Equality Labeling Sustainable Development

A study on the role of gender equality in the Swedish implementation of sustainable development

Eva Lövbrand
env98eld@student3.lu.se

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Supervisors

Karin Bäckstrand, Research Associate
Department of Political Science
Lund University
Box 52, 221 00 Lund
Tel: 046-2224763
Email: karin.backstrand@svet.lu.se

Dr. Minna Gillberg, Research Fellow
Institute for Sociology of Law
Lund University
Box 114, 222 21 Lund
Tel: 046-2228811
Email: minna.gillberg@soc.lu.se
Abstract

In 1992 the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development consolidated the need for a sustainable development that would reconcile global ecological, economic and social concerns. To operationalize this three-dimensional agenda the global action plan for sustainable development, Agenda 21, emphasizes the need for a broad participation and cooperation among states and societal groups. Women belong to the major groups that were given specific attention at UNCED. As stated in both Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, women's participation is crucial for a successful implementation of sustainable development. Drawing on ecofeminist and social feminist theories this thesis explores the implications of women's highlighted role in sustainable development. It also makes use of theories on ecological modernisation to illustrate how the cooperative effort suggested in Agenda 21 has been implemented in many countries in the North. The purpose is to create a theoretical framework for the role Equality Labeling, a new market-based method to bring about gender equality in Swedish society, could play in the Swedish implementation of sustainable development. The argument in the thesis is that men and women should have equal rights and responsibilities in the implementation of sustainable development. Equality Labeling or certification of companies and organizations builds on the methods used in the politics of ecological modernisation to reconcile economic incentives with equality concerns in the corporate world, and thus spread a broader awareness and commitment to men's and women's equal rights and responsibilities on the labor market. While this voluntary method secures women equal access to societal decision-making and encourages men to take parental leave, it also supports a democratic implementation of sustainable development. Building the experiences of environmental management systems Equality Labeling further offers a symbolic step towards an integration of economic, ecological and social concerns on the corporate agenda.
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Acknowledgments
1 Introduction

How can we bring about a development that will meet the needs of the entire human population at present as well as in the future? This is a question that entered the global political agenda in 1992, when 178 nations assembled for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, and since then has been open for much discussion. Searching for an answer that would hold both in a global and long-term perspective, the sustainable development suggested at the Rio Conference became a broad political vision with many parallel objectives. While a holistic aspiration was necessary for global legitimacy, the intertwined ecological, economic and social agenda of sustainable development resulted in a political project that has been both difficult to interpret and to turn into concrete action. One of the many ambiguous issues in this global agenda is the place of gender equality. To enable the global change towards a sustainable development the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 especially highlight the need for women’s participation in global political and economic decision-making. While many have welcomed the emphasis on women’s role in global development, some have also questioned what this political statement actually implies. Should women’s participation in sustainable development be interpreted as a true democratic goal or is it a method to ensure a nurturing and caring perspective that will reconcile the many opposing interests in the new global agenda?

While these complex global questions are debated on a theoretical level, national policy-makers are left with the responsibility to find concrete methods to implement the many different aspects of sustainable development. In the search for pragmatic answers governments in the North have been criticized for falling back on easy solutions. But pragmatism can also offer potentials. In 1997 the former Swedish Minister of Equality proposed a new soft steering instrument to increase equality compliance among Swedish companies and organizations. The initiative called Equality Labeling suggests how the market based methods that have brought about the positive trend of improved environmental practice in the Swedish corporate world, also could be used to strengthen the commitment to men’s and women’s equal rights and responsibilities among Swedish employers. Even though Equality Labeling is not developed within the frame of sustainable development, the extended corporate responsibility it suggests has clear links with the aspired integration of ecological, economic and social objectives in the new global agenda.

1.1 Purpose of the study

In this thesis I will attempt to connect parts of the theoretical debate of sustainable development with the concrete practice in the Swedish corporate world. The purpose
of the study is to create a theoretical framework that will enable an analysis of the role Equality Labeling could play in the implementation of a Swedish sustainable development. A number of questions have guided my study:

- How can sustainable development be conceptualized?
- Do theories of ecological modernisation offer any potentials for the implementation of sustainable development?
- How could women’s role in sustainable development be interpreted from ecofeminist and social feminist theories?
- Which role have environmental management systems played in the Swedish implementation of sustainable development?
- How could Equality Labeling favor a sustainable development in Sweden?

1.2 Methodology and material

The potentials and concrete outcomes of Equality Labeling among Swedish companies is still a relatively unexplored topic both in theory and practice. Apart from an initial study performed by the former Swedish Ministry of Employment (Ds 1998:49) and reports from the pilot-project JA-märkt! in Göteborg (Länsstyrelsen Västra Götaland, Rapport 1998:27), there is no written material to be found. The idea to connect Equality Labeling with the larger context of sustainable development was suggested in a supporting research, conducted by Minna Gillberg from the Department of Sociology at Lund’s University and enclosed in the Ministry’s study (Gillberg, 1998). But so far no elaborated attempts have been made to explore these connections. This thesis can consequently be described as an explorative study, in which I both intend to describe the idea of Equality Labeling and suggest how it could be interpreted in a larger context. The method I have used is both inductive and qualitative. By connecting the material provided by the Ministry of Employment and the project JA-märkt in Göteborg with studies that describe the development of environmental management systems in Sweden, I have tried to achieve an understanding of the mechanisms and expected results that lie behind the suggestion of Equality Labeling. From this initial platform, I have adopted a number of theoretical approaches to suggest a possible analytical framework for Equality Labeling in the larger context of sustainable development. The theoretical material partly consists of policy documents and literature on sustainable development as well as theories on ecological modernisation. I have also taken on ecofeminist and social feminist literature to explore the role of gender equality in sustainable development. The mental models developed in this theoretical part of the thesis are illustrated in so called causal-loop-diagrams (Haraldsson, 1999). My use of this methodological approach should not be interpreted as an attempt to establish strong causal links between the variables in my theoretical discussion, but rather be understood as an illustrative simplification of the conceptual links made in the text.

To gain opinions about the accuracy and feasibility of the connections made between Equality Labeling, environmental management systems and sustainable development I have also chosen to carry out five deep-interviews with official representatives for the
development of Equality Labeling, the implementation of environmental management systems in Swedish companies and the official Swedish work for sustainable development (see interviews in list of references). The interviews were more or less organized according to an unstructured model (Halvorsen, 1989, p 85). While the idea was to encourage an informal discussion around the topic, pre-made questions were still used to enable comparisons between the answers. Three of the five interviews were carried out eye-to-eye and registered by a tape-recorder. As a result of time-shortage and geographical distance, the other two interviews were held over the phone with written answers. In the end the complete interview material was written down and organized separately according to questions. The full answers are not presented in the thesis. Instead I have chosen to refer to the various responses in a discussion. Even though the Swedish interview answers naturally are not referred to word-by-word, my ambition has been to interpret and translate the material to make the English version as close to the intention of the original answers as possible.

1.3 Theoretical approaches

As mentioned above, the theoretical part of the thesis is used to suggest an analytical framework for what role Equality Labeling can play in the Swedish implementation of sustainable development. Here I have tried to bring together a number of different approaches. While I have leaned on reports and policy-documents mainly from WCED and UNCED to gain an understanding of how the concept and political project of sustainable development has developed, theories of ecological modernisation are introduced to highlight problems and potentials with the pragmatic interpretation of sustainable development a market approach implies. This discussion is complemented with an elaboration on women’s role in the sustainability discourse. To suggest a deeper understanding of the assumptions behind the emphasis on women’s participation in the documents from UNCED, I have chosen to introduce perspectives offered in the Women, Environment and Development (WED) debate (Braidotti et al, 1995) and ecofeminist theories. The links between women and nature suggested in these theories are not uncontested. To diversify the opinions on the role of equality in sustainable development I therefore also draw on social feminist perspectives on men’s and women’s equal rights and responsibilities in society.

An important point highlighted in my theoretical discussion is that the broad and vague definition of sustainable development has allowed a large variety of often divergent interpretations to exist in parallel with each other. While some have suggested that the large and vague scope is the weakness of the global agenda, others see how the vagueness has a constructive potential (Hajer, 1995). Accepting that there is no true but only different understandings of reality, a vague definition of sustainable development can be used to foster a broad debate that will draw on many different perspectives to create sustainable strategies for the future. An important consequence of this standpoint is that my specific combination of theoretical approaches by no means is an attempt to promote an objective or true interpretation of sustainable development. Neither should the role it gives Equality Labeling in the Swedish implementation of sustainable development be understood as the only right answer. As emphasized by Lennart Lundquist scientific material and results cannot be
understood independently, but are always the product of the specific problem, theory and method used by the researcher (1993, p 132). It is also important to acknowledge how the particular researcher also is coloured by his or her historic, cultural and social context (Harding, 1991). The intention with my choice of theoretical framework is therefore not to enable any general conclusions, but rather to offer one possible understanding on how sustainable development could be implemented in a Swedish context.

1.4 Limitations of the study

Equality Labeling as described in the study conducted by the former Swedish Ministry of Employment, both refers to a management system for raised equality standards in companies and organization as well as labeling of products and services. To make the scope of this thesis feasible I have chosen to focus on the part of Equality Labeling that elaborates on the potentials of an equality management system. A contributing factor to my choice is that this side of Equality Labeling so far is more explored. But my decision was mainly determined by the fact that a management system is focused on the concrete practice of eradicating gender bias at the work place and to ensure men and women equal rights and responsibilities in important societal decision-making. The name Equality Labeling is as a consequence rather confusing, as it in my case is supposed to refer to an equality management system rather than a product label. But as I refer to already existing studies with this terminology, Equality Labeling is the name I use in my thesis.

