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The Political Dynamics of Green Transportation

Implementation: The Case of the Norwegian Railway
Sector after 1990.



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Abstract

Norway, like all other large economies, needs to drastically reduce emissions to combat climate change. The oil and gas industry, which Norway is very invested in, is unlikely to be phased out in the near future. This calls for alternative solutions for emission reductions, especially the transportation sector, which is one of the most polluting sectors of the Norwegian economy. Sustainable public transportation can help reduce these emissions by moving passengers and freight from polluting forms of transportation like airplanes and cars, to railways and electric buses. However, achieving this can prove to be difficult, because political agendas get in the way of creating a sustainable public transportation sector.

The Norwegian railway has since the 1990s changed drastically, due to the European Unions Railway packages, and because of neoliberal ideology, which some of the largest political parties have adopted into their political agenda. Using discourse analysis, this thesis looks at how actors have framed the development of the railway discursively, in order to push for deregulation of the entire sector. Two discourse coalitions are identified, each with its own agenda. How have the narratives of these coalitions impacted development of the railway? And what implications could the recent policy changes have, which were enacted by the dominating coalition? The EU railway packages are seen as an underlying cause and facilitator of the deregulation policy, which was introduced as the 'railway reform' in 2015.

The policy has put the majority of the railway sector on public tender, and opened up full competition between train operators. Two discourse coalitions have been discovered, one of which is the proponent of the reform policy, namely the sitting conservative government. The coalition opposing the policy is the majority of the left-wing parliamentary opposition parties, and the various railway worker unions. Most of the focus in the analysis is given to the conservative coalition, because the rhetoric used is very ideologically charged. The narrative of the reform coalition is seen in context of the emergence of neoliberal ideals, more specifically the conceptual framework of ecological modernization by Maarten Hajer (1997).

The political contestation and the resulting ideological railway reform policy is seen as an impediment to the development of the railway, which one of the best options for reducing emissions in the transportation sector. Due to being a member of the European Economic Area, Norway is required to adopt certain amounts of EU legislation, which is why all of the EU

railway packages have been adopted so far. However, studies have shown that these packages don't work for all countries, and that there is no "one size, fits all" in organizing a large sector such as the railway. Thus, the narrative used by the dominating discourse coalition can have resulted in weakening the sector, and making it path dependent.

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Introduction

Sustainable development is defined by the United Nations as “development that satisfies the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations” (United Nations, 1987, p.41). The term was coined in the 1987 UN report *Our common future*, often referred to as the Brundtland report since the committee behind the report was led by the Norwegian ex-prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report has since then been the cornerstone of several UN summits on climate change and has had a tremendous effect on environmental discourse. The UN Sustainable development goals were adopted by all member states during the 2015 summit as a plan to tackle some of the world’s biggest and most complex problems, including world poverty, biodiversity, gender inequality and climate change to name just a few.

Climate change is without doubt one of the most important problems, because the negative effects of climate change are mostly felt by developing countries situated in the southern hemisphere, not the large, high emission economies (Agarwal, A., & Narain, S. in Dubash, 2012). Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is a crucial part of tackling climate change, and to prevent the global rise in temperature, keeping it below 2°C of pre-industrial levels, as well as working towards limiting the increase of the global mean temperature to 1,5°C above pre-industrial levels as ratified by the Paris agreement of 2016 (UNFCCC, 2020). Norway, like most other European countries also ratified the agreement, pledging to achieve climate neutrality by 2030 through the EU emissions trading scheme. In the original nationally determined contribution (NDC) of 2016, Norway planned to reduce emissions by 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, increasing their ambition in the updated NDC of 2020 to 50-55% emission reduction by 2030.

These goals may seem ambitious, however – even in the first NDC of 2016, they were not compatible with the 1.5°C target set by the Paris agreement, receiving the “insufficient” rating by the Climate Action Tracker (CAT). Norway, as a major producer and exporter of oil and gas, needs to play a bigger part in the global GHG reduction effort. The aforementioned industries are a vital cornerstone in the Norwegian economy, providing much of the wealth that has sustained the Norwegian welfare system since the 1960’s. Actions have recently been taken to reduce the emissions connected to these industries, including carbon capture and storage (CCS), and providing wind energy to oil rigs.

While the use of CCS and wind energy is a positive development that will reduce emissions, it is not sustainable in the long run and should only be implemented to ease the transition towards zero emission energy generation in the oil and gas sector (Mikunda et al., 2021). No matter how much the extraction process is improved, oil and gas are inherently unsustainable. Norway can thus be said to have a dilemma, either 1. continue extracting oil and gas with incremental progress in the extraction process (making it less polluting) and thus sustaining the economy which is under tremendous strain at the time of writing due to the corona virus, or 2. cut back and reduce extraction of oil and gas, to improve the climate and make a serious attempt in the global effort to cut emissions. Thus far, the course set by the Norwegian government does not include any drastic measures that limit the oil and gas industries capability to extract oil and gas. This is largely due to the importance of the industry to the Norwegian economy, and high levels of government investment through the state-owned oil company Equinor. It is very unlikely that Norway will stop exploration for, and production of oil any time soon, which means that other solutions need to be found to reduce emissions. What could Norway do, that could have a significant impact on emission levels?

There are many sectors in the Norwegian economy that struggle with high levels of pollution, one of the most important of which is the transport sector. Transport includes road traffic (both freight and personal transport), air travel, shipping and railway transport. Reducing emissions in this sector can have a large impact on the emission levels in Norway, with high potential for innovation which could make transportation not only less polluting, but also more convenient and faster than what was previously available. Reducing transport emissions would give the oil and gas sector some breathing room, allowing them to curb emissions and prepare for the more or less unavoidable end of the Norwegian oil and gas venture.

This thesis draws on the ongoing discussion on sustainable transportation, a transition that is being heralded as one of many feasible solutions to reduce CO₂ emissions. Implementing sustainable transportation is an important step in achieving the goals set out in the Paris agreement with regard to reducing CO₂ emissions. It can, however, in some cases be difficult to properly implement these changes because there are large political and ideological differences on how certain sectors should be organized, which can lead to a “tug of war” between different stakeholders, leading in turn to an overall worse implementation of sustainable transportation technology. The Norwegian railway system has therefore been

chosen as a contextual background because it is a popular mode of transportation and is for the most part electrified. It is also very politically contested, with different stakeholders wanting to organize the railway sector according to their ideological beliefs. The objective of this thesis is to identify the discourse used by the two factions, to give an understanding about why railway development has been so difficult in Norway.

The problem with the Norwegian railway, is that it is mostly outcompeted by other forms of transportation, especially on long distances, where airplanes are much faster and thus more convenient for both travel and transportation of freight. This is especially true for the northern parts of Norway, where the train needs to cover vast distances, making air travel not only more convenient, but also cheaper (Fallmyr, 2020). Air travel is by far the most polluting form of transportation, which makes the competitiveness of the railway a sustainability issue. While there is progress in reducing airplane emissions, it is hard to say when or even if it will happen, which is problematic considering the urgency of climate change. Using existing, sustainable modes of transportation, such as the railway, is arguably the best way forward because it already is sustainable, and has undergone centuries of innovation.

This thesis investigates the policy dynamics in Norwegian railway development over the last three decades. More specifically, the aim is to look into how the railway has featured politically, and how narratives have changed over time, with key stakeholders driving the issue forward and framing it discursively. There are many different stakeholders involved in setting the agenda for development of the railway, by creating narratives that reinforce their position. Who are these stakeholders, and how do they contribute to the discourse? This thesis investigates the discourses which have influenced railway development with a focus on transportation policy.

Railways have for a long time (at least since they stopped using coal as fuel) been regarded as a very environmentally friendly mode of transportation. It is in fact much less polluting than all other long-distance transportation such as airplanes, buses and cars. For roughly 200 years, humans have used railways to move themselves as well as goods for trading across vast distances. Over these 200 years, there have been tremendous improvements to the railway, creating a system, which has linked together countries and continents. Innovation and technology have continuously pushed for more environmentally friendly, cost-effective, fast and reliable railways, bringing us to today's railwaysystem, which – even after 200 years of transport innovation, is still widely used and expanding. The railway has since its introduction in 1854, been a strategic part on the Norwegian transportation infrastructure, allowing

transportation of goods and people between cities long before commercial air travel was introduced. The railway was initially built for transportation of raw materials and agricultural goods from rural areas to the larger cities where they could be sold and for the transportation of passengers over long distances.

The railway today, is still an attractive mode of travel for the many citizens that rely on it for daily commuting as well as travel over longer distances. However, when we compare the Norwegian railway to the railways of other European countries, it becomes less attractive. Because of the abrupt variations in terrain and the countless fjords, Norway has a challenging geography for railway development. Because of the harsh northern climate, maintaining infrastructure is also rather expensive.

Railway development in Norway is also a very politically contentious topic, because until recently, it was state owned and operated. Recent reform policy changes have toppled the state monopoly with the tendering of all railway transportation and infrastructure maintenance. Proponents of the policy, the “Railway Reform”, argue that state ownership is bad for the railway sector, and that retaining this form is far too expensive. The new policy, which is seen in connection to the EU railway packages, has fundamentally changed the railway. Today, several private operators, including Vy, the state operator, are competing on tenders, where the state chooses the cheapest and best option presented to them. Also other parts of the sector, from maintenance of infrastructure, to the sale of tickets is undertaken by a variety of different private – and state owned companies

1.2 Scope & Limitations

This section outlines the scope of the thesis, as well as some of the limitations encountered while researching the topic.

The scope of this thesis focuses broadly on Norwegian railway development. A historic account of it is necessary, as it gives context to why the railway is in its current state. However, many of the important decisions that shaped railway planning and development can only be looked at in hindsight, and have in reality little to no effect on today's railway (besides the complicated geography). One of these questionable decisions was to build narrow gauge tracks to save on development cost. While it obviously was a costly mistake, all narrow gauge tracks have been replaced a long time ago, meaning that besides giving the Norwegian railway venture a rocky

start, it does not affect the current railway. For that reason it is only mentioned in the case description to give some general context on the difficulty of railway development in Norway.

The main area of interest is the narratives different stakeholders employ in the discourse about railway development in Norway. These narratives are - depending on the stakeholders role in society – communicated through media outlets, public documents, corporate websites and adverts, as well as political party programmes. While the railway has a long and interesting history, the scope of this thesis is limited to the past 30 years, from 1990 and onward. The reason for this narrow timeline is to reduce complexity, because this is not a thesis on Norwegian history, and because the narratives after 1990 are more interesting from a research point of view, with regard to the political agendas that changed with the emergence of neoliberalism, and Norway’s membership in the European Economic Area (EEA).

The findings (narrative coalitions, storylines) can not be compared to other countries beyond vague similarities in forms of governments and policy based on neoliberal ideas, which have been popular since the 1980s. Comparing railway development discourse between countries would be interesting, but would prove to be difficult because of cultural, social and most importantly, geographical differences.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to literature regarding transitions to sustainable transportation. It is not meant to provide answers but rather to contribute to the discussion on railway development in Norway. Given the very political nature of the discussion, discourse analysis has been chosen for its versatility in uncovering the motives of involved stakeholders, and how they “create” a narrative storyline that supports their position. Discourse analysis helps develop an understanding of the railway development trajectory, based on the actions of stakeholders. What this means for the thesis is that no “objective truth” will be uncovered and presented, but rather an overview of discourses which can contribute to future research.

Discourse that has been analysed, has for the most part been translated from Norwegian, because the public documents and articles are not available in English. Great care has been taken to correctly translate all statements, because it is very important to get the correct meaning of what has been said when doing discourse analysis, to prevent important nuances from being lost in translation.

The initial plan was to conduct interviews with key figures connected to railway development to gain inside information about the different sides and their ideas. However, it was later

deemed unnecessary, because discourse analysis was chosen as theory and method. This means that the data used in the analysis consists of official government white papers, newspaper articles and opinions pieces which reflect the discourse. A limitation with this approach is that most documents and articles are only available in Norwegian, and had to be translated.

