



UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN

Department of Administration and Organization Theory

Master of Philosophy in Public Administration
Research Thesis

December 2018

Legitimation Processes of environmental NGOs

Florian Wingens

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1. THE LEGITIMATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS	7
1.2. THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THIS STUDY	8
1.3. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES	9
1.4. ESTABLISHED AND CHALLENGING PERSPECTIVES ON LEGITIMACY	9
2. RESEARCHING LEGITIMACY	11
2.1. LEGITIMACY AS PROPERTY	12
2.2. LEGITIMACY AS PROCESS	15
2.3. LEGITIMACY AS PERCEPTION	19
2.4. LEGITIMACY OF NGOS	24
3. THE ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS	28
3.1. FRAMTIDEN I VÅRE HENDER	28
3.1.1. <i>Financial overview</i>	29
3.1.2. <i>Strategic focus</i>	30
3.2. NATURVERNFORBUNDET	31
3.2.1. <i>Financial overview</i>	33
3.2.2. <i>Strategic focus</i>	33
3.3. THE LEGITIMATION OF FIVH AND NATURVERNFORBUNDET	34
4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	35
4.1. RESEARCH QUESTION	35
4.2. ACTIVE AND PASSIVE LEGITIMACY	35
4.3. SUDDABY AND GREENWOOD'S (2005) RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF LEGITIMACY	37
4.3.1. <i>Ontological Theorization</i>	38
4.3.2. <i>Rational Theorization</i>	39
4.3.3. <i>Teleological Theorization</i>	40
4.3.4. <i>Cosmological Theorization</i>	41
4.3.5. <i>Value-based Theorization</i>	41
4.3.6. <i>Adaptions of Suddaby and Greenwood</i>	42
5. METHODOLOGY	43
5.1. UNIT OF ANALYSIS	43
5.2. OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE LEGITIMATION PROCESS	44
5.3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY	44
5.4. CASE STUDY TYPE	45
5.5. ANALYTIC STRATEGY	46
5.5.1. <i>Adaptive theory approach</i>	47
5.5.2. <i>Analysing Documents</i>	48
5.6. QUALITATIVE DATA SOURCES	49
5.6.1. <i>Annual Reports</i>	50
5.6.2. <i>Thematic reports</i>	50
5.6.3. <i>Letters and public statements</i>	50
5.7. CODING OF THE DATA	51
5.8. CONCERNS OF RESEARCH QUALITY	53
5.8.1. <i>Construct Validity</i>	54
5.8.2. <i>Internal Validity</i>	55
5.8.3. <i>External Validity</i>	55
5.8.4. <i>Reliability</i>	56
5.9. CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY	56
6. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF LEGITIMATION PROCESSES WITHIN FIVH	58
6.1. CASE 1: FRAMTIDEN I VÅRE HENDER	59
6.2. PASSIVE LEGITIMATION	59
6.2.1. <i>Ontological theorization</i>	60

