or CE. These third parties include research institutions, organisations such as the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, individual persons, nature, money, companies, but also concepts, reports, governments, or other companies.	● Legitimating the need to talk more about CE, a presenter invokes efforts outside of Sweden: “They [Wageningen UR] are one of the world’s best agricultural universities if not the very best, and they have several projects underway with circular food production. And the Netherlands, where Wageningen is located, they are in fact something of a pioneering country when it comes to CE and circularity. Their government set a goal, in 2016 they set it, that by 2050 they will have a predominant share of CE.” ● An invited speaker integrates their own biography into their statement: “I have actually worked with what I usually call the metabolism in the body of society, the material flows, for very very many years. The Rome Club came

(*continued on next page*)

Table A.3 (*continued*)

Code	Brief Summary	Examples with descriptions and/or quotes
		out with a report as early as 1972 which actually said one thing: We cannot increase our footprint year after year, decade after decade and we have unfortunately done so. I'm sitting in something called the Global Resources, International Resource Panel. We came up with a large report Global Resources Outlook 2019 where we show how fast material demand has gone and is going."
metacommunication	Covers sequences in which the speaker(s) address(es) the current communication situation, a previous or anticipated statement or the role or behavior of a participant in the current conversation, i.e. when features in the current conversation and its participants become the topic of the conversation. Since metacommunication is present in all kinds of communication situations it is ubiquitous and not specific for these meetings, but may be different across cultured or different communities of practice. Metacommunication can be instructions and explanations of what is going to happen related to both the format and the content of the conversation.	● Moderators ending or summarising a contribution, such as: "Thanks. Very good presentation, I think. To me it was crystal clear. Fantastic." ● Any sort of agreement with previous speakers which may not necessarily signal concrete agreement but also conclude a previous thought and connect them to the flow of the meeting. ● Any sort of positioning of the speaker in relation to the conversation or more generally, such as "I spontaneously only wish to say", or "I will build on what has been said and I agree and will sharpen it even more …" ● Positioning statements about an ongoing contribution, especially after the statement when participants finalise their thoughts with "I stop there", informing the participants that the speaker could continue in the same direction but that they chose to temporarily take a break. ● Pre-emptive positioning both about the statement and about the self, such as: "I will only make a short comment, I will try to avoid being a middle-aged man consuming all air …" ● Non-verbal/visual metacommunication, for example raising the hand in a conversation to be addressed as the next speaker. This may then be verbally acknowledged, for example by the moderator: "Now we see one hand that is raised." ● Positioning statements about professional identities, such as in a plenary discussion to underline one's credibility: "Now I happen to be a researcher in food technology …" (see also the code *identity*)
normative/ pragmatic	Covers when activities or decisions are deemed, proposed, or acclaimed to be necessary or must be done (inspired by Berglund & Werr, 2000). This often creates an urgency or an implicit requirement to act, because of a looming catastrophe or hypothetical crisis scenario, or because other entities are already doing this or are expecting this.	● A panelist muses on the possibility of economies to change: "That we can be ready for an everyday life in peace and tranquility that may allow us companies to produce for large markets; but it must be possible to switch to smaller markets … or to a more local market in the event of crisis and war." ● A moderator motivates sustainability action in relation to the Baltic Sea: "It is a unique inland sea that we have, not only the world's youngest sea but also unfortunately the world's, or one of the world's most polluted seas." ● Referencing the need to talk more about CE, a presenter invokes other countries' efforts: "Their [the Dutch] government set a goal, in 2016 they set it, that by 2050 they will have a predominant share of CE. So there they are frontrunners." ● A moderator asks their panellists about the learning of the corona crisis for CBE: "How can the resource mobilisation of the corona crisis and changes and insights be used to benefit a circular bioeconomy. What are we learning now?" Two panellists respond with both a sense of urgency and popular wisdom: "We live well [like] a little alarm clock because we need to think more about how we feel about food and livelihood." — "… Food production is a means for life. It is absolutely vital to really get that insight to sink in with all of us, and that we can live smaller lives but have a greater experience."
Problem	Covers all utterances that can be considered to mention or elaborate on problems. These are distinguished from the code *despair*, as the *problem* focuses more on the content and less on the emotions. Problems are often, but not always presented together with solutions. Problems are among others identified to be global issues of society and environment, a lack of circularity, a lack of consideration for systems perspectives, waste or leakage in the agri-food chain, running a profitable agri-business, or the difficulty of collaboration.	● A participant in a plenary discussion considers the problems of buying a farm: "It is very difficult to take over or buy a farm, especially with the large investments that may then disappear in a bad harvest because you can not really control the weather." ● The moderator wonders in addressing a researcher panellist what sort of problems there might be: "What does the research situation say then? Has there been a knowledge gap with authorities etc, what does your crowd say, what are the latest research findings in this, that you can then give to responsible authorities?" ● Discussing with the politicians, the moderator wonders about the relevance of measuring circularity: "One question is how can you assess the level of circularity when you barely know what it is and how it should be measured, is a question. Does anyone want to answer it? …" upon which one politician addresses and nuances the problem: "Yes, but just when it comes to measuring circular economy, I think that you should really not measure in general, but you need to go into different prioritised streams, for example materials but also different services, and also the specific streams that need to be measured such as innovation-critical minerals. Because then it becomes very clear but overall I think that it is actually quite difficult."
Profitability	A specific manifestation of the code *rationality*. Covers talk about added value, surplus value, profitability and related terminology or thinking. Largely concerned with either the inherent profitability of CE or the need for CE to add value to business operations to be successful.	● A participant reporting back from a group discussion: "We talked about this with the business model and conditions for profitability. What does this organisational model look like, who takes part, who is responsible, and what does the distribution of profit and loss look like if a larger circular bioeconomy is set up?" ● In an introduction statement, a moderator highlights the importance of profitability: "In addition to our goals to save the Baltic Sea and manage plant nutrition wisely, our focus will be on the economic sustainability of this. We see this as a decisive factor for us to really achieve the goals we have set. It

(*continued on next page*)

Table A.3 (*continued*)

Code	Brief Summary	Examples with descriptions and/or quotes
		must be financially profitable even in the short term if we are to really speed up this work again. The economic driving force will be important to us.”
rationality	Covers when activities or decisions are deemed, proposed, or acclaimed to be ‘rational’ or because they align with profit-oriented business conduct (inspired by Berglund & Werr, 2000).	● A moderator summarises what they understand as the advantages of the CBE after a panellist has spoken: “It seems like there is a triple win when we can produce more food with less resources … Why have we not always done this then? Why has it not been implemented to a greater extent?” ● A panellist reflecting on the future of food: “If we look at the development ahead, the plant-based will be cheaper than the animal-based and then that component will come in the price and then it will take off much more.”
resource efficiency	A specific manifestation of the code *rationality*. Covers everything related to resource efficiency as an emic concept, as well as references to for example reduce waste or utilise waste flows. Often this refers to efficient production (in agricultural and biological processes) and process efficiency (utilisation of agricultural products, including byproducts).	● In an introduction, the moderator narrates: “In January 2019 Stefan Löfven [Swedish prime minister] said during a government declaration that Sweden should develop a resource-efficient CE.” ● Talking about global food production, a panellist notes that “we produce … nearly twice as much food as we consume. … As everyone knows, we have started importing a lot of food and produce only half, in the order of magnitude, today, but quite a lot of our land even in Sweden is used for fodder [production] … but there we well have a tremendous potential to start eating cereals directly or even protein.” ● A participant discusses their thoughts on the change of existing systems after break-out room conversations: “This is probably where CBE can capture the low-hanging fruit, that is, how can you with cycling up [reduce] this system leakage in waste that arises with these nutrients, or the material that you can benefit from or better use in a better way so that you do not lose sight that incremental or gradual modification of existing systems can create from a resource perspective, large-scale effects.” ● A panellist concludes their statement: “So it can be such types of changes. To be able to feed more people with less resources, that is the challenge.”
Solution	Covers utterances where solutions are discussed. This includes where CE is expressed as the solution to an identified problem, where what is needed for CE is listed, or more generally solutions to various problems mentioned in the data.	● A consultant panellist on how they identify solutions: “… We identify the challenge and then we work with the solution, so to speak, backwards.” ● A participant in a plenary discussion: “We have long had large-scale solutions, [but] a circular bioeconomy requires small-scale and innovative solutions. There seems to be a lot of thinking of small-scale solutions and local solutions to move forward.” ● A moderator summarises the meeting in relation to how a CE can be achieved: “And finally I think it’s important that we help each other here, do not see each other as competitors.” ● A panellist answering a question about the role of technology: “Of course, all technology can be useful to us. At the same time, I think if you go to small-scale, …industrial symbiosis, location-based circularity, I think one should [do that]. It’s just my personal thought that one maybe should not believe what technology can solve in some cases; maybe it’s so far away from technology and [we have to] go back to something that may seem a little more old-fashioned, but is more adapted to the small-scale context. But it is only my personal reflections that I was asked about.”
System	Covers any mentioning of the term ‘system’. The system is referred to in practical ways within which a business operates, as something to be observed or monitored, or as some concept for planning and thinking. Systems may also be described to be not functioning.	● A participant wondering about the system: “I think many of us agree that we will need to see the stimulus of new structures that may grow in parallel with structures that exist today; but that we should not be afraid to question the systems and conditions for the systems we have today.” ● Another participant in the same meeting reflecting on the current system: “Existing food systems are dominated by a certain type of logic: We can call it maybe the production economy producing large volumes and then lowering the cost.” ● A researcher as part of a panel suggests that not all research and activities will lead to system change: “The critical research I should say points out that this may not lead to systems changes but only perhaps styling systems at the edges.”

References

Angouri, J., 2012. Managing disagreement in problem solving meeting talk. J. Pragmat. 44 (12), 1565–1579. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2012.06.010.

Barreiro-Gen, M., Lozano, R., 2020. How circular is the circular economy? Analysing the implementation of circular economy in organisations. Bus. Strat. Environ. 29 (8), 3484–3494. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2590.

Berglund, J., Werr, A., 2000. The invincible character of management consulting rhetoric: how one blends incommensurates while keeping them apart. Organization 7 (4), 633–655. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840074008.

Böhm, S., 2006. Repositioning organization theory. In: Repositioning Organization Theory. Springer, pp. 179–192.

Boje, D.M., 1991. Consulting and change in the storytelling organisation. J. Organ. Change Manag. 4 (3), 7–17. https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM0000000001193.

Borrello, M., Pascucci, S., Cembalo, L., 2020. Three propositions to unify circular economy research: a review. Sustainability 12 (10), 1–22.

Burr, V., 2015. Social Constructionism, third ed. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Butler, J., 1993. Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’. Routledge.

Calisto Friant, M., Vermeulen, W.J.V., Salomone, R., 2020. A typology of circular economy discourses: navigating the diverse visions of a contested paradigm. Resour. Conserv. Recycl. 161, 104917. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.104917.

Callon, M. (Ed.), 1998. The Laws of the Markets. Blackwell Publishers/Sociological Review.

Callon, M., 2007. What does it mean to say that economics is performative?. In: Do Economists Make Markets? on the Performativity of Economics. Princeton University Press, pp. 311–357.

Charlebois, J., 2015. Interpretative repertoire. In: The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction. American Cancer Society, pp. 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi017.

Charmaz, K., 2006. Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Research. SagePublications Ltd, London.

Chimenti, G., 2020. Conceptual controversies at the boundaries between markets: the case of ridesharing. Consum. Mark. Cult. 23 (2), 130–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253866.2019.1657100.

Clark, T., Salaman, G., 1996. Telling tales: management consultancy as the art of story telling. In: Oswick, C., Grant, D. (Eds.), Metaphor and Organizations. Sage, pp. 166–184.

Clifton, J., Van De Mieroop, D., 2010. 'Doing'ethos—a discursive approach to the strategic deployment and negotiation of identities in meetings. J. Pragmat. 42 (9), 2449–2461.

Cochoy, F., Giraudeau, M., McFall, L., 2010. Performativity, economics and politics. Journal of Cultural Economy 3 (2), 139–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2010.494116.

Corvellec, H., Böhm, S., Stowell, A., Valenzuela, F., 2020. Introduction to the special issue on the contested realities of the circular economy. Cult. Organ. 26 (2), 97–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2020.1717733.

Corvellec, H., Hultman, J., Jerneck, A., Arvidsson, S., Ekroos, J., Wahlberg, N., Luke, T. W., 2021a. Resourcification: a non-essentialist theory of resources for sustainable development. Sustain. Dev. 29 (6), 1249–1256. https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.2222.

Corvellec, H., Stowell, A., Johansson, N., 2021b. Critiques of the circular economy. J. Ind. Ecol. https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.13187.

Craig, R.T., 2016. Metacommunication. In: Jensen, K.B., Craig, R.T. (Eds.), The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy, first ed. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.

Cramer, J.M., 2020. Practice-based model for implementing circular economy: the case of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area. J. Clean. Prod. 255, 120255. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.120255.

Diedrich, A., Eriksson-Zetterquist, U., Ewertsson, L., Hagberg, J., Hallin, A., Lavén, F., Lindberg, K., Raviola, E., Rindzeviciute, E., Walter, L., 2013. Exploring the Performativity Turn in Management Studies (GRI-Rapport 2013: 2). Gothenburg Research Institute.

Dobbs, R., Oppenheim, J., Thompson, F., Brinkman, M., Zornes, M., 2011. Resource Revolution: Meeting the World's Energy, Materials, Food, and Water Needs. McKinsey Global Institute.

Earnshaw, Y., 2017. Navigating turn-taking and conversational repair in an online synchronous course. Online Learn. 21 (4) https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v21i4.1029. Article 4.

El Hussein, M., Hirst, S., Salyers, V., Osuji, J., 2014. Using grounded theory as a method of inquiry: advantages and disadvantages. Qual. Rep. 19 (27).

Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013. Towards the Circular Economy: Economic and Business Rationale for an Accelerated Transition. Ellen MacArthur Foundation.

Escobar, O., 2019. Facilitators: the micropolitics of public participation and deliberation. In: Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance. Edward Elgar Publishing.

European Commission, 2020. Leading the Way to a Global Circular Economy: State of Play and Outlook [Commission Staff Working Document]. https://web.archive.org/web/20210418173233/https://ec.europa.eu/environment/circular-economy/pdf/leading_way_global_circular_economy.pdf.

Fineman, S., 2001. Fashioning the environment. Organization 8 (1), 17–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840181002.

Gans, H.J., 1999. Participant observation in the era of "ethnography". J. Contemp. Ethnogr. 28 (5), 540–548. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124199129023532.

Geisendorf, S., Pietrulla, F., 2018. The circular economy and circular economic concepts—a literature analysis and redefinition. Thunderbird Int. Bus. Rev. 60 (5), 771–782. https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.21924.

Geissdoerfer, M., Savaget, P., Bocken, N.M.P., Hultink, E.J., 2017. The Circular Economy – a new sustainability paradigm? J. Clean. Prod. 143, 757–768. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.12.048.

Ghosh, T., Yates, J., Orlikowski, W., 2004. Using communication norms for coordination: evidence from a distributed team. In: ICIS 2004 Proceedings. International Conference on Information Systems. December 31. https://aisel.aisnet.org/icis2004/10.

Gioia, D.A., Corley, K.G., Hamilton, A.L., 2013. Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: notes on the gioia methodology. Organ. Res. Methods 16 (1), 15–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151.

Glaser, B.G., Strauss, A.L., 1967. The Discovery of Grounded Field Theory. Aldine.

Glaser, B.G., Walsh, I., Bailyn, L., Fernandez, W., Holton, J.A., Levina, N., 2013. What grounded theory is. Acad. Manag. Proc. 2013 (1), 11290. https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2013.11290symposium.

Gond, J.-P., Cabantous, L., Harding, N., Learmonth, M., 2016. What do we mean by performativity in organizational and management theory? The uses and abuses of performativity. Int. J. Manag. Rev. 18 (4), 440–463. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12074.

Habibi, F., Hidayat, D.N., Alek, A., 2020. Turn taking in mata najwa talk show 'ragu-ragu perpu' episode: a conversational analysis. J. Pragm. Res. 2 (1), 80–96. https://doi.org/10.18326/jopr.v2i1.80-96.

Haug, C., 2013. Organizing spaces: meeting arenas as a social movement infrastructure between organization, network, and institution. Organ. Stud. 34 (5–6), 705–732. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613479232.

Heritage, J., 1998. Conversation analysis and institutional talk: analyzing distinctive turn-taking systems. In: Cmejrkova, S., Hoffmannová, J., Müllerová, O., Svetlá, J. (Eds.), Dialoganalyse VI/2. Max Niemeyer Verlag, pp. 3–18. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110965049-001.