1.2.1 Structuration

The first part of the thesis provides the necessary background needed to understand the Norwegian railway sector in a historical and political perspective. The subsequent literature review presents relevant articles on policy discourse and narratives, as well as path dependency in policymaking. The method chapter outlines how the analysis was conducted, what sources were used, and how discourse can be used as an analytical tool. Finally the findings of the analysis are presented and discussed, reflecting back on the literature review.

2. Case Background

The first railway in Norway was funded by British and Norwegian capital, and pioneered by Robert Stephenson, son to the British railway pioneer George Stephenson (Wisting, 2021). It connected the Norwegian capital, Oslo and Eidsvoll, 68 kilometers northeast of Oslo. Opening in 1854, it was very successful, drastically reducing transportation and travel time of goods and people (Bane NOR, 2018). Its success paved the way for the Norwegian railway venture, leading to several new projects.

The first fully state funded railway projects were planned and executed by Carl Abraham Pihl, engineer and leader of the Norwegian Railway Directorate. Pihl was a strong advocate of narrow gauge railway tracks (Aspenberg, 2011), which were much narrower (1067) than the standard gauge tracks (1435mm) in the first railway, and thus required fewer materials to produce. Almost all of the projects Pihl supervised were built with narrow gauge tracks throughout the remainder of the 19th century, except for the tracks over the Swedish border, which retained standard gauge.

The reason behind Pihl's advocacy of narrow gauge tracks was due to the relatively complicated Norwegian topography. He argued that it would make development cheaper if all tracks that didn't cross any borders were narrow gauge. A few years later and until today, as with most other countries (with the exception of New Zealand, Japan and South Africa) (Wisting, 2020b), Norway opted for the standard gauge railway tracks, which meant that most tracks had to be replaced in the early 20th century.

Not only was it costly to replace all the tracks, but several stretches had to be re-routed because standard gauge required more space and could not handle the same sharp turns. Additionally, tunnels had to be re-made because they were too narrow for standard gauge, and digging new tunnels was cheaper than expanding the existing narrow ones. In the end, it took a little over 50 years to replace all narrow gauge tracks (Aspenberg, 2011). Towards the end of 1880, the railway had grown to 1562km. Due to an economic downturn and political disagreements, further railway development was halted in 1883.

During these troubled times, Norges Stats Baner (NSB) was created, which was owned and operated by the government. Its purpose was to oversee and steer the development of the state-owned railways. Railway expansion resumed ten years later, marking the most industrious

period within railway development, with 1419km of new tracks built in the span of 10 years (Bane NOR, 2018). In the 1920's - with the development of the internal combustion engine - road traffic started to affect the railway, becoming a serious competitor in long distance passenger and freight transportation, due to development of the internal combustion engine.

In 1923 the Norwegian parliament created a new long term plan, which included roughly 3500 kilometers of new railway tracks. However, a majority of these planned projects were never realized as Norway was still relatively poor; collectively all the projects would have cost about twice as much as the state already had used on railway expansion since 1850. After meeting much resistance, NSB instead chose to focus on the two largest projects, *Nordlandsbanen* from central Norway (Trondheim) to northern Norway (Bodø), and *Sørlandsbanen* from southwestern Norway (Stavanger) to southeastern Norway (Drammen).

The most interesting of these projects is *Sørlandsbanen*, which was heavily lobbied against by coastal shipping companies. The railway represented a threat to their monopoly on coastal transportation, and they lobbied parliament to reconsider the planned coastal route under the guise of security concerns, they cited the possibility of enemy warships shooting the trains in a potential future conflict. This supposed "concern" made a lot of sense to parliament, and thus the railway routed inland without passing any of the major cities along the coast between Kristiansand and Tønsberg (Aspenberg, 2011). While there are connections between *Sørlandsbanen* and the excluded cities via branches such as the Arendal railway between Nelaug and Arendal, they make railway travel tedious due to having to change trains.

During World War Two, Germany invaded Norway and took control of the NSB. The Germans saw the railway as a strategic resource that needed to be expanded, which caused them to allocate not only substantial funding but also a large slave labor force from labor camps containing prisoners of war. Even though it is a contentious argument (Bane NOR, 2018), much progress on existing projects was made under the German invaders, including the conclusion of *Sørlandsbanen* between Stavanger and Oslo and significant progress on *Nordlandsbanen* (Wisting, 2019).

In postwar Norway, which had been stripped of resources, the NSB was in dire need of investment to continue developing the railway but lacked parliamentary support. In 1945, several of the south-western coastal municipalities expressed interest in developing *Haukelibanen*, connecting Stavanger, Haugesund and Bergen. The project had much potential

for personal transportation, but not freight, was considered too expensive, which stopped further development. The proponents of Haukelibanen however, never quite gave up on their idea. The private railway company Norsk Bane AS located in Ålesund is still trying to realize the Haukelibanen project. They aim to build a high-speed railway between Bergen and Stavanger.

In a new plan in 1952, the (partial) electrification of the Norwegian railway network was started. In this plan, lasting until 1970 (Bane NOR, 2018), all coal driven locomotives were replaced with electric – and diesel driven locomotives, and necessary infrastructure was built. The electric and diesel powered trains were more effective, and made travel faster than before. After the war, and until 1960, the importation of cars was rationed by the government; only a certain amount of cars could be imported every year, and strict rules and regulations prevented the few car-owning citizens from utilizing their vehicles fully. During the 1960's however, car import rationing was ended, and cars became commercially available on the Norwegian market. Between 1960 and 1964, 410'000 cars were imported, doubling car ownership in Norway (SSB, 1999)

Cars were at the time –, and are still today, the single biggest competitor to the railway. Shortly after the end of rationing, there was a large increase in road projects to accommodate the massive increase in road traffic. Roads were built everywhere, connecting places much more effectively than the railway, and cars had the added benefit of being used when needed, unlike the railway which ran on a schedule. Traffic on the railway decreased steadily, and was moved to road traffic as more and more cars were imported. NSB already operated small portions of road traffic since 1937 (SSB, 1938), in the form of a small bus fleet, which saw an increase in 1959 (SSB, 1961) to supplement railway traffic.

The railway lost some of its status and traffic, resulting in less investment in new projects from 1960 and onwards. In 1970 the entire railway network had been at least partially electrified, with over 50% of routes running on electricity and the remaining capacity being covered by diesel powered locomotives (Wisting, 2021). In the 1990s, with the emergence of mainstream environmentalism due to the release of the Brundtland Report, the railway again gained some prominence amongst the Norwegian population as a sustainable mode of transportation.

In 1996, the organization of the railway was changed. NSB was partitioned into two parts (also called vertical separation in economic theory), with one part (still called NSB) being responsible for traffic operation, and the other part for infrastructure maintenance and planning

of the railway under the new name Jernbaneverket. Parliament decided to put NSB's responsibilities on public tender in 2002. NSB was at the same time made a joint stock trading company under full state ownership to put them on equal footing with private competitor companies (Wisting, 2021). This change came as a result of the neoliberal policy trend throughout Europe from 1970 and onward, (Sondresen, 2008) leading to the public tendering of the Norwegian railway under the conservative government in 2017 in their railway reform programme (Jernbanereformen)

The primary arguments for the reform programme were to create a competitive and profitable railway. Instead of the state controlling the railway, railway companies would compete for contracts to run traffic on different stretches of the railway for a set amount of years before the contract is again put up for tender. The benefits of competition in the railway sector are according to the railway reform a better, more effective railway service that is less reliant on tax money (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020). NSB was in 2019 renamed Vy, in an effort to remove "State" from its name, and create a more effective railway company that could compete with the private operators. Today, there are three main operators, SJ (Svensk Jernbane), GO Ahead and Vy.

Given the scope of the last 30 years, there are several important events in railway development that have had major impact on discourse. While these events are described in more detail in the findings chapter, it is worth mentioning them briefly here. Since its creation in 1882, the state owned railway company NSB (Now Vy) had full responsibility in managing the railway and its development. This lasted until 1996, when parliament decided to split NSB into two parts (NSB, 1996), each being responsible for a certain part of the railway: jernbaneverket and NSB BA. The motive behind the split was to modernize the railway sector, making train operation the sole responsibility of NSB. Infrastructure was now maintained by Jernbaneverket (now Bane NOR). This is also referred to as 'vertical separation' in later chapters.

While it might not have been the goal at the time, the move was a big step towards putting the railway sector out to tender by both public and private operators. NSB was still owned by the state, but was in essence just a train operator. In 2015 and 2017, the Jernbanereformen policy opened up tendering of the railway to private operators. The changes made to the railway structure in 1996, and the Jernbanereformen policy have had a large discursive impact, and will be presented more in depth in Findings, chapter 5.

3. Literature Review

Ever since climate change was put on the agenda, interest in transitioning towards a “greener” more sustainable world has increased, resulting in many new academic fields in both the natural and social sciences. One fundamental question in this transition is how it may be possible to change society by removing pollutants without having negative effects on the economy. Many countries have large polluting industrial sectors on which they rely to keep their economy growing. Norway is a prime example in this regard: Since the 1970s, Norway has built a very large oil and gas industry, becoming a big player in the export business. This has had a very good effect on the Norwegian economy, contributing, amongst other things to the creation of a very generous welfare state.

The problem facing Norway, and many other exporting countries now, is that they have realized that climate change is a very real threat that needs to be addressed. However, how does one make a country, that heavily relies on pollutants such as oil and gas, sustainable? It is difficult to just “turn of the tap”, because the energy demand is very high, and is mostly covered by oil and gas. One of the options available is to shift the demand away from oil and gas through the implementation of green technology alternatives. In the case of Norway, this poses a dilemma, because the oil and gas income will have to be replaced with new, zero-emission sources.

The low carbon transition is a complex project filled with uncertainties, and transition literature is dedicated to solving dilemmas, paradoxes and contradictions. Governments are increasingly using environmental policy to reduce pollution and make themselves less reliant on fossil fuels. Policymaking and the narratives driving the policies are the main focus in this literature review, as well as path dependence and the implementation of sustainable transportation.

3.1 Environmental Policy

In recent years, environmental policy has been increasingly used as a measure to combat climate change with varying degrees of success. Environmental policy is a rather abstract and contentious topic in political discourse, as it is difficult to convey the “problem” policies are trying to solve to the public, because they for the most part develop very slowly, are (usually) not supported by local evidence and are thus hard to justify. In the 2006 publication “*Does discourse matter? Discourse analysis in environmental policy making*” (Feindt & Oels, 2005) the inherent problems of environmental discourse and policymaking are discussed.

One of the main problems with environmental policy is how it is presented and understood, and to what extent it actually is *about* nature and the environment, which is often the supporting narrative behind such policies. It is even further complicated by policies being scientifically very complex, and even if they are written in laymen language, they are still filled with expert terms and concepts that are hard to grasp for the general public. Thus, the way an environmental policy is articulated goes a long way to deciding how certain problems are handled.

Articulation is such a vital part of environmental policymaking because it influences how it resonates with the public. Inarticulate policy can easily be trumped by other policy which might be regarded as more pressing. Many environmental policies on climate change for instance can have negative economic or social impact, meaning that it competes with other policy such as economic, transportation and energy policy. The environmental discourse that substantiates environmental policy is part of a vast discursive landscape, which means that there are many different interpretations of environmental problems and how they should be addressed.

Given all these different interpretations, and how intangible and complex they are, environmental problems can be called social constructions. This does not mean that they are less “real”, it only means that instead of one reigning interpretation, there are several competing approaches that regard problems in different ways. By looking at the environmental discourse driving the creation and planning of environmental policy, the question arises whether the policy process is really driven by a desire to improve nature and the environment, or whether environmental policy is a tool used by discourse coalitions to strengthen their narrative.

These problems are also very important in regards to the topic of this thesis. The different discourse coalitions in the development of the Norwegian railway system both actively use environmental discourse to drive their narrative. Both sides believe that the railway is an important part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they have different interpretations of how that should be achieved, as well as having different motives for doing so. The most recent iteration of the governments National Plan for Transportation, (NTP) makes good use of environmental discourse to justify their decisions as sustainable and climate-focused (Department of Transportation, 2021). While transportation indeed has a big responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, it is very clear that climate change is used to legitimise the policy which is being presented.

