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## THE POWER OF NORMS A CASE STUDY IN SEARCH OF A FOSSIL-FREE SOCIETY

### Introduction

In his excellent book *Normvetenskap* (Norm Science),<sup>1</sup> Håkan Hydén has initiated an interesting discussion on strategic normative thinking (SNT).<sup>2</sup> One of the aspects in SNT, he suggests, regards the prerequisites for self-regulation in certain areas, inter alia the area of environmental issues.<sup>3</sup> He notes, for example, that a strategic way to reduce environmentally hazardous impact from motor traffic would be to exchange oil-based fuel for bio-fuels, such as ethanol and methanol.<sup>4</sup> While only some limited experimental work at that time (2002) had been performed, research in contrast was focused on efforts to minimize the use of cars and issues such as supporting car pools, gender perspectives on use of cars in the family etc. Even though that kind of measures can only reach marginal effects, Hydén observes that this is how the efforts have been directed. Why is that, he asks, and answers that the problem can be placed in a perspective of norm science for examination of what kind of normative forces are exerting a dominance.<sup>5</sup>

The problem is more relevant today than ever. In the proposition *En sammanhållen svensk klimat- och energipolitik – Klimat*, the Government declared the long-term priority for Sweden to be independency of fossil fuels for the car fleet in 2030 with a vision that Sweden in 2050 should have a sustainable and resource effective energy supply without net emissions of green-house gases to the atmosphere.<sup>6</sup>

Without claiming ambitions to perform a complete penetration of the problem, Hydén points to the direction: The entire problem complex indicates strong interests connected to the use of fossil fuel. In all, he suggests, it is about

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<sup>1</sup> Hydén, H. *Normvetenskap*. Lund Studies in Sociology of Law. Sociologiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Hydén, *Normvetenskap* (2002) p. 294.

<sup>3</sup> Hydén (n 1), p. 310.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> SOU 2013:84, *Fossilfrihet på väg, betänkande av Utredningen om fossilfri fordonstrafik* p.35, with reference to the Government's proposition 2008/09:162.

the power and the influence of the oil industry. Obviously, in this area we can find a forceful power which is blocking whole-hearted investments in alternative fuels. And obviously, he adds, there are also joint (economic) interests among the actors within the political system.<sup>7</sup>

In this article, I will present a case study trying to verify, falsify or, if possible, shed light upon the said aspects. My unit of analysis<sup>8</sup> will be the concept of norms, and my operational set of measures<sup>9</sup> will relate to research on norms.

## The question

Hydén has indicated the problem in focus: mighty forces are blocking whole-hearted investments in alternative fuels. Inspired by empowerment theory, I will call those forces *power blocks*.<sup>10</sup> With point of departure in Hydén's thoughts on norm science, I would like to discuss this problem within the frames of this question:

Why and how could socio-legal knowledge on norms help reduce effects from power-blocks, currently obstructing a full-scale domestic production of bio-fuel, with the purpose to free the society from fossil oil and gas?

I will try to approach a possible answer to the question by help from empowerment theory in a context of norm science and by utilizing a case study method.

## Theoretical approach and some crucial concepts

Let me start with some clarifications of some concepts to use. The term *norms*, initially, will be used in compliance with a definition, elaborated at the Sociology of Law Department in Lund, built on an ontological analysis that has combined three perspectives from behavioural, social and legal sciences.<sup>11</sup> This definition reads *socially reproduced imperatives that imply the individual's perception of expectations surrounding his/her own behaviour*.<sup>12</sup> It includes two

<sup>7</sup> Hydén (n 1), p. 310

<sup>8</sup> Yin, Robert K. *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC 2014, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Yin, *Case* (2014) p. 46.

<sup>10</sup> Solomon, Barbara Bryant. *Black Empowerment: social work in oppressed communities*. Columbia University Press, New York 1976, p. 19

<sup>11</sup> The definition to be used in this research derives from Hydén, Håkan and Måns Svensson. *The Concept of Norms in Sociology of Law*. Scandinavian Studies in Law, Volume 53, p. 15-32. Stockholm Institute for Scandinavian Law, Stockholm 2008. For the elaborations of the concept, see further Wickenberg (1999), Hydén (2002, 2002b and 2006) and Svensson (2008 and 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Svensson, Måns. *Sociala normer och regelbundenhet. Trafiksäkerhetsfrågor ur ett rättssociologiskt perspektiv*. Lund Studies in Sociology of Law, Lund 2008, p. 48.

ontological attributes (the 'ought' dimension and the 'is' dimension) while also taking the behavioural/psychological dimension (beliefs) into account. The definition covers social as well as legal and socio-legal aspects.