Heusinkveld, S., Benders, J., 2005. Contested commodification: consultancies and their struggle with new concept development. Hum. Relat. 58 (3), 283–310. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705053423.

Hobson, K., Lynch, N., Lilley, D., Smalley, G., 2018. Systems of practice and the Circular Economy: transforming mobile phone product service systems. Environ. Innov. Soc. Transit. 26, 147–157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2017.04.002.

Homrich, A.S., Galvão, G., Abadia, L.G., Carvalho, M.M., 2018. The circular economy umbrella: trends and gaps on integrating pathways. J. Clean. Prod. 175, 525–543. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.11.064.

Johansson, N., Henriksson, M., 2020. Circular economy running in circles? A discourse analysis of shifts in ideas of circularity in Swedish environmental policy. Sustain. Prod. Consum. 23, 148–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2020.05.005.

Jorgensen, D.L., 2015. Participant observation. In: Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. American Cancer Society, pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0247.

Kennedy, D., 2016. A World of Struggle: How Power, Law, and Expertise Shape Global Political Economy. Princeton University Press.

Kerdlap, P., Low, J.S.C., Ramakrishna, S., 2019. Zero waste manufacturing: a framework and review of technology, research, and implementation barriers for enabling a circular economy transition in Singapore. Resour. Conserv. Recycl. 151, 104438. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2019.104438.

Kirchherr, J., Reike, D., Hekkert, M., 2017. Conceptualizing the circular economy: an analysis of 114 definitions. Resour. Conserv. Recycl. 127, 221–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2017.09.005.

Koegl, I., Kurze, K., 2013. Sustainable development: a floating signifier in the EU's energy policy discourse? In: Barnes, P.M., Hoerber, T.C. (Eds.), Sustainable Development and Governance in Europe. Routledge, pp. 61–74.

Korhonen, J., Nuur, C., Feldmann, A., Birkie, S.E., 2018. Circular economy as an essentially contested concept. J. Clean. Prod. 175, 544–552. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.111.

Kovacic, Z., Strand, R., Völker, T., 2019. The Circular Economy in Europe: Critical Perspectives on Policies and Imaginaries. Routledge.

Larrue, J., Trognon, A., 1993. Organization of turn-taking and mechanisms for turn-taking repairs in a chaired meeting. J. Pragmat. 19 (2), 177–196. https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-2166(93)90087-6.

Law, J., Singleton, V., 2000. Performing technology's stories: on social constructivism, performance, and performativity. Technol. Cult. 41 (4), 765–775. https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2000.0167.

Leitch, S., Davenport, S., 2007. Strategic ambiguity as a discourse practice: the role of keywords in the discourse on 'sustainable' biotechnology. Discourse Stud. 9 (1), 43–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445607072106.

Lieder, M., Rashid, A., 2016. Towards circular economy implementation: a comprehensive review in context of manufacturing industry. J. Clean. Prod. 115, 36–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.12.042.

Llewellyn, N., Hindmarsh, J., 2010. Organisation, Interaction and Practice: Studies of Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis. Cambridge University Press.

Mahanty, S., Boons, F., Handl, J., Batista-Navarro, R., 2021. An investigation of academic perspectives on the 'circular economy' using text mining and a Delphi study. J. Clean. Prod. 319, 128574. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2021.128574.

McComas, K., Besley, J.C., Black, L.W., 2010. The rituals of public meetings. Publ. Adm. Rev. 70 (1), 122–130. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2009.02116.x.

Mény, Y., Surel, Y., 2002. The constitutive ambiguity of populism. In: Mény, Y., Surel, Y. (Eds.), Democracies and the Populist Challenge. Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403920072_1.

Methmann, C.P., 2010. 'Climate protection' as empty signifier: a discourse theoretical perspective on climate mainstreaming in world politics. Millennium 39 (2), 345–372. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829810383606.

Millar, N., McLaughlin, E., Börger, T., 2019. The circular economy: swings and roundabouts? Ecol. Econ. 158, 11–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2018.12.012.

Mol, A., 2002. The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice. Duke University Press.

Murphy, C., Klotz, A.C., Kreiner, G.E., 2017. Blue skies and black boxes: the promise (and practice) of grounded theory in human resource management research. Hum. Resour. Manag. Rev. 27 (2), 291–305. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.08.006.

Murray, A., Skene, K., Haynes, K., 2017. The circular economy: an interdisciplinary exploration of the concept and application in a global context. J. Bus. Ethics 140 (3), 369–380. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2693-2.

Nakassis, C.V., 2012. Brand, citationality, performativity. Am. Anthropol. 114 (4), 624–638. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1433.2012.01511.x.

Nash, C., 2000. Performativity in practice: some recent work in cultural geography. Prog. Hum. Geogr. 24 (4), 653–664. https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200701540654.

Niskanen, J., Anshelm, J., McLaren, D., 2020. Local conflicts and national consensus: the strange case of circular economy in Sweden. J. Clean. Prod. 261, 121117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121117.

Nunes, B., Pollard, S., Burgess, P., Ellis, G., de los Rios, I., Charnley, F., 2018. University contributions to the circular economy: professing the hidden curriculum. Sustainability 10 (8), 2719. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10082719.

Philips, 2014. Rethinkingthe Future: Our Transition towards a Circular Economy. Philips. https://www.philips.com/c-dam/corporate/about-philips/company/downloads/circular-economy-brochure.pdf.

Pollock, N., Williams, R., 2010. The business of expectations: how promissory organizations shape technology and innovation. Soc. Stud. Sci. 40 (4), 525–548.

Prieto-Sandoval, V., Jaca, C., Ormazabal, M., 2018. Towards a consensus on the circular economy. J. Clean. Prod. 179, 605–615. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.224.

Rancière, J., 1999. Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy. Univ. of Minnesota Press.

Reike, D., Vermeulen, W.J.V., Witjes, S., 2018. The circular economy: new or refurbished as CE 3.0? — exploring controversies in the conceptualization of the circular economy through a focus on history and resource value retention options. Resour. Conserv. Recycl. 135, 246–264. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2017.08.027.

Richardson, L., 2015. Performing the sharing economy. Geoforum 67, 121–129. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.11.004.

Schegloff, E.A., 1992. On talk and its institutional occasions. Talk at Work: Int. Institut. Sett. 101–134.

Schegloff, E.A., 1997. Whose text? Whose context? Discourse Soc. 8 (2), 165–187.

Schöggl, J.-P., Stumpf, L., Baumgartner, R.J., 2020. The narrative of sustainability and circular economy—a longitudinal review of two decades of research. Resour. Conserv. Recycl. 163, 105073. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2020.105073.

Schulz, C., Hjaltadóttir, R.E., Hild, P., 2019. Practising circles: studying institutional change and circular economy practices. J. Clean. Prod. 237, 117749. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.117749.

Seuren, L.M., Wherton, J., Greenhalgh, T., Shaw, S.E., 2021. Whose turn is it anyway? Latency and the organization of turn-taking in video-mediated interaction. J. Pragmat. 172, 63–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2020.11.005.

Stahel, W.R., 2016. The circular economy. Nature News 531 (7595), 435. https://doi.org/10.1038/531435a.

Taylor, J.R., 1995. Shifting from a heteronomous to an autonomous worldview of organizational communication: communication theory on the cusp. Commun. Theor. 5 (1), 1–35.

Valenzuela, F., Böhm, S., 2017. Against wasted politics: a critique of the circular economy. Ephemera theory Polit. Organ. 17 (1), 23–60.

Weigand, H., de Moor, A., 2003. Workflow analysis with communication norms. Data Knowl. Eng. 47 (3), 349–369. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0169-023X(03)00064-8.

Wickert, C., Schaefer, S.M., 2015. Towards a progressive understanding of performativity in critical management studies. Hum. Relat. 68 (1), 107–130. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713519279.

Winans, K., Kendall, A., Deng, H., 2017. The history and current applications of the circular economy concept. Renew. Sustain. Energy Rev. 68, 825–833. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rser.2016.09.123.

WWF, 2019. A Circular Economy in Central & Eastern Europe: A Virtual Conference November 26-27. November 5. https://wwf.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/black_sea_basin/danube_carpathian/?355371/circular-economy-2019.

II

When hope messages become the discursive norm

How repertoires of hope shape communicative capacity in conversations on the circular economy

Therese Åhlvik, Hanna Bergeå, Malte Rödl, & Lars Hallgren
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development,
P.O. Box 7012 SE-750 07 Uppsala Sweden

Accepted for publication in Journal of Environmental Planning and Management

Abstract

Environmental communication research often conceptualises hope as an internal state of mind, suggesting that messages focused on hope can be used in strategic communication to foster environmental engagement. In this paper, we critique this individualising approach and instead explore hope discourse as an emergent social phenomenon, focusing on how it is constructed and managed in inspirational meetings about the circular economy. Using critical discursive psychology as a methodology, we identify three interpretative repertoires through which hope is constructed: stronger together, change for real and silver lining. We explore what is accomplished by their use, and discuss the social implications within the meetings and beyond. The repertoires facilitate a positive meeting experience and solidarity amongst participants. However, hope discourse also relies on abstraction which prohibits disagreement, critique, and talk about concrete actions.

Keywords: hope discourse, inspirational meetings, critical discursive psychology, circular economy, environmental communication

Introduction

Environmental communication research and practice often suggest that communication on environmental issues should focus on messages of hope. The apocalyptic discourse that has long dominated environmental discourse is now being criticised for framing human agency to act against climate change as limited or even non-existent (Foust and O'Shannon Murphy, 2009) and for being ineffective in motivating climate change action (e.g. Merkel et al., 2020; O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole, 2009). There is therefore an increasing demand to abandon pessimistic future-orientations in favour of messages that emphasise hope for a better future (Cassegård and Thörn, 2018).

Hope is however a contested concept and encompasses many different theories and definitions (see e.g. Webb, 2012). Some take a pragmatist approach to hope discourse and argue that it is futile to assume an agreed upon definition since the meaning of a hopeful statement is highly context dependent (Herrestad et al., 2014). Even so, environmental research overwhelmingly view hope as a strategically important feature in persuasive communication aiming to foster pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour. It explores the effectiveness hope messages in promoting environmental engagement and overall conclude that there is a positive correlation between feelings or attitudes of hope and pro-environmental behaviour (see Schneider, Zaval and Markowitz, 2021).

In this paper, we complement environmental research on hope by exploring what the social preference of hopeful formulations shape the shared communication competence. If we want to understand the role of hope in promoting environmental engagement on a broad societal scale, we need to recognise that psychological issues are also discursive issues, and explore language in use (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). We therefore examine how hope features discursively in social situations and how it is constructed and made normative. More specifically, we examine how hope discourse is constructed and managed in inspirational meetings where the circular economy is portrayed as the solution to society's sustainability issues (Rödl et al., 2022). Our aim is to explore the communicative procedures that constitute hope discourse and analyse the social implications of the procedures for the local interaction situation. We study the local implications of hope discourse with the purpose of discussing how it shapes the communicative capacity of the participants to investigate, not only the possibilities, but the potential challenges to a circular economy transition, as well as disagreement on what such a transition entails.

The circular economy concept has over the past decade gained increased influence and support as a promising approach to create sustainability (Corvellec et al., 2020). It aims to replace linear models of production and consumption, and to bridge the longstanding conflict between sustainability and economic growth (Korhonen et al., 2018). The anticipation of a circular economy as *the* new sustainability solution that brings growth and new business opportunities overwhelmingly features in the meetings, rendering them an appropriate case for studying the role of hope discourse in the sustainability transition.

In this paper, we view communication as constitutive for social interaction and recognise the foundational and formative role of communication in all things social. Thus, communication is a social process that "produces and reproduces – and in that way constitutes – social order" (Craig, 1999, p. 128). Accordingly, we view hope as socially constructed rather than an intrinsic emotional or cognitive state. In order to study communication this way, and how it produces and reproduces hope, we adopt the analytical framework of critical discursive psychology (CDP) (Edley, 2001). We view discourse as constructed as well as constructive and as situated within social, cultural and historical settings. We examine discourse by identifying interpretative repertoires, which are coherent sets of ways of talking or writing about an issue. We also highlight how subjects are positioned in discourse through the use of such repertoires. CDP enables us to highlight the subtle and complex ways in which hope discourse is constructed, since it goes beyond explicit discourse and grammatical variations of the word 'hope' to include a wide range of communicative procedures.

In what follows, we review some of the literature on hope discourse and communication before moving on to the method section where we describe our material and analytical procedure. We then present our analysis, focusing on three interpretative repertoires we have identified in the meetings. Finally, we discuss our findings and present our conclusions the social implications of hope discourse.

Background: The role of hope discourse in the sustainability transition

The potential of hope messages in the promotion of environmental engagement

A growing body of research has explored whether messages of hope, which evoke feelings or attitudes of hope in individuals, are effective in promoting environmental engagement, and therefore should shape communication on environmental issues. The majority has found that hope messages indeed are effective in promoting pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (see Schneider, Zaval and Markowitz, 2021). Hope messages are for example effective in environmental education and communication activities aimed at fostering feelings of hope among students has been found to increase environmental engagement (Li and Monroe, 2019; Ojala, 2012). Hope communication is also an effective strategy in green business marketing and is 'a better sell' (Lee, Chang, and Chen, 2017), and increases individual motivation to act against climate change (Chadwick, 2015).

However, some research has found a weak correlation between hope and environmental engagement. Ettinger et al. (2021) tested the effects of climate change videos and found that while videos with a hope frame successfully elicited emotions of hope in participants, they were not more likely to change their behaviour or to engage in climate activism. Similar conclusions were drawn by van Zomeren, Pauls, and Cohen-Chen (2019) in their paper on climate change action where they suggest that while hope increases individuals' motivation to act against climate change it does not translate to increased collective motivation and action. Some research even suggests that hope messages may have a negative effect and that it limits motivation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Hornsey and Fielding, 2016).

Thus, it is debatable whether hope is effective in promoting pro-environmental behaviour (Hornsey and Fielding, 2020). However, regardless of whether hope increases individual motivation, if we want to expand our knowledge on environmental communication and hope, we need to also investigate what the consequences of a discursive preference of hope do with the communication procedures. While previous research contributes to a better understanding of the role of hope in strategic communication, it is limited to an intrasubjective view of hope, considering hope an internal state that can be objectively measured and manipulated through different interventions. It focuses on the instrumental properties of communication and study hope as an enabling rhetoric device in persuasive communication. Communication is, however, more than a means of persuasion: It is a constitutive process through which we create and negotiate meaning. (Craig, 1999; Cox and Pezzullo, 2018).

Hope as discursively constructed in social interaction

Qualitative research has been conducted aiming to understand the social dynamics of hope and the different ways it features discursively in naturally occurring social situation. The social, pragmatic, and context dependent aspects of hope have been a great topic of research in the field of health care (Herrestad et al., 2014). Counselling studies have explored hope as a social construct and discussed how the role of hope might be understood in therapy sessions. This research suggests that hope is part of dynamic social processes in which the concept of hope is co-constructed (Larsen et al., 2007). Thus, even if the counsellor is the one asking questions focused on hope, the client is an active co-creator of the hope discourse (Weingarten, 2010). It appears that the interaction in which accounts for hope are constructed are important for how hope is attributed (Eliott and Olver, 2002).

Previous research has studied the social dynamics of hope discourse in more depth and highlighted some of the discursive properties of hope. Eliott and Olver (2007) explore how hope features in interviews with cancer patients and demonstrate the social implications of hope discourse for patients and clinical practice. They found that different grammatical uses of the word hope perform different social actions. When employed as a noun, e.g. 'there is hope', hope is attributed to the situation and positions the patient as passive in their recovery and as having limited agency. In contrast, hope as a verb, e.g. 'I hope that', construes the patient as active and as having agency. Moreover, hope as a verb can be used both to assign moral responsibility to the speaker as well as to avoid it. The latter is evident in how patients tend to end interviews by saying "I hope it's been a help", which is an expression of support that does not hold the patient responsible for the outcome. This example also demonstrates how hope discourse can be used in ways that "signals goodwill" and to denote solidarity and a positive interaction (Eliott and Olver, 2007 p. 146).

Health care research directs our attention to the social implications of hope discourse. It shows the value of going beyond the instrumental perspective on hope and of exploring the constitutive aspects of environmental communication, whereby it is understood as symbolic action and as the co-construction of meaning (Cox and Pezzullo, 2018). Our analytical focus on hope as co-constructed social action complements the dominant perspective on hope communication and serves to increase our understanding of the naturally occurring situations in which people engage in hope discourse.