3.2 Investment in Sustainable Transportation

One of the largest emitters of CO₂ is the transportation sector. Reducing these emissions would be possible if fewer people drove cars, and used public, mass transportation instead. The problem of mass transportation is that the fastest available option (air travel) is the most polluting mode of transportation in its current iteration, and will continue to be until the development of zero emission airplanes succeeds. Another alternative for mass transportation is the railway, which (while outclassed by air travel after its commercialization) has a good reputation as a reliable mode of travel. While many people use the railway to travel shorter distances, it is often far more convenient to use air travel for long distances because it is much faster and cheaper. Transportation of freight is also affected by this, with most freight being transported by air, ship and road haulage.

In order for the railway to be competitive, it needs to be much faster, which is what high speed railways (HSR), with speeds above 250 km/h are trying to achieve. (Cetkovic et al., 2020) have analysed the environmental benefits from investment in railway infrastructure in Serbia using cost-benefit analysis. The project analysed is the re-construction of 108 km railway track between Serbia and Hungary. Transportation is identified as an important part of sustainable development. However, environmental policies tend to have a very small focus, and a tendency to overlook other aspects of sustainability (like ecology, social justice and economic dimensions). Thus, it is better to view sustainable transportation as a small part of a larger sustainability background, where only focusing on one part could adversely affect other parts.

“The full contribution of transport to sustainable development should be dealt with systematically and be considered through its links to social, economic and environmental policies”(Cetkovic et al., 2020, p.2172) Policymakers are faced with the dilemma of continuous growth in passengers and freight, while simultaneously making transportation more sustainable. This has amongst others, shaped the concept of sustainable mobility that aims to integrate sustainability into economic development in the transportation sector.

The study concludes that at the current stage, high speed railways are not a good investment in southeastern Europe because of an unfavourable benefit-cost (B/C) ratio for investors. At the same time however, there is a positive B/C ratio for socio-economic impacts, predominantly from the reduction of GHG emissions. In conclusion, the overall effect on the environment is

positive due to the move from road to rail for both freight and mass transportation, with the downside being that investors in the infrastructure do not get satisfactory investment returns.

The findings in (Cetkovic et al., 2020) are similar to the findings in a study conducted by Railconsult AS on behalf of the Norwegian government into the possibilities of developing high speed railways in Norway (Bane NOR, 2012). This concluded that development of high speed railways is feasible and has a positive impact on emissions reduction. However, the plans were only economically viable if investment cost is separated from the equation.

3.3 Narratives in Policy Making

Narratives play a large part in policymaking. All actors involved in the creation of policies are influenced by political, institutional and personal views on all subjects. These influences affect the narrative used in the creation of policies, where a contentious subject such as environmental policy is framed in different ways depending on the policymakers political background. In the digital age it has also become much easier for policymakers to perpetuate their narrative through posts and advertisements on social media, circumventing traditional media such as press conferences and media outlets which previously acted as editorial obstacles (Shanahan et al., 2011).

Politics and subsequently policy are arenas where narratives are extensively used in discourse to sway decision makers and the public in favor of policy propositions. While these narratives are framed as rational analytical projects, they more often than not represent political claims in disguise. Policy discourse should for that reason be understood as manufacturing how issues are portrayed through the use of signs, ideographs and story lines. Miller (2012) describes the framing of policy narratives as “Representations of a problem [that are] fashioned to gain leverage and sympathy for a point of view or a policy prescription” (Miller, 2012 p.18). Ideographs are personal trademarks of individuals and organizations, and are frequently used in policy discourse to represent issues to strengthen policy positions or to gain sympathy.

A good example of ideographs used in policy discussion are terms like “refugee wave” and “climate hysteria” where issues are connected to words with negatively charged connotation. The idea behind the use of ideographs in policy discourse is to elicit an emotional response through use of either positively or negatively charged words depending on the preferred policy outcome. Looking at “climate hysteria”, a common term used in Norway by both private and political actors, the (relatively) neutral term of climate is combined with hysteria, a word with

negative connotations, in order to down-play the urgency of climate change and simultaneously make climate change activists look bad. This tactic is very effective on certain policy issues that people might have strong feelings about, such as environmental, energy, defence and social policy.

In recent years, it has thus become increasingly important to see policies in context of the controlling narrative, something that the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has tried to introduce; a policy narrative is the storyline policymakers use to “sell” the policy as a valid measure against the problem they want to solve, consisting of plot, hero, villain and victim. The story that is told is angled in a way which makes the preferred policy look good, the hero defeats the villain, and saves the victim (Shanahan et al., 2011). The NPF approaches policy through four assumptions:

1. Narratives are a central component in policy making.
2. There are three levels on which narratives operate: micro, macro and meso (individual, institutional and the policy sub system).
3. Policy narratives are created by a large group of actors, including the media, politicians and interest groups.
4. The policy narrative is the vehicle through which the policy is conveyed to the public.

Based on these four assumptions with policy narratives at the core, the NPF can be used to analyze how policy narratives influence changes in policy. The meso level of analysis is the most interesting in regards to the thesis topic, as it is used to analyze groups and coalitions, as well as how narratives shape the composition of advocacy coalitions. Policy narratives are created by interest groups, public officials and private citizens with an agenda to influence policy, and spread information to the public. Individual stakeholders and interest groups with aligned agendas form advocacy coalitions if they share a belief in the same policy and how it should be coordinated to achieve the desired policy output.

In context of the Norwegian railway sector, the advocates for sector competition can be regarded as a discourse coalition, with several interest groups, public persons and political parties actively building the narrative that public tendering is not only the best choice, but also the only choice if Norway is to have a competitive railway system. In this example, the narratives position competition as the hero, seeking to make the railway cheaper, cleaner, and less on spending peoples tax money. Other characters are the the tax paying population as the

victim, and ineffective, publicly owned companies as the villain. Advocates of competition are in this case the conservative government and its supporting parties. Opposing this advocacy coalition are the opposition parties in parliament, as well as unions in the railway sector.

Coalitions can portray themselves as either winning or losing; a winning side creates a storyline that aims to maintain the status quo, while a losing side actively seeks to change policy. The main differences between winning and losing storylines is how the two sides attribute costs and benefits of the project/policy in question. A winning coalition diffuses cost and concentrates benefits, while a losing coalition would diffuse benefits and concentrate cost. In context of the Norwegian railway, the advocates of tendering are the “winning” coalition because they maintain the status quo, while the “losing” coalition creates a narrative for policy change that would justify reversing the railway reform policy.

The “winning” coalition, that wants to maintain the status quo (privatized railway sector) diffuses benefits of a publicly owned and operated railway sector by pointing at for instance the large maintenance backlog accrued over time while the railway was fully state operated, concentrating the cost on society by highlighting taxation. The “losing” opposition coalition on the other hand, aims to destabilize the status quo and to gain support for the wanted policy change. Here, benefits are concentrated on providing reliable railway services to the population, operated by one actor instead of many different actors, which has been a consequence of the railway reform programme.

Cost, on the other hand is diffused by pointing to the railway as a public good which should not be exploited for profit by private investors. The goal of the “losing” side is to frame the issue as a public interest that is better suited for purpose than the status quo, which is something the opposition parties in parliament have done for a long time. The NPF is interesting because railway development is highly influenced by policy, making it relevant in identifying various narratives used in discourses surrounding the expansion of the Norwegian railway. It showcases how the coalitions can portray themselves as losing in the policy subsystem to appeal to other potential stakeholders in order to increase the opposition to the status quo.

3.4 The Governmentality of Climate Change Politics

With climate change being the complex phenomenon that it is, ‘controlling’ its trajectory is nearly impossible. Some scholars have argued that the emergence of liberal economies has had a significant impact on how the threat of climate change is perceived and handled. Oels (2005)

applies Foucault's theory of governmentality to the politics of climate change, and argues that modern governments through a combination of eco-modernism and liberal discourse try to make climate change governable (Oels, 2005). Power relations have changed dramatically, to a point where both private and public actors have equal levels of influence over politics, largely due to neoliberalism. This has consequences on the power balance, shifting power from government to the market through deregulation and privatization. The core ideal of neoliberalism is less government control of the economy, allowing the markets to self-regulate instead.

There are four types of governmentality (types of power) identified by Foucault that emerged throughout history, characterizing different forms of power in government throughout history. The oldest governmentality is sovereign power, in which the ruler exercises power over his subjects, legitimizing the 'right' to rule through law. Sovereign power was common in the middle ages and it can be contrasted to disciplinary power in the fifteenth/sixteenth century, which used power to create order through standardization of norms. From the 18th century and onward, biopower was the most commonly used form of power. It can be described as power that uses skills and capabilities of each individual being of the population.

Biopower governmentality protects, cares and disciplines the population through the use of military, police, health services and schools – effectively regulating the population. While these three governmentalities are arranged historically, which could suggest that one replaces the other, they should be seen as forms of power which change (or recode) the previous form instead, meaning that all three forms are present in some degree. The latest form of governmentality is liberalism and neoliberalism, a form of power that has changed biopower drastically: "While society in biopower was still conceptualized as a domain of needs, advanced liberal government (neoliberalism) regards the population as a pool of resources whose potential for self-optimization needs to be unleashed" (Oels, 2005, p.191) Neoliberalism uses the market as a controlling mechanism for all organizational activities, also on the state level.

Oels (2005) argues that a discourse from the 1980 and 90s increasingly influenced neoliberal policy, mainly through ecological modernization. This discourse utilizes economics to address environmental problems, instead of the traditional natural science terms, allowing amongst other things to see opportunities for innovation instead of environmental crisis. Pollution is thus seen as a system inefficiency, where :

... Nature is (now) conceptualized as a public good whose provision requires clever economic incentives and management to overcome collective action problems. The aim of environmental policy making is not to minimize pollution but to determine “the levels of pollution which nature can endure” (M. A. Hajer, 1997 p.27, in Oels, 2005 p.196)

This type of discourse was a shift from the traditional approach where environmental pollution was considered a moral problem, to something that needed to be solved through cost-benefit analysis. An example of this new discourse is the Kyoto Protocol, where member states can trade emissions through permits, essentially allowing them to pay for CO₂ abatement in other (often developing) countries instead of imposing stricter regulations on their own polluting industries. This exemplifies the cost-benefits approach of neoliberal climate change governance, where moral or ethical considerations have been replaced by cost.

So far, we have established that a new type of discourse has emerged based on neoliberal principles of market control mechanisms, called ecological modernization. This discourse, which amongst others is responsible for the creation of the Kyoto Protocol has allowed governments to “govern” climate change on a cost-benefits basis. The carbon emission trading mechanism introduced by the Kyoto protocol is particularly interesting in the context of Norway as an oil producing country. Since signing the Kyoto Protocol, Norway has been an active participant in emissions trading, as have many other oil producing countries.

The big question is how much it is actually helping in reducing emissions, or whether it is just an excuse for big polluters to continue with business as usual practices while reducing emissions in developing countries which aren't even responsible for most of the global emissions. The trend of focusing on cost-benefits approaches in fighting climate change is very apparent in Norwegian politics, especially in the center-right wing parties where neoliberalism is very popular.

It may seem that Norway isn't going to stop extracting oil and gas in the foreseeable future, because there is too much money involved. This can also be interpreted as a form of ecological modernization discourse, where the cost to benefit ratio is negative when discussing Norway's oil and gas exit, making it an economic – not a moral or ethical choice. Thus the government and stakeholder groups can “ ... limit the range of policy choices perceived as ‘possible’ to technological measures of energy efficiency and will identify the location for these measures

purely on the basis of costs, not by attributing moral responsibilities” (Oels, 2005, p.203). Examples of this, in a Norwegian context is for instance the development of wind power in connection to oil rigs, such as the Hywind-Tampen project by Equinor, where floating wind turbines are set to supply the surrounding oil rigs with electricity, thereby reducing local emissions.