6.2.2.	<i>Rational Theorization</i>	61
6.2.3.	<i>Teleological Theorization</i>	63
6.2.4.	<i>Cosmological Theorization</i>	65
6.2.5.	<i>Value-based Theorization</i>	66
6.2.6.	<i>Creating a Professional Identity</i>	67
6.3.	ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	68
6.3.1.	<i>Ontological Theorization</i>	68
6.3.2.	<i>Rational Theorization</i>	69
6.3.3.	<i>Teleological Theorization</i>	70
6.3.4.	<i>Cosmological Theorization</i>	71
6.3.5.	<i>Value-based Theorization</i>	72
6.3.6.	<i>Us vs. Them</i>	73
6.4.	FIVH'S STRATEGICAL COMMUNICATION	74
7.	LEGITIMATION PROCESSES WITHIN NATURVERNFORBUNDET	75
7.1.	CASE 2: NATURVERNFORBUNDET	75
7.2.	PASSIVE LEGITIMATION	75
7.2.1.	<i>Ontological Theorization</i>	76
7.2.2.	<i>Rational Theorization</i>	77
7.2.3.	<i>Teleological Theorization</i>	79
7.2.4.	<i>Cosmological Theorization</i>	80
7.2.5.	<i>Value-Based Theorization</i>	82
7.2.6.	<i>A different battleground</i>	82
7.3.	ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	84
7.3.1.	<i>Ontological Theorization</i>	84
7.3.2.	<i>Rational Theorization</i>	86
7.3.3.	<i>Teleological Theorization</i>	88
7.3.4.	<i>Cosmological Theorization</i>	89
7.3.5.	<i>Value-based Theorization</i>	91
7.3.6.	<i>Missing Effort</i>	92
7.4.	NATURVERNFORBUNDET'S STRATEGICAL COMMUNICATION.....	92
8.	COMPARING FIVH AND NATURVERNFORBUNDET	94
8.1.	PASSIVE LEGITIMATION.....	94
8.2.	ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	95
8.3.	PASSIVE AND ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	96
8.4.	MIXED SEGMENTS	98
9.	COMPARING FIVH AND NATURVERNFORBUNDET	99
9.1.	PASSIVE LEGITIMATION.....	99
9.2.	ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	100
9.3.	PASSIVE AND ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	101
9.4.	MIXED SEGMENTS	103
10.	CONCLUDING ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	104
10.1.	SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	105
10.2.	A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PASSIVE AND ACTIVE LEGITIMATION	106
10.3.	HOW DO ENVIRONMENTAL NGOs ENGAGE IN LEGITIMATION PROCESSES?	106
10.3.1.	<i>Passive Legitimation Processes</i>	107
10.3.2.	<i>Active Legitimation Processes</i>	107
10.3.3.	<i>Passive and Active Legitimation</i>	108
10.4.	BLENDING OF THEORIES IN RESEARCH.....	109
10.5.	FUTURE RESEARCH	110
10.6.	CONCLUSION	111
11.	REFERENCES	113

LISTS OF TABLES

TABLE 1: THE THREE DOMINATING RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES	12
TABLE 2: LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES (WALTON 2012)	36
TABLE 3: DOCUMENTARY DATA SOURCES	51
TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION BY RHETORIC STRATEGY – FIVH PASSIVE.....	59
TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION BY RHETORICAL STRATEGY – FIVH ACTIVE	68
TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION BY RHETORICAL STRATEGY – NATURVERNFORBUNDET PASSIVE	75
TABLE 7: DISTRIBUTION BY RHETORICAL STRATEGY – NATURVERNFORBUNDET ACTIVE	84
TABLE 8: ADAPTIVE THEORY RESEARCH MIX	109

LISTS OF DIAGRAMS

DIAGRAM 1: LEGITIMACY TYPOLOGY (SUCHMAN 1995)	13
DIAGRAM 2: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FIVH.....	29
DIAGRAM 3: FINANCIAL STRUCTURE FIVH	29
DIAGRAM 4: ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE NATURVERNFORBUNDET. THE THICK ARROWS SYMBOLIZE HOW AN ORGAN IS CONSTITUTIONALIZED. THE THIN ARROWS SHOW WHO GETS TO SEND DELEGATES TO WHICH ASSEMBLY/CONVENTION	32
DIAGRAM 5: FINANCIAL STRUCTURE NATURVERNFORBUNDET	33
DIAGRAM 6: INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	42
DIAGRAM 7: AN EMBEDDED, MULTI-CASE STUDY. THE CIRCLE AIMS TO ILLUSTRATE HOW THE CASES ARE INTEGRATED IN THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS (LEGITIMATION PROCESS).	46

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff and faculty within the Department of Administration and Organization Theory at the university of Bergen. In particular, I would like to thank Steinar Askvik and Ishtiaq, who in their roles as supervisors, have provided valuable insight and guidance during my whole degree.

I would further like to thank all interviewees, who offered their valuable time to participate in this study. Even though your interviews ultimately could not be included in this study, you contributed substantially and therefore, I am grateful.

I would also like to thank the student culture organization Kvarteret for how I was integrated in the Norwegian society through becoming a volunteer there. Every aspect of my social life during my time in Bergen was so much better due to the friends I found here.

Most of all, I want to thank my family, especially my parents. Whether it was participating in an exchange program with Bergen during my bachelor's or when I decided that I would like to come back for my master's degree as well, you did not only support me unconditionally, you encouraged me. For this, I am deeply grateful, and I dedicate this thesis to you!