Method

Empirical material

In order to examine how hope discourse is constructed and managed in social interaction, we apply a discourse analytic approach and view discourse as constructed, performative and situated (Burr, 2015). We analyse hope discourse in inspirational meetings where the circular economy is promoted as a key component in the sustainability transition. In previous work, we identified that highly optimistic statements about the present and the future are prominent in these meetings (Rödl et al., 2022). The starting point of this work was an investigation of how actors in the Swedish food sector foster a transition to a circular food system. We explored how the ambiguous concept of circular economy is performed and were surprised to see that the predominant approach was to arrange inspirational meetings to promote the concept. Moreover, the explicit purpose of the meetings (as stated in the meeting invitations) is to promote a transition to a circular economy. Thus, when actors in the Swedish food sector *do* circular economy, they do inspirational meetings, which is why these specific meetings were chosen for closer examination in this paper. There are many other types of inter-organisational meetings which may be radically different from meetings of an inspirational character and different sectors may approach the circular economy transition using a different approach than inspiration. Whether these are also characterised by a discourse of hope is not explored here and is thus a limitation of our paper. We identified the meetings online and through memberships in circular economy advocacy organisations. The meetings were arranged by private organisations, such as consultancies, agencies, and NGOs, with an interest in promoting the circular economy. They were conducted via online meeting platforms in Sweden during 2020 (with the exception of one meeting held in person in 2019) and largely open to the public, but primarily targeted to actors in the food sector. Invitations to the meetings typically state that participants will learn about the circular economy and be provided good examples of circular practices. The expressed purpose is to promote the circular economy and to inspire participants to adopt principles of circularity in their business. Meetings activities include lectures, panel discussions and group discussions.

The meetings were typically one to two hours long with roughly twenty participants, invited speakers, and one or two moderators. We attended the meetings and used recordings made available online by the organisers as our empirical material. In total, our material include eighteen inspirational meetings, resulting in roughly 35 hours of recorded material, of which we analysed around five hours in seven meetings in more depth (see Rödl et al., 2022 for an overview of the corpus). This choice of material means that the findings resulting from this study are specific to inspirational meetings on circular economy in Sweden. Nevertheless, we suggest that the insights we develop on hope discourse in this paper are relevant to social situations where people inform, inspire, or educate about ambiguous or contested concepts (cf. Rödl et al., 2022).

In line with Swedish law, ethical approval was not required as no sensitive personal data was collected or processed. We pseudonymised participant names in the meeting excerpts with letters following the alphabet in order of appearance in the article (skipping the letter 'I' for readability).

Analytical procedure

Our analytical interest lies in how hope discourse is constructed and managed, as well as the social implications of this discursive practice. We understand hope as the expressed anticipation for a desired future outcome characterised by uncertainty or set against the backdrop of great obstacles. Hope discourse is then found in affirmative expressions of optimism that focuses on positive outcomes. Our corpus includes the use of the word ‘hope’ as well as socio-linguistic constructions that seem to have similar functions as such explicit hope-constructions. Explicit hope-constructions are rare in our material and we go beyond the focus on its explicit use (e.g. Eliott and Olver, 2007) by exploring how hope is socially constructed in ways that are subtle and implicit.

Our analysis builds on critical discursive psychology (CDP), a form of discourse analysis that views discourse as constructed and constructive and as having implications for both local interaction and broader societal context (Edley, 2001). Accordingly, we examine what is accomplished in the immediate conversational context of the meeting while also considering how participants simultaneously engage with a wider cultural and historical context, which enables and constrains what can be said and done. We utilise two analytical concepts from the CDP toolbox (see Locke and Budds, 2020); interpretative repertoires and subject positions.

The first stage of our analytic procedure involved multiple readings of the material. It was followed by an inclusive coding of all sequences that in some way relate to hope, using our previously stated understanding of hope as a guide, while continuously building on the notion of hope as contextually and situationally dependent (Webb, 2012). We also included borderline cases as well as sequences in which hope discourse is countered. This resulted in roughly 150 sequences being coded and 22 excerpts transcribed in more detail including emphasised words (underlined) and pauses in speech (transcribed as (.)). We discerned *what* was being constructed, *how* and *when* in the interaction and then explored what the participants accomplish by using those constructs in the specific interactional context. Based on this initial analysis, we identified discursive patterns of hope discourse, that is, we identified a number of possible interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

An interpretative repertoire is a “recognizable routine of arguments, descriptions and evaluations distinguished by familiar clichés, common places, tropes and characterizations of actors and situations.” (Edley and Wetherell, 2001, p. 443). They are discursive resources that people use in their various constructions of ‘reality’ and thereby draw on already established discourses (Edley, 2001). Interpretative repertoires make different positions or identities discursively available, which means that participants are positioned by discourse while also positioning themselves and others (Locke and Budds, 2020; Davies and Harré, 1990). Thus, in addition to the *what*, *how*, and *when* of discourse, there is a *who* to be considered. Different ‘ways of being’ are produced and, depending on the cultural context, some are more available than others (Edley, 2001). We explored what the subjects constructed *can* and *should* do, in what position they are to act and *who* is going to do *what*.

We identified three repertoires that are most typical of how hope discourse was constructed in our material. These, and the subject positions produced within them, are treated extensively in the analysis section, exemplified with excerpts from the material.

Analysis

We have identified three patterns of hope discourse: the *stronger together repertoire*, the *change for real repertoire* and the *silver lining repertoire*. In this section, we present how they are constructed and employed and what is accomplished by their use in the immediate interaction, as well as how they draw on wider discourses. We also highlight how participants position themselves and others in discourse.

The stronger together repertoire

The *stronger together repertoire* is a pattern of talk found in the various ways in which collaboration is portrayed as crucial for implementing a circular economy in the Swedish food sector. The repertoire mainly consists of active verbs that in different ways refer to collaboration, such as “working together”, “helping each other”, “having a close dialogue”, and “joining arms”. It also consists of nominalisations, such as “coordination”, “collaboration” and “networking”, which portrays collaboration as a product rather than a process (Halliday, 1978). Neither the use of nominalisations nor active verbs includes specifying the process of collaboration and *who* is doing *what*. The verbs do, however, position actors as interdependent. For example, “joining arms” implies a physical closeness and a dedication that is not necessarily implied by collaboration. Similarly, to “help each other” appeals to a willingness to collaborate and frames collaboration as a matter of altruism, positioning participants as having shared responsibility. Thus, such appeals seem to serve the social function of establishing a sense of community (Rödl et al., 2022).

The following excerpt demonstrates how appeals for collaboration are typically constructed to serve this function. The excerpt is from a meeting that focuses on innovation in a circular economy and which provides “inspiring examples” of circular projects. A panel of four speakers discussed the potential obstacles for innovation and repeatedly returned to collaboration as the answer. The moderators A and B provide a summary of the meeting and again emphasise the importance of working together, which is met with agreeing responses by panel participant C.

Excerpt 1

```
A:  […] and finally (.) I believe that
    it is important that we help each
    other here and not see one another
    as competitors because […] there
    are businesses that are pretty big
    in the food sector that say open
```

innovation (.) but close the door as soon as they have an idea

C: mm

A: and I think that (.) there we probably need to help each other and get up and help each other (.) for real (.) everyone so in conclusion (.) we are going to do this together

C: mm

Setting up a contrast between collaboration and competition, and between helping each other “for real” as opposed to for show, works to strengthen A’s argument in favour of the former. By putting emphasis on the word ‘together’, and having it be the concluding statement, A’s argument for ‘real’ collaboration is strengthened. Using ‘together’ in this manner seems to serve the interactional function of engaging participants, aligning with a recurring pattern in which moderators emphasise that participants are not alone in the endeavour of realising a circular business, but part of a larger movement (Rödl et al., 2022).

Participant B performs a positive assessment of the meeting, suggesting that it has been “wonderful” and energising. This metacommunicative account works to promote a shared positive experience, which further supports the collective identity that A constructs. Such accounts are a common feature in the meetings and this particular example demonstrates how performing a positive meeting experience is made a priority.

An example of the unusual activity of talking about collaboration in more concrete terms is found in excerpt 2. In this meeting, participants discuss how circular models can create new business opportunities. Participants were divided into groups to discuss what conditions are lacking to bring about a transition to the circular economy. D summarises their group discussion and shares their concerns regarding collaboration. Moderator B also participates in this meeting.

Excerpt 2

D: […] then we talked about if whether it is the case that (.) other actors that sort of will realise these (.) systems collaborations that a previous speaker mentioned (.) who is this then? who is going to lead this and is it (.) so what competencies does this person need to be perceived as legitimate by the different parties (.) and this thing about creating a feeling of trust and that (.) we all sort of benefit from this that we are sort of not really there yet but […]

B: wonderful many thanks for (.) for all thoughts it yeah it is very valuable for us to gather this so thank you so much [...]

Participant D raises a series of questions regarding potential obstacles for successful collaboration. D shows that their account may be heard as negative by using minimisations such as ”sort of”, which downplays the potentially negative in their account (Cranwell and Seymour-Smith, 2012). The moderator B does not elaborate on the unaddressed obstacles for collaboration. Instead, B comments with the positive adjective “wonderful”, which confirms that D’s account has been well received. This is another example of a metacommunicative account that promotes a positive meeting experience, here also functioning to create an inclusive atmosphere where all accounts are welcome – even the potentially negative ones.

Rather than addressing how to collaborate, e.g., by identifying concrete activities and by jointly investigating potential challenges, the *stronger together repertoire* is used to emphasise that as long as we work together things will work out. In addition, the argument that more can be accomplished by a collective positions the individual actors as having limited agency relative to the collective – they are dependent on the collective for greater success. However, what collaboration entails for the actors involved, and how it may affect their agency, is not addressed. Talk about collaboration overall tends to stay at an abstract level.

The strong emphasis on collaboration can be traced to broader discourses of environmental management. Collaboration is often considered a pillar of contemporary environmental management, and as a solution for a wide range of managerial and organisational issues (Hardy, Lawrence, and Phillips, 1998, p. 66). Collaboration is seen as key for overcoming issues of competition and silo-thinking, which is what led to the environmental crises in the first place (Westley and Vredenburg, 1996). Moreover, it is implied to be a more pragmatic way of addressing environmental issues, shifting focus away from conflict to “less disruptive strategies” for addressing environmental issues. (Prasad and Elmes, 2005, p. 857).

Collaboration is also key in the win-win narrative of circular economy discourse. What is argued to make the circular economy so appealing is its promise to deliver a win-win outcome by shifting the common focus on “trade-offs and constraints” to “synergies and opportunities” (Völker, Kovacik, and Strand, 2020, p. 116). Lazarevic and Valve (2017) even suggest that a circular economy is expected to “carve out a common future where only winners exist” (p. 67). This win-win narrative is very much reproduced in the meetings and in a manner that departs from the more formal, technical and managerial language that is typical of a circular economy discourse (Kovacic, Strand, and Völker, 2019), in favour of a discourse of community and solidarity.

The change for real repertoire

The *change for real repertoire* is found in the different ways in which participants stress that some action or event will lead to actual change. It is most pronounced in instances in which participants use the words "for real". It is also evident in talk of circular economy as doing things radically different than other sustainability initiatives, and that circular economy projects perform better than 'regular' ones. That something is to be done "for real" implies that current attempts have not been able to meet expectations. What those attempts are is however not specified by the participants. Moreover, they refer to greater shifts in society that they claim will improve conditions for the food sector, emphasising that the food industry "actually want to do something differently" and that its importance "has now been realised and it will get the recognition it deserves."

The next excerpt is an example of how the *change for real repertoire* is constituted by a 'we–circular' versus 'them–linear' duality (Rödl et al., 2022). It is from a panel discussion on the possibilities and obstacles for realising circular food production. The conversation has moved on to talk about obstacles and the panelist E argues that there is ”very good hope” for overcoming them and highlights the great potential of the circular economy.

Excerpt 3

E: […] that is a common misunderstanding around circular concepts that this is about recycling only we can continue linearly and then we make a small twirl at the end […] and then we are actually still as linear only a little better (.) as sustainability we are a little less evil (.) but circular economy is about doing good and it is that aspect that allows this to spin that there is an economic pitch on circular business models that make business see that there is an economic value in this […] and that (.) can be the key in (.) in actually making this a reality otherwise we will not get much further than we do today and then we will see what happens but we what was it that you said? we are

F: [inaudible]

E: you had an expression (.) a little you said have childhood faith (.) maybe that is what is needed?

Participant E explains that it is common to mistake circular economy for recycling with "a small spin at the end", which does not lead to real change. By arguing that recycling only makes us "a little less evil" E positions 'us-circular' against 'them-linear', invoking a 'good guys'-'bad guys' narrative (Hardy, Lawrence and Phillips, 1998). By invoking the morality of evil and goodness, E makes a strong case for circular economy by positioning people supporting it on 'the good side', the side that will actually bring change. E also invokes issues of accountability by positioning those who misunderstand what a circular economy is as accountable for reproducing a linear economy. In contrast, those who belong to the circular side are positioned as having a responsibility to realise a circular economy, and thus "doing good" in the world.

Invocations of accountability and responsibility are central features of the *change for real repertoire*. Some actors – primarily actors described as 'linear', but also more specific actors such as different supervisory authorities and lawmakers – are portrayed as being accountable for preventing change and are to blame for slow progress. Participants tend to assign a collective 'we' the responsibility and agency to make 'real' change, however, they do not specify who they are.

E contrasts circular economy against an uncertain future by stating that if we do not transition to a circular economy "we will not get much further", an alternative that will have unforeseen consequences. E does, however, soften this potentially bad news by positing that maybe what we need is "childhood faith", a suggestion made earlier by panelist F. This implies that we risk finding ourselves in a situation that would be so unpredictable that naïve faith is needed to manage it. E portrays this as the alternative to putting one's faith in a circular economy. Moreover, they orient to a norm stipulating that accounts with negative connotations should end on a positive note, possibly attending to an expectation to uphold a positive meeting experience.

Deviating from the common line of argument in the *change for real repertoire*, there are a few instances in which participants are less optimistic about the possibilities for change. The following excerpt is from the same panel discussion as previous excerpt, taken from the start of the discussion. A presentation round is led by the moderator G, and F is the last panelist to present himself. After having described their circular business, F talks about past and current delegations founded to support the national transition to a circular economy. F refers to the concept of "eco-cycle" [Swe kretslopp], which was used in Swedish public and policy discussions in the 1990s and which preceded the circular economy concept (Johansson and Henriksson, 2020). "The eco cycle delegation" [Swe kretsloppsdelegationen] was the name of a former policy committee that produced policy proposals to the Swedish government.

Excerpt 4

F: […] now things are starting to speed up and that is incredibly gratifying and then there are things (.) I will probably be a bit sharp here today and sit and be this old uncle that has seen everything already (.)

Audience: [laughter]

F: how many of you remember how revolutionary the eco cycle delegation was in your life (.) or all the other delegations that have appeared and disappeared when politics gets tired of an old concept like waste then they create a new concept and think (.) shit (.) this feels fresh and revitalising

Audience: [laughter]

F: nothing happens […] we have not regulated shit (.) […] so there is reason to be a bit sharp and dreary towards all delegations but we have childhood faith so I of course believe in this

G: now we should probably add that the delegations are not present in the panel here today

F: not even that

Audience: [laughter]

G: yeah but (.) yeah we will follow up on that so (.) they have participated

F: you can turn off my mic there is probably some technician here

Participant F acknowledges that things are starting to change but emphasises that there is still reason to be sceptical. F argues that policy delegations have come and gone and suggests that politics is to blame for this because it tends to go for what is considered “fresh and revitalising”. Thus, F portrays politics as incapable of creating change and encourages the participants to be critical of political initiatives. While F argues that ”nothing is changing” they show that this is a potentially problematic opinion by positioning themselves as an “old uncle” who is “a bit sharp”. F chooses to formulate their disclaimer by making a joke, which is an acknowledged way to mitigate disagreement (Osvaldsson, 2004). F resists the subject position of an agreeable participant and acknowledges that there is a norm to be agreeable and to strive for consensus (Rödl et al., 2022). Furthermore, and in line with a pattern in the material overall, F chooses to end on a positive note by stating that we have “childhood faith” and that they therefore believe in the circular economy project. Issues of agency are evident in the way F positions circular economy practitioners as having limited agency and places the blame on the delegations. It is thus an external agent who limits the agency for people running a circular business. F do however reclaim some agency by saying that they despite this believe in the circular economy project.