3.5 Path Dependency in Policy Narratives

A common approach to studying policy is through the phenomenon of path dependency, which describes processes where institutions become locked-in on a certain development path based on the insitutional traditions, beliefs and values in which past choices influence the choices of the present, making changes in trajectory difficult:

A process is path dependent if initial moves in one direction elicit further moves in that same direction; in other words the order in which things happen affects how they happen; the trajectory of change up to a certain point constrains the trajectory after that point (Araral, 2013).

It is important to stress that path dependency is not considered a theory, as it lacks a general list of variables which removes the ability to make hypotheses about the connections between variables. Instead it should be viewed as a concept to be used for labelling processes over time (Kay, 2005). Path dependency is related to incrementalism, a theoretical approach to decision making in public and private institutions. Incrementalism assumes that previous decisions and policy made in an organization act as a baseline for future decisions, with old policy being reproduced with small (incremental) changes (Hansen, 2019).

Using the concept of path dependence is appealing for the study of policy narratives, because it shows how some policy is hard to change once implemented in turn, which means that convincing narratives need to be used in order to “sell” the policy over other, less desirable outcomes. An example of this is the ongoing deregulation of the Norwegian railway sector. The conservative government has since their ascent to power worked on the neo-liberal project of privatizing public services such as the railway through various reform policies, the most important of which was Jernbanereformen (The Railway Reform) passed in 2017. Under Jernbanereformen, the railway was put up for tender, and Vy, the state owned railway company that perviously was reponsible for all services on all routes now had to compete with private actors, both in terms of railway route tenders and infrastructure maintenance (Wisting, 2020a).

It is interesting to apply the concept of path dependence to the Jernbanereformen policy because it is difficult to undo, which is something several of the parties in the parliamentary opposition want to do. However, even if that coalition wins the 2021 parliamentary election, chances of overturning Jernbanereformen are slight because the policy has completely restructured the railway sector, making it difficult to change. Path dependency is a good approach to understanding the policy because the decisions made by the government restrict policy options for future policymakers.

Path dependency is an especially useful concept in the study of narratives in policy making, because they influence each other. Path dependency influences decision making, which in turn influences policy creation and the narrative used to achieve the wanted policy outcome. This means, in context of the Norwegian railway sector, that the dominating discourse coalition which wants to maintain the status quo and continue building on existing railway infrastructure has characteristics of path dependency. This is reinforced by transportation policy (NTP) which builds on previous iterations of the same policy. Making changes in the set policy trajectory can prove to be difficult not only for the dominating advocacy coalition, but also for the opposition should they get the chance to change the status quo.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, environmental discourse is a contentious topic, especially in the policy arena. Paradoxes, dilemmas and contradictions are common place because environmental issues are often complex, and involve many different stakeholders with different needs and goals. Environmental policy can create paradoxes where the stated goal of a policy contradicts policy in other areas. One such paradox is the Norwegian climate commitments in relation to the Norwegian oil and gas industry.

While commitment seems high, with Norway participating in many climate summits and meetings and ratifying the Paris Accord with new goals in 2020, there has yet to be a definite answer about when Norway will stop producing oil and gas. This paradox highlights the competition between environmental and economic policy, with the latter winning. Norway has very significant investments in the oil and gas industry through both the State owned oil company Equinor and the national pension fund (folketrygdefondet), often called “the oil fund”.

One of many solutions to reduce emissions in the transportation sector is to make existing technology such as the internal combustion engine more effective, by making it consume less fuel. The effort to make both fuel and engines more efficient is an ongoing process that gained

momentum as a result of the increase in environmental concern after the release of the Brundtland Report (Limits to Growth) in the 1970s. At the time it was (and to some stakeholders still is) a solution to the large emission levels that the transportation sector is responsible for. The automobile industry did not mind making more efficient vehicles, as it did not have negative economic implications, and made them look like they cared about the environment.

The problem with the efficiency approach to reducing emissions in transport is best explained through Jevons Paradox, a theory in economics, named after its creator William Stanley Jevons. The Jevons Paradox theory is that advances in technology which make a process more efficient will lead to an increase in resources used, thereby negating the positive effects of the efficiency increase. The theory was coined during the industrial revolution where efficiency in the use of coal in factories also increased coal consumption (York & McGee 2015). The theory turned out to also be applicable to variety of other situations involving technological efficiency, as in the transportation sector.

There are several studies that have been conducted after engine efficiency approaches were initiated. These studies have looked at what kind of effect efficiency improvements have had on emission levels. The study by Klumpp (2016) explores green logistics by applying the Jevons Paradox to efficiency of heavy duty diesel trucks, concluding that even though engines have improved a lot, the positive effect on emission reduction is negated by increased transportation volume (Klumpp, 2016). Even if engines consume less fuel per tonkilometer, total emissions are still rising due to:

... national as well as global economic development it becomes obvious that increased globalization and trade will inevitably lead to higher transport and energy consumption levels. Under current physical conversion and primary energy use regimes, this will also lead to increasing absolute carbon emission levels” (Klumpp, 2016 p.13).

Several solutions are put forward to solve these issues, including heavy taxation on transportation, restricting supply of fuel and most importantly, public investment in infrastructure and supply of biofuel. This includes the railway and other forms of public mass transportation, where the state can subsidize the switch from trucks to railway (Klumpp, 2016). The core problem here is that it is difficult to combine economic growth with sustainability, because it is inherently unsustainable. Growth requires increased resource use – ultimately

leading to more emissions and environmental degradation. This dilemma started the sustainable development approach, which is today widely applied in both private and public institutions.

Returning to the policy arena, there are many ways policy can create paradoxes as unintended consequences. Environmental policy that aims to reduce emissions, such as heavy taxation of oil, gas and coal – while well intended, can have the opposite effect, leading to more emissions. This paradox is commonly referred to as the Green Paradox, where policymakers introduce policy that either penalizes oil and gas producers, which in turn causes them to speed up extraction and selling of their resources, making the policy counterintuitive

4. Research Design

Given the focus of this thesis, namely discourse surrounding the development of the Norwegian railway, the most optimal methodological approach is discourse analysis. This has been chosen for its ability to reveal the role of language in both politics and practice, as well as revealing mechanisms (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005). While there are different ways of approaching discourse analysis, Maarten Hajer's approach is most suited as it has roots in both environmentalism and political science, and has had tremendous influence on the study of policy discourse. These factors make it an excellent framework to use when conducting a study on environmental discourse.

4.1 Analytical Approach

The topic, namely discourse surrounding the Norwegian railway development has been approached through an abductive research strategy because the aim of the thesis is to describe the motives of actors which they portray when interacting with one another (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Railway development is seen in social, financial and environmental context.

To analyze public discourse surrounding the railway, the chosen analytical approach is to look at public discourse through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a large field in the social sciences that regards all discourse (Language) as non-neutral, and influenced by each persons world view. Thus, some people who for instance don't believe in climate change, might describe climate activism as "climate hysteria" instead, to discredit activism and make it look bad. Similarly, many individuals and interest groups participate in the public debate on different topics such as the railway using discourse that reflects their interests, goals and world views.

4.2 Data Selection

The main method of data collection is done through document analysis. This method allows for interpretation of what the "true" meaning of statements is by stakeholders in railway development. Discourse is analysed through the help of metaphors, storylines and discourse coalitions as a means of distinguishing between different discourses. Each side (or coalition) builds a storyline using the narrative, to either maintain or change the status quo. The working hypothesis is that there are two sides that exist in the railway debate, one of which is working towards a deregulated market, and has successfully enabled market competition in the railway

sector, while the other side is in favour of the old system, where the state owned and operated the railway tracks without the involvement of private actors.

These coalitions will act as a base, where other prominent stakeholders can be placed through discourse analysis. Some actors have been placed in their coalition preemptively because they are the main “constituents” of that discourse. While they already have been placed, they are of course thoroughly analysed in the document analysis to justify the placement. These actors are the current conservative government, placed in the pro-deregulation coalition, and the anti-deregulation coalition, which includes most of the opposition parties, as well as railway workers and their unions. The struggle is seen as both between the political parties, as well as between political and private actors.

Public documents, articles and news coverage are the primary source of discourse to be analyzed. Through analysis, discourse coalitions can be identified, each adding a different narrative to the debate. According to Maarten Hajer (1993), discourse coalitions are groups of people that share the same social construct which frames the narrative they bring to a debate in which they try to impose their view of reality onto others (van der Ploeg, 2013). A social construct is nontangible idea that exist only by virtue of people agreeing about its existence, such as money, countries, governments.

Discourse coalitions are according to Hajer (1993) “ ... the ensemble of a set of storylines, the actors that utter these storylines, and the practices that conform to these storylines, all organized around a discourse” (Hajer, 1993, p. 47). In society, discourse coalitions have varying levels of influence on the public opinion. It is possible for a discourse coalition to achieve high levels of (1.) *structuration*, convincing central actors to believe in its storyline, in addition to becoming (2.) *institutionalized*, causing the given discourse to directly influence policy making. If a discourse manages to fulfill both of these conditions, it dominates the political realm, such as the development of the railway in Norway (M. Hajer, 1993).

The dominating discourse coalition in Norwegian railway development has been identified as the conservative government in parliament and its supporting parties. The narrative of the dominating coalition is to change the railway sector by breaking the state monopoly, opening it to market competition and allowing private railway operators to compete with the state owned operator Vy.

One of the main narratives is economics. Making operators compete on tenders will according to the proponents of the policy, make the railway cheaper for the state, and reduce tax money spending. The railway is – from an environmental viewpoint - one of the most important modes of mass-transportation because it has no emissions beyond the building of infrastructure. The Railway Policy explicitly states that “[through the railway reform] the railway sector will play an even more important role in the climate challenge” (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020).

In the most recent National Transportation Plan (NTP), a policy plan detailing what the sitting government aims to achieve in the following ten years, much focus is given to road development and a massive tunnel for ships that will cost billions to build and maintain. The same plan also predicts that transportation (over distances above 70 kilometers) by car will increase from 39% (of total transportation of people) in 2018 numbers to 44% by 2050. Railway on the other hand increases only from 7% to 8% in the same period (Department of Transportation, 2021).

The secondary discourse coalition that coexists in opposition to the dominating - “incumbent” narrative of the government is the opposition to deregulation of the railway. This coalition opposes the railway reform policy which was introduced in 2015, opening the railway sector up to market competition. The opposition argues that the railway should be owned and managed by the state, because it is a public good – not a source of profit for private actors. The railway sector was until 1996 operated as a state monopoly through NSB. Where proponents of the railway reform policy want to make the railway profitable through market competition, opponents want to increase state investments to make it a more viable form of transportation.

To summarize, the data collected in this study consists entirely of documents and news coverage that communicate the railway discourse in various ways. Through discourse analysis, it can be discovered how certain actors frame issues in a certain way, creating a storyline that benefits them. The goal is thus not about generalizing the findings to a population, and the findings are therefore not meant to be representative. The empirical framework of discourse analysis by Maarten Hajer, which has been applied in this case study, fulfills the criteria for validity and reliability, given that it has been “... empirically validated in many different policy fields and regions” (Kern & Rogge, 2018, p. 2).

4.3 Data Analysis

As mentioned in the beginning of the methodology chapter, Maarten Haajers approach to discourse analysis has been chosen due to its relevance in the study of policy. Parts of Hajers

“10 steps of doing discourse analysis” (Hewitt, 2009) are utilized in the effort. While there are originally ten steps, steps 1, 2, 4, 8 and 10 as shown below are not useful in regard to this thesis. They mostly concern themselves with interviews, which this thesis does not contain.

Table 1: Hajer's ten steps of doing discourse analysis

1. *Desk Research* – a first chronology and first reading of events
2. *'Helicopter Interviews'* – to gain an overview from different perspectives
3. *Document Analysis* – to identify story lines and metaphors, and the sites of discursive struggle
4. *Interviews with key players* – to enable the researcher to construct the interviewee discourses and the shifts in recognition of alternative perspectives
5. *Sites of argumentation* – search the data to account for the argumentative exchange
6. *Analyse for positioning effects* – to show how people, institutions or nation-states get caught up in an interplay
7. *Identify key incidents* – to understand the discursive dynamics and the outcomes
8. *Analysis of practices in particular cases of argumentation* – by going back to the data to see if the meaning of what is said can be related to the practices in which it was said.
9. *Interpretation* – come up with an account of the discursive structures, practices, and sites of production
10. *Second visit to key actors* – respondents should recognise some of the hidden structures of language.