ABSTRACT

This case study examines the legitimation processes of two environmental NGOs in Norway. Building on an extensive discussion on the conceptualization of legitimacy, this embedded multi-case study assesses both passive and active legitimation processes. The study views legitimation as a process rather than as a property. This means that legitimacy is an interactive process of social construction which makes it highly dependent on an organization's communication. The study is set out to examine, whether the selected NGOs engage in passive or active legitimation processes. Due to the legitimacy-perspective's dependency on communication, existing sets of legitimation strategies are supplemented by various forms of theorization serving as rhetorical strategies.

The study finds that the previous categorical distinction between passive and active legitimation is not mutual exclusive in certain contexts. Thus, the study concludes with the claim that passive and active legitimation processes can rather be interdependent. The study furthermore presents findings about the rhetorical strategies' impact on legitimation processes.

1. Introduction

Since the establishment of structured, hierarchical societies, (political) legitimacy has always been a core concept for political regimes. Whereas in ancient times, legitimacy often was seen as God-given, philosophers such as John Locke began to establish the modern understanding *consent of the governed*. This term refers to the thought that a government's use of state power is justified by the consent of the governed society (Ashcraft 1991, p. 524). Picked up by and further established through philosophers such as John Milton, David Hume or George Mason, the concept of *consent of the governed* found its way into UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948:

"The will of the people shall be the basis of authority of government."

Article 21, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

While the concept of legitimacy in context of societal structure has been established for several centuries, it is relatively new in context of private or semi-private organizations. For a long time, private organizations – especially private businesses – have been viewed as “social machines designed for the efficient transformation of material inputs into material outputs” (Suchman 1995, p. 571), presenting a very limited picture of organizational behaviour. This perspective changed with the elemental work of scholars such as Parsons (1960) or Weber (1968) who transferred legitimacy from the public to the private sector and created “an anchor-point” (Suchman 1995, p. 571) for scholars examining normative and cognitive concepts that affect organizational behaviour.

Today, legitimacy is a widely acknowledged requirement for any public or private actors that engage in interactions with others. But despite its popularity in the fields of management theory, public administration and sociology, many contradicting definitions exist. This is often due to an insufficiently illustrated context, in which such studies occur.

As private actors, NGOs underlie typical rules of the free market as well. It has been widely acknowledged that NGOs rely on financial resources in order to secure their non-profit establishment (Lefroy & Tsarenko 2013; Runte et al. 2009; Seitanidi & Ryan

2007). A common misconception is that NGOs do not sell a product and therefore cannot be compared to the for-profit sector. In reality however, NGOs produce an output for which they typically allocate financial resources. The only difference is that not the recipients of those outputs pay for a certain product or service but donors or investors. This is why these organizations can be assessed from a classic managerial perspective. A typical challenge in for-profit sectors are external pressures such as sector competition and market share or public reputation. These questions have received much less attention in relation to the non-profit sector: how do NGOs adapt to external pressures?

External pressures can be sudden changes of the political landscape in a country (Dupuy et al. 2014). But external pressures can also result from gradual societal and political changes or a challenging environment in general. Gradual shifts of the political landscape are far more common in stable democracies than radical changes. Nevertheless, such natural developments do not seem to be of much interest in the academic literature. Thus, the scholarly work on legitimation of NGOs in politically stable systems is rather unique.

The following sections of this introduction offer some relevant background on legitimation of NGOs and a short overview of the selected organizations. Furthermore, the research problem will be addressed accordingly. The succeeding chapters of the thesis begin with an extensive theoretical background on various legitimacy perspectives. This background lays the foundation for the theoretical concepts that are further used in the study. In chapter 3, the case study will be defined in more detail before the methodological groundwork is presented in chapter 4. In chapter 5, the collected data is presented, whose analysis will be outlined in chapter 6. Finally, chapter 7 concludes the thesis with several contributions to the academic field of legitimation research and organizational behaviour.