1.5 Disposition

This thesis is divided into one theoretical and one empirical part. To offer the reader the framework necessary to clearly understand the empirical and the analytical discussion, I have chosen to present my work in a different order than what is suggested by my inductive method. I therefore start off in the broad concept and political project of sustainable development. My intention is to initially introduce the mainstream story of this global vision, before I elaborate critical perspectives. The discussion on ecological modernisation is introduced as a second step to give the reader an understanding of a common northern interpretation of sustainable development, and to go deeper into the problems and potentials with this cooperative approach. The role of women in sustainable development is elaborated next and in the end connected to the previous discussion on ecological modernisation. The causal-loop-diagrams function as some sort of conclusion for this theoretical part. From this large macro perspective I turn to the Swedish corporate world. Here I try to give Equality Labeling a platform or context, by first portraying the development and experiences of environmental management systems in Swedish companies. With this background understanding of the system dynamics, the presentation of Equality Labeling is intended to come as a logic extension. The connections made between these systems are further discussed in a following part, where I also bring in the opinions from my interviews. The theoretical and empirical discussions are finally connected in a concluding analysis.
Sustainable development is not an obvious concept or idea that suggests a clear interpretation. In the following passage sustainable development as a concept and political vision will be explored and connected to critical theoretical discussions, to suggest one possible understanding on the global agenda.

2.1 Sustainable development - a political vision with three dimensions

In 1972 Donella Meadows and her colleagues in the Club of Rome presented a report that questioned nature’s long-term ability to carry a rapidly growing human population and the resource-intensive activities of an expanding industrial development. With help from a computer model a daunting future scenario was simulated, envisioning a collapse of the entire ecological system within the next hundred years if no change to the existing growth patterns occurred (1997). Together with a number of other influential reports and articles from this time, Limits to Growth by the Club of Rome placed the ecological crisis on the public agenda. By recognizing that environmental degradation is not an isolated phenomena but highly interconnected with modern society and demographic dynamics, the report triggered an ongoing debate over what sort of human development nature can sustain.

The concept sustainable development was first put forward by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980, as a part of the World Conservation Strategy against the depletion of natural resources (1997). Three years later a UN formed World Commission on Environment and Development was assigned the major challenge to “propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving sustainable development by the year 2000 and beyond” that could be shared by a world community and thus stimulate a cooperative action between countries at different stages of economic and social development, as well as between individuals, voluntary organizations, business and institutes (WCED, 1987). After three years of world wide inputs from public hearings the 23 Commissioners from 22 countries unanimously declared that “(h)umanity has the ability to make development sustainable - to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (ibid, p 8). To bring about this development the Commission on Environment and Development in its report Our Common Future calls for conscious political action to sustain the environmental resource base and to assure that it is shared equitably around the world. But according to WCED, meeting the essential needs of all humankind also requires a new era of economic growth. “If large parts of the developing world are to avert economic,
social, and environmental catastrophes, it is essential that global economic growth be revitalized" (WCED, 1987, p 89). By connecting issues of international economy, population, urbanization, energy, industry, peace and security, Our Common Future is extended far beyond a purely ecological concern. The sustainable path it suggests rather contains a social and equitable development driven by an economic growth that recognizes the constraints of the ecosystems.

2.1.1 Global action through participation and cooperation

The global need for a sustainable development was politically consolidated when 178 national delegations and over 14000 NGOs gathered for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro five years later. Building on the agenda put forward by the World Commission on Environment and Development, the Rio Conference for the first time managed to bring together the previously contradictory interests of the environmental agenda in the North and economic and social development objectives of countries in the South. In the non-binding but highly recognized Rio Declaration a number of general principles and obligations are stated that delicately balances the combined environmental and development agenda of UNCED, and guides governments in their pursuit of a sustainable development (Porras, 1993, Elliot, 1998, p 20). As stated in Principle 4 of the Rio Declaration “in order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it” (UNCED, 1992).

The principles set out in the Declaration are deeper elaborated in UNCEDs detailed plan of action for the 21st century, Agenda 21. In this 40 chapter long document it is established that ecological, economic and social objectives cannot be treated separately in the implementation of sustainable development. As made clear in the first section of Agenda 21, a long term protection of the environment can only be operationalized if the ecological problems connected to poverty, patterns of production and consumption, population growth, human health and settlement are given full attention (UNCED, 1992). The action program takes a similar standpoint to that of the World Commission on Environment and Development by identifying stable economic growth as a necessary mean to finance the turn to the aspired sustainable socioeconomic development. But as WCED, Agenda 21 does not promote an ungoverned growth. To allow the necessary changes especially in the developing countries, it is recognized that global economic resources must be redistributed and shared more equitable around the world. An economic growth in line with sustainable development must also be guided by ecological responsibility, as a healthy environment is the prerequisite for continued growth (UNCED, 1992, chapter 2, 33).

By intertwining global ecological, economic and social issues in this manner, Agenda 21 thus invokes a picture of three highly interdependent and mutually reinforcing cornerstones of sustainable development (Nationalkommittén för Agenda 21, 1997, p 25).
Fig 1. Two common illustrations of the interdependent nature of ecological, economic and social sustainability.

To enable an efficient implementation of the three-dimensional objectives of sustainable development, Agenda 21 highlights the need of cooperation. Along side with a strengthened global dialogue and exchange between states, one section of the document emphasizes the importance of a broad public participation on a more local scale and the need to strengthen major groups in society. It is recognized that the various perspectives of different societal groups, organizations and individuals are all needed when the important decisions for the future are to be taken (UNCED, 1992, chapter 23). To handle the challenge of sustainable development the program emphasizes the need to evoke a sense of common purpose among all sectors in society and a will to engage in cooperation and a dialogue grounded on respect for the independent role, responsibility and competence of each participant. The document also points out that significant national environmental and development information should be made available to all citizens. As explicitly stated in the text, a sustainable development must allow all parties to affect the society where they live and work (UNCED, 1992, chapter 23). Cooperation and participation are therefore two key words in the global action plan for sustainable development.

2.2 Green reform through cooperative action

When explaining common patterns in the environmental and development politics that followed the Earth Summit, an increasing number of academics have employed the concept ecological modernisation. Even though the concept is ambiguous and used in different ways, there are also many common features (Christoff, 1996). According to Marteen A. Hajer, the politics of ecological modernisation represent a pragmatic response to sustainable development that has become the “most credible way of talking Green” in late Western environmental policy-making (1995, p 30). This particular environmental strategy, found in most OECD countries, builds on the reform oriented and cooperative tendencies found in Agenda 21. As recognized by Hajer, ecological modernisation identifies the old structures of modern industrial
society as the cause of environmental degradation, but suggest that a more sustainable development can be attained through institutional learning (1996). In accordance with the strategies set out at UNCED, the policies within ecological modernisation propose that ecological concern can become integrated as a new structuring principle for the political, economic and social institutions of modern society through a broad public awareness raising and a cooperative effort from policy makers, industry, science and the environmental movement (Hajer, 1995, 26, Dobson, 1990, p 13, Christoff, 1996). Typical for this environmental approach is the attempt to reconcile the opposing interests of industrial society and the environmental movement, by suggesting that a sound environment is compatible with the aspiration for continued industrial development and economic growth within modern society. “Remedying environmental damage is seen as a ‘positive sum game’: environmental damage is not an impediment for growth; quite the contrary it is the new impetus for growth” (Hajer in Lash et al, 1996, p 242).

Where traditional western bureaucratic and regulatory regimes of the 1970s had created a negative value around the environment, by imposing limits for pollution and resource depletion that forced representatives of modern industrial society to adopt costly abatement technologies at the end-of-pipe, the new politics of ecological modernisation have taken up the language of business and recommends a profitable management of the ecological crisis through preventive action (Hajer, 1995, p 26, Harvey, 1999, Christoff, 1996). The corporate world is suggested to take advantage of the expertise offered by science and the environmental movement as well as a growing environmental awareness among consumers. By stimulating a development of preventive technology and new environmentally conscious management procedures, companies are suggested to both improve their environmental performance and gain a competitive advantage in new green markets. As pointed out by Wolfgang Sachs ecological modernisation, or the ‘contest perspective’ to sustainable development, understands eco-efficiency as a strategy of considerable innovative power. “Shifting consumer demand spurs innovation, trimming down resource use lowers production costs, and environmental technology opens up new markets”(1999, p 31). By engaging a variety of economic, environmental and scientific interests in cooperative action, the policies of ecological modernisation consequently suggests a method to reconcile ecological and economic sustainability within the frames of the capitalist market logic and in further but reformed progress of modern society.

2.2.2 Contested consensus

While this ‘management of sustainable development’ has gained an increasing support from government officials, industrialists, financiers and scientists or the “heartland of contemporary political-economic power” in the Western world (Harvey, 1999, p 168), it has also been highly questioned. When trying to reconcile interests through a sense of cooperation, critics have argued that the politics of ecological modernisation have lost the deeper social and cultural critique of modern society itself.
As pointed out by Luke Martell:

“most political ecologists reject the idea that ecological problems can be solved within existing economic and social systems. It is the fundamental values and practices of industrial societies that are at the basis of environmental problems. Change to greater sustainability is more than a technical question. It is a social and political issue about different values and style of life” (1994, p 184).