For purpose of integrating sciences on environmental issues, Håkan Hydén and Mina Gillberg have argued, that to produce a practically relevant output, the link between primary causes, effects and measures should be studied.<sup>13</sup> A relevant link for an approach to integrating social and natural sciences, they suggested, "could be constituted by the study of societal norms, which could function as a focus in the same way as the landscape does in human geography".<sup>14</sup> This metaphor has appeared striking to me, and I will refer to it by use of the term *normative landscape*. The term in my understanding is aimed at targeting the perceivable image of prevailing norms from time to time in a social context. It covers social and legal norms as they appear from time to time in interaction with each other and should recall a picture of dominance and sub-dominance, contrasts, nuances, harmonies, disharmonies and timbres of consensus as well as conflicts.

Further, as an analysis tool to systemize knowledge on human actions, Hydén has suggested the *norm model*.<sup>15</sup> This model opens for application of action theories as well as systems theories and is adaptable for different purposes in sociology of law, such as inquiries on norm development and norm application. The model can be used to help discern norms by observing subjects' activities and decisive choices. In studies of activities and historical courses of events, thus, the model invites to asking for details of impetus of influential effect from one situation to another. It could help to identify economic, legal, cultural or social norms, which are likely to have a general directorial power for action with implications for future development.<sup>16</sup> This is, for example, a way to generate knowledge regarding conditions for sustainability themes to be introduced into a social system (cf. Wickenberg 1999:300). The *volition* aspect (V) of the norm model, Hydén suggests, includes components like power, interests, religion, politics, economy, conscience, moral, ethics etc. Such components create the motives, values and driving forces for the willpower perspective of the norm as a compass for action. The *cognition* aspect (C), next, is composed by the features experience,

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<sup>13</sup> Hydén, Håkan and Minna Gillberg. *Law as a Safety Belt and as an Enforcer* in Rolén (ed.) *Challenges in Environmental Human Dimensions Research*, Forskningsrådsnämnden 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Hydén & M. Gillberg. *Law* 1996 p.76.

<sup>15</sup> Hydén (n 1), p. 280-294.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Baier, Matthias. *Norm och rättsregel*. Lund Studies in Sociology of Law. Sociologiska institutionen, Lunds universitet, Lund 2003.

competence, tradition, genus, ethnicity and education, personal characteristics, age etc. The third aspect in the norm model is that on *systemic conditions* (S). Hydén suggests components like nature, physic conditions, biotic conditions and society including sociocultural, economic, technical and political-administrative conditions (Hydén 2002b:287).

Svensson has, strikingly, emphasized the strength in the norm model by its capacity in creating categories for sorting and interpretation of empirical results that indicate the background of processes of norms' formation. In extension, it could also make it possible to improve knowledge on the impact of "is" and "ought" for situated cognition.<sup>17</sup>

*Empowerment*, next, in my understanding is the generation of power within and between individuals, as well as the transfer of power to individuals. It is a process oriented towards a specific object.<sup>18</sup>

## Methodological considerations

Case study research has been described as "a methodology for studying the complexity of the 'real' world."<sup>19</sup> It has also been described as inquiry that copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as a result, relies on multiple sources of evidence.<sup>20</sup> Considering such aspects, I have collected data to be described and analysed with focus on my unit of analysis: The functional power of norms in relation to the public interest of achieving a car fleet 2030 that is independent of fossil fuels.

In my narrative of the case I have followed the perspective of a protagonist, i.e. a certain individual, a group of individuals or a system chosen for focus as to taking initiatives, making key decisions and experiencing the consequences of those decisions. The protagonist is to be considered in relation to antagonists, supporters, senders of decisive information and other actants, all those terms borrowed from language in narratology, but also applicable in sociological contexts (cf. Latour 2007 with reference to Greimas

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<sup>17</sup> Svensson, *Sociala* (2008) p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> This definition is derived by me from studies of academic works such as, inter alia, Solomon (1976), Rappaport (1987), Zimmerman (2000) and Adams (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Gummesson, Evert. *Case Theory in Business and Management. Reinventing Case Study Research*. Sage Publications Ltd, London 2017, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Yin (n 8).