Figure 1 – Hajer, 2006, p.77-74 in Hewitt, 2009, p.12

Steps 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9 are used, as highlighted in *fig 1* to analyze the discourse surrounding railway development in Norway, using devices of metaphor, discourse coalitions and storylines to uncover the narratives of the parties involved in the discourse.

5. Findings

There are two main discourses surrounding the development of the Norwegian railway, as well as two corresponding discourse coalitions, where one coalition upholds the status quo, which the other coalition wants to change. Certain discourses can have a very high impact on the creation of policy; this is especially true for the railway, as it is part of the transportation sector, which means that it is also affected by environmental policy. Given that one of the coalitions is upholding a status quo, it is identified as the dominating, or winning discourse in context of the Narrative Policy Framework (Shanahan et al., 2011). It is also the discourse that will be focused most upon, because it has had more impact on development in recent years.

The first part of this chapter presents key events in the history of railway development, which have had a major impact on it. These events are all related to important changes in policy and structuration of the Norwegian railway sector. While the whole timeline is very interesting, it has been limited to 1990 and onward, because of the structural changes made to the railway sector, which as mentioned in the scope and limitations chapter have had a very large impact on discourse.

5.1 Major Discourse Shaping Events in Railway Development

The following chapter outlines important events that have shaped railway development discourse, as well as a short introduction to the political process in Norway. These events have been chosen because they represent big changes from previous practice, and because they directly or indirectly influenced the narrative storylines of stakeholders. Development of the railway has been, and always will be controlled through the political decisions made by the government (the coalition or party with the most number of seats in parliament), if they hold a majority in parliament that supports the policy change. This mechanism ensures that decisions are made in accordance to the democratic process, allowing the opposition parties to oppose or make amendments to policy proposals. The railway sector is subject to the Department of Transportation (Samferdselsdepartementet) which is led by a minister of transportation, a political position, and thus chosen by the government.

The Department of Transportation regulates the transportation sector and creates policy for the government. Traditionally, left wing governments have favoured more decentralized policy through state ownership, while the more right wing governments have pushed for centralization

and privatization and deregulation of public goods. This is reflected in the policy created under each respective government.

The Norwegian railway sector has for a long time been both controlled and regulated through state ownership. NSB was established by the state in 1883 to maintain and develop railway transportation throughout Norway. This lasted 113 years, until 1996 when parliament decided to split the company into two parts, NSB BA and Jernbaneverket (a type of policy that is commonly referred to as ‘vertical separation’). NSB BA was now just a railway operator, while Jernbaneverket was responsible for building and maintenance of the infrastructure (Wisting & Nordal, 2020). As a regulating entity, Jernbanetilsynet was also established to ensure development was conducted in accordance with existing rules and regulations.

This structural change is very important in railway history. By breaking up NSB into several companies, they effectively ended the monopoly the state had until that time. While NSB BA still was the sole railway operator for a long time after restructuration, it took only 19 years before the railway sector was put up for tender with the Jernbanereformen policy of 2015 and 2017. This would not have been possible had the responsibility for railway maintenance not been removed from NSB.

In 2015, the conservative government put forward the “Railway reform” (jernbanereformen) policy, representing the biggest structural change in the railway sector since 1996. The policy, which was accepted in 2015 and enacted by 2017, ended the historic state monopoly that NSB had on the railway sector since its creation. Under the railway reform, several stretches of the railway were now put up for tender, allowing private train operators to compete for contracts. The motivation behind the policy was to make the railway cheaper through public tenders, where train operators would compete on price and quality (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020). NSB was still owned by the state, but it operated on the same terms as the other operators, and had to compete on tenders.

The railway reform was opposed by both the parliament opposition parties and many railway workers, resulting in a protest outside the parliament building in Oslo, before the issue was put to vote by opposition party and railway union members (Lilleås, 2015). This shows just how politically contentious the issue is, presenting a perfect opportunity for discourse analysis. The underlying drivers that facilitated this policy change are the so-called EU railway packages, which happened to align with the politics of the conservative government, and given Norway's

EEA (European Economic Area) membership, which gives access to the EU market on the condition that members adopt EU legislation, the policy had to be accepted.

One of the primary instruments of the European Union is the process of standardization, a practice that is meant to make cross border trade easier by standardizing laws, regulations across all EU and EFTA/EEA nations. The same idea is also behind the (currently) four railway packages introduced in 2001, 2004, 2007 and 2016. All four packages aim to open up the railway market for competition. Norway has adopted the three first packages which amongst other things reduce cross-border delays for freight transportation (package 1, 2001), increased levels of competition in the freight transportation sector, and the establishment of the ERA (European Railway Agency) as a international body of railway governance (package 2, 2007) and the latest which opened the personal traffic market for competition (package 3, 2007). The last package which was put forward by the EU has not yet been adopted, and is still waiting for approval by parliament.

These railway packages can be seen in relation to previous events. The split of NSB for instance, nearly coincided with the first package, which demanded separation between train operators and infrastructure development (CEP, 2021), effectively removing barriers to competition and setting the stage for the second and third package which opened competition on both freight and personal transportation. The fourth package, which is in the process of being approved, is the last piece in the EUs goal of full competition in the railway sector. The main points of package four are to remove juridicial and administrative hindrances, allowing all railway operators to operate anywhere in Europe without requiring a license, and most importantly, the introduction of mandatory tendering of all railway tracks to prevent discrimination against private operators (Bormans, 2017).

These four packages combined, are the EUs attempt at standardizing the railway sector across all European nations. Norway has adopted the three first packages, and is also considering adopting the fourth. The railway packages have had a major impact on Norwegian railway policy, starting with the severance of NSB from infrastrucure maintenance in 1996. Norway is not an EU member, but became part of the European Economic Area in 1992 and signed the Eurpoean Free Trade Agreement in 1994, which means that Norway now has to adhere to some EU policies, hence the adoption of the railway package. The railway reform policy of 2015/17 also closely coincides with the introduction of railway package four by the EU in 2016. The

reform has re-organized the railway in ways that the fourth package also aimed to do already, making adoption very likely under the current government.

As a consequence of the railway reform, NSB was put on equal footing as the private railway operators, meaning they had to compete on the tenders for railway operation. NSB was still state owned, which was reflected in the name “Norges Statsbaner”. The “state” label was seen as a problem when competing with other operators, resulting in the name change in 2019, when NSB became Vy, in order to distance the company from state ownership implicit in its name.

5.2 Common Discursive Themes

In this part of the findings chapter, the documents that form the basis of the discourse analysis are presented and analysed. There are several narrative themes that dominate the debate around railway development in Norway. Several of these themes have been chosen to highlight how stakeholders use different narratives to influence policy in their favour.

The main discursive themes found in the debate is regarding a deregulated railway sector, open for competition, versus a completely state owned and operated railway, which for the sake of the discussion chapter is regarded through the concept of ecological modernization by (M. A. Hajer, 1997; Oels, 2005) briefly introduced in the literature review. Since 1996, the entire railway sector has changed dramatically, which is partially due to Norway's EEA membership, as well as neoliberal tendencies in government policy. Neoliberalism is a political ideology that emerged in the 1970s, and introduced the concept of free market capitalism (Sondresen, 2008), where state ownership is frowned upon due to its perceived ineffectiveness, resulting in many western countries using neoliberal policy to privatize and deregulate state owned companies and assets.

Norway, like most other European countries was also affected by neoliberal policy, but instead of adopting the common free market capitalism, made (in)famous by Margareth Thatcher in the UK (Nunn, 2014), Norway opted for a softer kind of capitalism together with the other Nordic countries. This model is commonly referred to as “the nordic model”, and is a combination of social benefits and free market capitalism.

While Norway may not have adopted the pure form of free market capitalism, it has been increasingly affected by neoliberal policy through its EEA membership, which requires its members to adopt some EU legislation, as well as through party politics in parliament. Support

and opposition of deregulation can, in the context of Norwegian politics be tied to the right and left wing of the political spectrum respectively. The following table clarifies the attitudes of the major parties currently sitting in parliament, based on how they communicate discourse regarding the railway deregulation.

Due to the election happening in september 2021, there is a good chance that the current government are replaced (Grønli, 2021) by a center-left coalition, which aims to disrupt the deregulation plans. Nevertheless, even with a change of government, most of the pro-deregulation policy has already been passed. Even though several parties wish to reverse the current governments reform policies (Aspøy, 2020), it will be a very difficult task to do with the railway reform, due to private operators having legally binding contracts, and Norway being part of the EEA. In any case, this is how the most influential parties relate to, and communicate about deregulation of the railway sector, with the government coalition parties marked in blue:

POLITICAL PARTIES, SORTED BY SIZE (SEATS IN PARLIAMENT 2017-21):	POLITICAL ORIENTATION, AND MAIN INTERESTS:	DISCURSIVE STANCE ON RAILWAY DEREGULATION:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ARBEIDERPARTIET (AP) <p>(ARBEIDERPARTIET, N.D.; TVEDT, BULL, ET AL., 2021)</p>	<p>Social democracy as core ideology, working towards an equal society</p>	<p>Anti-deregulation: Aims to reverse the railway reform, public tenders make it difficult to create a good railway service, and the fragmentation of the railway sector is bad for railway customers because too many companies are involved in facilitating railroad travel.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HØYRE (H) - CURRENT GOVERNMENT, SINCE 2013 <p>(HØYRE, N.D.; TVEDT, NOTAKER, ET AL., 2021)</p>	<p>A liberal conservative party focusing on deregulation, lowering public expenditures and taxes. Most positive towards the EU amongst all parties.</p>	<p>Very pro-deregulation: Deregulation is regarded as a tool through which public expenses can be cut, and business be made more efficient. Competition is a necessity for the creation of a reliable and profitable railway, to</p>

		get the most out of the money spent. Main proponent of the railway reform.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FREMSKRITTSPARTIET (FRP) (FRP, N.D.-B; JUPSKÅS & GARVIK, 2021A) 	<p>A mixture of economic liberalism and right wing populism, focuses on reducing taxation, minimal government intervention and deregulation. Has left the government coalition.</p>	<p>Very pro-deregulation: competition based on public tenders make transportation cheaper, and reduce emissions. Deregulation will make the railway more competitive with other forms of transport.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SENTERPARTIET (SP) (SENTERPARTIET, N.D.; TVEDT & GARVIK, 2021) 	<p>Traditionally the farmers party. Centrist politics and anti centralization.</p>	<p>Anti-deregulation: The railway should be the responsibility of the state; strong state control over the railway to ensure fair prices and good infrastructure maintenance. Against the fracturing of the railway sector and the EU's fourth railway package.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SOSIALISTISK VENSTREPARTI (SV) (GARVIK, 2021B; SV, N.D.) 	<p>Socialist/leftist party against capitalism, strives for more equality in society (monetary and gender) as well as fighting climate change.</p>	<p>Anti-deregulation: the railway is a public good, and should be built and financed by the state. Too many stakeholders involved in the railway sector, the state should be in control of both railway operation and infrastructure maintenance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VENSTRE (V) (GARVIK ET AL., 2021; VENSTRE, N.D.) 	<p>Socio-liberal political party, against government power and surveillance of citizens. Focus on education and environmental issues.</p>	<p>Slightly pro-deregulation: market competition ensures better railway services to the public. However, the railway is still a public good; maintenance of infrastructure is a state responsibility.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KRISTELIG FOLKEPARTI (KRF) <p>(GARVIK & TVEDT, 2021; KRF, N.D.)</p>	<p>Christian-conservative party with centrist politics. Focus on protecting christian values and national/international aid.</p>	<p>Pro-deregulation: the railway reform revitalizes the railway sector, solving the large maintenance backlog accumulated under the NSB monopoly.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MILJØPARTIET DE GRØNNE (MDG) <p>(JUPSKÅS & GARVIK, 2021B; MDG, N.D.)</p>	<p>“ecological” green-party politics comparative to other variations across europe. Also focus on peace, equality and feminism.</p>	<p>Anti-deregulation: the railway sector is operated by too many actors. Interested in reversing the railway reform if possible.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RØDT (R) <p>(GARVIK, 2021A; RØDT, N.D.)</p>	<p>Socialist party against the capitalist system, focusing on equality amongst genders and society. Decentralizing politics and anti-EU.</p>	<p>Very anti-deregulation: The railway and infrastructure development and maintenance need to be organized under government controll, not many different private and public stakeholders. The railway reform needs to be reversed.</p>

Fig. 2: The 9 largest political parties as of 08.06.21, currently sitting in parliament , organized according to size (Stortinget, 2020)

Looking at individual party political agendas, often presented on their website, can give a very good idea where the desire for deregulation stems from. There are many common points across parties in the current sitting government, the most important of which is that they all support the effort of privatizing the railway. While some are strong proponents, like the conservative party (Høyre) And the Progress Party (FrP), others are more tentative, like the Christian Peoples party (KrF), which agreed to the railway reform, but also stated that “ ... we hope that the government will use this opportunity to gain experience before rushing into tendering of the entire railway sector” (NTB, 2016).