Even though the broad concept of sustainable development officially acknowledges the cultural aspects of the global ecological crisis, it has been argued that the interpretation of sustainable development as ecological modernisation has failed to exercise the necessary self-reflexivity. Framing the environmental degradation as a scientific problem with technological and managerial solutions, this particular strategy avoids addressing the environmental problems connected to characteristic traits of modern culture, such as excessive material growth and consumption (Fisher & Hajer, 1999, p 8). Drawing on the laws of thermodynamics Herman Daly questions the positive sum game proposed in the policies of ecological modernisation, and argues that the idea of ‘sustainable growth’ implies an eventual impossibility (1992). Emphasizing that the earth is a closed system in which energy cannot be created or destroyed, Daly recognizes that there are clear limits to how much the global economy can grow. When extracting and processing low entropy resources from nature and giving back high entropy wastes and pollution, the economy is slowly undermining its continued existence. Even though the politics of ecological modernisation suggests increased efficiency in resource use and pollution abatement that slows down entropy, it still promotes the impossibility theorem when applied on a global scale. As argued by Daly, the promise of increased economic growth for all is only a strategic solution of ‘overdeveloped countries’ to buy off social conflict and divert attention away from the qualitative aspects of development such as sufficiency and distribution of wealth (1992, p 152).

While failing to address the social dimension of sustainable development and its demand for distributive equity and limits to unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, critics see how the strategies of ecological modernisation also fail to implement the full political change suggested in the concept of sustainable development. Even though the policies of ecological modernisation have managed to engage a variety of actors in the common cause to reconcile economic and ecological objectives and thus successfully spread an increased environmental awareness among institutions originally identified as the root cause the ecological crisis, it is argued that this particular interpretation of sustainable development simultaneously has become corrupted by mainstream political and economic interests and diluted the more radical message of green politics (Connelly & Smith, 1999, p 56, Dobson, 1990). Leaning too heavily on modern institutions, ecological modernisation has turned into yet another representation of dominant forms of economic power that tend to reproduce rather than question current institutional practices in any deeper cultural sense (Harvey, 1999, p 171) Through this acknowledgment some have come to question the whole idea of sustainable development as a broad political reform project built on cooperation. The holistic aspiration of sustainable development and its vague definition implies that we can have it all and thus justifies everything and nothing at the same time, radical change and status quo (Merchant, 1999, Fisher and Hajer, 1999). It has been argued that while sustainable development initially was an
attractive concept that offered grounds for a fundamental critique of existing practices, it has become increasingly broadened and in the process lost much of its radical cutting edge (Connelly & Smith, 1999, p 2, 56). By fostering consensus around the importance of sustainable development, the concept today both disguises the large divergence in which sustainable development is interpreted, and allows groups and institutions whose very practices are at odds with the ideals inherent in the sustainable development to use the concept for their own ends (a a, p 57, 59). According to Fisher and Hajer there is reason to question the “all-encompassing problematique” of sustainable development that suggests that there is no longer need for conflict, only for collaboration (1999, p 4). Leaning on the facts established at the Rio-plus-Five conference in New York in 1997 (UNGASS), they highlight how this environmental strategy of consensus did not manage to keep any of the important commitments made in Rio five years earlier. Despite a global economic upswing, UNGASS showed how the distributive efforts from North to South through foreign aid had decreased while the carbon dioxide emissions had increased (1999, p 2). This is an acknowledgment that puts the mutually reinforcing and reconcilable nature of the ecological, economic and social objectives found within the framework of sustainable development in question. As argued by Fisher and Hajer “(t)hose who thought that once a shared understanding was established, ameliorative environmental action would only grow and spread are now proven clearly wrong” (1999, p 9).

2.2.3 Reflexive ecological modernisation through democratic representation

Does the criticism towards a weakened common agenda imply that a separate radical environmental movement is the only solution to assure a real sustainable development? Even though many radical ecologists question the pragmatic environmentalism that followed the Earth Summit, some are also troubled by the weak agency of radical green politics and point at the difficulty to gain a broad public support for a position that calls modern industrial society into question and threatens deeply rooted patterns of production and consumption (Dobson, 1990, Achterberg, 1993). While recognizing that the great material sacrifices required for radical cultural change will not be long lasting if imposed from above, Wouter Achterberg highlights that long-term social and environmental changes demand voluntariness, understanding and ‘preparedness’ of all people involved (1993, p 82). From where will this democratic support for a radical position arise?

While skeptics stress the weaknesses of the cooperative approach and the holistic aspiration of sustainable development, cooperation and holism are paradoxically the very traits in which optimists find the potentials for long-term change suggested by radical greens. By introducing the concept ‘discourse-coalition’ Marteen A. Hajer gives a theoretical framework to the dynamic capacity of the concept and political project of sustainable development. “Discourse has been defined as a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that is produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (Hajer, 1995, p 60). Hajer argues that politics is a struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their
specific understanding of reality. While mainstream politics of this kind tend to cement differences between political positions or discourses, Hajer sees how political coalitions or interaction between discourses open up for new meanings and identities that alter old understandings of reality and thus activate a process of political change (1995, p 59). Crucial for this sort of constructive coalition is a common concept or a ‘story-line’ around which the different actors can meet and communicate despite their different perceptions and understandings. The story-line is metaphor that allows the various actors to expand their understanding beyond their own discourse of expertise and experience. According to Hajer the story-line is therefore both the very cement of political coalitions and “the prime vehicle for change” (1995, 63).

Sustainable development is an influential story-line that has brought together a large variety of interests in a common discussion about the future path of humanity. The vague definition of the concept has broadened the acceptance and support for the project, and thus offers potentials for dynamic coalitions that can use a wide range of experiences and understandings to suggest political strategies to integrate ecological, economic and social objectives in future societal development. As emphasized by Lamont C. Hempel the real accomplishment of UNCED was the creation of environmental coalitions between interests normally in opposition. “By fostering thousands of personal contacts and the cross-national and cross-cultural sharing of environmental perspectives, the Earth Summit contributed vitally to improved understanding of the diverse opinions that currently divide the world community and impede environmental cooperation” (1996, p 44). But the crisis environmentalists have to respond to is also a crisis of representation (Connelly & Smith, 1999). Resting mainly on the participants from mainstream economic and political institutions, the predominant interpretation of sustainable development as ecological modernisation has reduced the reflexive potentials or cultural critique of late Western environmental politics and limited the possibilities for fundamental environmental and social change (Fisher & Hajer, 1999). While some let the weaknesses of ecological modernisation overthrow the entire idea of a common agenda, others see potentials for a stronger or more reflexive notion of ecological modernisation that through democracy and communication acknowledges the radical environmental critique of modern industrial society itself and thus diversifies narrow, instrumental and uniform understanding of sustainable development (Christoff, 1996). The logic of a reflexive environmental discourse coalition rests on the idea that there is a large variety of environmental perspectives that in a common debate can challenge hegemonic understandings and thus activate the dynamics of political change. When identifying actors that through a democratic representation can exercise the cultural critique necessary to integrate the social dimension in the current interpretation of sustainable development, some have turned to women.
2.3 Women’s participation - a prerequisite for sustainability?

Women represent one of the major groups that was given specific attention at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro 1992. As established in both the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21, women play a vital role in environmental management and development and must actively participate in economic and political decision-making to enable the aspirated turn to a more sustainable development (UNCED, 1992, *Rio Declaration*, Principle 20, UNCED, 1992, *Agenda 21*, chapter 24). In the 24th chapter of Agenda 21 empowerment of women in public and private life is highlighted as a crucial strategy for sustainability. The text recognizes that women still are underrepresented in most public decision-making and therefore encourages national policies for increased female participation in executive positions in society. It is stated that women should participate as decision-makers, planners, technical advisers, managers and researchers in the development and implementation of policies and programs for a sustainable development. But to attain an equal participation of women in the corridors of power, it is recognized that the more fundamental barriers in women’s lives must be addressed. Several paragraphs therefore also stress the need to eradicate legal, administrative, cultural, social and economic obstacles that impose negative stereotypes on women and thus counteract men’s and women’s equal opportunities and rights in society. In other paragraphs empowerment is defined in more basic and concrete terms such as women’s access to equal pay for equal work, education, healthcare, family-planning, resources and land (UNCED, 1992, *Agenda 21*, chapter 24).

Why women play a vital role in the pursuit of sustainable development is never explicitly addressed in the official UNCED documents. As the connection between women and environment does not speak for itself, it is important to discuss the underlying assumptions that gave women as a group a specific position in the sustainability discourse.

2.3.1 Highlighting experiences from the South

Chapter 24 or “the Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development” should be seen in the light of the long-term effort to integrate women’s concerns in the development and environmental debate. Already in the early 1970s a gender dimension was added to mainstream development thought. Through research like Ester Boserup’s *Women’s Role in Economic Development* it was brought to public attention that women in the developing countries did not necessarily benefit from the development programs. Studying the conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa, Boserup showed that the modernization of agriculture and the migration to towns that followed the economic development rather weakened women’s positions in society. While the male African population benefited from the new opportunities in the modern urban sector, women were most often left behind in rural sustenance agriculture without access to credits, education or technology (Boserup, 1970, Braidotti et al., 1995, p 78). This acknowledgment highlighted the daily-life realities
of many women in the developing world and at the same time established their link to nature. It was recognized that the responsibility for sustaining the family through agriculture, collection of wood, fresh water and fodder not only gave rural women in the South a direct contact with the environment but also made them vulnerable to environmental degradation (van den Hombergh, 1993, p 17). An increasing number of reports showed how the introduction of commercial agriculture, modern forestry, mining and water dams in the South drove women into marginal and infertile land and forced them to walk longer distances each day to collect wood and fresh water (Mellor, 1997, p 27). While it was recognized that the traditional sexual division of labor in combination with the modern development model placed many women from the developing world in a marginal position outside the center of power and resources, a picture of women as major victims of the ecological crisis emerged in the North.