1966).<sup>21</sup> It is a method to concentrate each stage of analysis towards a chosen perspective, but also a technique for considering power available for an individual, a group or a system in focus. The terminology and the chosen aspects have no other function than to make clear which perspectives within the case that I wanted to follow, analyse and explain. In contrast, they should never be judged as conceptual cornerstones for my general conclusions or theoretical reasoning.

## The Case

The protagonist, in this case, i.e. the main character of my narrative, is Björn O. Gillberg, an illustrious environmentalist and researcher, well known from the germinating environmental movement in 1960s and the 1970s. He is a Licentiate of Philosophy and in 1999 he was appointed doctor honoris causa at Lund University. In 2001 together with some friends, after many years of confrontational work in law courts, environmental agencies, environmental debates etc., he started VärmlandsMetanol AB, a company with plans to build a plant for production of *methanol* (CH<sub>3</sub>OH) by gasification of crude forestry material. The conception is based on relatively old knowledge of the production to avoid oil and gas from fossil sources, and a full-scale project is ready for realization. As per official governmental reports, methanol, when compared to other kinds of bio-fuels (ethanol and bio-gas), and seen from the perspectives of production capacity and production cost, is by far the most realistic alternative for non-fossil fuels in a country such as Sweden with a large stock of growing wood.<sup>22</sup> 57 % of the Swedish land mass consists of productive forest land with a total amount of almost 3,500 million cubic metres of wood. Notwithstanding regular felling, the total standing volume has constantly been on the increase during the 20th and 21st century.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, in this country, forest is a rich and important source of renewable energy that functions as a gigantic natural "solar power station".

Evert Gummesson, professor of marketing and management, has compared

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<sup>21</sup> *Actant* in that language was used by Greimas (1966) with referral to Vladimir Propp. As to Oxford Dictionary, the term represents a person, a creature or an object playing any set of active roles in a narrative.

<sup>22</sup> Alternativa drivmedel. Betänkande från Alternativbränsleutredningen. SOU 1996:184, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> The total standing volume in Swedish forests was 2,000 million cubic metres in 1950 and exceeded 3,000 million cubic metres in 2001, excl. protected areas. The total standing continues to increase as the growth exceeds the felling by at least 20 %. Source: Skogsdata 2018, Sveriges officiella statistik. Institutionen för skoglig resurshushållning, SLU Umeå 2018, p. 53.

this case with the instance of Norwegian oil exploitation.<sup>24</sup> With start in the 1970s this exploitation, he notes, made Norway one of the richest countries in the world per capita with one of the lowest dispersion rates between high and low incomes. In parallel, Swedish bio-methanol could be produced at a reasonable cost from an unlimited source of raw material.<sup>25</sup> It would take 20 years and 50 factories (replicas of the first factory) spread in the forest areas from the south to the north of Sweden.<sup>26</sup> In this way, raw material would always be close to a factory and the methanol would be distributed in the region of the factory; no big transport would be needed.<sup>27</sup> Operations and maintenance of the factories would provide 10,000 permanent jobs.<sup>28</sup> In 20 years from now, Sweden would not have to import any oil and could later export fossil-free energy and fulfil sustainability and environmental goals on the top of politicians' priority list.<sup>29</sup> So why does this not happen, Gummesson asks. Is the demand for innovation and entrepreneurship mere rhetoric? Are we afraid of change? How can we stop lobbyists and others taking over important nation interests just for the benefit of special interest groups? And what are the rules of EU, the national government, financial institutions and universities?

In all, hard facts and powerful arguments for national and global benefits are in favour of full-scale production of bio-methanol in Sweden. Nevertheless, not even the first plant has yet been built. Why is that? I have interviewed Gillberg on this topic and he identified the following options and obstacles:<sup>30</sup>

*Science:* Compared to other fuel energy sources excluding fossil fuel, bio-methanol from wood is proven to render the best energy outcome during the production stage, the best effect during the combustion stage, the best carbon dioxide balance in total and the least possible pollution from emissions. Additionally, there is a safe supply of raw material from private as well as publicly held forest land.<sup>31</sup> The gasification technique is well developed and, subject to funding, the plant can be delivered and built in a period of three years from turning the first sod. Electric car engines are under production, but there

<sup>24</sup> Gummesson, *Case* (2017) p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Gummesson (n 19) p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Gummesson p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Interview Björn Gillberg, 3 March 2016. This interview was part of my work on a doctoral thesis about civil impetus for sustainable development.