1.1. The legitimation of Non-Governmental Organizations

With begin of the high tide of Institutionalism, Decentralization, and Privatization from the 1950s on, policy making, and governing procedures changed. After the first wave of emerging global institutions and international organizations, in the 1980s, the era of

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began. In the past thirty years, NGOs have risen to become one of today's main actors in terms of influencing regional and international societies and affecting public policies. Indefinite small and large organizations, connecting the civil and the administrative sector, through being committed to morally desirable goals, have created a glowing reputation for the NGO-sector. Hence, it is little surprising that NGOs were often "seen as a 'magic bullet' which could be fired off in any direction and still find its target" (Lister 2003, p. 175).

But with all the enthusiasm, it is easy to forget that NGOs remain private actors without any form of democratic legitimation – in contrast to public actors (Collingwood & Logister 2005, p. 175). Due to their deep involvement in grass-root activities, corporate partnerships, and regional, national, and international policy making, NGOs have not just become increasingly powerful but have at the same time started facing questions and challenges regarding their legitimacy. The concept of legitimacy is widely established in various academic disciplines such as political science (Lipset 1958), organization studies (Suchman 1995) and psychology (Tyler 2006). However, the legitimation of NGOs has long remained underemphasized. Existing studies about NGO legitimacy mainly focused on legitimation crises in terms of 'lack of accountability', bad outputs, or ineffectiveness and inefficiency. In short, studies about NGO legitimation crises typically analyse internal organizational failure (Collingwood & Logister 2005; Rusca & Schwartz 2012; Walton et al. 2016), which often leads to a simplification of legitimacy and the context in which it occurs.

1.2. The Non-Governmental Organizations in this Study

The three examined organizations in this study are all non-Governmental organizations from Norway which are engaged in the environmental sector. Two of them are large, member-based organizations that engage in both grassroots activities and on the regional and national political level. The third one is a foundation which is active on both national and international levels. Whereas the first two NGOs are quite similar to each other, the third one marks a clear contrast. With the inclusion of the third one, the study aims to emphasize not only the conceptual but also the practical diversity of legitimation.

1.3. Research Problem and Objectives

While legitimacy is widely acknowledged as being an important corner stone in any modern organization, many scholars have focused on NGOs which either are located the third world or – if located in industrialized nations – are active in the development sector. Thus, this study aims to analyse the legitimation of environmental NGOs in Norway. Norway is often seen as one of the most progressive countries in terms of environmental protection and the use of renewable energies. Testing established legitimacy concepts in this context is therefore the main objective of the research.

In addition, the second objective of the study is to shift the unit of analysis on the process of legitimation. As explained in further detail later, this fairly underexplored research perspective offers some valuable contributions to the legitimacy research. However, despite of some case studies that (partly) have adapted this perspective, it still seems to lack descriptive representation. Hence, this study aims to contribute to further establish chosen perspective.

The lack of descriptive representation requires an approach that has been described as *adaptive theory approach* by Layder (1998). This approach calls for “[the use of] both inductive and deductive procedures for developing and elaborating theory” (p. 133). Existing literature and few case studies contribute to the research design of this study and guide the analytical process whereas new findings will develop the existing theory in terms of robustness.

1.4. Established and challenging perspectives on legitimacy

As mentioned, there are several perspectives on legitimacy that derive from different research backgrounds (Lipset 1958, Weber 1968, Suchman 1995, Zelditch 2001, Tyler 2006). Thus, as described in previous dissertations at this faculty, “important theoretical implications should be considered whenever designing and carrying out research within this field” (Hathaway 2012, p. 4). Even though Hathaway examined trust, his implications are just as valid for legitimacy, as this concept as well is shaped by various academic perspectives. These academic backgrounds and their implications must be addressed as well as three elementary questions: 1) *What is*

legitimacy? (2) *Where does legitimacy occur?* (3) *How does legitimacy occur?* These three questions will be focused on in the following chapter and in context of the various research perspectives.