While the United Nations acknowledged the need to integrate women in the development process by launching a Women's Decade (1975-1985) and development organizations gradually initiated schemes to secure women’s place in their development programs, an alternative debate emerged that challenged the whole notion of mainstream development. Fueled by women’s movements in the South a reconceptualized picture of women as environmental managers at the center of the food-fuel-water crisis became the focus of a new Women, Environment and Development (WED) theme within the development discussion (Mellor, 1997, p 35). Pointing at the achievements made by women’s grassroots groups, such as the Chipko movement’s successful preservation of indigenous forest in the Indian Himalayas or the forest-plantation efforts to stop the spread of desertification and soil-erosion carried out by women involved in the Kenyan Green Belt movement, the WED approach highlighted the environmental agency of rural women concerned with the maintenance of their life-support systems (ibid, p 20). It was argued that the intimate environmental knowledge bore by the rural woman in the South made her the answer to the ecological crisis and a key agent in an alternative development ruled by ecological concern (Braidotti et al, 1995, p 97).

2.3.2 Ecofeminist interpretation of the women-nature association

In 1989 Vandana Shiva reinforced the picture of the unique environmental agency of ‘the third world woman’ by connecting the everyday life struggle of rural Indian women with Hindu religion and philosophy. In Staying Alive Shiva sees women’s nurturing and reproductive work as an expression of the feminine principle of cosmos; the energy that creates and sustains all life (1997, 40). In Indian cosmology this feminine principle or Prakriti is exerted in dual unity with the masculine principle, Purusha, and together they interact as inseparable complements in nature or the creative and productive Terra Mater (ibid). According to Shiva this living and nurturing relationship between women, men and nature that signified pre-colonial India, was disrupted by the arrival of the western ‘maldevelopment’.

“Maldevelopment is maldevelopment in thought and in action. In practice, this fragmented, reductionist, dualist perspective violates the integrity and harmony of man in nature, and the harmony between men and women. It ruptures the co-operative unity of masculine and feminine, and places
man, shorn of the feminine principle, above nature and women, and separated from both (Shiva, 1997, p 6).

In Shiva’s view the global ecological crisis is the result of a western scientific and industrial discourse that has transformed the notion of productivity to the exclusive qualities of the enlightened modern man. Leaning on an idea of human superiority and independence, Shiva argues that this male maldevelopment has devalued the creative and reproductive capacity of women and nature and reduced the ‘sustainers of life’ into dispensable objects available for exploitation (ibid). The message conveyed in Staying Alive is consequently that the solution to the global crisis cannot be found within the Western development model, but should rather be sought in the survival expertise of women in the South and a restored feminine principle. As argued by Shiva; “(T)he producers of life alone can be its real protectors. Women embedded in nature, producing life with nature, are therefore taking the initiative in the recovering of nature” (1997, p 47).

Staying Alive belongs to the number of publications that since the 1970s had placed the intertwined interests of women and nature in a larger structural framework and thus offered the WED debate a theoretical basis. Addressing patriarchal structures inherent in the western development discourse, this emerging ecofeminist movement established a link between the exploitation and degradation of nature and the subordination and oppression of women (Mellor, 1997, p 1, Salleh, 1997, p 3). In ecofeminist literature the root cause of the mutual domination of nature and women has been traced down to the scientific revolution of the 17th century when the ancient respect for nature as an organic whole, a magic cosmos in which humans were a natural part, was replaced by a notion of human superiority and a will to predict and control nature. As argued by Carolyn Merchant, the enlightened scientist removed the ethical constraints against the violation and exploitation of nature by letting human reason and rationality reduce nature into a dead machine and a source of raw material (1992, p 41). Ecofeminists in general question the hierarchical relationship between an independent human civilization and an inferior nature, and call for a renewed awareness of humanity’s dependence upon the natural world (Mellor, 1997, p 1). But the ecofeminist school of thought takes different paths when explaining women’s relation to nature. While cultural and spiritual ecofeminists like Shiva have suggested that women are closer to nature as a result of their innate life-affirming abilities and argue that this feminine quality has been devalued in modern society, social ecofeminists have instead argued that the mutual domination of women and nature is the result of a historical and social construction that has associated women with the devalued nature. By connecting femininity with characteristics such as reproduction, caring and emotion, social ecofeminists see how modern discourse has not only fostered women’s nurturing role in society, but also justified her subjugation by making areas of reason and abstraction (i.e. the superior human civilization) exclusive to men (Merchant, 1992, p 191, Plumwood, 1994, p 74). Social ecofeminists on the other hand suggest that the socially constructed gender roles, that have made women more responsible for concrete bodily needs, have given women a greater understanding of humanity’s dependence upon nature than men, who through their more abstract work in the public spheres of modern society have lost the daily contact with and thus respect for nature (Mellor, 1997). Despite the division made between
the biological and social cause of women's specific 'connectedness', the common call for empowerment bring the various ecofeminist perspectives together. By highlighting women's position in society and bringing forward her embodied knowledge, it is argued that the patriarchal nature of modern development can be challenged and replaced by a development that respects the entire humanity and its dependence upon nature (Mellor, 1997, p 69).

2.3.3 Do all women care for the environment?

The appreciation of women as environmental agents, as expressed in the WED and ecofeminist debate, came to influence the global agenda. In the UNCED preparatory process women from NGOs, aid agencies, research institutions and grass-root action groups gathered in several global conferences to forward the role of women in the new sustainability discourse and to prepare policy recommendations for the coming Earth Summit that would reflect the values, skills and experiences of women from all over the world (Braidotti et al., 1995, p 102). At the “World Women’s Conference for a Healthy Planet” held in Miami 1991, a Women’s Action Agenda 21 was established. In this document 1500 women from a large variety of political, geographical, institutional and professional settings agreed that it was the Western mode of development that had lead to the ecological crisis, and that this obvious crisis in development was highly linked to the persistent subordination of women. As a consequence:

“(t)hey called for a ‘Healthy Planet’ in which participatory democracy, open access to information, accountability, ethical action, justice and full participation of women are realized. They challenged the present development model with its economic conception of sustainability and suggested a more holistic notion of politically, socially and culturally sustainable development, that is, sustainable livelihoods for all” (ibid).

The views established in Miami were brought to Rio in 1992 and forwarded by at a women’s conference within the Global Forum, ‘Planet Femea’. Leaning on the statements in Women’s Action Agenda 21 the women present at UNCED stressed “the need for women’s empowerment as a prerequisite for a sustainable livelihoods of all people” (Braidotti et al., 1995, p 92). But Planet Femea also raised an important question of representation. Some participants questioned whether the unified position in Women’s Action Agenda 21 really is representative for women on a global scale. It was asked whether all women care about the environment (a a, p 5). Even though these doubts did not stop the official recognition of women’s vital role in the global political action for sustainable development, they have been much discussed in the literature.

A common objection to the established connection between women and nature concerns the universality of the claim and the implicit notion of women as a homogeneous group regardless of the very different historical, cultural and social contexts in which women live and act around the world. Chandra Talpade Mohanty is one of the many feminists who have emphasized the impossibility of a ‘global sisterhood’ or women as a coherent group with shared interests and desires. She argues that “the discursively consensual homogeneity of ‘women’ as a group is
mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women” (1993, p 200). Even though Mohanty’s criticism is directed towards the Western feminist movement, it is valid also for the generalization of women as environmental agents. As shown above, much of the women-nature link confirmed in the UNCED documents, has been built upon the concrete life-affirming struggle of particular groups of rural women in the developing world. Scientific research and women’s grassroots groups have together pointed at site specific connections between women’s labor and the state of the environment that may be of highest relevance in that particular context. On the other hand these regional experiences do not necessarily establish the aspired connection for all women in the South, and even less for all women globally.

In a study carried out by Cecil Jackson a number of reports from the South are highlighted that even counteract the idea that women and nature have common cause (1996). It is shown how women’s struggle to break out of oppressive sexual labor patterns and search for increased individual autonomy, in several different areas have increased rather than reduced environmental degradation. Jackson as a consequence argues that “equity in, and democratization of, development is not necessarily compatible with environmental protection, conservation and sustainable use of resources” and that “the false idea of the positive synergism of women’s gender interests and environmental interests seems strongly related to an essentialist denial of the social, and to a historical construction of gender and nature (1994, p 140, 127). Recognizing that it can be in women’s emancipatory interest to take part in the exploitation of the environment, women’s assumed connection with nature can just as well be a prison as a liberating force. This is an idea that is taken up by many social feminists in the strong opposition against the essentialist claims in the ecofeminist school of thought. By celebrating women’s biological identification with nature, Janet Biehl argues that the many ecofeminist scholars “confine women to the same regressive social definitions from which feminists have fought long and hard to emancipate women” and thus play along with the patriarchal structures that excludes women from the rational decision-making spheres of society (1991, p 3). As expressed by Victoria Davion “if feminists seek a society without domination and subordination as a part of the solution to the present ecological crisis, the idea of a separate feminine reality cannot be part of that solution” (1994, p 20). By uncritically upgrading the feminine role ecofeminists reinforce the false dualisms of human/nature, reason/emotion and masculinity/femininity and thus cement rather than challenge the domination inherent in the Western patriarchal framework (a a, p 26).