The moderator G responds to F by emphasising that the delegations are not present to respond to F’s account, implying that the delegation would probably dispute F’s account. G also adds that the issues posed by F will be followed up at another occasion. G’s response to this potential disagreement is in alignment with a conversation procedure recognised in a paper by Hallgren, Bergeå and Westberg (2018) that promises of future elaboration is used to avoid articulation of potential disagreements. G’s promise of a future elaboration, in combination with F positioning themselves as a trouble maker that no one has to listen to, solves the interactional tension.

With ecological modernisation and incremental change process at the core of the circular economy concept (Niskanen, Anshelm, and McLaren, 2020), it is no wonder that participants put emphasis on adjusting business models. While the circular economy offers a critique of linear economic relations, it does not profess systemic change. Instead, businesses are typically encouraged to adjust their business models and increase collaboration (Temesgen, Storsletten, and Jakobsen, 2019). In the circular economy narrative, environmental “problems” become “opportunities”, and since the circular economy is framed as a win-win policy, criticisms are generally hard to voice (see excerpt 4). (Kovacic, Strand and Völker, 2019). Central to this narrative is the overall framing of the business case (see excerpt 3), which is portrayed as “the main rationale for the pursuit of circularity” (Kovacic, Strand and Völker, 2019 p. 41). Thus, change is to be done by businesses, which is often the “we” referred to in the meetings. This invokes a neoliberal discourse about the responsibility of businesses and the incapability of states and governmental actors, as well as promises of sustainable growth through privatisation (Kinderman, 2012). As evident in excerpt 4, the *change for real repertoire* is used to profess a political inability to foster a circular economy, with responsibility for circularity instead being assigned to individuals and entrepreneurs (Johansson and Henriksson, 2020).

The silver lining repertoire

The *silver lining repertoire* is enacted whenever participants describe some event in negative terms while also accounting for the different ways in which it has brought, or will bring, something positive. It emphasises that seemingly negative situations can bring something positive. Participants often refer to the then ongoing covid-19 pandemic, highlighting its far-reaching negative consequences while also emphasising its positive outcomes. They argue that the pandemic has benefitted the environment and led to the recognition that the food sector has as a critical function in society. Setbacks are effectively reframed as possibilities for positive change.

Excerpt 5 is from the start of a panel discussion taking place in a meeting where participants were invited to learn more about the circular economy and its possibilities. The moderator H provides an introduction to the panel discussion and invites the panel participant J to answer the first question.

Excerpt 5

```
H: […] food has ended up very close to the epicentre in the corona crisis (.) we have become crucial in society (.) we who work with food (.) we see death and misery but we actually also see healthier air and a lessened impact on the climate (.) due to less travelling and less production but we also know that there is one production that we must keep going (.) and that is food because one can imagine (.) the complete hell that would have been if we got a food crisis on top of this so (.) with that background we know that we have to transition […] how are we going to increase production while simultaneously transitioning? […]

J: yeah (.) that is of course a crucial issue but (.) I actually do not think (.) actually I think we should also remember that we use (.) considerably less arable land than we did (.) only fifty years ago so we can utilise more land but I also believe that we can utilise the land in a better way
```

Moderator H argues that the pandemic has brought positive changes in the form of cleaner air and a lessened impact on the climate. Moreover, the food sector has become recognised as crucial for society – alluding to greater opportunities for this sector, which is great news for the meeting participants. H makes these positive claims against the backdrop of “death and misery” and “complete hell”, which works to emphasise the importance of the food sector and the need for transitioning to a circular economy. By referring to this backdrop, H adds credibility to their argument that the food sector will now get the recognition it deserves since it demonstrates the serious context in which this issue deserves to be placed. J responds by describing H’s question as central, but chooses to remind everyone that we are actually using less land than we used to. Thus, J argues that the situation of the food sector was not that bad to begin with, which downplays H’s contrasting account (Locke and Horton-Salway, 2010), and contributes to a more hopeful account.

The final excerpt is from the same meeting as the previous one, now mid discussion, where the covid-19 pandemic is portrayed as an opportunity to learn and to promote a circular economy. It is assumed that we can learn from bad experiences and facilitate continued development, rather than repeat past mistakes. Moderator H presents the last question and panelist K is the first to answer, followed by panelists L and M.

Excerpt 6

```
H: […] how can the corona crisis’ resource mobilisation and changes and insights be used to favour a circular bioeconomy? (.) what do we learn now? (.)

K: we probably learn (.) it is probably a small wake up call for everyone that we need to (.) think more about (.) how we (.) the state of food and (.) the supply

H: thank you

K: I think

H: yeah mm

L: food (.) business (.) food production it is (.) means for life (.) it is completely vital to really get that insight to sink in in all of us and that we can live (.) smaller lives (.) but have a greater life experience

H: sounds fantastic […]
```

Participant K suggests that the pandemic is a “wake up call” for everyone to pay more attention to food – implying that we have been asleep until now. However, K minimises their account with “probably” and “small”, making the metaphor of the pandemic being “a wake up call” seem less serious. This enables K to avoid being positioned as an alarmist, while at the same time using a strong statement that may even be heard as going to the extremes (Edwards, 2000). In addition, by finishing their response with the hedging "I think", K allows for some room to retract her account (Goodman and Burke, 2011). By hedging and minimising their response, K manages accountability by distancing themselves from any particular stance. Moreover, the 'we' constructed here is an inclusive and unspecific 'we'. It is also a passive 'we', and it is not made specific what 'we' should do, other than to "think more about" food and food supply, an activity that does not necessarily involve action.

Participant L continues to refer to this inclusive and unspecific 'we' when arguing that we should realise how important food is. Even though it is an unspecific 'we', L conveys a "sense of an authoritative consensus" (Horton-Salway 2001, p. 253) about the societal role of the food sector, urging us to realise that food is vital. The pandemic has the potential to bring about this vital understanding. H expresses support for L's utterance and invites more comments. Participant M responds to H's question by emphasising how quickly things can change "if we are open, constructive, creative, and collaborate and [...] help each other to transition". M finalises their account by adding that this is what they "hope for" (not in excerpt).

While the *silver lining repertoire* is mainly used to refer to the covid-19 pandemic, it draws on wider discourses. Overall, the repertoire relates to hope discourse more broadly as something that enables the speaker to acknowledge the possibility of both positive and negative outcomes while privileging the former (Eliott and Olver, 2007). In a similar fashion, the acknowledgement of the negative renders the ecological crisis, and the circular economy as a response to this, as a question of risk (Beck, 1992): Choosing a measurable and predictable circular economy future over the uncertainties of the status quo, is essentially what participant E suggests to naysayers when saying "then we will see what happens" (excerpt 3). Participants' acknowledgement of a potential environmental and food crisis, as seen in apocalyptic environmental rhetoric (Foust and O'Shannon Murphy, 2009) and in their accounts of "death and misery" and "complete hell" (excerpt 5), highlights the increased multiple responsibilities that businesses have in tackling the complex and interconnected issues of contemporary society (Berglund and Werr, 2000). Moreover, such apocalyptic framing portrays the change that is now going to happen 'for real' as all the more needed or anticipated. Here, the pandemic is being turned into a pivotal moment that has highlighted the vulnerability of the food system. Promises of self-improvement await through an advance of control and resilience that continue the anthropocentric trajectory (Fremaux, 2019) through the circular economy.

Discussion

We have explored three interpretive repertoires that constitute hope discourse in inspirational circular economy meetings: *stronger together*, *change for real* and *silver lining.* In this section, we discuss the implications of these repertoires for the meetings and beyond.

In the meetings, the *stronger together repertoire* is used to encourage participants to work together, and it seems its main social function is to establish interpersonal ties and solidarity between them (Eliott and Olver, 2007). Thereby, participants create a positive meeting experience in which a hopeful orientation towards the circular economy is maintained. While an emphasis on the great potential of collaboration may be appealing, the complexity of collaboration – such as large time requirements and establishing dialogue across different institutional languages (Kovacic, Strand, and Völker, 2019; Fadeeva, 2005) – is overlooked. Instead of addressing such issues, participants maintain an abstract or vague discourse and when potential challenges to collaboration are raised they are not elaborated on. Thus, emphasis on community and togetherness seems to occur at the expense of constructive conversations about obstacles, differences and disagreement – conversations that are necessary for advancing environmental planning and management (Hallgren, Bergeå, and Westberg, 2018).

Abstract or vague language is also characteristic of the *change for real repertoire*. Here, hope is constructed in the tension between the promise of 'real' change and the often unarticulated risk of hypocrisy, failure and greenwashing evident in sustainable development discourse and practice (Cho et al., 2015; Higgins et al., 2020). While space is not created for deliberating why something is changing for real – and what is then implied to be inauthentic or simulated – such claims are made with an implicit reference to insincere or broken promises of the environmental movement. Maybe as a response to this, participants construct a responsible and actionable collective 'we' that are going to create real change. However, rather than promoting action by clarifying *who* is responsible for *what*, such claims seem to function as a discursive device which main function is to engage people. Moreover, the responsible and actionable 'we', is contrasted to 'them-linear', who participants assign responsibility to for reproducing a linear economy. They employ a 'good guys' - 'bad guys' narrative (Hardy, Lawrence and Philips, p. 70), arguing that "circular economy is about doing good", which effectively portrays circular businesses and actors as the 'good guys'.

Participants use the *silver lining repertoire* to highlight formative moments and the great potential for change that desperate situations bring. The repertoire builds on an assumption that society is continuously developing in the right direction – even though there are setbacks along the way. Such setbacks can create momentum to accelerate change and societal hardship is turned into pivotal moments that reinforce a responsibility to act on those moments. Thus, the responsible and actionable 'we', who will bring real and good change, find themselves at a fruitful time in history. While it may be valuable to identify formative moments, it is also important to acknowledge and explore potential challenges and obstacles, and actively address any related negative emotional response to hardship. Otherwise hope may result in denial of the gravity of the situation and lead to inaction. (Ojala, 2012). We see no such explorations in the meetings. Instead, we see a social expectation to highlight the silver lining, which reproduces a positive one-sidedness. Consequently, talk of challenges and obstacles are avoided, which may preclude genuine conversations where discourse is open to conflicting ideas and interpretations.

Meetings constitute a key ingredient in environmental planning and management processes as a means to communicate on complex issues of sustainability (Cox and Pezzullo, 2018). The meetings explored here are a case of such meetings and considering that the interpretive repertoires identified here are patterns of discourse that draw on established broader discourses they are likely to feature in other settings – and in relation to other sustainability concepts than circular economy. Our exploration of hope discourse is an important addition to studies of hope. We add to previous research on hope as an individual project, where it is considered a rhetorical device in instrumental communication, by shedding light on hope as a collective project and on the co-construction of hope. This is an important contribution considering that we have shown that investigations of differences or tension are rarely made, and when they are, they are being closed down in favour of a positive meeting experience and a norm to maintain hopeful discourse.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored hope discourse as it is co-constructed and managed in inspirational meetings about the circular economy. Overall, a responsible and actionable circular economy collective, that is able to create 'real' change, is constructed. Participants also highlight that societal hardship provide them with momentum for change. However, investigating the social implications of such hope discourse – in the meetings and beyond – we found that this narrative stays at an abstract level, not specifying *what* actions to be taken by *whom*. While previous research has shown that hope messages foster environmental engagement, we have demonstrated that when hope appears as a general discursive preference or norm it obscures the communicative capacity to address problems, ambiguities and contestation in environmental management (Hallgren, 2016). Thus, inspiring and encouraging as such discourse may be, it risks staying at a positive meeting experience, perhaps building community and solidarity among meeting participants, but overlooking discussions of commitment and concrete action. Therefore, we conclude that hope discourse, and the three interpretative repertoires it is expressed as here, limits participants' capacity to acknowledge potential obstacles that a circular economy collective face.

We argue that environmental communication researchers and practitioners should pay attention to both instrumental and constitutive aspects of communication, and consider *when* and *how* hope discourse can facilitate environmental planning and policy production, and when it hampers such processes. We claim that considerations of the social implications of hope discourse can be used to increase the constructiveness of sustainability initiatives. Inspirational meetings need to be accompanied by other forms of collaborative approaches that actively address concrete action and raise potential challenges and tensions. We suggest that the findings of this paper is used to inform a more nuanced discussion about the role of hope discourse in environmental communication

References

Beck, U. 1992. From Industrial Society to the Risk Society: Questions of Survival, Social Structure and Ecological Enlightenment. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 9 (1): 97–123. doi:10.1177/026327692009001006

Berglund, J., and A. Werr. 2000. The Invincible Character of Management Consulting Rhetoric: How One Blends Incommensurates While Keeping them Apart. *Organization*, 7 (4): 633–655. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840074008

Burr, V. 2015. *Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Cassegård, C., and H. Thörn. 2018. Toward a Postapocalyptic Environmentalism? Responses to Loss and Visions of the Future in Climate Activism. *Environment and planning. E*, Nature and space (Print), 1 (4): 561–578. https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618793331

Chadwick, A. E. 2015. Toward a Theory of Persuasive Hope: Effects of Cognitive Appraisals, Hope Appeals, and Hope in the Context of Climate Change. *Health Communication*, 30 (6): 598–611. doi:10.1080/10410236.2014.916777

Cho, C. H., M. Laine, R.W. Roberts, and M. Rodrigue. 2015. Organized Hypocrisy, Organizational Façades, and Sustainability Reporting. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 40: 78–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aos.2014.12.003

Corvellec, H., S. Böhm, A. Stowell, and F. Valenzuela. 2020. Introduction to the Special Issue on the Contested Realities of the Circular Economy. *Culture and Organization*, 26 (2): 97–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2020.1717733

Cox, R., and P. Pezzullo. 2018. *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Craig, R. T. 1999. Communication Theory as a Field. *Communication Theory*, 9 (2): 119–161. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.x

Cranwell, J., and S. Seymour-Smith. 2012. Monitoring and Normalising a Lack of Appetite and Weight Loss: A Discursive Analysis of an Online Support Group for Bariatric Surgery. *Appetite*, 58 (3): 873–881.

Davies, B., and R. Harré. 1990. Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20 (1): 43–63.

Edley, N. 2001. Analysing Masculinity: Interpretative Repertoires, Ideological Dilemmas and Subject Positions. In: M. Wetherell, S. Taylor and S. J. Yates (Eds), *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London: Sage, pp. 189–228.

Edley, N., and M. Wetherell. 2001. Jekyll and Hyde: Men's Constructions of Feminism and Feminists. *Feminism and Psychology*, 11 (4): 439–457.

Edwards, D. 2000. Extreme Case Formulations: Softeners, Investment, and doing Nonliteral. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 33 (4): 347–373.

Eliott, J. A., and I. N. Olver. 2007. Hope and Hoping in the Talk of Dying Cancer Patients. *Social science and medicine*, 64 (1): 138–149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.08.029

Eliott, J. A., and I. N. Olver. 2002. The Discursive Properties of "Hope": A Qualitative Analysis of Cancer Patients' Speech. *Qualitative health research*, 12 (2): 173–193. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230201200204

Ettinger, J., P. Walton, J. Painter, and T. DiBlasi. 2021. Climate of Hope or Doom and Gloom? Testing the Climate Change Hope vs. Fear communications Debate through Online videos. *Climatic change*, 164 (19). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-02975-8

Fadeeva, Z. 2005. Promise of Sustainability Collaboration—Potential Fulfilled? *Journal of cleaner production*, 13 (2): 165–174. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0959-6526(03)00125-2

Foust, C. R., and W. O'Shannon Murphy. 2009. Revealing and Reframing Apocalyptic Tragedy in Global Warming Discourse. *Environmental Communication*, 3 (2): 151–167. doi:10.1080/17524030902916624

Fremaux, A. 2019. The 'Return of Nature' in the Capitalocene: Against the Ecomodernist Version of the 'Good Anthropocene'. In: *After the Anthropocene. Environmental Politics and Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 85–117. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11120-5_3

Goodman, S., and S. Burke. 2011. Discursive Deracialization in Talk about Asylum Seeking. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 21 (2): 111–123.

Hallgren, L. 2016. Reframing Conflict in Natural Resource Management – Mutuality, Reciprocity and Pluralistic Agonism as Dynamics of Community Constructivity and Destructivity. In: Peterson,T.R., Bergeå, H.L., Feldpausch-Parker, A.M., and K. Raitio (Eds), *Environmental Communication and Community*. Routledge, pp. 16–30.