<sup>31</sup> 50 % of Swedish forests belong to private owners, while 40 % are owned by privately or publicly owned limited companies. The biggest forest land owner is the state-owned Sveaskog, holding about 15 % of the forests. skogsstyrelsen.se.

are significant worries about the problem of sufficient and sustainable electricity production and distribution.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, from a *scientific* point of view, all these reasons seem to support bio-fuel production.

*Ecology:* No doubt, when considering decreased pollution and the least possible climate effects, representatives of the ecological system could not but welcome a transition to a methanol economy as shown in detail by, for example, Hunt<sup>33</sup>, Olah et al.<sup>34</sup> and Kungl. Vetenskapsakademien<sup>35</sup> (Royal Academy of Science).

*Civil Society:* On average, public opinion in Sweden still seems to be indifferent or slightly well-inclined towards bio-fuel as a large-scale energy resource. The complexity of the matter is not that easy to grasp, and probably the issue has still not been sufficiently well communicated for civil society to raise a substantial driving force in either direction. No objections of importance, however, have been noticed, neither in respect of the production, nor about the use of methanol as fuel for cars.

*Law:* This production requires licence from the Land and Environmental Court. Law supports the project and it can be maintained that licences are achievable.

*Market:* As indicated above, bio-methanol is highly competitive with other sustainable energy sources for vehicles, while imported fossil fuels are today still cheaper to buy. A full-scale production requires heavy investments, but from a strict market perspective – provided there is confidence in fiscal rules and fair taxation – the company's calculations offer full payback and satisfactory earnings.

*Finance capital system:* When it comes to venture capital supply, the company has experienced severe obstacles. This has not been due to lack of interest or lack of risk capitalists principally willing to invest in the project. Investors as well as bankers and brokers, however, are deeply concerned about market uncertainty which can be explained in terms of failing long-term reliance on the political system.

*Political system:* Gillberg expresses his personal view of the political system's relation to Swedish bio-fuel production in one word: "ignorance". Lack of

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<sup>32</sup> Gillberg, Björn. *Varifrån ska elen komma*. Polemical article in Göteborgs-Posten 11 September 2018.

<sup>33</sup> Hunt, Peter: *Metanol – ersätter olja – och blir ny internationell hårdvaluta* in *Miljö och Framtid*, Uppsala March 1982.

<sup>34</sup> Olah, George A., Alain Goepfert and G.K. Surya Prakash: *Beyond Oil and Gas. The Methanol Economy*. Wiley-VCH Verlag GmbH & Co KGaA, Weinheim, Germany 2006.

<sup>35</sup> *Biodrivmedel nu och i framtiden*, Rapport från Energiutskottet, Kungl. Vetenskapsakademien, april 2013.

knowledge and lack of awareness within political communication seem to develop a systematic obstacle for the project to be realized. In spring 2012, the market and the financial conditions appeared just right for a large-scale share issue. Several major investors were ready to join the company and take the risk of starting up and developing production. Agreements with the most important contractors and customers were secured. Contracts were drafted, and a stock exchange introduction was prepared. At that time, however, the Ministry of Finance announced that new taxation rules for bio-fuels would take effect from 1 January 2013, thereby severely changing the economic conditions for investments and production. In addition to that, the introduction of a compulsory quota system for bio-fuels favoured bioethanol and bio-diesel but entailed severe disadvantages for bio-methanol. All at once, the whole situation had changed. The new rules resulted in inhibiting all planned investments for the Swedish production of bio-fuels. Since then the political incentives for bio-fuels have remained indistinct, ambiguous and contradictory or just non-existent.<sup>36</sup>

The financial problem, in other words, is still far from solved. The tax rules for bio-fuels were changed four times between 2012-2015, Gillberg explains, and the long-term politics on this issue are obstructively hazy. This makes investors sit on the fence, waiting for long term securities from the political system and the state authorities.<sup>37</sup>

## Analysis

Now, let me depict the normative landscape in terms of volition (V), Cognition (C) and System Conditions (S) as suggested in Hydén's norm model and by application of the general definition of the concept as related above. As declared above, I will do it from the perspective of the protagonist and the expectations upon him to bring about a bio-methanol production. Further, by necessity, it must be done with broad strokes of the brush, by complexity reduction, presumptions and simplifications. Nevertheless, an image of the normative landscape for production of bio-methanol could help visualize a development. As indicated above, in this normative landscape we will recognize the protagonist, the antagonist, the supporters and the senders of decisive information.