Representatives from the deep ecology movement have also strongly criticized this essentialist ecofeminist claim, that confines men to an oppressive and destructive role in the same general sense as women and nature are the oppressed. While acknowledging that women cannot resolve the ecological crisis alone, it has been highlighted that men as well as women can express caring, emotion and respect from nature, while women as well as men have been distorted by the effects of patriarchy and internalized its strategies of domination (Braidotti et al, 1994, p 167). Many have argued that women, as a result of their femininity, are not excluded from domination. Through the assertion of social status or privilege given by factors such as race and class women around the world take part in the oppression of other women and men, as well as the degradation of the environment. The gender system that makes women
inferior to men is interlocked with social structures of race relationships that systematically provides white women with economic, political and social advantages at the expense of Blacks and other people of color (Davion, 1994, p 19, Harding, 1991, p 215). This important recognition highlights that oppression is not exclusive to men and thus contradicts the idea that women in a general sense would be more suited than men to build an equitable and ecological society.

2.3.4 Participation and cooperation on equal terms

In *Partnership Ethics and Cultural Discourse* Carolyn Merchant calls for an equitable and cooperative platform within the political project of sustainable development that recognizes women's social position but avoids endowing either males or females with a special relationship to nature or to each other. Instead;

"(t)he partnership of earthcare means that both women and men can enter into mutual relationships with each other and the planet independently of gender. It does not hold women responsible for 'cleaning up the mess' made by male-dominated science, technology, and capitalism, or individual men responsible for creating it" (1999, p 212).

The position held by Merchant takes an important step away from the essentialist claims found within the WED and ecofeminist movement, and offers a positive interpretation of men's and women's equal rights and responsibilities in the pursuit of a sustainable development. Releasing men and women from the biologically determined positions, Merchant's partnership ethic does not imply that women in any universal sense will promote environmental protection while counteracted by men. Demand for an equitable participation in the pursuit of sustainable development must rather be based on democratic ideals, where the participants, women as well as men, have to accept and respect each others equitable input (Braidotti et al, 1995, 167). A democratic participation and a cooperation on equal terms allow those women who carry particular environmental knowledge to influence and change unsustainable modes of development, without suggesting that a specific environmental contribution is the prerequisite for women's participation in the important decision-making for the future. Women's highlighted role in sustainable development can thus be interpreted as a part of a democratic goal, rather than a method to secure ecological perspectives. On the other hand Merchant's partnership ethics still makes use of a social feminist understanding of women's social position when suggesting new relationships between humans and non-human nature (1999, p 220). Recognizing that a historic and social construction of modern society has given many women experiences from an inferior position outside the rational decision-making spheres of society, women are likely to offer different perspectives to mainstream thought and challenge dominant understandings. But this acknowledgment does not necessarily support the idea that all women and no men are disloyal to modern civilization, as many women while far from all men enjoy the benefits of an inequitable and unsustainable world order. As emphasized in postmodern critique, women's standpoints are not innocent and do not produce more adequate or true understandings of the world than those carried by men, only different (Haraway, 1996). And accepting that these differences in experiences and perspectives rest on socially constructed gender roles, they are also open for change. By highlighting the structures in society that suggest different rights and
responsibilities for men and women, the call for women's equal representation in sustainable development can thus be more than a claim for legitimate decision-making, but also a crucial step towards a new understanding of men and women as individuals beyond generalized gender constructions.

This less romanticized picture of women's role in sustainable development still goes along with the reflexive dynamics of Marteen A Hajer's discourse-coalition, that assumes that the political process towards a sustainable development will be favored by a broad participation. In difference to the essentialist and separatist tendencies found in ecofeminist argumentation, a strategy built equal participation and cooperation does not create opposing and irreconcilable positions. Instead a reform-oriented strategy of reflexive ecological modernisation supports a democratic debate in which different experiences and perspectives in cooperation can create new meanings and understandings beyond current discursive limits. By maximizing the perspectives among the actors involved in environmental coalitions, current technocratic and instrumental understandings and solutions to the ecological crisis are likely to be diversified and eventually replaced by a more legitimate and culturally reflexive notion of sustainable development. As emphasized by Hajer; the unification of different fields is not a pragmatic alliance that leaves reality unchanged. "On the contrary, in the process of creating new discursive understandings practical reality might change too" (1995, 68).

2.4 Causal Loop Diagrams

The causal loop diagrams below sum up the different understandings of sustainable development as discussed above.

Fig 2. Ecological modernisation. This perspective identifies the old structures of modern industrial society as the cause of the global ecological crisis, but suggests that modern institutions can learn to integrate ecological concern through the policies of ecological modernisation. The constructive cooperation between the environmental movement, science and industry suggested by ecological modernisation will result in new eco-efficient technology that both supports modern progress and prevents a continuation of the ecological crisis. The negative loop is balanced (B).
Fig 3. Radical ecofeminist critique. Critics have suggested that the modern development model is the cause of the global ecological crisis, and that a strategy of ecological modernisation that builds on modern institutions will only reinforce maldevelopment and the ecological crisis (R). According to ecofeminist theory the subjugated woman can question the modern culture and balance the negative loop caused by maldevelopment, by suggesting radical institutional change (B).

Fig 4. Reflexive ecological modernisation. To stop or balance modern maldevelopment and the ecological crisis it creates, the cooperative and reform oriented strategy of ecological modernisation is important as it reconciles rather than creates opposing positions. But the cooperation must be based on democratic representation to maximize the necessary cultural critique and create a self-reflexive strategy for institutional change necessary to balance the reinforcing loop of maldevelopment and allow environmental recovery.
3 Equality Labeling- towards a pragmatic integration of ecological, economic and social sustainability?

Industry plays a paradoxical role in the pursuit of sustainable development. While it is a societal sector that generates an important part of the wealth and products necessary to meet human needs, industry is also a major polluter and thus one of the grand contributors to the global ecological crisis. Some have as a consequence argued that one of the major challenges in the political project of sustainable development is to find means for industry to generate the required wealth without degrading the environment and support patterns of global inequity (Robins & Trisoglio, p 1995). Even though many question the feasibility of this aspiration, a new global trend in corporate management suggest an awakened interest for sustainable development within this societal sector. Turning to the Swedish corporate world positive signs of an extended business agenda can be traced.

3.1 A new Swedish business époque

In 1997 the Swedish government published strategies for a sustainable Sweden, in which economic and ecological policies were largely intertwined. By making strategic investments in areas such as information and education, greener energy systems and more modern transportation and housing, the government announced how Sweden both will take a leading role towards ecological sustainability and develop as modern industrial society (Regeringskansliet, 1997). As proposed, the ‘greening’ of Sweden requires new techniques and processes that will open up new green markets for Swedish companies and thus stimulate a sustainable economic growth (ibid). In the wake of this Swedish ecological modernisation a growing interest for environmental issues has emerged within the Swedish corporate world. Some talk about a new business époque or paradigm and refer to new perceptions of management that has given industry a new role in the pursuit of sustainable development (Industriförbundet, 1998, Dobers et al, 1997, p 205, Strannegård, 1998, p 8). While the Swedish command and control strategy of the 1970s and 1980s used to generate a negative and defensive industrial response to the enforced environmental regulations, some have highlighted how many Swedish companies during the 1990s have adopted a more proactive attitude towards the environment and in some cases even taken a leading role for environmental change beyond the requirements of current legislation (Gillberg, 1998, Strannegård, 1998). The explanation to this shift in corporate environmental attitudes and practice has been found in a new market pressure created by an increased environmental awareness in Swedish society and the informative
activities of environmental NGOs and media (Industriförbundet, 1998, Strannegård, 1998). Pointing at Swedish examples where inadequate environmental performance has lead to media scandals, Minna Gillberg shows how companies today can be forced to place environmental issues on a strategic level in their organizational decision-making out of sheer survival (1999, p 115). With a bad environmental reputation companies nowadays run the risk of losing customers' confidence and eventually the entire business. But according to Gillberg the real change in Swedish environmental practice does not stem from this impending threat on the corporate world, but rather from the insight that environmental strategies can result in good business. In the case of the Swedish paint company Flügger AB, a broken pipe and a polluted river became the reason for a complete business restructuring. Bringing in environmental awareness as a core element in their management strategies, Flügger did not only turn its bad image but also enhanced the company's commercial value by taking a leading environmental position in the paint business (Gillberg, 1999, p 166). While the positive market response to Flügger's new responsible image created a chain reaction of raised environmental standards among its competitors, similar experiences in other markets are gradually leading to an overall shift in traditional corporate attitudes towards the environment. The picture of environmental compliance as a mere cost is being replaced by a 'win-win' rhetoric (Strannegård, 1998, p 8). Acknowledging that preventive action can reduce future risks and liabilities and secure a more long-term position in a market where environmental issues are gaining increasing importance, many Swedish managers are today recognizing that environmental investments are profitable (Strannegård et al, 1997). An important consequence of these new monetary incentives for environmental performance is that Swedish companies gradually are taking own initiatives for environmental learning and adopting voluntary strategies to reduce the environmental impact of their activities (Dobers et al, 1997).