Hallgren, L., Bergeå, H. and L. Westberg. 2018. Communication Problems When Participants Disagree (or Avoid Disagreeing) in Dialogues in Swedish Natural Resource Management – Challenges to Agonism in Practice. *Frontiers in communication*, 3. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2018.00056

Halliday, M.A.K. 1978. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. London: Edward Arnold.

Hardy, C., Lawrence,T.B. and N. Phillips. 1998. Talk and Action: Conversations and Narrative in Interorganizational Collaboration. In: Grant, D., Keenoy, T. and C. Oswick (Eds), *Discourse and Organization*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 65–83. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446280270.

Herrestad, H., S. Biong, B. McCormack, M. Borg, and B. Karlsson. 2014. A Pragmatist Approach to the Hope Discourse in Health Care Research. *Nursing Philosophy*, 15 (3): 211–220.

Higgins, C., S. Tang, and W. Stubbs. 2020. On Managing Hypocrisy: The Transparency of Sustainability Reports. *Journal of business research*, 114: 395–407. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.08.041

Hornsey, M. J., and K. S. Fielding. 2016. A Cautionary Note about Messages of Hope: Focusing on progress in reducing carbon emissions weakens mitigation motivation. *Global Environmental Change*, 39: 26–34.

Hornsey, M. J., and K. S. Fielding. 2020. Understanding (and Reducing) Inaction on Climate Change. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 14 (1): 3–35.

Horton-Salway, M. 2001. Narrative Identities and the Management of Personal Accountability in Talk about ME: A Discursive Psychology Approach to Illness Narrative. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 6 (2): 247–259.

Johansson, N., and M. Henriksson. 2020. Circular Economy Running in Circles? A Discourse Analysis of Shifts in Ideas of Circularity in Swedish Environmental Policy. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 23: 148–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.spc.2020.05.005

Kinderman, D. 2012. "Free Us Up so We can be Responsible!" The Co-evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility and Neo-liberalism in the UK, 1977-2010. *Socio-economic review*, 10 (1): 29–57. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwr028

Korhonen, J., C. Nuur, A. Feldmann, and S. E. Birkie. 2018. Circular Economy as an Essentially Contested Concept. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 175: 544–552. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.111

Kovacic, Z., R. Strand, and T. Völker. 2019. *The Circular Economy in Europe: Critical Perspectives on Policies and Imaginaries* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061028

Larsen, D., W. Edey, and L. Lemay. 2007. Understanding the Role of Hope in Counselling: Exploring the Intentional Uses of Hope. *Counselling psychology quarterly*, 20 (4): 401–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070701690036

Lazarevic, D., and H. Valve. 2017. Narrating Expectations for the Circular Economy: Towards a Common and Contested European Transition. *Energy research & social science*, 31: 60–69. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2017.05.006

Lee, Y. K., C. T. Chang, and P. C. Chen. 2017. What Sells Better in Green Communications: Fear or Hope?: It Depends on whether the Issue is Global or Local. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 57 (4): 379–396.

Li, C. J., and M. C. Monroe. 2019. Exploring the Essential Psychological Factors in Fostering Hope Concerning Climate Change. *Environmental education research*, 25 (6): 936–954. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2017.1367916

Locke, A., and K. Budds. 2020. Applying Critical Discursive Psychology to Health Psychology Research: a Practical Guide. *Health psychology & behavioral medicine*, 8 (1): 234–247. https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2020.1792307

Locke, A., and M. Horton-Salway. 2010. 'Golden Age' versus 'Bad Old Days': A Discursive Examination of Advice Giving in Antenatal Classes. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 15 (8): 1214–1224.

Merkel, S. H., A. M. Person, R. A. Peppler, and S. M. Melcher. 2020. Climate Change Communication: Examining the Social and Cognitive Barriers to Productive Environmental Communication. *Social science quarterly*, 101 (5): 2085–2100. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12843

Niskanen, J., J. Anshelm, and D. McLaren. 2020. Local conflicts and National Consensus: The Strange Case of Circular Economy in Sweden. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 261, 121117. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.121117

Ojala, M. 2012. Hope and Climate Change: the Importance of Hope for Environmental Engagement among Young People. *Environmental Education Research*, 18 (5): 625–642. doi:10.1080/13504622.2011.637157

O'Neill, S., and S. Nicholson-Cole. 2009. Fear Won't Do It: Promoting Positive Engagement With Climate Change Through Visual and Iconic Representations. *Science communication*, 30 (3): 355–379. https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547008329201

Osvaldsson, K. 2004. On Laughter and Disagreement in Multiparty Assessment Talk. *Text & Talk*, 24 (4): 517–545. https://doi.org/10.1515/text.2004.24.4.517

Potter, J., and M. Wetherell. 1987. *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage.

Prasad, P., and M. Elmes. 2005. In the Name of the Practical: Unearthing the Hegemony of Pragmatics in the Discourse of Environmental Management*. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42: 845–867. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00521.x

Rödl, M. B., T. Åhlvik, H. Bergeå, L. Hallgren, and S. Böhm. 2022. Performing the Circular Economy: How an Ambiguous Discourse is Managed and Maintained through Meetings. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 360, 132144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.132144

Schneider, C. R., L. Zaval., and E. M. Markowitz. 2021. Positive Emotions and Climate Change. *Current opinion in behavioral sciences*, 42: 114–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.04.009

Temesgen, A., V. Storsletten, and O. Jakobsen. 2019. Circular Economy – Reducing Symptoms or Radical Change? *Philosophy of management*, 20 (1): 37–56. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40926-019-00112-1

van Zomeren, M., I. L. Pauls, and S. Cohen-Chen. 2019. Is Hope Good for Motivating Collective Action in the Context of Climate Change? Differentiating Hope's Emotion- and Problem-Focused Coping Functions. *Global environmental change*, 58, 101915. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.04.003

Völker, T., Z. Kovacic, and R. Strand. 2020. Indicator Development as a Site of Collective Imagination? The Case of European Commission Policies on the Circular Economy. *Culture and organization*, 26 (2): 103–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2019.1699092

Webb, D. 2012. Pedagogies of Hope. Studies in philosophy and education, 32 (4): 397–414. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-012-9336-1

Weingarten, K. 2010. Reasonable Hope: Construct, Clinical Applications, and Supports. *Family process*, 49 (1), 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2010.01305.x

Westley, F., and H. Vredenburg. 1996. 'Sustainability and the Corporation: Criteria for Aligning Economic Practice with Environmental Protection'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 5 (2): 104–119. doi:10.1177/105649269652003.

III

Undeniably exciting to follow

How issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in hope discourse

Therese Åhlvik & Hanna Bergeå
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Urban and Rural Development,
P.O. Box 7012 SE-750 07 Uppsala Sweden

Manuscript

Abstract

The importance of having environmental communication be characterised by messages of hope is largely embraced by environmental scholars and practitioners today. Research on hope and communication overall suggests that strategically designed hope messages can foster pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour. Such research tends to conceptualise hope as an internal cognitive state and focus on the instrumental aspects of communication. In contrast, research that emphasises the social function of hope considers it a discursive phenomenon that people in interaction actively use to perform different social actions. Previous research has shown that issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are central features of hope discourse. It is important to address these social issues in environmental communication and management in order to move from good intentions and high ambitions to taking action. In this paper, we examine how these issues are managed in inspirational meetings that promote a transition to a circular economy, a transition that is largely regarded a promising strategy to solve contemporary environmental issues. We adopt the methodology of discursive psychology and analyse how the hope discourse that dominates these meetings is constructed, situated and oriented towards action. We found that hope discourse is used to downplay problems and challenges and to avoid accountability for claims that can be considered negative. Hope discourse is also used to assign responsibility to others as well as to renounce it personally, thereby externalising responsibility and construing hope as a passive act. Furthermore, hope discourse enables participants to portray themselves as active and agentic by claiming responsibility and making commitments to realise a circular economy and bring "real" change. However, such commitments tend to be unspecific and the extent of their responsibility is rarely discussed, nor what actions it encompasses. We conclude that environmental scholars and practitioners should engage critically with hope discourse by identifying when it enables the joint exploration of problems and challenges and when it closes down such discourse.

Keywords: hope, discourse, discursive psychology, environmental communication, circular economy

Introduction

One of the most debated issues in environmental research has been whether the invocation of hope or fear in communication is more effective in promoting pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Morris et al., 2020; Ettinger et al., 2021). Previous research on hope and communication suggests that hope, and other related positive emotions, is an antecedent for pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (see Schneider et al., 2021). Research has found that well-tailored hope messages can motivate and encourage individuals to engage in environmental issues, while messages of fear are discouraging and rather promotes disengagement (e.g. Feldman and Hart, 2018; Marlon et al., 2019; Bury et al., 2020). Therefore, it is argued that successful environmental communication that fosters environmental engagement should employ specifically designed messages that evoke hope rather than fear in the target audience (e.g. O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Merkel et al., 2020; Ettinger et al., 2021).

Building on this research, there is a widespread call to focus on hope in environmental research (Stern, 2012; Moser, 2016; Cassegård and Thörn, 2018) and practice (Head, 2016; de Vries, 2020). Adopting a discourse of hope has become the norm when addressing issues of the environment and sustainability and has replaced the 'gloom and doom' discourse that has long characterised the environmental movement (Chandler, 2019; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, 2019). However, little is known about the social implications of this norm and how it shapes environmental research and practice (Åhlvik et al., forthcoming).

One social issue in particular, that may be especially important to investigate, is how people in different initiatives for sustainability manage issues of accountability, responsibility and agency when hope discourse is made normative. In fact, research has demonstrated that hope discourse tends to revolve around issues of accountability, responsibility and agency and that the ways in which they are managed interactionally has practical implications (Eliott and Olver, 2007; Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015; Kirby et al., 2021). Hope discourse can, for example, be used by the speaker to show support for something (e.g. "I hope it was useful") while avoiding responsibility for its outcome by positioning themselves as a passive actor (Eliott and Olver, 2007). Furthermore, accountability, responsibility and agency are central issues to address in environmental communication research and practice since they concern fundamental issues within the field, namely how communicative procedures in change processes for sustainability are created and maintained in interaction. The ways in which these issues are investigated by collaborating actors in different sustainability initiatives, has implications for environmental communication and management. For example, a hope discourse that obscures these issues by placing one's hope on technological innovations and solutions to climate change, and thereby reducing one's own responsibility and agency to act, may foster false hope, which in turn fosters inaction (Ojala, 2012; 2015; Moser, 2015; Marlon et al., 2019).

While previous research on hope and communication offers valuable insights into the role of hope in strategic communication, and recognises that there is no 'one size fits all' approach regarding the design of hope messages (Schneider et al., 2021, p. 117), it relies on an instrumental view of communication (Craig, 1999). Accordingly, the task or goal of communication is to encourage, inspire, motivate, and convince individuals to engage in environmental issues (Merkel et al., 2020). In order to answer questions on the implications of an overarching hope norm, and produce knowledge about the role of hope discourse in large scale social change processes, this view needs to be complemented with what Schneider et al. (2021) describe as a "careful, situationally sensitive analysis and assessment rather than reliance on broad assumptions about what positive emotions [such as hope] 'do' in this context." (p. 117).

In this paper, we do just that. In order to understand how hope and issues of accountability, responsibility and agency feature in large scale societal change processes, such as the sustainability transition, we view hope and communication as social and discursive phenomena. More specifically, we examine the relationship between hope discourse and accountability, responsibility and agency as it is constructed and managed in inspirational meetings on the topic of circular economy, which is promoted as a promising solution to contemporary sustainability challenges (Corvellec et al., 2020).

The circular economy generally refers to "an economy that is restorative and regenerative by design" (EMF, 2019, p. 22) and has been widely promoted as key in addressing issues of sustainability as it radically reduces resource use and waste (Kerdlap et al., 2019). Moreover, it is argued to solve the conflict between continued economic growth and limiting environmental degradation and climate change, which makes circular economy a highly optimistic concept (Persson, 2015; Korhonen et al., 2018). In the Swedish circular economy community, it is common practice to organise inspirational and business oriented meetings with the purpose of promoting a circular economy (Rödl et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that these meetings are dominated by a hope norm that hinders the joint exploration of ambiguities, conflicts and challenges regarding the implementation of a circular economy (Åhlvik et al., forthcoming). Such exploration is, however, crucial for successful environmental communication (Hallgren, 2016). Moreover, it is never made clear what actions that are to be taken and by whom (Åhlvik et al., forthcoming), a finding that we build on in this paper by exploring how issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in social interaction.

How these issues are managed by people in interaction is a traditional analytical theme in the field of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992). Research in this field acknowledges that a central part of describing different events is to attend to accountability and responsibility (see Wiggins, 2017). Discursive psychology acknowledges that people in interaction continuously attend to events in terms of what is considered normal, expected, and proper and in doing so they manage their accountability and responsibility – both in the event as it unfolds and for the retelling of the event (Edwards, 2007). Moreover, when managing accountability and responsibility speakers also manage their personal agency. Speakers can, for example, make excuses for their actions, blame others or justify them and effectively downplay their agency (Buttny, 1993; Locke, 2004).

By adopting the methodology of discursive psychology, we examine how the management of accountability, responsibility and agency in hope discourse sets the discursive scene for change processes for sustainability. In order to do this, we treat hope as constructed in and as constructive of the social world and as being used to perform different social actions. Accordingly, we explore discourse as social action and as specifically designed for its interactional context. (Burr, 2015). Thus, we depart from the dominant focus on hope as a cognitive-behavioural phenomena with a positive effect on individual pro-environmental behaviour and instead view hope as a social accomplishment.

We now turn to a brief review of the literature on circular economy, hope communication and research on the social function of hope discourse. This is followed by a description of the material and analytic procedure. We then present our analysis of hope discourse in the meetings and discuss the broader implications of our findings for understanding hope discourse more generally and for the circular economy transition.

Background

High hopes for a circular economy

Over that past decade, the circular economy model has become an increasingly popular to address complex issues of sustainability (Corvellec et al., 2020). The model is argued to bridge the longstanding conflict between economic growth and the environment and to be a promising approach to sustainable development (Korhonen et al., 2018). In a circular economy the linear models of production and consumption are replaced by a circular model, implemented through inter alia recycling, reusing, repairing and repurposing products (Ghisellini, 2016).

The circular economy has become an established economic strategy in the EU (European Commission, 2020), and countries like Sweden have adopted a national strategy for the implementation of a circular economy (Regeringskansliet, 2021). One of the many sectors in which the concept has been adopted broadly is the Swedish agrifood sector where its inherent flows of biomaterial in the production of food and fibre add to general circular economy principles of recycling of materials. Here, meetings that serve to promote a circular economy are common practice (Rödl et al., 2022). Previous research has demonstrated that these meetings are dominated by a hope norm, which means that optimistic expressions of the potential of a circular economy are emphasised while deviations from this potential are accompanied by excuses and reprimanded in the interaction. As a consequence, a sense of community in favour of a circular economy and solidarity is created among meeting participants while problems and disagreement are avoided. (Rödl et al., 2022; Åhlvik et al., forthcoming).

The tendency to focus on the positive side of things, to avoid disagreement and to emphasise the strength of a collective that comes together to realise a circular economy is reflected in broader circular economy discourse, which centres on the creation of win-win situations, the possibility of large-scale collaboration across sectors and the importance of building consensus among collaborators (Kovacic et al., 2019). However, previous research suggests that the hopeful circular economy discourse promotes vagueness and consequently what actions that are to be taken and by whom in order to realise a circular economy is never discussed. Instead, discourse overall focuses on the great chances of realising a circular economy if coming together and collaborating; that a circular economy actually brings real change in sustainability; and that there is always some progress to be found in disasters and setbacks (Åhlvik et al., forthcoming). This paper aims to further the ambition to investigate the consequences of this vagueness in relation to issues of accountability, responsibility and agency. These issues are important considering that the implementation of a circular economy requires that a wide range of actors, often crossing over diverse sectors, align their potentially conflicting economic interests and objectives in order to establish the intricate collaboration that is required to create circular flows of production (Kovacic et al., 2019). Thus, a transition to a circular economy places great demands on action, coordination and the division of responsibilities.

Hope communication research

Extensive research has been carried out investigating whether, and to what extent, messages of hope foster pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour. Research has, for example, examined hope as an explanatory factor for increasing environmental engagement among students in environmental education (Ojala, 2012; 2015; Jie Li and Monroe, 2019; Bury et al., 2020) and suggests that it is an effective strategy in green business marketing (Lee et al., 2017). Research has also found that hope appeals increase individual motivation to engage in activism against climate change and therefore argue that it is an important tool in climate change communication (Chadwick, 2015; van Zomeren et al., 2019). Overall, research suggests that employing hope messages in persuasive communication, and thus evoking hope in individuals, is a successful strategy for fostering pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour.