The parties in support of the railway reform communicate the discourse on it through policy proposals, such as the railway reform proposals of 2015, and the national transportation plan (NTP). Other sources are party websites, opinion pieces, interviews and debates/statements in parliament. All of the opposition parties are against deregulation, and some have even comitted to reversing the railway reform, as well as rejecting the fourth EU railway package. The main sources through which the opposition parties communicate the railway reform discourse is through party political programmes, the different workers unions (fagorganisasjoner) which are deeply rooted in the left side of politics, opinion pieces in newspapers, interviews on television and statements made in parliament during parliamentary sessions.

These two sides of the debate create two discourse coalitions, both of which actively create a narrative about public tendering which supports their political agenda. The main difference between the two coalitions in how discourse is communicated is the power structure. The parties which support deregulation are the ones holding the majority of seats in parliament, meaning they create the policy they want, and are able to vote it through parliament if all government parties agree on it. Therefore, analysing these policy documents can give a very good idea about the narrative storylines the reform proponents create. Because of the political power that the pro-deregulation coalition has, it is seen as the “winning” narrative, as it tries to maintain the status-quo, which was established through their policy on the railway sector (jernbanereformen).

5.3 The Railway Reform Policy – Constructing a Narrative Storyline

The Railway reform policy of 2015/17 was developed by the conservative coalition government led, by the conservative party. The policy is presented in Meld. St. 27 2014-2015, and presents how the governments aims at changing the whole railway sector, comparing it to the restructuring of 1996, when the national rail operator NSB was split into several parts. The biggest change is the increase of competition in the sector through the tendering of railway tracks to private and state operators. The analysis looks at certain discursive themes in the overview of the railway reform, published on the transportation department website (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020), which are used to create the narrative supporting the suggested changes. Additionally, newspaper articles regarding the reform will be used to substantiate these narratives, with both proponents and opponents being represented.

One of the key narratives used to enable competition in the railway sector is - as with most other policy changes – money. More specifically, the proponents for full market competition argue that the previous system, where NSB not only operated the railway, but also maintained infrastructure and developed the railway was a financial drain on society. As seen in the document by Samferdselsdepartementet (2020): “The railway needs to be a competitive alternative [mode of transportation] for many more [customers], thus what previously did not work, needs to be changed, which what the reform will contribute to the railway sector” (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020)

This sentence implies that the monopoly that the state has had over the railway for most of its existence, is not feasible anymore. The reform aims to fix the sector by “ ... making railway travel more affordable and utilize tax-payer money more effectively” (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020). Using terms like “tax-payer money” is very effective ideograph in the creation of a narrative, because most people pay taxes, and want the money to be invested in useful things. Thus, relating a policy objective to “more effective spending of taxes” can evoke positive feelings towards a proposed policy. The “tax-payer money” ideograph is repeated several times, also in the section regarding results of the railway reform:

“Competition [on tender 1, 2 and 3] resulted in the state – meaning taxpayers – spending a lot less money on railway services which are at least as good, or better than they were before [the

railway reform]” (Samferdselsdepartementet, 2020), the argument being that the money saved was spent other vital parts of society.

In an interview in 2014, Linda Hoftad Helleland, who at the time was leader of the transportation committee in parliament for Høyre, remarked to the newspaper VG that “ We are going to squeeze so much toothpaste out of this tootpaste tube, Arbeiderpartiet wont be able to get it back inside” (Skarvøy, 2014). The statement was made in context of the planned railway reform which was in danger of being stopped if the opposition parties won the 2017 election; she also reiterated that “ the NSB monopoly needs to be destroyed by the governments blue sledgehammer as fast as possible” (Skarvøy, 2014).

These statements are still to this day quoted by critics of the railway reform, because the metaphors are very ideologically charged. Especially the toothpaste quote can easily be translated as “do as much damage as we can before the government is replaced”, which is how many critics have chosen to translate it. The second statement about the blue sledgehammer is also very ideological. It is common practice in politics to attribute colours to political parties based on their ideological positions. All parties on the Norwegian left for instance are red, with the exception of MDG, which is green, as is the centrist party SP. Center right, KRF, is yellow, and right wing is blue (especially the conservative party, Høyre), with darker shades of blue the further right you go. The statement by Helleland can thus be roughly translated to “the right (høyre) needs to destroy the NSB monopoly as fast as possible”, reiterating the first statement with the toothpaste metaphor.

As mentioned, critics of the railway reform still quote the toothpaste statement to this day, and have even adopted it in their own rhetoric. The most recent example is a opinion article I Adressavisen dated 10th of may, 2021, by a representative for the State Railway Workshop Union (Statsbanenes verkstedforening). The critique is mostly regarding the fracturing of the railway sector, where many different companies are noe responsible for different tasks in the railway sector, as a result of the railway.

The author illustrates how uncertain the reform has made the working life of his and fellow colleagues in the railway sector, stating that “the railway reform uses the mantra of market competition ... the state forces companies to bid as low as possible on available tenders, which

affects wages and working conditions” (Støre, 2021). The article is then finished by reflecting back on the statement made by Helleland in 2014;

The working people in the railway will make sure that we will get a new government that listens to us [in the 2021 election], so mind your toothpaste tube, because we will find the biggest toothbrush available! A thorough cleaning is needed, before these holes can be repaired (Støre, 2021)

The article by Støre (2021) perfectly presents many of the grievances that the opposition has with the railway reform, and gives (together with the actual railway reform policy) a good impression of the different discourses that have impacted (or at least tried to impact) railway development in recent years.

5.4 The Opposition Narrative

Most, if not all opposition to deregulation stems from the left side of the political spectrum. Below, the reasons for the opposition will be described, as well as how these concerns are conveyed to the public in the form of a narrative.

One of the key ideals behind the opposition to deregulation is the idea that the railway is a public good, in the same way that for instance access to water and the postal service is. The railway should thus not be used to maximize profits, but welfare. For most of Norwegian railway history this was also exactly how the railway was organized, lasting over a century, where the railway was operated by the state. In the last couple of decades, however - with the influx of Neoliberalism – new ideas started to emerge. The ideal of the railway as a public good was still present, but parts of the political debate started to question whether the monopoly should be broken up to allow competition in the railway sector – leading to the separation of the state railway operator and infrastructure development and maintenance in 1996 (Schnell & Carlson, 2019).

This was the beginning of the end for the state railway monopoly, and carved the way for the EU railway packages 1-3, as well as the railway reform policy introduced in 2015. Many of the opposing stakeholders fear that deregulation will make the railway service worse, and that “ ... it is paid for by society, railway employees and customers – while the profit is shared between a few private companies, with all the money going to a few directors and investors” (Steigan,

2018). This quote exemplifies one of the main concerns that the opposition has with the reform, namely that the profit is not reinvested in society, but ends up in the pockets of private investors.

Many critics have argued that market competition in the railway sector can have impacts on the working conditions and compensation of railway employees. Both railway employees and their supporting unions have voiced concerns over the issue, as already mentioned in the previous chapter, where a representative of State Railway Workshop Union described how the reform has affected his work place. Also the Norwegian Railway Association (NJF), has voiced its concerns after the reform policy document was published in 2015. “The government says: ‘The aim is not to save money by allowing train companies to compete on the lowest wages and pensions’ In the white paper, it says - in black and white - that it is up to the companies to decide.”(NJF, n.d.)

This statement reflects the discourse that is very common in the anti-deregulation coalition. Especially the unions representing railway workers have argued that public tendering of the railway will have negative consequences on workers, because firms will have to compete with other firms by making the cheapest offer on available contracts, which could lead to workers being paid less.

Much, if not all of the rhetoric used by the opposition of the reform, is very much against the European Union and the laws and policies EEA/EFTA members have to adhere to. It should therefore come as no surprise that they also are negative towards the EU railway packages, three of which have already been implemented. The discourse used to describe these is therefore overwhelmingly negative, especially regarding the fourth railway package, which - if accepted – will transfer some of the responsibility for the railway to the European Railway Agency (ERA). Common rhetoric in the opposition movement is that Norway will lose control over the railway if railway package four is accepted: “The EU's fourth railway package will deprive Norway of the right to control its own railway”(Brustad, 2018).

This statement was made by the Railway Association and the Norwegian Locomotive Drivers Union in regards to the mechanism in Railway package four that will transfer some jurisdiction to the ERA. More precisely, the package contains a segment, which would give the ERA jurisdiction to grant licenses to railway operators across all EU member states, as well as

allowing operators that successfully established themselves in one member state, to operate in all other member states also (Bergsaker, 2019).

While the anti EU sentiment is mostly placed on the left of Norwegian politics, it is also somewhat popular in the progress party (FrP), and several other fringe far-right parties without any political influence. FrP was one of the parties that backed the railway reform, but have since left the coalition government, and are now part of the parliamentary opposition. While they are still positive towards deregulation, they have ideological differences with the EU which they believe has too much influence over Norway (FrP, n.d.-a). After leaving the government, they have joined the other opposition parties request for the supreme courts evaluation of the legal consequences that EU railway package four could have for Norway (NTB, 2020).

One of the many goals of the railway reform was to break the state monopoly on the railway sector, which is something that has been done rather successfully – to the disdain of the reform opposition. After the reform was introduced, the entire structure of the railway was changed, and most of the sector was put up for tender together with the railway tracks. Tasks that before were NSBs responsibility are now done by many smaller contractors. This new organizational structure has been criticized by both political opposition and industry stakeholders.

In its current iteration, the railway consists of the private sector, which includes railway operators, maintenance companies and contractors which compete on public tenders. The public sector is split into an administrative and commercial sector. The administrative sector, which is controlled by the ministry for transportation and communication (samferdselsdepartementet) and the railway directorate (jernbanedirektoratet) are responsible for coordination, regulation and development within the sector. They also own and control the commercial part of the public sector, which consists of Vygruppen AS, the state operator; Mantena AS, railway vehicle maintenance; Entur AS, tickets and travel planning; Norske Tog AS, procurement and management of railway vehicles and Bane NOR SF, which is responsible for infrastructure maintenance and development. These companies are owned by the state through the ministry for transportation and communication, and are managed for profit (commercial incentives).