However, before devoting more to the relevant research perspectives in the next chapter, the academic development of legitimacy needs to be addressed. The widespread contribution of scholars from various disciplines has led to a divergent perception of legitimacy. Scholars cannot even be classified by academic disciplines such as political science or sociology as one can often find larger intradisciplinary than interdisciplinary differences. Political legitimacy, for example, which goes back to philosophers of the 17th century such as John Locke, has been a core concept of both promoting fascism and democracy. Political philosopher and legal mastermind of the German faciscm, Carl Schmitt questioned democratically elected governments by asking “how parliamentary government [can] make for law and legality, when a 49 percent minority accepts as politically legitimate the political will of a 51 per cent majority” (Schmitt 1932). Political sociologist Seymour Lipset (1959) on the other hand viewed legitimacy as “affective and evaluative” (p. 86), depending “upon the ways in which the key issues which have historically divided the society have been resolved” (*ibid.*). This view, already pointing towards some aspects of the several years later in collaboration with Stein Rokkan developed *Cleavage Theory* (Lipset/Rokkan 1967), emphasizes a liberal democratic dimension.

Whereas many political scientists and philosophers treated legitimacy on the macro-dimension, sociologists, management theorists and especially psychologists shifted the focus towards the micro-dimension. Especially psychologists focus on the individual that legitimizes an authority or a simple action but regarding it as rightful or proper (Tyler 2006, Zelditch 2001). While this perspective also views legitimacy as being evaluative, the main difference is that the evaluator, meaning the individual or society that is responding to an authority or an action, is in the focus of interest. There are basically three perspectives that emerge from the multidisciplinary approaches. All three are being covered in context of the three previously mentioned questions in the next chapter.

2. Researching Legitimacy

According to Weber (1968, p. 35-7), legitimacy and validity are interconnected. Thus, legitimacy can stem from a) *tradition* – something that is considered valid and legitimate because it always has been, b) *affection* – which roots in emotional faith, c) *value-based rationality* – something that is deducted as absolute, or d) *legality* – which either can stem from a mutual agreement between all relevant actors or from authority. In the last cast, where legitimacy stems from authority, not the action is seen legitimate but the authority who enforces it as for example the executive branch in a democracy. Weber's definition is interesting as he placed an isolated action in the centre of his definition meaning that every activity needs to be addressed individually in terms of legitimacy.

Later scholars shifted the focus from isolated actions to the actors claiming that organizations as a whole are units of legitimation. This development has led to various research streams. As a quick summary of these developments, it can be stated that legitimacy can hardly be conceptualized universally. Various perspectives lead to different approaches and different definitions. Thus, it has become an unclear concept which makes it difficult to compare theoretical and empirical contributions. The latest attempt to bring clarity to this concept was done by Suddaby et al. (2017). By asking three central questions, the authors present three “configurations of legitimacy” (p. 451). (1) *What is legitimacy?* (2) *Where does legitimacy occur?* (3) *How does legitimacy occur?* (Ibid.). I tend to follow their distinction for mainly two reasons – its topicality and its respect for different perspectives. The following research perspectives are presented below before I attempt to derive relevant theoretical outlines for the NGO sector.

	Legitimacy as Property	Legitimacy as Process	Legitimacy as Perception
Definition	Legitimacy is an asset, thus a measurable quantity. It is a capacity that an organization has or has not.	Legitimacy is a process of social interaction, that occurs in its temporal context.	Legitimacy is a social judgment or evaluation of a legitimacy object (i.e. organization, organizational behavior, a product)
Where Does it Occur	Between an organization and its environment. Mainly at the organizational level.	Between multiple social actors. Mainly at the field level.	Between individual and collective actors. Mainly at the micro-level but multi-level approach.
How Does it Occur	Contingency view: attributes of an organization fit or fit not to the expectation of its environment	Agency view: Change agents and other social actors construct a context to legitimize change.	Judgment view: Perceptions, judgments, and actions of individuals under the influence of collective level judgments (validity)
Criticism	Organizations and their environments are seen as stable and universal. Legitimacy is often used as an independent variable instead of being the research object itself.	The approach differentiates between agents (active) and audiences (reactive) → underemphasizes the power of environments/audiences. Empirically, the approach is almost entirely based on case studies.	Overemphasis on micro-social explanations for legitimation → forgets about organizational side (macro level)
Typically applied to	Corporations and for-profit organizations; less NGOs	Social Movements; New product categories; NGOs	Organizations' environments and <u>surrundings</u>
Main Literature	Aldrich & Fiol (1994); Scott (1995); Suchman (1995); Zimmerman & Zeitz (2002)	Sine & Lee (2009); Suddaby & Greenwood (2005); Navis & Glynn (2010)	Bitektine (2011); Bitektine & Haack (2015); Haack et al. (2015)