The protagonist himself holds considerable resources of cognition (C) and

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<sup>36</sup> Interview Gillberg (n 30).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

volition (V), but he is still lacking the prerequisite of suitable systems conditions (S). The market, the distribution chains, and consequently the essential provision of capital must be changed for the project to come true. The norm guiding him could shortly be formulated *arrange for production of bio-fuel from wood residuals!*

The antagonist, i.e. the symbol of all stakeholders representing the established energy suppliers, competitors, lobbyists etc., can be assumed to have sufficient amount of C, while negative to a realization of the project in respect of V and S. This actant, further, in the perspective of the project, can be suspected to produce considerable powers of disinformation about the protagonist and his project. Such disinformation, probably, will likewise be distributed in a vast range of media. Possibly, lobbying is an active power, and probably existing social structures have disfavoured the project within the political arena. The basic norm for this actant is *stop the plans for domestic production of bio-fuels!*

The supporters, for example shareholders and possibly some scientists, journalists and other influencers can be assumed to possess resources of C and V. Their most important S-resources are to be found within the field of communication. By learning, debating and possibly teaching, they are in position to help distributing C and V among other members of the society.

In the field of senders of decisive information, we will recognize the consumers, the political system, the science and the market. Hitherto, the bio-methanol has been low-rated on most agendas and its advantages as a source of energy have generally been kept back from discussions. By simplified vulgar arguments like "it is dangerous to drink" etc. the bio-methanol resource has been set aside from discussions. By this reason, the resources of C, V and S are low in the public discourse among consumers. Their basic norm is, perhaps, *let the best possible kind of energy be produced.*

Significant sectors of science, in contrast, are generally in favour of bio-methanol as to C, while scientists – by ethical and credibility reasons – are traditionally careful in expressing their standpoint as to V. They have limited resources in the field of S, but they could probably improve their position with appropriate research proposals. I have positioned the representatives of science within category of senders of decisive information, due to their obvious authority in relation to the politicians and the consumers. Their main norm, presumably, is *discover the truth.*

The market seems to be neutral as to C and S. If there is sufficient willpower (V) among consumers to buy the product at price which is good enough to

cover the costs, the market will adapt the resources of C and S to for a production and distribution to be arranged. By now, however, representatives of the financial market, as well as the distribution market, are negative as to V. This is simply due to the low long-term expectations as to profitability.

The political system, in these circumstances, appears crucial for the project's systems conditions. If the politics don't provide favourable prerequisites for the market to recognize the product, nothing will change. Today, however, the political system seems to lack satisfactory resources as to S. With a forceful willpower in this sector, we could expect the production of bio-methanol to come true.

The factors now sketched are decisive for how normative dominance on this specific problem will develop in the future. How could they be managed? – Probably by help from extensive empowering communication among the actants concerned. Lacking resources in some sectors must be covered by communicative exchange through relevant channels. Possibly relevant channels of this kind could come to take shape as follows: The protagonist could intensify communication with senders of decisive information within the sector of science. This is probably still an underexploited channel of communication for conveyance of crucial information. It is important, while the sector of science, in turn, is a key factor for conveyance of C resources to the political system. Likewise, supporters could share their C resources for empowering consumers regarding the V factor and for making this factor conveyed to the political system. They all need to think, ask, answer, talk, mime, gesticulate, write, meet and communicate by voices and on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter etc. That's how norms are being generated and regenerated.

It is in other words, a matter of subsequent change of the normative landscape by communication. Not by random communication, however. Supporters need to communicate with consumers in a spirit of empowerment. The protagonist needs to communicate with science. The political system, in turn, possibly empowered by C from science and V from consumers is in powerful position to exploit the S resources and thus to convey the norms to the market.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the case illustrates how the norm model can be used as an instrument to discover and sort information on norms as power-sources and power-blocks in governance of human actions and decisions. Reduction of

effects from power-blocks existing in the current composition of the normative landscape requires knowledge on crucial components of cognition, volition and system conditions in the evolution of norms in society. An analysis of the normative landscape by help from those factors helps understanding where the heaviest power-blocks are located and how their effects can be reduced.

This use of a normative landscape model and the norm model, in other words, is how socio-legal knowledge on norms can help show the way to reduce effects from power-blocks currently obstructing a full-scale domestic production of bio-fuels to free society from fossil oil and gas. It is the possible activation of an empowerment process to start in one or a few nodes of an extensive network of knowledge, will-power and systems conditions in need of change for the plans to be realized.

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