Irrespective of the correlation between hope and pro-environmental behaviour, this research conceptualises hope as an intrasubjective phenomenon that can be quantified and manipulated. Hope is explored in terms of a cognitive and emotional individual experience and evaluated for its effectiveness in motivating individuals to change their attitudes and behaviour. This methodology builds on a view of hope as a cognitive-behavioural phenomenon that can be transferred between individuals (Eliott and Olver, 2002; Webb, 2012), which overlooks the social nature of hope (Crapanzano, 2003) and the interactional function that it plays (cf. Wiggins et al., 2001; cf. Edwards, 2000). The development of such an intersubjective understanding of hope is crucial when investigating its role in communication processes that address complex issues of sustainability, which are large scale processes that necessitates open and constructive expression of different perspectives and imagined solutions (Rödl et al., 2022). By analysing hope as a discursive accomplishment (Åhlvik et al., forthcoming) and communication as co-constructed social and symbolic action (Craig, 1999), we shed light on the implications of the societal call for hope discourse (Head, 2016; Chandler, 2019; Ettinger et al., 2021) as the strategy for implementing a transition to a circular economy – and to a sustainable society overall. In doing this, we build on research that explores the social function of hope and emphasise the situatedness of hope discourse and that people in interaction actively (albeit unconsciously) use discourse to accomplish different social actions (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Edwards, 1999; Eliott and Olver, 2007).

The social functions of hope discourse

The way that hope features in social interaction has been widely studied in a context that is seemingly very different from circular economy meetings and issues of sustainability, namely the context of health care (Herrestad et al., 2014; Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). Here, a more pragmatic approach to research is taken and hope is understood as being constructed and managed in social practices (Herrestad et al., 2014). This research acknowledges that hope has "no single defining essence or significance, but rather is ascribed multiple meanings, articulations, and implications" (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015, p. 116) depending on the context and the surrounding social practices, which in turn allow for different actions.

Aiming to examine the discursive properties of hope, Eliott and Olver (2007) emphasise the importance of viewing hope as an interpersonal practice and to study the social functions of hope discourse. They explore how hope features in cancer patients' talk and what the implications are for clinical practice. Interviewing patients about the prospects of their treatment being unsuccessful, they found that hope features as a possession of the patient (e.g. "I hope that…") and is used by patients in a manner that portrays them as active participants in their treatment. Hope is also portrayed as something objectively verifiable and attributed to circumstance and used by patients to position them as passive and as dependent on whatever the circumstance being conveyed by the medical practitioner. This in turn highlights issues of responsibility: Whether there is hope for recovery is simply conveyed by the practitioner in a way that minimises their responsibility for it. Thus, to hope for something construes outcomes as a matter of uncertainty and enables the speaker to avoid responsibility for whatever the outcome is. Moreover, it enables the speaker to show "support for an outcome without claiming responsibility for it." (p. 145). Conversely, hope also featured as an "I hope you…" construct, working to assign responsibility to others. Again, by placing hope onto another, patients position themselves as being passive and dependent on the medical practitioner, but morally oblige the practitioner to fulfil a certain wish, effectively placing responsibility onto them.

Hope discourse is also used to manage accountability. Variations of "I hope" function to acknowledge the uncertainty of a specific outcome as well as to deflect the degree to which the speaker can be held accountable. For example, by ending the interview by saying "I hope it's been a help", patients express support for the research study, and commitment to the work of the interviewer, while also acknowledging that the value of their input can be questioned, thereby deflecting accountability for the outcome of the interview.

Similar discursive features were found by Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2000) in their study on a related discursive resource; the "think positive" idiom. The authors examine how this conversational idiom is used by breast cancer patients to manage the prospects of their death. They suggest that it, similarly to the hope constructs found in Eliott and Olver (2007), is used in a manner that mitigates accountability. Claims to be "thinking positive" orientate towards the overall norm to consider health an individual responsibility and are used by patients "to protect themselves against accusations of complicity in the onset and progression of their cancer – of having brought their suffering upon themselves." (p. 809). Thus, "thinking positive", just like "I hope it's been a help", mitigates accountability.

It is evident from the studies presented above that hope discourse has a variation of social functions in relation to accountability, responsibility and ascribing agency to someone. We build on this research while also acknowledging that hope discourse may have additional functions in circular economy meetings considering that sustainability transitions typically involves more actors, is to a lesser extent limited to individual behaviour, and has a different, often longer, time scale. Nevertheless, issues of accountability, responsibility and agency are crucial issues to address in the sustainability transition.

Methodology

Empirical material

The empirical material consist of video recorded online meetings on the topic of circular economy in the Swedish food sector. The meetings are titled seminars, panel discussions and workshops and typically focus on the great potential of transitioning to a circular food sector. Invitations to the meetings generally emphasise that participants will learn about the circular economy, be provided "good examples" of circular practices and "get inspired". A common outline of the meeting is to provide a presentation of some kind and to have a moderated discussion by invited guests, which is then followed by a session where the participants can discuss what has been presented or their views on the topic. Organisers encourage participants to share their knowledge and to jointly explore what the circular economy is and how to realise it. We label the meetings 'inspirational meetings' to distinguish them from more formal meetings that typically have a detailed agenda and more specific goals and dedicated to making decisions, solving problems, negotiating agreements, develop polices and so on (Assmuss and Svennevig, 2009). The organisers are private organisations that either have a financial or ideological interest in sustainability in general or corporate sustainability more specifically. The meetings were identified through mailing lists, personal contacts, internet searches and through membership in two Swedish circular economy advocacy organisations. Most meetings were free of charge and open for anyone to attend. However, they primarily targeted entrepreneurs, business people and policymakers within the agrifood sector.

All meetings were held online during 2020, with the exception of one in person event held in March 2019, recorded, and made available online by the organisers. In total 18 meetings make up the corpus of this paper and cover 35.5 hours of video recordings, each of them being 1 to 2 hours long with around 20 participants. Sequences in the form of lectures were attended and discussed but excluded from the data corpus. This resulted in 5.5 hours of 7 meetings being transcribed and subject to further analysis. To protect the privacy of the participants, we have pseudonymised their names with letters that follow the alphabet, in order of appearance (skipping the letter 'I'). For publicly available video material ethical approval is not required according to Swedish legislation.

Analytic process

This paper engages with foundational issues in the field of environmental communication, namely how overarching trends and norms in communicative procedures are created and maintained in environmental communication practice, and what the social implications are of such procedures (e.g. Hallgren et al., 2018). The analytic process of this paper follows the methodology of discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Wiggins, 2017) and we examine how participants actively (albeit unconsciously) use discourse to construct different versions of reality, and the social implications of such constructs (Burr, 2015). We analysed how hope discourse is constructed, all the while taking into careful consideration that it is situated in a specific social and interactional context in which it is used to perform different social actions, actions such as agreeing, assessing, justifying, encouraging, accepting offers, making commitments and avoiding responsibility (Wiggins, 2017). Accordingly, we consider participants' talk as "social action designed for its local interactional context", rather than the outcome of cognitive processes (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000, p. 798). Thus, discourse that is constructed in inspirational circular economy meetings does not only serve a social function in the meetings but has social implications beyond them, which the examination of discourse in interaction enables us to explore.

The initial coding was performed in collaboration with research colleagues and out of the 5.5 hours of transcribed material we coded roughly 150 sequences that in some way relate to hope – including borderline cases and where hope is countered by talk that is pessimistic regarding the potential of a circular economy. We used the broad definition of hope as *expressions of optimism that focus on positive future outcomes* as a guide for our coding process, which covers both explicit and implicit hope constructions. Criteria for including different sequences in the 'hope code' was continuously discussed in data sessions and adjusted accordingly. We performed a second coding by identifying patterns in the 150 sequences, patterns such as the discursive construction of win-win situations, the creation of success stories, claims that circular economy brings *real* change, how small actions leads to great changes and the construction of a powerful circular economy collective. These patterns informed a third round of coding in which we identified patterns regarding how such hope discourse was constructed and managed in social interaction. We performed a more detailed analysis, zooming in on the interaction, and transcribed the material according to the transcription system developed by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson, 2004), marking emphasis by underlined text, pauses by (.) and overlapping talk by placing the turns under each other marked by square brackets. We took 47 relatively long excerpts through this procedure and then, guided by our research question, we selected 22 excerpts in which issues of accountability, responsibility and agency were more prominent. We analysed these excerpts for how these issues are constructed and managed in hope discourse. In order to do this, we identified discursive devices, such as hedging, minimising and contrasting talk (see Wiggins 2017 table 6.1 for a comprehensive list), which according to the methodology of discursive psychology, perform different social actions concerning the management of accountability, responsibility and agency, which we investigate in the analysis.

Analysis

As mentioned previously, research has demonstrated that a hope norm is reproduced in the circular economy meetings (Rödl et al., 2022). In what follows, we examine the discursive practices and social actions related to this norm. More specifically, we examine how the social actions of claiming or avoiding accountability, responsibility and agency are managed in hope discourse. This analytical focus was chosen with the aim to explore how discourse in the meetings shape the possibilities to go from ambitions and intentions to action and implementation. In what follows, we present our discursive psychological analysis of eight selected excerpts from the circular economy meetings, the empirical material upon which this study builds.

Excerpt 1: Undeniably exciting to follow

Hope discourse is constructed in the meetings by describing a circular economy project or event as "exciting", which, considering that the aim of the meetings is to promote a circular economy, implies a positive outcome. In the excerpt below, taken from a panel discussion on the potential of circular food production in Sweden, the invited speaker A presents a circular project that produces insect fed fish. After having described the project, she claims it has provided a solution to the crucial problem of making sustainable food products as tasty as ‘regular’ ones. Speaker A describes a successful circular economy project that she hopes they will be able to up-scale.

A: […] we had a very good taste evaluation there was more wild fish taste and better texture in the insect fed fish and that’s a very important aspect […] if it’s going to end up in a product then it has to be tasty […] so that’s one example of a circular project that we work with (.) and we hope that we’ll be able to up-scale together with a number of waste companies in swedish municipalities
B: that’s undeniably going to be exciting to follow (.) and next time when we talk regenerative agriculture I know that you’ll join with more exciting projects
A: yes
B: thank you A thank you […]

Participant A uses the verb ‘hope’ in a way that manages accountability; it marks the up-scaling of the project as tentative or provisional. This implies a level of uncertainty: There is a possibility that the up-scaling might fail and by invoking hope, A can retract the claim in the event of such failure. Used in this way, we suggest that the verb ‘hope’ is part of the discursive practice of hedging. The moderator B responds by describing the project as “undeniably exciting to follow”, which invokes great expectations and implies that the project will succeed. Furthermore, it constructs a ‘doer’ (the project, which speaker A is part of) and an unknown ‘follower’ who is portrayed as passive and not responsible for the progress of the project. This can also be seen as an expression of support for the project where the ones following it are rooting for its success. In that way, hope discourse serves the function of expressing support and of making a weak commitment to something (in this case a circular economy project), without taking responsibility for its progression. Speaker B emphasises that A will return with more examples of “exciting projects”, providing even more hope for the circular economy community. In conclusion, this excerpt demonstrates that hope discourse can be used to hedge talk, that is, to make something tentative or provisional, and to show support without claiming responsibility for taking action.

Excerpt 2: A little last

One of the most prominent ways in which participants construct hope discourse is by downplaying the seriousness of negative talk or “troubles talk” (Jefferson, 1988), orientating to a social expectation of ending negative talk on a positive note (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000). This is demonstrated in the excerpt below, taken from the same panel discussion on the potential of circular food production in Sweden. The panel participant C talks about the obstacles for realising a circular economy and then turns to the progress that is being made.

C: […] the greatest eh changes now (.) takes place at an eu level if you look at europe that is […] so we’ll have to see (.) we’ll have to hope more for eu I think than maybe the delegation since we’re last among the nordic countries eh when it comes to eh seize a circular economy (.) ehm so (.) we’re a little last […]

Speaker C claims that the greatest progress in promoting the circular economy is made on EU level, which is why we should put our hopes on the EU rather than Swedish authoritites. She hedges this claim by adding “I think”, thereby marking it as a sensitive or contested issue (Goodman and Burke, 2011; Wiggins, 2017). This softens the potentially negative impact of C’s claim that Sweden is last to realise a circular economy and enables her to reframe it is as a matter of opinion, and not necessarily a fact. In that way, C manages accountability for the claim by framing it as uncertain, making it possible to soften or take it back if disagreement arises. In addition, the “we” that C encourages to hope more for EU, is constructed as passive in relation to an active and agentic EU. Thereby, to hope is constructed as a passive act that places the responsibility for implementation on the undefined actor upon which the hope is placed.

Speaker C claims that Sweden (the “we” she refers to) is last among the Nordic countries to “seize” the circular economy. However, she minimises this claim by reformulating it to Sweden being “a little last”, effectively downplaying the significance of her claim (Cranwell and Seymour-Smith, 2012). It is unclear what position one takes when being “a little last” and this claim may be interpreted simply as an attempt to sound more positive. The minimisation device also deflects C’s accountability for her claim and rhetorically works against the potential counter-claim that Sweden is actually not last and, similarly to the hedge “I think”, makes it possible for her to take back the claim in the event of disagreement (Goodman and Burke, 2011).

This excerpt demonstrates an overall expectancy in the meetings to either deliver “good news” regarding the progress of the circular economy or, at least, to end negative talk on a positive note. Making claims that counter this expectancy requires one to renounce accountability for that claim. This raises important issues regarding responsibility and agency: To hope places expectations onto someone else and does not require the hoper to do anything herself (Eliott and Olver, 2007).

Excerpt 3: Time is ticking

Similar to the downplaying of troubles talk, hope discourse is produced by the participants in contrasting statements that deflect from something negative. In the excerpt below, speaker C shifts from sharing her observation of the current state of the circular economy, to a moral discourse.

```
C:    […] we've reached the end of the
      road (.) it doesn't work anymore
      we won't be able to feed nine
      billion on earth and it's [that]
B:    [twenty fifty]
C:    yes twenty fifty and it's that
      (.) yeah exactly it's that real-
      ity we live with today so we
      simply must do something and
      that's why we sit here today be-
      cause the realisations are start-
      ing to catch up
B:    (.) time is eh ticking (.) ac-
      cording to C eh I will let you in
      but first a question to […]
```

Speaker C claims to talk about 'the state of reality' and does so in a resolute manner, marked by intonal emphasis and by breaking with the overall discursive practice in the meeting of hedging and minimising talk. She attributes responsibility to an unspecified "we" who are left with no choice than to do something since "the end of the road" has been reached. She constructs an agent who is left with no choice than to face the consequences of their actions. It is however, unclear what "we" should do, only that we have to do *something*. Thus, C constructs a strong, but indirect, discourse of accountability, not clarifying who should be held accountable (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005). Using such vague discourse enables C to make a strong statement, portraying herself as committed to the issue of circular economy and global food supply, without necessarily being held accountable for securing it (Lester and Paulus, 2011). Through value-laden discourse, she also encourages others to commit and even attributes them with responsibility to realise a future in which we can feed nine billion people.

Moderator B takes a deep breath and pauses briefly, indicating interactional trouble of some kind (Jefferson, 1988), before responding with the formulation of gist "time is ticking". While this figurative expression reproduces C's invocation of time, urgency and drama, it downplays the seriousness of her account. The claim that we are running out of time has a long history in environmental discourse and has become somewhat of a worn out expression (Woroniecki et al., 2022). Thus, B summarises C's troubles talk in a cliché phrase – a discursive strategy that deflects from difficult conversations (Drew and Holt, 1998). B says this formulation in English instead of Swedish (the language in which the meeting is held), which works to create a distance to it and further enforces the cliché. Moreover, B mitigates accountability by adding that this is C's opinion and uses the formulation to close the discussion (ibid.) and to make a swift transition to the next question.

This excerpt demonstrates that strong moral discourse, in which urgency and a strong sense of responsibility is constructed, is treated as troubles talk. This creates an interactional situation that requires distracting or downplaying discourse in order for the hope norm to be maintained.