Table 1: The three dominating research perspectives

2.1. Legitimacy as Property

The most established and dominant configuration of legitimacy is without doubt the view that legitimacy can be possessed in “measurable quantity” (Ibid., p. 453). It is thus seen as a property or an asset. This approach is based on Max Weber (1968) who defined three types of legitimacy in the context of authority. Traditional legitimacy occurs if the authority has been experienced for a long time. Charismatic legitimacy occurs if the authority is backed up by community trust. Rational-legal legitimacy occurs if the authority is based on practical logic. Weber’s typology has become especially influential in management studies, where measurable and quantifiable concepts are always welcome. Thus, management scholars have put great efforts into developing categories of legitimacy (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 454).

One of the ground-breaking works was provided by Suchman (1995, p. 574), who stated that “legitimacy is possessed objectively, yet created subjectively.” However, Suchman admitted that legitimacy is “socially constructed”, representing “a reaction of observers to the organization as they see it” (Ibid.). Based on that assumption, Suchman developed three types of legitimacy: Pragmatic, moral and cognitive legitimacy (p. 577). Pragmatic legitimacy stems from the self-interest of an organization’s audience and can be simply expressed through support for a certain

policy based on the expected value of this policy to the audience (exchange legitimacy). A more long-term oriented type of pragmatic legitimacy (influence legitimacy) is achieved when the audience sees the organization as “being responsive to their larger interests” (Ibid., p. 578).

Legitimacy as Property – Typology by Suchman (1995)

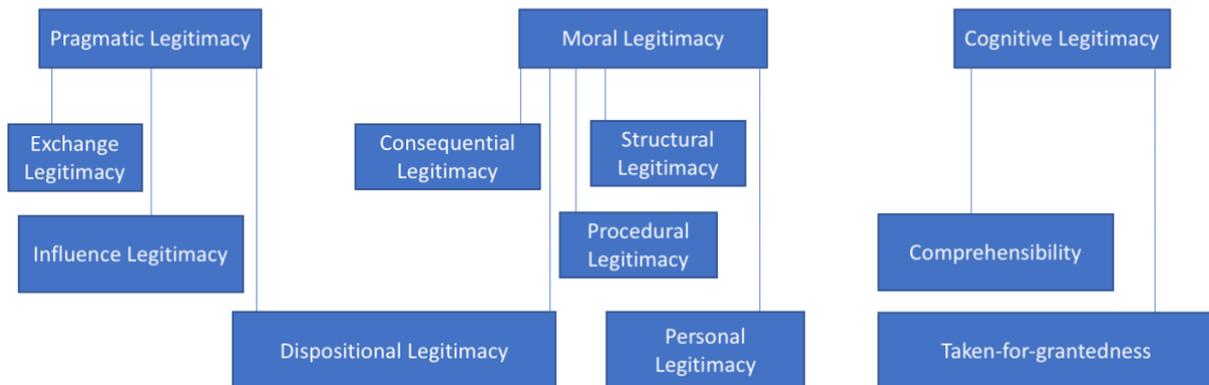


Diagram 1: Legitimacy Typology (Suchman 1995)

A possible third subtype of pragmatic legitimacy – dispositional legitimacy - overlaps with moral legitimacy and emerges if audiences think that an organization shares the same values, displaying behaviours such as honesty, decency or trustworthiness. The audience’s belief in the organization’s good behaviour results in a more robust legitimacy in times of individual failures of an organization (Ibid., p. 579).

In contrast to pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy does not stem from considerations whether an organization’s behaviour benefits the audience, but rather on whether that behaviour is ‘the right thing to do’. It can be seen as a congruence between an organization’s activities or characteristics and the beliefs of its social environment and has also been defined by Scott (1995) as normative legitimacy as well as by Aldrich and Fiol (1994) as socio-political legitimacy. As illustrated in figure 1, moral legitimacy can be stem from mainly four (excluding dispositional legitimacy) forms of legitimacy. Consequential legitimacy is determined by what organizations accomplish. It follows a similar logic as exchange legitimacy but based on moral grounds. Procedural legitimacy can be achieved by “embracing socially accepted techniques and procedures [...] [which] becomes most significant in the absence of other measures” (Suchman 1995, p. 580). Structural legitimacy occurs when an