3.1.1 Environmental management systems

The environmental management system (EMS) is an increasingly applied voluntary tool among Swedish companies wanting to secure a high environmental performance (Industriförbundet, 1998). As indicated by the name, an environmental management system helps companies to 'manage' and prevent their environmental impact by offering routines and strategies for systematic and efficient environmental work within the corporate organization. Today there are two leading standards for environmental management systems in Sweden; ISO 14001 and EMAS. The most commonly adopted is ISO 14001. This internationally established standard, developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 1996, functions as a guide for companies wanting to introduce or improve their environmental management system. ISO 14001 involves a systematic set of steps that are designed to integrate environmental concern as a core element in the overall management but also spread the responsibility for environmental improvement at all levels in company. As illustrated in fig 5, the initial decision to conduct environmental improvement through the standardized EMS must be taken by the corporate management. But in the process of environmental investigation, goal setting and planning, implementation and evaluation, responsibilities are assigned to involve the entire company.
This ‘learning process’ for the staff is one of the clear strengths with the standardized environmental management system, as it fosters a broad responsibility and commitment that eventually can lead to a new environmental ethic and practice within but also outside the business organization (Morelli, 1999). Another important feature of the ISO 14001 standard is its circular process of continuous improvement. When initial goals are reached, higher ones are formulated to constantly increase the company’s environmental performance (International Organization for Standardization, 1999). The reward for those companies that manage to adjust to the systematic model for continuous improvement, is a certificate which guarantees that the company’s environmental management holds an ISO 14001-standard. This certificate is achieved after an independent assessment from an accredited third-party. Critics have questioned the fact that the ISO 14001 standard does not require a certain level of environmental performance apart from compliance with the current environmental legislation, and argue that the certificate thus can be used as a false marketing device or ‘smokescreen’ for companies with minimum environmental achievements (Netherwood, 1996). On the other hand the system still suggests progression for those companies looking for good publicity alone. To retain the certificate the ISO 14001 standard requires that the certified company can show the accredited auditor evidence of a continuous process of reduced environmental impact (International Organisation for Standardisation, 1999). The dynamic potential and strength of the certification process thus lies in the demand for constant improvement above current legislative levels (Gillberg, 1999). The parallel EMAS standard (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) offers further response to those who question the actual achievements of the certified companies. This alternative standard is a voluntary EU regulation from 1993 that follows the requirements of ISO 14001, but puts more emphasis on communication with the external world by including a verified environmental statement in the certification criteria (SIS SAQ Certifiering, 1999). Allowing the public to assess the environmental performance through a transparent environmental report, the EMAS standard suggest a method to increase the
accountability of the voluntary environmental initiatives taken by the corporate world (Netherwood, 1996).

![Graph showing the number of ISO 14000 and EMAS certified organizations in Sweden from 1995-1998.](image1)


![Graph showing the continued development of Swedish ISO 14001 and EMAS certifications from August 1998 to October 1999.](image2)


As illustrated in figure 6 and 7, Swedish companies and organizations have shown an increased interest for voluntary certifications according to EMAS and the ISO 14000 family of environmental management standards during the 1990s. Even though this trend does not necessarily suggest environmental performance far beyond current legislation, the voluntary initiatives still signal an awakened interest for environmental issues within a societal sector that traditionally has avoided demands for environmental compliance. As argued by Minna Gillberg the economic incentives for companies to work for an ISO 14001 or EMAS certificate has brought about a bottom-up implementation of environmental standards that already is far more efficient than the traditional Swedish top-down rule (1999). By allowing companies to create environmental goals according to market demand rather than on the command from above, the voluntary environmental management systems have created a deeper environmental commitment among companies to independently raise environmental standards (Gillberg, 1999). While many expect that this development of corporate environmental achievements will continue to follow the positive pattern of the 1990s, some even suggest an extended corporate responsibility in the future. Resting upon
the same market mechanisms that have brought about the successful integration of economic and ecological objectives, it has been argued that also social issues can gain a new highlighted position on the business agenda (Council of Economic Priorities, 1999). One of the recent Swedish attempts to use market forces for a social cause is called Equality Labeling, and concerns companies' commitment to men's and women's equal rights and responsibilities.

3.2 Strengthening women's voice on the Swedish labor market

In 1992 a new Swedish law for gender equality was passed with the purpose to support women's and men's equal rights on the labor market (SFS, 1991:433). The legislation was based on an official recognition that the public arena is not gender neutral and that particularly women's labor conditions need to be strengthened (Prop 1990/91:113, p 64). The law thus obliges each Swedish employer to actively promote gender equality at the workplace. For instance the legal text states the employer's responsibility to adjust work conditions to both men and women needs, to support a balanced representation of men and women in different positions, to facilitate a reconciliation of parenthood and employment and to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination based on sex in recruitment, advancement and wages. The strategies developed to handle these concerns should be stated in an official equality plan (SFS, 1991:433).

So far this legislative attempt to promote gender equality has showed limited success. Even though equality today is a well established ideal in society and regarded as highly politically correct within the corporate world, research show that many Swedish employers tend take equality in the own organization for granted and despite the law often view work for equal rights and opportunities between the male and female employees as unnecessary (Schömer, 1999, p 184, Sundin, 1998). And according to recent statistics and official research, the Swedish labor market is still a highly segregated arena. Men and women do not only work in different fields of the labor market, but also have significantly different positions within the same field. For instance it is clear that women are largely over-represented at workplaces connected to health and child care. In 1998 as much as 95 percent of all nurse assistants and primary school teachers were women in Sweden. At the same time only 43 percent of the executive positions within the public sector are held by women (Sundin, 1998, p 11, SCB, 1998, p 52, 95). In the corporate hierarchy women are even more under-represented. Today 91 percent of all chief executives of private companies are men, and among the other head positions within corporations men represent 75 percent (SCB 1998, p 95). Statistics also show that parental leave still is mainly used by women. In 1997 only 10 percent of all Swedish fathers made use of the state-financed leave offered for care of ill children (SCB, 1998, p 38). When it comes to wages men consequently score higher than women, even though only fifty percent can be explained by work relevant differences between male and female employees. Despite the now seven year old equality law, statistics show that the wage gap between
Swedish men and women has been constant since the early 1980s (Persson & Wadensjö, 1997, p 11).

3.1.1 Equality Labeling- a new method for equality

To offer the legislative and regulatory work for gender equality support, the former Swedish Minister of Equality Ulrica Messing in 1997 initiated a project that takes on a very different approach than the traditional command and control strategy. ‘Equality Labeling’ (jämställdhetsmärkning) is the name of the new method for equality compliance, that uses the market forces to give employers incentives to change equality rhetoric to practice.

In the study that followed the Minister’s initial proposal, performed by the former Ministry of Employment, Equality Labeling is presented as a voluntary system for certification of companies and organizations as well as labeling of products and services (Ds 1998:49). The underlying logic of a voluntary system is to make equality assurance beneficial and thus in the interest of any profit seeking company or organization. Apart from the recognition that improved equality would allow companies to gain access to a greater resource base by using both men’s and women’s competence and experiences in decision-making, companies engaged in equality certification and labeling of their products or services would be rewarded through official recognition and encouragement as well as through good publicity (Ds 1998:49, p 20). While the system would function as a tool for promotion and a key to gender aware market segments for producers, the Equality Label is simultaneously an instrument through which consumers will be allowed to influence the market. Consumer power is one of the key concepts in the study, and something to be practiced by individuals as well as other companies and organizations, municipalities and state bodies wanting to cooperate with companies committed to equal opportunities and rights for their employees and consumers or customers (Ds 1998:49, p 38). By giving consumers and customers the choice to support companies and organizations that can show their gender awareness through a certificate or labeled products/services, the system is thought to start off a chain reaction where equality compliance would be an issue for competitiveness among competing actors within the same field (ibid, p 40).

Among the long term benefits of Equality Labeling, the study identifies increased public awareness and a strengthened democracy (Ds 1998:49, p 20). By creating a positive agreement on voluntary basis between a variety of people throughout the workforce, such as corporate managers, politicians, auditors, journalists and women’s organizations, a system of Equality Labeling is hoped to initiate a public debate about opportunities and rights of Swedish men and women that can spread an interest and support for gender equality in society as a whole (ibid). As stated in the study, the purpose of Equality Labeling is to change structures and behavior that today allow gender to be a factor that determines which salary, work and service people are offered in Swedish society (Ds 1998:49, p 19).
3.1.2 Equality management system - a first step

The Ministry of Employment suggests in its study that Equality Labeling should start off as a management system to create structures, routines and continuity for the internal equality procedures within a corporation or organization (Ds 1998:49, p 39). The system would be focused on a number of clearly defined categories or criteria, developed through open negotiations between representatives from state authorities, unions representing both employers’ and employees’ interests and women’s organizations (Ds 1998:49, p 50). These criteria would involve areas where men and women at present do not have the same opportunities and rights, such as in recruitment procedures, employees’ opportunities to career within the company/organization, wage development, and possibilities to combine the professional life with parenthood (Ds 1998:49, p 33). The minimum standard for receiving the certificate would be compliance with the Swedish equality legislation, but the system would encourage continuous improvement. Figure 8 illustrates the dynamic model for equality management.

![Image of the suggested model for an equality management system.](image)


The model suggested in the study is inspired by the environmental management system ISO 14001. As illustrated in figure 8, the first step in the equality management system is a top management decision to initiate the system and incorporate equality concern in the company policy. What follows is then a deep audit and documentation of the current state of equality within the organization, that can be used as a basis for the development of an official equality policy that articulates the ambitions of the management to improve the company’s equality standards (Ds 1998:49, p 56-57). From here the management, in cooperation with employees and other interests, should state concrete and realistic goals. By documenting a plan of action for each goal, responsibilities can be appointed, resources allocated and time frames be put up for the implementation process (Ds 1998:49, p 58). In the next step the work should be...
followed up by measuring actual results against the equality policy, the stated goals and the equality legislation. This procedure would reveal the inadequacies and weaknesses in the system and where to make improvements. What follows is a report of the current state of affairs. Information about achievements and problems should be distributed internally to keep the entire organization up to date. External reports are mainly produced for promotion purposes, to give external stakeholders such as customers, owners, authorities and media insight in the equality measures (Ds 1998:49, p 60). The last step in the circle is the evaluation or the feedback of the system, that should result in new goal formulations and initiate a continued process of new achievements (ibid). To receive a certificate the assessment should be carried out by an independent and accredited organization. The Equality Council (Jämställdhetsrådet) is the suggested name for such a non-profit organization, that initially could be run and financed by the state but eventually should be in the hands of independent and legitimate actors (Ds 1998:49, p 68-69).