Excerpt 4: Child's faith

When troubles talk is produced, meeting participants tend to end on a positive note, thereby orientating to a hope norm (Rödl et al., 2022). The excerpt below is from the same panel discussion as previous excerpts and is preceded by a discussion about the obstacles for a circular transition. The panelist C initiates a shift from talk about obstacles to the great potential of circular economy. She attributes the potential success of the circular economy to its incorporation of the economic realm: It is beneficial for businesses, which is key in the transition to a circular and sustainable society. Without this incorporation, the progress of this transition will be limited. Businesses are portrayed as the actors with agency – it is businesses that are going to bring the circular economy forward.

```
C:    […] and it's that (.) that can be
      the key mm (.) in making this a
      reality otherwise we'll not eh
      reach much further than we have
      today and then we'll have to see
      what happens but we (.) what was
      it that you said? we're eh
D:    (unclear)
C:    you had an expression eh a little
      have child's faith you said (.)
      is that what's needed maybe? […]
```

Participant C portrays the future as uncertain and as one where we have limited control over. She argues that if a circular economy is not realised we will have to wait and see what happens, which implies a passive and agentless actor. The alternative of an unknown future is rhetorically portrayed as less appealing than realising a circular economy and setting up such a discursive contrast strengthens her argument for the great potential of circular economy. She does however not end with this dire statement, but returns to a previous claim made by panel participant D. D stated that even though there are great obstacles in realising a circular economy, he has "child's faith". C repeats this statement by rhetorically asking whether it is child's faith that is needed. This invokes a passive agent who does not doubt, question, or seek explanations; they just believe. Believing does not require action and discursively works in similar ways as hoping. Moreover, it sets up an either/or state of affairs and simplifies things, making it appear as if there are only these two choices (a circular economy or an uncertain future) and that the choice is simple. Ending on this more 'upbeat' note downplays the seriousness in C's threat of an uncertain reality since uncertainty can be managed through faith. It softens her dire statement. It is however, possible that C is making a point of the absurdity of child's faith and of not taking responsibility by resolving to faith, when promoting circular economy as the obvious better alternative.

So far in the analysis, we have demonstrated that participants tend to end troubles talk on a positive note and that they orientate to issues of action and agency in different ways. In this excerpt, not acting is potentially portrayed as the hopeful thing to do.

Excerpt 5: Hands-on advice

Participants also take initiative to end troubles talk of *another* participant on a positive note. This indicates that the hope norm is so strong that it compels participants to make the extra effort to take the turn, even when in an interactional situation where a moderator manages turn-taking. The excerpt below is from a different panel discussion where participants discuss how to realise a circular economy. The panel participant E is asked to comment on whether increasing indoor cultivation will enable the food sector to meet increasing food demands.

E: […] it's great that we can produce more I just (.) don't think maybe that it's that which will currently kind of save us or whatever we should say from some kind of dramatic perspective
F: a thousand thanks e[h
G: [comment (.) one more thing about urban cultivation […] there's also a movement towards doing cultivation yourself (.) in the city cultivating in the forest and eh we have a tradition of this colony garden eh production and eh in many parts of the world you support your family by having some backyard cultivation and then you go to work (.) we can also increase that I think we shouldn't forget that (.) [so there's a lot of fun to do
E: [no of course not]
G: there actually also
F: good a very good hands-on advice […]

Speaker E argues that while increasing food production might be great, it might not be our salvation. This "dramatic perspective" constructs reality as a matter of 'us' being in the passive position of needing to be saved, which is not a desirable or empowering position to be in. E shows that her claim may be heard as problematic by hedging her talk, and in several ways marks it as provisional ("I just think maybe") and tentative ("right now"), and thereby highlighting that this is a delicate issue (Wiggins, 2017). By making her claim unspecific and provisional, E avoids accountability and opens up for her claim to be downplayed or taken back if disagreement would arise (Wiggins, 2017). E's hedging response possibly also points to the interactional challenge the panel participants are dealing with in the meetings overall, i.e., of being expected to present 'good news', even when there are not any.

Speaker G interrupts the moderator F and takes the turn to "comment", which is a noteworthy act considering that F manages turn-taking and that there is a strong interactional norm to speak one at the time (Sacks et al., 1974). G encourages participants not to forget that there is a lot of "fun" that individuals can do regarding food production. Thereby, she shifts discourse from the issue of salvation and drama, to fun and possibilities. In contrast to E, the 'we' that G invokes is portrayed as agentic: There are fun and easy accessible things that individuals can do today. Moreover, it is what people already do "in many parts of the world", a corroboration that makes her account seem more factual and independent of her opinion (even if vague). Backyard cultivation is constructed as a scripted event (Edwards, 1994) that someone simply does before work, and as minimal ("a little"), which further adds to portraying backyard cultivation as easy accessible. This in turn indirectly serves to attribute responsibility: Since it is so easily accessible, and something that people in other parts of the world already do, there is really no excuse to not grow your own food.

F supports and upgrades G's comment as a "very good hands-on advice" and encourages the participants to grow at least one plant (data not presented in excerpt). In sum, this excerpt demonstrates how hope discourse can accommodate participants to encourage people to utilise their agency and attribute them the responsibility to do so.

Excerpt 6: Triple-win

As touched upon in previous excerpts, hope discourse performs the attribution of accountability. In the excerpt below, the moderator B describes circular food production as a "triple win" and poses a question about accountability.

B: […] about the circular (.) food production it seems to be such a triple-win which is (.) we can produce more food with less resources (.) because we use those that we don't use kind of and that's great benefits for the environment (.) so and we can make money on things we

don’t make money on today because it’s thrown away (.) why haven’t we always done this? (.)
B: so why (.) has it not been implemented (.) to a larger extent? (.)
B: it can be a stupid question, but I figure it’s worth asking it seems so
C: should you start? ((turning towards H))
B: so real (.) good this(.)
H: yeah but i[t
B: [why don’t everyone?
H: it’s two factors (.) it’s money (.) and it’s old eh photosynthesis if you put it that way in other words coal oil […]

A “triple-win” is an upgrade of the “win-win situation” idiom and places a strong emphasis on the potential of a circular economy in addressing the challenges faced by the food sector today. Moderator B lists this potential in three parts, which strengthens her claim of a triple-win situation by making it seem more factual and independent of her opinion (Jefferson, 1990). She concludes the list by asking the panel why we have not always had a circular food production, which portrays a circular economy as the obvious choice. Moreover, the question has moral connotations and marks a shift to a moral discourse where the panelists are indirectly held responsible (Sneijder and te Molder, 2005) to account for why the circular economy has not been realised. B then demonstrates that she understands that this question may be heard as problematic by performing several turn expansions. Invoking the potential of stupidity serves as a disclaimer for posing a question that is not in line with the objective of the panel discussion, showing that her identity and professionalism as a moderator could be questioned (cf. Condor et al., 2006). The expansions downgrade the question and make it appear less controversial, confrontative or problematic, while also reducing the extent to which B can be held accountable for it. It is also possible that B’s turn expansions serve the function of filling the long silence that follows her question, a silence which may be due to a confusion regarding who in the panel was actually given the turn to answer. However, the fact that B interrupts H when he starts providing an answer indicates that this is not the primary reason.

While it may seem that B speaks very optimistically about the potential of a circular economy, the turn expansions she produces indicate that a different interpretation may be more feasible: The triple-win construct and the expansions that follow it may serve as a provocative overstatement that actually invites criticism of circular economy. B may open up for a critical discussion of the circular economy by implying that if circular economy actually is as great as it seems, we would have realised it by now, and hence the critique for inaction would not be placed on the participants but on the idea of circular economy. The panelist H, who finally answers B’s question, orientates towards B’ question as a simple one that has two explanatory factors; money and fossil fuels, none of which is moral or philosophical in the way he expands on this in the succeeding talk (data not shown). This excerpt demonstrates that accountability is a central feature in hope discourse and treated as a delicate issue; the moral issue of accounting for what someone should have done, is interactionally difficult in this social context – and not made easier by the fact that it is unclear whether B actually challenges circular economy and who is supposed to answer the question.

Excerpt 7: Energy forward

Agency is an important aspect of hope discourse and in order for hope to be constructive and foster change, issues of agency need to be addressed (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015; Marlon et al., 2019). While the construction of an agentic and responsible actor can sometimes be heard as problematic (see excerpt 6), there are cases in which the opposite is true, as demonstrated in the following excerpt. The excerpt is from a panel debate on the topic of innovation and circular economy, providing “inspiring examples” of circular economy projects. The moderator H closes the debate by emphasising the importance of real collaboration where actors involved “help each other for real” (Åhlvik et al., forthcoming). H then gives the word to the second moderator J.

H: […] thank you everyone (.) for having (.) joined (.) and thank you for a good panel discussion and with that I leave the word (.) to (.) J
J: big thanks this has been an absolutely wonderful morning […] ehm otherwise (.) I just wanna thank you and wish you a nice weekend (.) it feels like I at least got plenty of energy going forward (.) thank you so much […]

Moderator J expresses appreciation for the meeting, describing it as “absolutely wonderful”, portraying the meeting as rewarding. She concludes by explaining that she received energy from participating in it while, through hedging, emphasising that this is her subjective experience, which the other participants may not align with. In that way, J manages accountability for her claim and refutes the potential counter-claim that the meeting was not wonderful and energising, demonstrating an orientation towards a culture of virtual meeting fatigue that drains participants of energy (Toney et al., 2021). This meeting is acknowledged to be different in that it generates energy. Moreover, the emotional state of having “energy going forward” implies a positive progression and establishes J’s stake in the progress of circular economy: As a result of having participated in the meeting, she will be able to do more, portraying herself as agentic and able to influence the course of events. She also expresses commitment and implies that she will use her gained energy to act and thereby encourages others to feel energised and agentic as well – this commitment fosters a "sense of participation and therefore their 'buy-in' to the eventual outcome" (Wodak et al., 2011, p. 604).

This excerpt, however, demonstrates that while the construction of an agentic and committed actor can be an integral part of hope discourse, it does not necessitate clarification on who that actor is and what they are supposed to do. Such discourse instead counters potential claims of non-productive meetings and lack of inaction for a circular economy. Things are moving forward, but it is never made clear what direction forward really is.

Excerpt 8: Let's go!

As explored by previous research on inspirational circular economy meetings, collaboration is typically emphasised as essential for the success of circular economy initiatives. Moreover, highlighting the great progress that is made when actors join in collaboration is a central feature of hope discourse (Rödl et al., 2022). The following excerpt is an example of such hope discourse and demonstrates the manner in which participants can be portrayed as agentic as a collective. This involves discursive acts of bonding, encouragement and making commitments (Wodak et al., 2011). The excerpt is from the launch of a circular economy network that aims to increase the circular flow of nutrients in the agricultural sector. The seminar portion of the meeting is concluded with an inauguration ceremony led by the moderators K and L.

```
K:   […] eh and now we thought we'd
     have a small inauguration cere-
     mony we first thought we would
     cut a ribbon (.) and then we re-
     alised that (.) we should actu-
     ally not do that since we're sup-
     posed to build networks here so
     we should probably tie a ribbon
     instead […]((ties the ribbon))
L:   like that I think will be abso-
     lutely excellent
K:   like a little infinity symbol
L:   e[x
K:    [let's see (.) if we can get a
     small fanfare (.)
K:   tada!
K:   tada fantas[tic!
L:   [so now we feel inaugurated and
     eh tied together every[one
K:   [very much so
L:   yes […]
K:   and we of course want you to join
     us (.) so (.) let's go!
L:   let's go! […]
```

Moderator K and L tie a ribbon as an illustration of networking and collaboration. The infinity symbol represents an integrative process with no end and is often associated with the circular economy (Bianchini et al., 2019). The circular flow of nutrients is portrayed as limitless and eternal, which speaks to the great potential the network ascribes to an agricultural sector that is circular. K and L conclude the ceremony by invoking a feeling of being tied together, referring to a bond that has been created between the participants, which discursively constructs a group identity (Wodak et al., 2011). The thus argue that the ceremony has created a shift in how participants feel, which invokes a change on a deeper embodied level, deeper than a cognitive level. This implies that participants now have a greater stake in the initiative, a deeper level of commitment. Furthermore, to be bound together implies an interdependence and a responsibility towards those you are bound to (Wodak et al., 2011)

The moderators conclude by directly addressing participants that have yet to join the network and encouraging them to do so. Both exclaim "lets go", which creates a forward momentum and implies a positive development. The 'we' that is supposed to do the going is however not specified and it is unclear in what direction, but it nevertheless constructs a collective on the go, a collective that is now, after having participated in this ceremony, ready to make a change. This creation of forward momentum is similar to "exciting to follow" (see excerpt 1), but different in that an active agent is constructed here; and similar to the "energy going forward" example (excerpt 7) which also lacks the specification of direction. Here, the actor is part of the 'going' and not simply observing and supporting.

This excerpt demonstrates how an active agent is constructed and managed in hope discourse through making commitments, bonding and encouraging. However, it is never made clear what that active agent is supposed to do, other than to join the network.

Discussion

In this paper, we examine how participants in inspirational circular economy meetings manage issues of accountability, responsibility and agency – three issues that are central, but often implicit, in hope discourse (Elliott and Olver, 2007; Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). The expressed aim with the meetings overall is to promote a circular economy, provide good examples of circular economy practices and inspire participants. As demonstrated in the analysis, hope discourse has several social functions. It has the function of downplaying talk about problems or challenges. Participants end talk about problems or challenges on a positive note, shifting discourse to a more optimistic future scenario and thereby closing down further elaborations on those problems or challenges. Using the conversational strategy of ending negative talk on a positive note, serves to "round off and close down 'troubles telling', while simultaneously making it possible for troubles telling to take place" (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000, p. 805). Ending on a positive note, enables the speaker to raise such negative talk without the risk of being held accountable for breaking the hope norm (Rödl et al., 2022). In that way, hope discourse highlights issues of accountability and that making negative claims in a social context where a hope norm dominates is a delicate issue that requires that the speaker mitigates accountability for breaking the hope norm. Accountability is for example mitigated by explicitly highlighting that a negative statement belongs to the previous speaker and is not agreed with ("time is ticking, according to C").

It is not only talk about problems or challenges that is being rounded off or closed down by hope discourse. Moral discourse in which an urgency to deal with critical issues such as food scarcity is emphasised (see excerpt 3), and the indirect attribution of individual responsibility to address such issues, is also treated as troubles talk and met with distracting or downplaying discourse. This demonstrates that issues of urgency and responsibility in hope discourse needs to be softened when expressed – or be expressed indirectly (cf. Sneijder and te Molder, 2005).

Hope discourse also highlights issues of agency. In the meetings, a passive 'follower' who merely shows support for circular economy initiatives is constructed in contrast to an active 'doer' who implements and realises initiatives. Hope discourse is used as a verb (e.g. "we hope that…") in a manner that hedges talk and thus makes it tentative or provisional and to show support for circular economy initiatives while simultaneously avoiding responsibility for its progression. Thereby, hoping is constructed as a passive act that places responsibility onto someone else, not requiring anything of the hoper (Eliott and Olver, 2007). However, hope discourse is also used by participants in a way that portrays them as active and agentic by claiming responsibility and making commitments to realise a circular economy. This is also done through acts of bonding and of encouraging others to use the agency they actually do have. However, it is rarely discussed what they are claiming responsibility for, or what action that should be taken. Thus, even though participants encourage people to use their agency, and even attribute them responsibility to do so, they rarely elaborated on what they are supposed to do.

There is one exception to this (see excerpt 5) where a participant emphasises individual responsibility to take action by giving a specific example of relevant action that is easy accessible. This reflects a cultural shift in broad societal discourse of hope in which individual action and responsibility is emphasised rather than collective action (Head, 2016). This in turn builds on normative and political ideals of individualisation and responsibilisation where hope becomes a matter of exercising choice, personal control and empowerment (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015). While individual actions are an important part of the sustainability transformation, there is a great disadvantage in reducing it to a matter of individual attitude, behaviour, choice and responsibility and having that be the main framework for social change (Shove, 2010; Soneryd and Uggla, 2015). As Shove (2010) argues, such individualised conception of social change risks obscuring "the extent to which governments sustain unsustainable economic institutions and ways of life, and the extent to which they have a hand in structuring options and possibilities" (p. 1274). Individualised conceptions provide a very limited foundation on which to address significant societal transformation as it contributes to depoliticise environmental issues and to place a disproportionate responsibility on individual consumers (Maniates, 2001). This results in a narrow and oversimplified view of green consumption and everyday activities (Soneryd and Uggla, 2015). As argued by Maniates (2001), it results in narrowing our collective ability to imagine and pursue productive responses to the environmental problems. Therefore, we argue that hoping is better understood as a process in which the speaker is an active participant with the capacity to influence outcome, while at the same time acknowledging that hoping is an interpersonal or collective activity (Eliott and Olver, 2007) – and thereby avoid reducing it to a matter of individual responsibility.