organization ensures structures that guarantee a certain behaviour. The difference between procedural and structural legitimacy can be explained with a simple example. An organization can establish procedural legitimacy by being transparent and annually publishing a financial report. If the organization actually has a person or a whole department being responsible for transparency measures, the organization gains structural legitimacy (Ibid., p. 581; Scott & Meyer 1991). Personal legitimacy stems from charisma and other personal characteristics of key persons in organizations. Cognitive legitimacy can be seen as the result of an ultimate acceptance of an organization or an organization's activities. At this stage, legitimacy can be taken as granted (Suchman 1995, p. 583; see also Scott 1995; Aldrich & Fiol 1994). However, this does not necessarily mean that cognitive legitimacy is the highest form of legitimacy, an organization can possess. In contrary, cognitive illegitimacy results in stigmatization (Hudson 2008).

Regardless of its form, it has become clear that legitimacy occurs from an organization's environment. Theorists who see legitimacy as a property thus try to measure the relationship between organizations and their environment in different ways. Popular conceptualization methods include population densities, focusing on the reciprocal influence of legitimized organizations and the number of organizations with similar structures or practices (Hannan & Carroll 1992, p. 95; Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 455). Other approaches have included media accounts, focusing on both frequency and content analysis (Bansal & Clelland 2004; Deephouse & Carter 2005) and regulator's authorizations, adopting a legality-based perspective on legitimacy (Baum & Oliver 1991; Tost 2011).

In his typology, Suchman (1995) hints to the question, how legitimacy occurs by defining subtypes of pragmatic, normative and cognitive legitimacy. For these definitions, Suchman employs inter alia institutionalist theorems such as coercive isomorphism. However, as coercive isomorphism as a source of legitimacy has recently been contested, the focus has shifted towards mimetic isomorphism (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 457). Answering the question how legitimacy occurs reveals the importance of differentiating between private, often profit-oriented organizations and rather non-profit organizations or social activist organizations. Elsbach and Sutton (1992) showed how certain organizations used decoupling strategies to

disconnect their official representatives from illegal activities in their closest environment to preserve legitimacy among moderate supporters but at the same time extend legitimacy among more radical supporters.

One of the main criticisms against the legitimacy-as-property approach is it underlies the basic assumption that both the organizations and their environments are universal and stable entities (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 458). An alternative view, however, focuses on processes which are used by organizations to construct and maintain legitimacy.

2.2. Legitimacy as Process

“[Legitimacy is] the process by which cultural accounts from a larger social framework in which a social entity is nested are constructed to explain and support the existence of that social entity, whether that entity be a group, a structure of inequality, a position of authority or a social practice”

- Berger et al. 1998, p. 380

In this view, legitimacy is understood to be unstable which is why it “must be repeatedly created, recreated and conquered” (Hallström & Boström 2010, p. 160). Hence, the unit of analysis in this approach is not the outcome of the process, but rather the process itself (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 459).

The legitimation process is highly affected by the social construction of an organization’s environment. Every organization has various internal and external stakeholders who might have conflicting interests (Lister 2003, p. 184). Traditional technical approaches to legitimacy thus fail to answer questions such as ‘*legitimacy to whom?*’ or ‘*legitimacy for what?*’ (Ibid., p. 178) to a satisfying extent. Suddaby et al. (2017, pp. 459-60) go in a similar direction when they ask, ‘*where does legitimacy occur?*’ and ‘*how does legitimacy occur?*’. They find that process-oriented research sees legitimacy occurring in a much broader context, where (legitimation-) processes are defined “in terms of movement, activity, events, change and temporal evolution” (Langley 2007, p. 271).

Seeing legitimacy as a process and focusing on practical challenges of NGOs can be identified as a bottom-up approach. In contrast to technical top-down approaches which stem from International Law (Charnovitz 2006, 2007) and International Relations (Risse and Sikkink 1999; Reimann 2006), bottom-up approaches adopt empirically grounded perspectives that emphasize the various environments and stakeholders, organizations operate within (Lister 2003; Suddaby et al. 2017). Whereas it is certainly important to include various stakeholders in the legitimacy debate, these actors must not be overemphasized as it implies that the organization itself is only a playball of external (and internal) actors and therefore is only reacting in the legitimation process instead of acting. Instead, organizations can play an active and leading role in steering such a process and hence generating and maintaining legitimacy themselves by engaging in a wide range of context- and audience-specific strategies (Bryant 2005, Walton 2012, Walton et al. 2016).