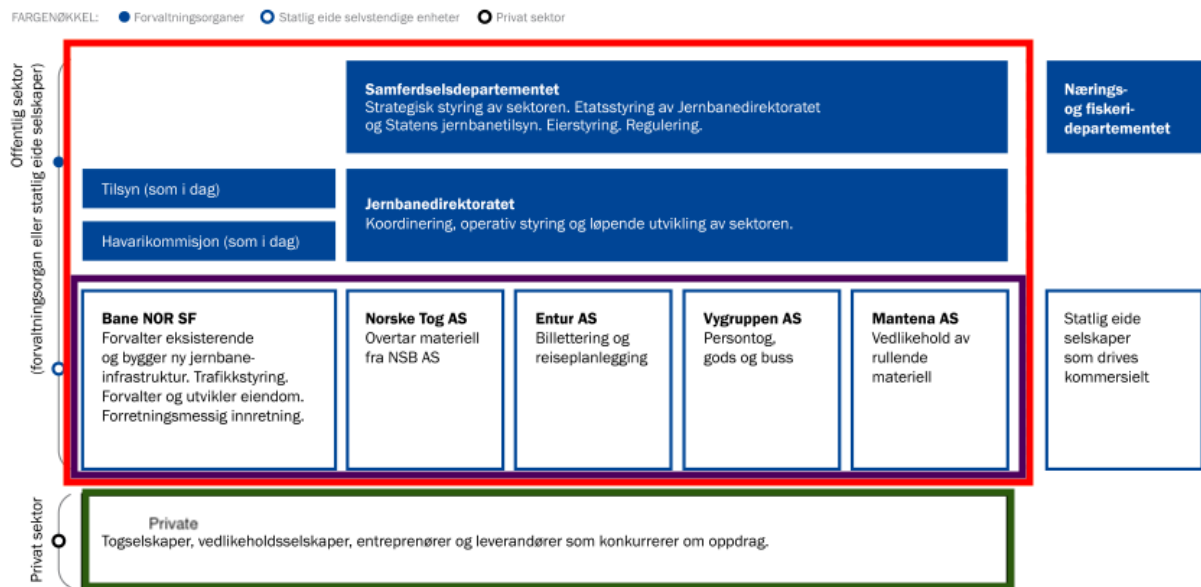


Figure 3: Visualization of the organizational structure in the railway sector. Red, purple and green represent the public, public commercial and private sectors respectively retrieved from (The Railway Directorate, n.d.), edited for clarity.

As shown in the above illustration, the railway has been fragmented as a result of the railway reform, with many services that previously were provided by the state operator, NSB (now Vy), being put up for tender and competition in the private sector, or given to one of the many commercial state owned companies. The discourse used by the critics regarding this fragmentation follows two discursive themes: 1. Impact on customers, and 2. wages and working conditions for railway sector employees. Both themes are frequently compared to the UK, which privatized its railway in 1993 with very mixed results (Welsby & Nichols, 1999).

In an article posted by the Norwegian Locomotive Drivers Union (lokførerforbundet), called “Four myths about british railway privatization”, “positive” aspects about the UK privatization are presented and then “debunked” and summarized. All the points made in the article are seen in context of the Norwegian railway reform. Regarding the impact on customers, it states that

... Privatization has created more expensive and less reliable railway services. The UK has Europe's highest ticket prices. From 2010 to 2014, the average price of season tickets in the UK increased by 27 percent. Two and a half times more than the wage increase in the same period. British commuters pay significantly higher prices than their European counterparts, who mainly travel by publicly owned railway (Grethe Therese Thorsen, 2016).

The implication here is that privatization (or deregulation, in the case of Norway) is presented by proponents as a way of making the railway cheaper for customers, which was not the case in the UK. In a similar vein, it is stated that privatization does not reduce the spending of tax money “Railway costs on taxpayers has more than doubled [since privatization] ... Private operators in the UK are completely dependent on public funding. This does however not stop them from paying dividends to investors” (Grethe Therese Thorsen, 2016). This statement indicates that there is no genuine interest by private operators in improving the railway, even though they receive state funding.

In comparison with the Norwegian Railway, before the railway reform, it is stated that “NSB made a profit of 815 million NOK, which can be payed back into the state as dividend, or reinvested in other [things] that benefit society” (Grethe Therese Thorsen, 2016) which strengthens the narrative that the state should be responsible for railway development. Even in a society with a fully privatized railway, the state has to spend a lot of money on subsidies, which benefit investors, and are not reinvested – the way NSB did in 2015, before competition started. It must be noted that there is a very large socio-cultural and political difference between Norway and the UK, making direct comparison difficult. Nevertheless, it is a very potent argument especially given that one of the private operators from the UK; GoAhead, has won several tenders in Norway, and currently operates the railway between Stavanger and Oslo.

The opposition frequently uses the term ‘privatization’ when describing the railway reform policy. While this would be accurate description in the case of the UK, the reform policy in Norway is better described as ‘deregulation’, meant to open up a tightly regulated market (controlled by the state) to private actors. Privatization usually involves selling of, or transferring state owned assets to private ownership, which happened in the UK in the 1990’s, when the operator British Rail was split up and sold (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1993). The Norwegian railway reform can – at a glance – look somewhat like an attempt at privatization. However, the state still owns the operator Vy, and has only deregulated the railway sector to allow for competition.

Another part of the narrative storyline which the opposition to the railway reform have maintained, is that the fragmentation of the railway sector is bad for the customers. The argument follows that if customers had problems while travelling before, there was only one

company, NSB, which they had to contact. However, after the adoption of the railway reform, there are many different companies involved in maintaining the railway, which can be confusing for the customers (Johansen, 2020). This fragmentation as a result of the railway reform has been criticised as being a “fundamental misunderstanding of competition in the travel sector” (Fridstrøm, 2019). In an opinion article posted in 2019, a researcher at the Institute for Transport Economics (TØI), Lasse Fridstrøm, argues against the fragmentation, saying that the EU regulations (railway packages) which are largely responsible for the railway reform are difficult to implement in a Norwegian context.

Fridstrøm is not directly opposed to the idea of competition on the railway sector, but takes issue with the current implementation through the railway reform. Using the privatization of telecommunication in Norway as example, when Telenor was created and listed on the Oslo stock exchange, he argues that Norway would be better served with partial privatization of the railway: “instead of insisting on competition *on* railway tracks, parliament could in principle adopt competition *along* the tracks. The railway could be re-integrated as one company [...] where most of the sector is subject to one director with a mostly commercial goals” (Fridstrøm, 2019). In this system, he argues that the railway would have to compete with all other forms of transportation.

In addition, it should also be partially privatized (with the state owning a large quantity of shares) and listed on a stock exchange. Competition, the way it was implemented with the railway reform conflicts with Norwegian competition law (konkurranseloven), because it states that competition should be used to make more effective use of societal resources, and not an end to itself (Lovdata, 2004).

The fragmentation of the railway is a disservice to both the environment and transportation. A fully integrated, partially privatized and [stock exchange] listed railway company, which can see operating cost and investment decisions in context, and steer the company towards the most profitable areas, while simultaneously competing with cars, busses, boats and planes (Fridstrøm, 2019)

The narrative in Fridstrøm, 2019 is relatively politically neutral; it both criticizes the governments railway reform policy, which has fragmented the railway sector, but it also manages to pose an alternative form of competition which others in the opposition wont

necessarily find much more attractive. For that reason, it is hard to pinpoint his narrative position besides him being against the railway reform; there is – however, no ideological driver which is present in the rest of the opposition coalition. Even so, due to how critical it is of the railway reform, it is considered to be a part of the anti-deregulation discourse coalition.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, the results of the previous section are summarized and then interpreted in order to see what kinds of implications they could have on both the current state and the future of railway development in Norway.

6.1 Ecological Modernization

The discourse that has characterized the development of the Norwegian railway in recent years can best be described through the concept of ecological modernization (see (M. A. Hajer, 1997; Oels, 2005)). As presented in the literature review, Ecological modernization is a new form of discourse that emerged in the 1970s, combining eco-modernist and neoliberal discourse. This is highly relevant because both the EU and its policies that have affected railway development to such a high degree, as well as the main proponents for the tendering of the railway in Norway are very influenced by neoliberal ideology:

The shift to the discourse of ecological modernization represents a general trend in the western world. That is to say, we can see the same ideas, concepts, divisions, and classifications emerging in different countries and international organizations, such as the UN, the OECD, or the European Union (M. A. Hajer, 1997).

Ecological modernization discourse utilizes economic terms to address environmental problems. Instead of regarding the value of nature itself, it was now put in monetary terms; the question was no longer “how do we reduce pollution?” but “how much pollution can nature endure?”, at the same time reconciling that economic growth and solving environmental problems are possible in principle (M. A. Hajer, 1997). In the 1970’s up until 1980, environmental problems were handled through a ‘react-and-cure’ approach, which was replaced by ‘anticipate-and-prevent’ by the 1980’s (Oels, 2005). At the center of Ecological modernization is the idea that all problems can be solved through economics. Climate change and the consequences are thus seen as an opportunity to re-invent the capitalist system through innovation. This is evidenced by for instance the recent trends in green energy investment, and an increase in battery electric vehicle sales.

Oels (2005) describes what she refers to as a ‘weak’ form of ecological modernization, in which free market governments seek to solve the ecological crisis in the most cost effective fashion, through market deregulation and reduced government interference, which is meant to spur innovation. The EU especially, but also the proponents for competition in the Norwegian railway sector communicate this discourse to some degree. The Norwegian railway before the reform is presented as ineffective, and expensive; a problem that only can be solved through competition in the sector, which will lead to innovation and cheaper transportation, causing more people to use the railway and thus reducing emissions.

The railway packages introduced by the EU attempt to standardize all the railway systems across its member states, to make trade and travel easier for passengers and freight. They are a part of the European Green Deal, the EU environmental policy plan. At the current state, the European rail network is described by the European railway agency as a ‘patchwork’ of interlinked national systems (Pagand, 2020) which makes the system ineffective. The EU is one of the largest organizations where ecological modernization discourse is used, because environmental issues are treated as issues of inefficiency which need to be fixed by the right economic incentives.

6.2 Political Influence on Railway Development

The railway reform is without doubt the biggest shift in Norwegian railway policy since the restructuring of the sector in 1996, when NSB (now Vy) was split up, separating railway operation from infrastructure development. What are the reasons behind this shift? The Norwegian railway has for most of its existence been state owned, which has had full control over the railway sector. The most apparent influences on development are political. The left side of Norwegian politics, together with the various unions, has always favoured state control over important societal functions, such as the railway. They view the railway as a common good that should not be used to make profit, but should instead be subsidized by the state to provide a reliable service throughout the country.

Norway has historically had a very strong labor movement, with every sector of the economy having their own union (fagorganisasjon), subject to the national workers union Landsorganisasjonen (LO). This is also the case in the railway sector, where Norges Jernbane Forbund (NJF) and Norsk Lokomotivmannsforbund (NLF), represent workers and locomotive

drivers respectively (Gisle, 2020). While unions in general tend to lean towards the left, where workers rights are more focused on, they are by no means all leftist organizations. Both unions (NJF and NLF) and LO, as well as most of the parliamentary opposition (excluding FRP) are against opening the railway sector for public tendering, which they often describe as privatization, though deregulation is a more fitting term. This opposition movement constitutes one of the two largest narrative coalitions in Norwegian railway development. In context of the National Policy Framework (Shanahan et al., 2011), this coalition portrays itself as “losing” by trying to change the status quo, which was enacted by their opposition.

The winning, and dominating discourse coalition, is the conservative government and its supporting parties in parliament. They are portrayed as such because they have changed the status quo in the railway sector through the railway reform, which has allowed increasing amounts of the sector to be tendered to both public and private actors. This ideal of market competition has roots in neoliberal ideology, in which state ownership and regulation is seen as an impediment to profit and effectiveness. Where once NSB had a monopoly over the entire sector, they are now re-branded as Vy, and have been reduced to the role of state railway operator, having to compete with private operators on the tenders put forward by Jernbanedirektoratet.

These political differences and disagreements can potentially harm the development of the railway, which is one of the only forms of transportation considered to be truly emission free. An interesting compromise to the problem has been suggested by Fridstrøm (2019). Competition in the railway sector can understandably cause problems, when companies have to cut cost and employee wages to win tenders put forward by the state (Støre, 2021). However, if the sector was re-integrated (or defragmented) to a similar organizational state as before, and then listed on the stock market as a partially privatized company, the railway could compete with other forms of transportation in the transportation sector. The stock market listing would then incentivise the profit maximization aspect that the dominating discourse coalition strives to achieve, while the state still holds a majority of shares, satisfying the coalition against competition.