The thorough procedures required for equality certification necessitates a broad commitment and a delegation of responsibilities that affects a large number of people within the internal and external business organization. As recognized in the study, an equality management system could consequently both offer a framework for efficient equality compliance and give the work for improved equality standards within the private sector a new priority (Ds 1998:49, p 38).

3.2.3 Labeling of products and services

When properly integrated in the organizational structure, improved equality standards are hoped to spill over to products and services. To earn an Equality Label, a product should be adjusted to the needs and demands of both men and women (Ds 1998:49, p 17). A medicine should for instance be equally tested on men and women to avoid the unexpected side-effects that today are relatively common on women patients, when male anatomy is used as the norm in drug development. The idea is similar for private and public services. As an example an insurance company would have to examine whether its insurance system for pensions is adjusted to men’s and women’s often different life cycles. To receive an Equality Label such a service would have to recognize and take into account that women in many cases have lower wages and a higher tendency to work part time (Ds 1998:49, p 17-18).

In the study performed by the former Ministry of Employment it is recognized that there is a clear strength in a label directly visible on the product and an obvious need for services influenced by equality concerns. But this part of Equality Labeling is also identified as most difficult, as there so far there is little experience from other labels on how to develop social criteria (Ds 1998:49, p 39). Therefore the focus of the study is put on the development of a management system for labor conditions, while the exploration of Equality Labeling of products and services is passed on to future investigation. In February 1999 the Swedish Government responded to the request for increased knowledge, by initiating a second complementary study on Equality Labeling more focused on products and services. The study that will be presented in December 2000, is assigned to explore the interest for a voluntary Equality Labeling among producers and consumers and to suggest explicit equality criteria for two
product and service areas (Kommittédirektiv 1999:13). It will also investigate possible legal impediments to a system of Equality Labeling, and further penetrate the organizational aspects of a management system.

3.2.4 JA-märkt! - a Swedish pilot project

During 1998 a pioneering attempt to introduce Equality Labeling on the market was carried out by the regional administrative board in Västra Götaland. The project (JA-märkt!), conducted in association with the Ministry of Employment, was given the task to develop and test criteria and procedures for a future equality management system and to explore how such a system would be welcomed and implemented by the actors on the Swedish labor market. To enable this investigation, the regional administrative board engaged eight different private and public employers in the Göteborg area to act as guinea-pigs for six months. Among these, two were already officially rewarded for their high equality standards.

The procedures and methods used during the six-month- project, have been described and discussed in the project report (Länsstyrelsen Västra Götaland, 1998:27). As a basis for the assessment each participant was asked to conduct a documentation of the internal equality procedures. The methods offered to facilitate this documentation appear less developed than the systematic model of the equality management system suggested by the Ministry of Employment (see fig 8). Still many of the components are similar in the two systems. What first was presented as a check-list to guide the equality audit and documentation, during the project developed into a more advanced matrix. The matrix identifies seven different criteria for gender equality that each are coupled to six process areas. The criteria are, with one exception (mainstreaming), based on the equality law from 1992.

Criteria

1. Mainstreaming or incorporation of equality concern in all decisions and procedures. Equality concern in external contacts.
2. Equality concern in work conditions. Health and psycho-social environment.
3. Equal opportunities to combine parenthood with work. Parental leave etc.
4. Equal opportunities for internal education.
5. Gender neutral procedures for recruitment and advancement.
6. Gender neutral wage levels and benefits.
7. Methods to counteract sexual harassment.

Process areas

a) goal formulation
b) audit of current equality standard
c) methods for improvement
d) follow up and reporting of methods
e) delegation of responsibilities
f) management evaluation of achievements
The project in Västra Götaland was not primarily focused on identifying the company or organization that scores highest in gender equality. The objective was rather to compare and assess how the internal work for gender equality was carried out within the frame of the project-criteria. The results show that the participants had managed to create goals and methods to promote gender equality for the majority of the criteria areas presented above, but more seldom managed to audit the current state or follow up how the work for improvement had been implemented. Best overall scores were found in internal education and recruitment, where the participants had managed to conduct at least 50% of the required processes. For the other five criteria, the scores held significantly lower standards. Even though all participants failed to reach the initial project standards for equality, interest and curiosity dominated the overall response among the participating companies and organizations. The opportunity to share experiences of equality management and to receive guidance for compliance with current equality legislation, was given a positive response (Länsstyrelsen Västra Götaland, 1998:27).

The limited empirical basis for the project JA-märkt! in Västra Götaland does not allow any general conclusions. Still it is interesting to note that all participants showed standards below current equality legislation, as a result of inadequate routines for equality management. If the eight companies and organizations are representative for the conditions of the Swedish labor market, a management system for Equality Labeling could thus be an important and welcomed tool to improve equal rights and responsibilities for Swedish men and women. According to the report, the project JA-märkt! in Västra Götaland has indicated that the practical and political preconditions for a more permanent introduction of an equality management system on the Swedish Labor market already exist (1998:27, p 41).

3.3 Extending the business agenda

While the study conducted by the Ministry of Employment contributes with a systematic and dynamic model for a voluntary equality management system, the pilot-project JA-märkt in Göteborg confirms that both a need and interest for improved equality management currently exist among Swedish companies. The intention with the following part is to let the results of five different interviews contribute to a discussion about the connections between Equality Labeling, the Swedish experiences with environmental management systems and sustainable development.

3.3.1 One mechanism for several objectives

As indicated above the equality management system is a tool that builds on the same market mechanisms as the environmental management system. While the systematic management routines of the EMS are focused on increased efficiency in resource use and pollution abatement, the equality management system suggests how similar management strategies can help companies and organizations to make better use of human resources. Both systems rest on the current legislation as minimum standard for certification, but also rely on a positive response from customers and consumers to
give companies and organizations economic incentives to engage in a dynamic process of improved performance beyond legislative standards. The increasing Swedish interest for the standardized environmental management systems ISO 14001 and EMAS, suggests that the market dynamics have worked in the environmental field. According to the Swedish Agenda 21 coordinator Rolf Lindell, the environmental management system has proven to be a powerful tool for long-term change of unsustainable market structures. When an increasing number of large companies chose to certify according to ISO 14001 or EMAS, they start off a dynamic chain-reaction of raised environmental awareness and standards among suppliers and customers that eventually can change old business structures and routines in a positive direction. As the market has to be included in the overall strive for sustainable development, Rolf Lindell sees how the environmental management system is one positive method that can speed up the process (1999). This cooperative and efficiency argument is complemented with a ‘learning argument’. According to Ebbe Adolfsson from the Natural Protection Agency the environmental management system is a useful tool for sustainable development as it clarifies or translates environmental issues for companies (1999). Also Inger Strömdal from the Federation of Swedish Industries stresses the learning aspects of the voluntary environmental management systems. By opening doors for competition in new markets, she sees how the EMS like several other market-based tools has contributed to a voluntary environmental awareness raising and the development of environmental expertise among Swedish industries, that has increased their will to participate in the pursuit of sustainable development (1999). While these statements highlight the positive outcomes of voluntary cooperation, there are also those who send out warnings for a blind belief in the sustainable accomplishments of ungoverned market mechanisms. As emphasized by Britt Linner-Norberg at the Swedish Institute for Standards, the introduction of an environmental management system is no guarantee for advanced environmental work among companies. Working as an advisor for companies wanting to introduce environmental management systems, she has noted that there is a great divergence in companies’ level of ambition when formulating environmental goals. Today a large responsibility therefore rests on the accredited certifiers to ensure that the process for continuous improvement starts off on a reasonably high level. Britt Linner-Norberg also suggests a more restrictive use of sustainable development in companies’ environmental policies, as the concept involves a far larger commitment than mere environmental improvement (1999).

Could then an introduction of Equality Labeling offer a positive extension of the business agenda towards a broader sustainable practice? Inger Strömdal and Rolf Lindell agree that it is an interesting idea to use the functioning structure of management systems for yet another area, but both see how an extended responsibility also could cause problems. According to Rolf Lindell a system that aspires to include a large agenda can be both difficult to grasp and implement (1999). Also Inger Strömdal is hesitant towards a complex system and emphasizes that the extended scope of management systems must build on voluntary participation. She argues that it is important to accept that some companies will chose to work for only one of several objectives (1999). Britt Linner-Nordberg is on the other hand more optimistic towards a successful implementation of yet another management system, and points out that there already today is a tendency to integrate different management systems.
within Swedish companies. According to her experience the majority of the companies that chose to introduce an EMS is today already well acquainted with similar routines from quality management systems and consequently find it relatively easy to add yet another set of criteria to the management structure. An equality management system that builds on the same model as the existing systems will therefore be fully possible to implement according to Britt Linner-Nordberg (1999). This recognition supports the system proposed by the Ministry of Employment. Building on a similar model as the standardized EMS (see fig 5 and figure 8), this equality management system would fit in the existing framework and thus easier gain acceptance among companies already practicing management system routines, than the separate system used in the pilot-project JA-märkt!. The current bottle-neck for a immediate extension of management systems is according to Britt Linner-Norberg rather found in the certification process, as most accredited certifiers so far only are competent to assess one set of criteria. Companies that would want to gain both an environmental and equality certificate (Equality Label) would therefore have to go through two assessments and must therefore manage to pay double costs. An important prerequisite for companies’ interest in several management systems is thus, according to Britt Linner-Norberg, increased competence and scope among certifying bodies and thus lower costs for a combined certification (1999).