In sum, and in line with Wilkinson and Kitzinger's (2000) study on the "think positive" idiom, hope discourse has several different social functions. It is used to demand accountability as well as to minimise it. It is used to assign responsibility to others (although it sometimes creates morally delicate situations) as well as renounced personally. It constructs individuals as passive and merely hoping for others to create change, but also as agentic actors who will create change. Thus, and as found in previous research on the discursive features of hope discourse (e.g. Eliott and Olver, 2007), hope discourse is used in flexible ways and serves different interactional purposes.

Our study complements the intrasubjective view on hope, commonly adopted by hope communication research (see section 2.2.), according to which hope is an individual activity that can be manipulated, measured and used to shape attitudes and predict behaviour (cf. Wiggins et al., 2001; Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2000). Our paper aligns with research that suggests a more complex relationship between hope discourse and individual and social action (Petersen and Wilkinson, 2015; Lange and Dewitte, 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Park, 2020; Ettinger et al., 2021). We argue that it is necessary to take this complexity into consideration when studying issues of sustainability and communication to promote societal transformation. Our study contributes to such research by taking a discursive psychology perspective, treating hope discourse as situated and co-constructed in social interaction, rather than as an attitude or feeling that is reported by individuals. We demonstrate that hope discourse overall fosters ambiguity and vagueness regarding issues of accountability, responsibility and agency in the circular economy transition. This vagueness and ambiguity present challenges for the circular economy transition considering the large-scale collaboration between different actors, often across different sectors, that it requires (Kovacic et al., 2020). Moreover, we have demonstrated that hope discourse shuts down negative talk, and consequently talk about problems and challenges are avoided. The shutting down of negative talk presents challenges for the kind of environmental communication that highlights the joint exploration of challenges, ambiguities, differences and disagreement as a necessary and constructive feature of environmental communication and management (Hallgren, 2016; Hallgren et al., 2018). Considering that it is increasingly popular to emphasise the importance of hope messages in communication on environmental issues (e.g. Christensen and Wormbs, 2017; Kelsey, 2020), it is important for environmental communication scholars to critically engage with hope discourse. Before these scholars join the propagation for hope messages, we argue that they need to seriously consider whether reproduces optimistic, but vague, encouragements for individual action, or if it has the potential to foster authentic hope, which promotes agentic individuals that are part of a powerful collective where responsibilities are addressed (Moser, 2015).

Conclusion

Inspirational meetings that serve the purpose of promoting the circular economy are limited by hope discourse. The norm to engage in hope discourse obscures talk about accountability, responsibility and agency. It allows for considerable ambiguity regarding these important issues and risk reproducing the *status quo*. They are talked about in ambiguous ways – mentioned, and used to perform different social actions, but rarely explored in more depth. This in turn means that challenges in realising a circular economy are briefly raised but not elaborated on in more depth. This hampers the circular economy transition to move beyond positive attitudes and intentions, created in hope discourse, to the promotion of action.

References

Asmuß, B. & Svennevig, J. (2009). Meeting talk: An introduction. *The Journal of Business Communication (1973)*, *46* (1), 3–22.

Bianchini, A., Rossi, J. & Pellegrini, M. (2019). Overcoming the Main Barriers of Circular Economy Implementation through a New Visualization Tool for Circular Business Models. *Sustainability*, 11, 6614. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11236614

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Bury, S. M., Wenzel, M. & Woodyatt, L. (2020). Against the odds: Hope as an antecedent of support for climate change action. *British journal of social psychology*, 59 (2), 289–310. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12343

Buttny, R. (1993). *Social accountability in communication*. London: Sage.

Cassegård, C. & Thörn, H. (2018). Toward a postapocalyptic environmentalism? Responses to loss and visions of the future in climate activism. *Environment and planning E, Nature and space* (Print), 1 (4), 561–578. https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618793331

Chadwick, A. E. (2015). Toward a Theory of Persuasive Hope: Effects of Cognitive Appraisals, Hope Appeals, and Hope in the Context of Climate Change. *Health Communication*, 30:6, 598–611, DOI: 10.1080/10410236.2014.916777

Chandler, D. (2019). The death of hope? Affirmation in the Anthropocene. *Globalizations*, 16 (5), 695–706.

Christensen, M. & Wormbs, N. (2017). Global Climate Talks from Failure to Cooperation and Hope: Swedish News Framings of COP15 and COP21. *Environmental communication*, 11 (5), 682–699. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2017.1333964

Condor, S., Figgou, L., Abell, J., Gibson, S. & Stevenson, C. (2006). "They"re not racist ...' Prejudice denial, mitigation and suppression in dialogue. *British journal of social psychology*, 45 (3), 441–462. https://doi.org/10.1348/014466605X66817

Corvellec, H., Böhm, S., Stowell, A. & Valenzuela, F. (2020). Introduction to the special issue on the contested realities of the circular economy. *Culture and Organization*, 26 (2), 97–102. https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2020.1717733

Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication Theory as a Field. *Communication theory*, 9 (2), 119–161. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.

Cranwell, J. & Seymour-Smith, S. (2012). Monitoring and normalising a lack of appetite and weight loss. A discursive analysis of an online support group for bariatric surgery. *Appetite*, 58 (3), 873–881. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2012.01.029

Crapanzano, V. (2003). Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis. *Cultural anthropology*, 18 (1), 3–32. https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2003.18.1.3

de Vries, G. (2020). Public communication as a tool to implement environmental policies. *Social Issues and Policy Review*.

Drew, P. & Holt, E. (1998). Figures of speech: Figurative expressions and the management of topic transition in conversation. *Language in society*, 27 (4), 495–522. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500020200

Edwards, D. (1994). Script Formulations: An Analysis of Event Descriptions in Conversation. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 13 (3), 211–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X94133001

Edwards, D. (1997). *Discourse and cognition*. London: Sage.

Edwards, D. (1999). Emotion Discourse. *Culture & Psychology*, 5(3), 271–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X9953001

Edwards, D. & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive Psychology*. London: Sage.

Eliott, J. A. & Olver, I. N. (2002). The Discursive Properties of "Hope": A Qualitative Analysis of Cancer Patients' Speech. *Qualitative health research*, 12 (2), 173–193. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230201200204

Eliott, J. A. & Olver, I. N. (2007). Hope and hoping in the talk of dying cancer patients. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 64 (1), 138–149. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.08.029

Eliott, J. A. & Olver, I. N. (2009). Hope, Life, and Death: A Qualitative Analysis of Dying Cancer Patients' Talk About Hope. *Death studies*, 33 (7), 609–638. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180903011982

Ellen MacArthur Foundation (EMF) (2019). *Cities and Circular Economy for Food*. http://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications

Ettinger, J., Walton, P., Painter, J. & DiBlasi, T. (2021). Climate of hope or doom and gloom? Testing the climate change hope vs. fear communications debate through online videos. *Climatic change*, 164 (1–2). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-02975-8

European Commission (2020). *Leading the way to a global circular economy: State of play and outlook*. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/31079d7e-3a96-11eb-b27b-01aa75ed71a1

Fahlquist, J. N. (2009). Moral Responsibility for Environmental Problems—Individual or Institutional? *Journal of agricultural & environmental ethics*, 22 (2), 109–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-008-9134-5

Feldman, L. & Hart, P. S. (2018). Is there any hope? How climate change news imagery and text influence audience emotions and support for climate mitigation policies. *Risk Analysis*, 38 (3), 585–602.

Ghisellini, P., Cialani, C. & Ulgiati, S. (2016). A review on circular economy: the expected transition to a balanced interplay of environmental and economic systems. *Journal of cleaner production*, 114, 11–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.09.007

Goodman, S. & Burke, S. (2011). Discursive deracialization in talk about asylum seeking. *Journal of community & applied social psychology*, 21 (2), 111–123. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.1065

Grund, J. & Brock, A. (2019). Why We Should Empty Pandora's Box to Create a Sustainable Future: Hope, Sustainability and Its Implications for Education. *Sustainability*, 11 (3), 893. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11030893

Hallgren, L. (2016). Reframing conflict in natural resource management Mutuality, reciprocity and pluralistic agonism as dynamics of community constructivity and destructivity. In: Peterson, T. R., Ljunggren Bergeå, H., Feldpausch-Parker, A. M. & Raitio, K. (Eds), *Environmental Communication and Community*. Routledge, pp. 16–30.

Head, L. (2016). *Hope and grief in the Anthropocene: Re-conceptualising human–nature relations*. Routledge.

Jefferson, G. (1988). On the Sequential Organization of Troubles-Talk in Ordinary Conversation. *Social problems*, 35 (4), 418–441. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.1988.35.4.03a00070

Jefferson, G. (1990). List construction as a task and resource. In: Psathas, G. (Ed.), *Interaction competence*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, pp. 63–92.

Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In: Lerner, G.H. (Ed.), *Conversation Analysis: Studies From the First Generation*. California: John Benjamins, pp. 13–31.

Kelsey, E. (2020). *Hope Matters: Why changing the way we think is critical to solving the environmental crisis*. Vancouver: Greystone Books

Kerdlap, P., Low, J.S.C. & Ramakrishna, S. (2019). Zero waste manufacturing: a framework and review of technology, research, and implementation barriers for enabling a circular economy transition in Singapore. *Resour. Conserv. Recycl.*, 151, 104438. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2019.104438.

Kirby, E., Broom, A., MacArtney, J., Lewis, S. & Good, P. (2021). Hopeful dying? The meanings and practice of hope in palliative care family meetings. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 291, 114471. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114471

Korhonen, J., Nuur, C., Feldmann, A. & Birkie, S. E. (2018). Circular economy as an essentially contested concept. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 175, 544–552. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.111

Kovacic, Z., Strand, R., & Völker, T. (2019). *The Circular Economy in Europe: Critical Perspectives on Policies and Imaginaries* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061028

Lange, F. & Dewitte, S. (2020). Positive affect and pro-environmental behavior: A preregistered experiment. *Journal of economic psychology*, 80, 102291. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joep.2020.102291

Lee, Y. K., Chang, C. T. & Chen, P. C. (2017). What sells better in green communications: Fear or hope?: It depends on whether the issue is global or local. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 57(4), 379–396.

Lester, J. N. & Paulus, T. M. (2011). Accountability and public displays of knowing in an undergraduate computer-mediated communication context. *Discourse studies*, 13 (6), 671–686. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445611421361

Li, C. J. & Monroe, M. C. (2019). Exploring the essential psychological factors in fostering hope concerning climate change. *Environmental education research*, 25 (6), 936–954. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2017.1367916

Maniates, M. F. (2001). Individualization: plant a tree, buy a bike, save the world? *Global Environmental Politics*, 1 (3), 31–52. doi:10.1162/152638001316881395.

Marlon, J. R., Bloodhart, B., Ballew, M. T., Rolfe-Redding, J., Roser-Renouf, C., Leiserowitz, A. & Maibach, E. (2019). How Hope and Doubt Affect Climate Change Mobilization. *Frontiers in communication*, 4. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2019.00020

Morris, B. S., Chrysochou, P., Karg, S. T. & Mitkidis, P. (2020). Optimistic vs. pessimistic endings in climate change appeals. *Humanities & social sciences communications*, 7 (1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00574-z

Moser, S. C. (2015). Whither the heart (-to-heart)? Prospects for a humanistic turn in environmental communication as the world changes darkly. *The Routledge handbook of environment and communication. Routledge*, pp. 422–433.

Moser, S. C. (2016). Reflections on climate change communication research and practice in the second decade of the 21st

Century: What more is there to say? *WIREs Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 7, 345–369.

Ojala, M. (2012). Hope and climate change: the importance of hope for environmental engagement among young people. *Environmental Education Research*, 18:5, 625–642, DOI: 10.1080/13504622.2011.637157

Ojala, M. (2015). Hope in the Face of Climate Change: Associations With Environmental Engagement and Student Perceptions of Teachers' Emotion Communication Style and Future Orientation, *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 46:3, 133–148, DOI:10.1080/00958964.2015.1021662

Park, S. (2020). How Celebrities' Green Messages on Twitter Influence Public Attitudes and Behavioral Intentions to Mitigate Climate Change. *Sustainability*, 12 (19), 7948. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197948

Persson, O. (2015). What Is Circular Economy? − The Discourse of Circular Economy in the Swedish Public Sector. Master thesis in Sustainable Development. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Petersen, A. & Wilkinson, I. (2015). Editorial introduction: The sociology of hope in contexts of health, medicine, and healthcare. *Health* (1997), 19 (2), 113–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459314555378

Regeringskansliet, Sweden (2021). *Cirkulär ekonomi – Handlingsplan för omställning av Sverige*. https://www.regeringen.se/informationsmaterial/2021/01/cirkular-ekonomi--handlingsplan-for-omstallning-av-sverige/

Reser, J. & Bradley, G. (2017). Fear Appeals in Climate Change Communication. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*. https://oxfordre.com/climatescience/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-386.

Rödl, M. B., Åhlvik, T., Bergeå, H., Hallgren, L. & Böhm, S. (2022). Performing the Circular Economy: How an ambiguous discourse is managed and maintained through meetings. *Journal of Cleaner Production*.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A. & Jefferson, G. (1974). A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation. *Language*, 50 (4), 696–735. https://doi.org/10.2307/412243

Schneider, C. R., Zaval, L. & Markowitz, E. M. (2021). Positive emotions and climate change. *Current opinion in behavioral sciences*, 42, 114–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2021.04.009

Shove, E. (2010). Beyond the ABC: climate change policy and theories of social change. *Environment and planning A*, 42 (6), 1273–1285.

Sneijder, P. W. & te Molder, H. F. (2005). Moral logic and logical morality: Attributions of responsibility and blame in online discourse on veganism. *Discourse & society*, 16 (5), 675–696. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926505054941

Stern, P. C. (2012). Fear and hope in climate messages. *Nature Climate Change*, 2, 572–573.

Soneryd, L. & Uggla, Y. (2015). Green governmentality and responsibilization: new forms of governance and responses to 'consumer responsibility'. *Environmental Politics*, 24 (6), 913–931.

Toney, S., Light, J. & Urbaczewski, A. (2021). Fighting Zoom Fatigue: Keeping the Zoombies at Bay. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 48. https://doi.org/10.17705/1CAIS.04806

Wiggins, S. (2017). *Discursive psychology: theory, method and applications*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Wiggins, S., Potter, J. & Wildsmith, A. (2001). Eating your words: Discursive psychology and the reconstruction of eating practices. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 6 (1), 5–15.

Wilkinson, S. & Kitzinger, C. (2000). Thinking differently about thinking positive: a discursive approach to cancer patients' talk. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 50 (6), 797–811. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00337-8

Wodak, R., Kwon, W. & Clarke, I. (2011). "Getting people on board": Discursive leadership for consensus building in team meetings. *Discourse & society*, 22 (5), 592–644. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926511405410

Woroniecki, S., Wibeck, V., Zeiler, K. & Linnér, B.-O. (2022). *Dethroning the Planetary Perspective: Dealing with Actually-Occurring Transformations Using Dialogical Sense-Making and Critical Phenomenology*. Preprints. Published. https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202201.0293.v1

van Zomeren, M., Pauls, I. L. & Cohen-Chen, S. (2019). Is hope good for motivating collective action in the context of climate change? Differentiating hope's emotion- and problem-focused coping functions. *Global environmental change*, 58, 101915. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2019.04.003

Åhlvik, T., Bergeå, H., Rödl, M. B. & Hallgren, L. (forthcoming). Beyond effective hope messages: How interpretive repertoires of hope shape Environmental Communication in inspiration meetings. *Submitted to journal of environmental planning and management*.

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae

Doctoral Thesis No. 2023:93

There is a societal notion that to advance the sustainability transition, communication must be characterised by hope. However, a democratic transition presupposes possibilities for complexities and challenges regarding the transition to be explored. This dissertation investigates the consequences of hope discourse and how it shapes communicative conditions for exploring challenges in the circular economy transition. It concludes that hope discourse closes down and obscures the exploration of challenges and prevents actors from developing a richer understanding of the sustainability transition.

Therese Åhlvik earned her BA in Environmental Science at Gothenburg University in 2014 and her MSc in Environmental Communication at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) in 2017, which is also where she carried out her doctoral studies in Environmental Communication.

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae presents doctoral theses from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU).

SLU generates knowledge for the sustainable use of biological natural resources. Research, education, extension, as well as environmental monitoring and assessment are used to achieve this goal.

ISSN 1652-6880
ISBN (print version) 978-91-8046-240-2
ISBN (electronic version) 978-91-8046-241-9