Many state owned assets have been partially privatized in the last 30 years, many of which were completed under a left wing government. Arbeiderpartiet has for instance privatized the

state oil company Statoil (now equinor), Norsk Hydro, DNB and Telenor, to incentivize growth and allow them to establish themselves internationally (Krekling, 2017). One might argue that doing something similar to the railway sector would be a positive outcome for both sides of the debate. There is, however, a very big barrier stopping this idea dead in its tracks: the EU, and Norway's EFTA/EEA membership.

Norway is part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and is a member of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA). These agreements allow Norwegians and Norwegian products to move across the EU (free movement for freight, services, people and capital) unhindered, even though Norway technically is not a member of the EU. These benefits do however come with a caveat: some EU laws and policies are included in the agreements, and have to be enacted by member countries should they want to retain member status. The railway packages, which have had such an impact on the railway sector in Norway are part of EFTA, and need to be implemented by law.

Norway has implemented three and is working on implementing the fourth package. These packages have been implemented partially because Norway has to - in accordance with the EFTA agreement, but also because it coincided with the politics of the conservative government. With the upcoming general election in September 2021, the decision on railway package four is very likely to be accepted by the conservative coalition in government, making it very difficult to change. This is reminiscent of the discourse used by proponents of railway competition, specifically the statement made by conservative politician Linda Helleland in 2014 where she compared her party's politics to "squeezing toothpaste out of the toothpaste tube" (Støre, 2021).

It highlights how ideologically charged the discourse is; whether a policy is right or wrong loses meaning, and is replaced by the need to push through political ideology. If (or when) the fourth EU railway package passes in parliament, it will be very difficult to regain state control of the railway, even though several parties have promised to put an end to the railway reform, should they win the general election (Aspøy, 2020).

EU membership has always been a contentious topic in Norwegian society. Two referendums were held in 1972 and 1994, both of which were rejected. Instead, Norway became part of the European Economic Area, which allows access to the open market, but has been argued by

many to be a worse option than just being a member. Ex-foreign minister to Norway, Espen Barth Eide, (2015) argues that being part of the EEA comes at a heavy price. The main issue is that Norway has to abide by EU legislation without participating in the decisionmaking process in Brussels, which has led to the adoption of three quarters of EU legislative acts into Norwegian legislation (Eide, 2015). Even though EU critics outside of Norway have praised the ‘Norwegian Deal’ with the EU as something extraordinary, the largest benefits Norway has through the EEA, is access to the open market, and free movement of goods and citizens across the EU, while adhering to legislation that not necessarily represents Norwegian interests.

While the development of the Norwegian railway is politically controlled by the government and parliament, the European Union does have a very large impact on it (as discussed in the previous chapter), which might not be immediately obvious to a layperson, who might think that the current trend of railway tendering is just part of the governments policy plan, which it is. The largest proponents for competition in the railway sector, however, is the EU; and Norway has to follow EU regulations due to being part of the EEA. While there definitely is high levels of support for competition in right wing politics, as showcased in the findings chapter, it is a case of aligned policy goals between the EU and the conservative Norwegian government. The question is, whether the railway packages that have been adopted are even useful in a Norwegian context.

A study conducted on behalf of the Community of European Railway (CER) in 2012, has looked at different organizational structures in railway sectors across European countries. The findings suggest that vertical separation (which in the case of Norway is the separation of the state operator, NSB from infrastructure development into two separate entities) does not have a large impact on cost. Furthermore, no evidence has been found that would support the claim that vertical separation is needed to make competition beneficial; there is no ‘one-size, fits all’ way of structuring the railway (Velde et al., 2012). Different circumstances require different solutions, making the EU railway packages less than ideal, because they impose a structure that might not necessarily work for all countries, and can increase costs dramatically:

A decision to impose vertical separation throughout Europe would raise costs by at least €5.8 billion/year for no accompanying benefits. If rail traffic density rises, as would be a result of the European Commission’s strategy to raise rail

mode share, then the costs of imposing complete vertical separation everywhere will rise dramatically (Velde et al., 2012).

Vertical separation is a key element in the railway packages, leading in some cases to the EU to start infringement proceeding against member states which refused to implement the ‘separation model’, despite a lack of evidence supporting it. In fact, data collected between 1994-2009 from nine European countries, shows that implementing vertical separation has left countries worse off than others, which retained the integrated model (Laabsch & Sanner, 2012). The Norwegian railway sector has been vertically separated since 1996, and has been further fragmented through the railway reform of 2015/17, in order to create fair conditions for both private and state operators.

Railway package four, which is likely to pass parliament, will allow the tendering of even more railway tracks. This is despite evidence pointing towards evidence of low feasibility of vertically separated systems, which is at the heart of the railway packages (Laabsch & Sanner, 2012; Velde et al., 2012). Therefore, it is in the interest of all EU/EEA member states, that they are allowed to choose how their railway is structured, because the railway packages don’t work in all countries. It should also be possible to use the holding company model (a mix between vertical separation and vertical integration), which is most aptly described by Fridstrøm (2019), where the state owns a majority of a holding company, which is listed on the stock market, and maintains ownership over the railway operator and infrastructure development.

6.3 The Path Dependence Dilemma

Discourse regarding the tendering of the Norwegian railway has been very polarized, with two coalitions staunchly defending their positions. The policy created by the proponents of tendering, to a large extent reflects the discourse which has been used to ‘sell’ the reform outside of the policy realm. From a researchers point of view, little has been done to critically reflect around these important changes, and - judging by the discourse, the debate is for the most part about achieving ideological goals no matter what the cost. The thesis has largely focused on the proponents of railway tendering. This was done because they are the ‘winning’ discourse coalition; they have successfully changed the status quo, and are currently maintaining it, if the agreement regarding the fourth railway package are anything to go by (Bentzrød, 2021).

The opposition is also very vocal, but their goal is very far from achievable at this point. In fact, they lost the battle in 1996, when vertical separation of NSB was conducted, or maybe even earlier, when Norway joined the European Economic Area. In any case, it is very unlikely that they will be able to reverse much of the policy of their predecessors, should a left wing government be elected in 2021, the EEA membership guarantees this. The railway reform has truly squeezed all of the toothpaste out of the toothpaste tube, and the government has won an ideological victory, but at what cost?

The Norwegian railway sector has become increasingly path dependent, starting with the vertical separation, and increasing with each railway package – culminating in the railway reform of 2015/17. Norway is not a member of the EU but has to adhere to certain EU policies to continue having access to the free market through EEA, which cannot be influenced due to not being a member.

It is quite the paradoxical situation Norway is in. The EU railway regulations (and other EU regulations for that matter) are potentially hindering the development of the railway by forcing vertical separation and competition, presented as a positive change by the government. How can this be solved? Can we leave the EEA, or ignore EU legislation? Out of the question, one has only to look at the state of the UK after Brexit to see how bad that could be. The pro-deregulation discourse coalition truly seems to have won; the reform has passed and so have all the railway packages. All that remains now, is to wait and see.

7. Conclusion

This thesis investigates the policy dynamics in Norwegian railway development over the last 3 decades. More specifically, the aim is to look into how the railway has featured politically, and how narratives have changed over time, with key stakeholders driving the issue forward and framing it discursively.

The previous two chapters have shown how polarized Norwegian railway development discourse has become. Two distinct discourse coalitions have been identified, both of which are mainly driven by ideological convictions. The conservative government and its supporting parties in parliament has been identified as the ‘winning’ coalition, responsible for creating a pro-deregulation narrative, in which vertical separation and deregulation in the railway sector are presented as good opportunities to foster competition and to reduce state spending, in accordance with neoliberal ideals. This winning coalition has successfully passed a major reform programme in the railway sector in 2015, which has put most of the sector up for tender, and opened the door for full competition between public and private actors on railway tracks.

The findings show that there is an ideological divide in the discourse, with each side wanting to go in the opposite direction. This has implications for the future of the railway, because it will be difficult to create a good, working railway system – which is absolutely needed – when development is ultimately decided by parliament, where two ideologies are in a constant tug-of-war. The primary objective of development should be to make it competitive with other forms of transportation, because at the current stage, it is outcompeted by most other forms of transportation, especially airplanes for travel over longer distances.

The majority of the parliamentary opposition, as well as the various railway unions have been identified as the losing discourse coalition. The narrative for the losing coalition is pro-state ownership and regulation; the railway is viewed as a public good that should remain in public hands, not to be exploited for profit. Railway unions are amongst the more vocal opposition to the railway reform, fearing that it will negatively impact wages and working conditions for railway workers.

The railway reform is seen in context of the EU railway packages, which is EU legislation that all members of the European Economic Area (EEA) have to adopt. The goal behind the railway

packages is to standardize the railway across all European countries, to allow all operators to operate in any EU/EEA country, as well as making border crossing easier. To achieve this, the packages ‘force’ vertical separation of railway operators from track maintenance and development. This is meant to allow fair competition between private and public operators, which have to compete on tenders put forward by the state.

The discourse narrative used by the EU and the conservative government are compared to the theoretical concept of ‘ecological modernization’, which proposes that environmental policy is increasingly influenced by neoliberal discourse. This means that governments seek to solve the ecological crisis in the most cost effective fashion, through market deregulation and reduced government interference. The railway is one of the only forms of transportation which is completely emission free, making it a vital part of Norway’s emission reduction strategy. The railway reform is a massive deregulation of the Norwegian railway sector, which – if it fails – can have serious consequences for the environment.

This deregulation started shortly after Norway joined the EEA, with the vertical separation of the state operator from infrastructure maintenance, leading to the adoption of the railway packages and ultimately the railway reform in 2015, when the sector was sufficiently deregulated for competition to start. Studies have shown that certain aspects of the railway packages are not applicable to all countries, the most important of which is vertical separation, one of the cornerstones of the railway packages. Due to Norway’s membership in the EEA, the railway packages must be adopted, and due to the conservative government, it is set to pass in parliament. The parliamentary opposition has promised to reverse the reform should they be elected. However, unless some large changes are made to the EEA agreement, there is little that can be done. This leads to the conclusion that the Norwegian railway sector has become highly path dependent.

7.1 Limitations and Further Research

Finally, this chapter presents some of the limitations that were encountered while writing this thesis, as well as some ideas for further studies that could benefit the field of policy discourse.

The findings presented in this thesis reflect the discourse – meaning the things that have been said, about the development of the Norwegian railway. As such, they do not represent an

‘objective truth’, and are most useful for creating an understanding about ‘why’ the development of the railway has been so complicated in Norway, compared to other European countries. One of the limitations of this study is that most of the focus has been on the winning pro-deregulation discourse coalition, as they are the most interesting of the two from a research perspective. This is because they have successfully passed a major reform policy, which according to their narrative is going to improve the railway sector. While the pro-deregulation coalition is undoubtedly also driven by ideological convictions, they have less impact in the policy arena at this time. However, should the government be replaced by a center-left coalition in the 2021 election, it would be interesting to conduct a more in-depth study of their discourse. Another limitation is regarding the implications of the railway reform policy. While it was implemented in 2017, operation didn’t start until 2019 (Wisting, 2020a). This means that it is difficult to conclude with any certainty what implications the reform has on the sector in the long term. Time will show.

Further studies should be conducted in the future, to determine what kind of an impact the railway packages and the railway reform have had. Cross-country comparisons would also be interesting, as long as factors like sociocultural and political differences are taken into consideration in the discourse analysis. Exceptionally interesting cases for comparative studies would be Switzerland, where the railway is still vertically integrated and unaffected by the EU railway packages. Switzerland, which is well known for its railway, controls around 80% of it through the state operator, with the rest being privately operated. Each operator owns and maintains their own railroad tracks, giving access to other operators when needed. Sweden on the other hand, is very similar to the Norwegian system. Here, the railway was vertically separated in 1988, which until that time was fully controlled by the state operator SJ, with the being increasingly deregulated as time went by. Due to how similar the system is compared to Norway, it could be of interest to study the narratives that drove this development.

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