3.3.2 Equality Labeling and sustainable development

While the technical implementation of an equality management system is one issue, the actual results and implications for sustainable development is another. According to Solveig Persson, from the equality unit at the Ministry for Industry, Employment and Communications, the underlying objective of Equality Labeling is to offer men and women equal rights and responsibilities in society. While Solveig Persson sees how an increased consumer power through labeling of products and services could have potentials to spread a broader societal commitment to this democratic goal, she is skeptic towards the accomplishments of the management system approach of Equality Labeling. Building on voluntary participation, an equality management system invokes the idea that companies are free to chose whether to comply with current equality legislation or not. According to Solveig Persson an equality certificate can therefore only be awarded for equality performance beyond legislative standards (1999). On the other hand experiences in the environmental field show how legal requirements and voluntary management systems can go hand in hand. While the market-based EMS has given Swedish companies new incentives to improve environmental performance, the environmental legislation has functioned as a guiding framework or safety-belt for minimum standards (Gillberg, 1999, p 109). Building on the same logic an equality management system would not constitute a voluntary alternative to current legislation. Instead it would function as a complementary tool that makes use of working management structures from the environmental field to spread an interest and commitment to men’s and women’s equal rights and responsibilities on the labor market as envisioned in the equality law. While Solveig Persson strongly supports the legislative equality ideal, she is still hesitant towards any connections made to sustainable development. She argues that gender equality is a broad societal goal that does not have any stronger links to the environmental field than any other societal area (1999). This statement highlights the need to clarify how
men’s and women’s equal rights and responsibilities could affect the Swedish process towards sustainable development.

According to both Rolf Lindell and Ebbe Adolfsson equality is a democratic issue also within the frames of sustainable development. As decisions taken in the name of sustainable development will affect all groups in society, both Rolf Lindell and Ebbe Adolfsson see how an equal participation of men and women is important for a legitimate outcome (1999, 1999). A more equal representation of men and women in decision-making positions within Swedish companies and organizations goes along with this democratic ideal in sustainable development. But Ebbe Adolfsson also suggests how a more representative societal decision-making can bring about qualitative gains. Leaning on the idea that women tend to be more altruistic and open to children’s needs than men, he suggests that women are more likely to promote a development that respects the needs of future generations (1999). As already indicated in statistics from the Swedish labor market, women currently perform a larger part the nurturing work in Swedish society and carry the main responsibility for child care (SCB, 1998). The assumption that many Swedish women could draw on different experiences in economic and political decision-making than a large part of the men currently in power, is thus possible (Platzer, 1998). On the other hand no studies have been able to confirm that the current sexual division of labor have made Swedish women in general more oriented towards a sustainable development than Swedish men. Even though further statistics suggest that Swedish women are more environmentally aware consumers and travellers than Swedish men (Konsumentverket, 1998), more research is required to draw any general conclusions. To expect more environmentally benign perspectives from women than from men would also counteract the legal equality ideal that gives women and men the same rights and responsibilities in Swedish society. According to Rolf Lindell it is wrong to restrict women’s choice of development to an environmentally benign one, in the same sense as it is wrong to suggest that countries in the South should have to develop according to more sustainable patterns than what countries in the North have done so far. Referring to Swedish foreign-aid programs within the framework of Agenda 21, Rolf Lindell argues that the work for equality in the South rather has been focused on women’s equal rights to chose their societal roles in the future (1999). Even if Inger Strömdal and Ebbe Adolfsson agree that men’s and women’s equal rights and responsibilities beyond current gender roles is the ideal also for a sustainable Swedish society (1999,1999), nobody is acquainted with any projects specifically designed to secure this outcome. Both Rolf Lindell and Ebbe Adolfsson imply that the lacking focus on gender equality in the Swedish implementation of sustainable development is a result of the already high equality standards in Swedish society. While Ebbe Adolfsson points out how it today is considered natural that men and women work side by side, Rolf Lindell argues that equal representation of men and women in decision-making has become an automatic part of ‘the Swedish way’(1999, 1999). These optimistic views are contrasted by statistics and research. As indicated above, the initiative to introduce Equality Labeling rests on the recognition that the Swedish equality law still is under-prioritized on the labor market. The final question is consequently whether a voluntary Equality Labeling of companies and organizations could be a possible tool to secure the democratic ideal of gender equality in the implementation of a Swedish sustainable development.
Building on functioning market structures an equality management system has potentials to spread a broader commitment to current equality legislation among Swedish companies and organizations. Systematic management routines would help to secure women's equal right to recruitment and advancement and thus suggest a development within Swedish society where women will be encouraged to influence public decision-making to the same extent as men. While this accomplishment would offer a broader and more legitimate base for the public agenda, an equality management system would at the same time ensure men's equal rights to parental leave and thereby also broaden the experiences of nurturing and caring. A long-term gain of an equality management system could consequently be a gradual eradication of gender roles that today suggest different rights and responsibilities for men and women in Swedish society. This process would have a true democratic impact on the implementation of a sustainable development in Swedish society as a whole. Looking closer on the corporate world, an equality management system could also have a clear symbolic value. Even though Inger Strömdal points out that gender equality only is one of several dimension included in social sustainability (1999), the extended business agenda an equality management system suggests can offer one step ahead towards what Rolf Lindell identifies as the real challenge in the current work for sustainable development; to integrate the economic, ecological and social dimensions of sustainable development (1999).
Concluding analysis

The suggested Equality Labeling of Swedish companies and organizations draws on the ‘win-win rhetoric’ found in the politics of ecological modernisation to improve equality compliance on the Swedish labor market. Acknowledging that current equality regulations have not given Swedish employers enough incentives to assure equal rights and responsibilities among working men and women, this new voluntary tool suggests how market mechanisms can be used to reconcile gender equality with economic interests. While the equality management system proposed by the former Swedish Ministry of Employment is designed to help companies and organizations to raise equality standards through more systematic management routines, it simultaneously offers a better use of human resources and a good reputation among consumers and customers through an official Equality Label. In the same sense as critics have questioned the positive-sum game of green markets, warnings of an uncritical use of market mechanisms to give men and women equal rights and responsibilities are in place. Using the language and economic incentives of business, the good intentions with the voluntary Equality Labeling run the risk of becoming misinterpreted and even diluted by profit seeking interests. On the other hand the legal requirements would still assure that short-term economic interests do not replace long-term ‘institutional learning’, as the law constitutes the minimum standard in the process for continuous improvement. Acting as a voluntary complement rather than an alternative to current equality legislation, the suggested equality management system would thereby not be a threat to equality compliance but a possible enforcer. As suggested in the study from the former Ministry of Employment, a system for Equality Labeling would engage a variety of societal groups such as corporate managers, politicians, auditors, journalists and women’s organizations in a common debate and effort for continuous improvement of men’s and women’s equal rights on the Swedish labor market (Ds 1998:49, p 20). While this joint action suggests a positive mean to spread a broader awareness and commitment for the legislative equality ideals in Swedish society, it also goes along with the cooperative and democratic aspiration of the global action plan for sustainable development.

To enable a shift towards a more sustainable development Agenda 21 emphasizes the need to evoke a sense of common purpose among all sectors in society and a will to engage in a constructive dialogue grounded on respect for the independent role, responsibility and competence of each participant (UNCED, 1992, chapter 23). A highlighted prerequisite for this cooperative effort is that women are granted equal rights to affect the economic and political agenda in the society where they live and work (UNCED, 1999, chapter 24). An equality management system suggests how to use the methods of ecological modernisation to create a broader interest for men’s and women’s equal participation in the societal dialogue envisioned in Agenda 21. The results it offers have both constructive and democratic potential. Drawing more equally on women’s and men’s experiences and understandings in corporate and
organizational decision-making, new perspectives could be introduced on the Swedish business agenda that would diversify old understandings and thus activate the dynamics of Marteen A Hajer's discourse-coalition. Instead of accepting structures that let men and women act in separate fields or hierarchical levels of Swedish society, the equality management system could support a societal decision-making in which a larger base of understandings can be used to elaborate more sustainable solutions. But this constructive potential does not support the essentialist claims in the ecofeminist rhetoric, that expect more sustainable perspectives from women than men. Even though statistics and research indicate that women today have the main responsibility for nurturing and child rearing work in Swedish society, there is no evidence that these particular experiences give Swedish women in general a deeper understanding on how to equally meet the needs of present and future generations. It does not either prove that the nurturing and caring knowledge is exclusive to women as a result of biology. Building on the ideals of Swedish legislative equality, the equality management system would rather counteract structures that today assign different rights and responsibilities to men and women as generalized groups, and open up for democratic cooperation beyond societal gender roles. While this accomplishment could favor an increased reflexiveness of the Swedish ecological modernisation, it would also support a more legitimate development towards a sustainable Swedish society.
List of references


Proposition 1990/91: 113. Olika på lika villkor - om en ny jämställdhetslag m m.


Web sites


Interviews


Ebbe Adolfsson, works with environmental assessment of strategic regional and physical planning at Natural Protection Agency (Avdelningen för hållbar samhällsplanering, Naturvårdsverket). Interviewed in Stockholm 1999-10-05.

Inger Strömdal, works with environmental issues at the Federation of Swedish Industries (Industriförbundet). Interviewed over the phone 1999-10-19.


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