There are three main processes in which legitimation occurs, that can be identified in the literature: (1) the process of persuasion, translation and narration; (2) the process of theorization; and (3) the process of identification/categorization (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 460). The process of persuasion, translation and narration is based on language and communication and is actively negotiated. However, there is disagreement about the “degree of awareness and agency within which actors use language to make meaning” (Ibid.), indicating that individual actors but also organizations as a whole might or might not be aware of their use of language and its effects on their environment. Some researchers acknowledge the process of legitimation on a micro level but not at the collective field of the organizational level (Maguire & Hardy 2009; Vaara & Tienari 2011; Vaara et al. 2006). Vaara et al. (2006, p. 804) found various discursive legitimation strategies in a series of newspaper articles about a mill closure that led them to the conclusion that “although journalists construct the texts, the use of specific legitimating strategies is not likely to be fully intentional or conscious.” What sounds more like a general criticism of the analysed journalists, gets more convincing under the aspect of interpretation. Maguire and Hardy (2009) showed in an impressive case study about the delegitimation of a toxic chemical that “regardless of how persuasive a text is, actors cannot control whether or how other actors will translate their problematizations in subsequent texts” (p. 172), meaning that the process of interpretation is beyond the control of individual use of

narration. Even though this logic seems convincing, the question occurs if the capacities of collective actors such as organizations might be underestimated. Researchers who advocate this view rather use the term *rhetoric* (Suddaby & Greenwood 2005) or *framing* (Benford & Snow 2000) instead of *discourse* to emphasize the role of certain actors in actively using language in the legitimation process. For Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), who also identified rhetorical strategies in a (de-) legitimation process, language was used purposively, showing a high degree of agency. Similarly, a series of studies demonstrated the dependency of legitimation on the “persuasiveness of rhetoric and the use of a well-known genre of rhetoric that gives the ‘audience’ a taken-for-granted narrative structure” (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 460).

A second process of legitimation is theorization, where “existing norms or practices are abstracted into generalized specifications or categories” (Ibid., p. 461). The diffusion of norms or practices can thereby result in a taken-for-granted status across a whole organizational field if they take on greater legitimacy over time. Empirical studies have shown how the concept of theorization has legitimized new professions in the field of Business Administration (David et al. 2013) or wind power as a renewable energy source (Sine & Lee 2009). Sine and Lee (2009) demonstrated how environmental social movement organizations-initiated change in several states in the USA by both delegitimizing the existing energy situation in these states and offering a new solution. The United States in the 1970s had just suffered from a nation-wide energy crisis and air pollution was getting a problem in industrialised cities, which environmental social movements and organizations used to delegitimize the existing energy sources. At the same time, these movements and organizations came up with wind energy that had basically not existed so far. The theorization of the energy situation helped the emerging wind energy sector to legitimize its new existence.

The third process – identification and categorization – is often described as a paradox of organizational behaviour, that is the need of organizations to be both isomorphic and different at the same time (Deephouse 1996; Navis & Glynn 2010; Røvik 1996). In a closer look, it is rather a logical challenge of hitting the fine line between isomorphism and uniqueness with the real paradox being that this behaviour is both driven and achieved by the legitimation process (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 461). As an

organization has various stakeholder, it relies on an assessment of approval from these stakeholders to legitimize its behaviour. If the behaviour and thus character of multiple organizations is too alike, most of them will become redundant. Therefore, every organization needs to create their mark of distinction without leaving the socially accepted spectrum to legitimate their actions and themselves (King & Whetten 2008, pp. 193-4). This demonstrates that legitimacy is constructed through identity (see also Navis & Glynn 2010). Correspondently, categories are constructed around claims of a legitimate identity. To create a new product or to fundamentally change a behaviour, an organization needs to be aware of existing standards of legitimacy. If these standards do not fit for the desired change of behaviour, legitimacy standards have to be gradually adapted until they allow the new organizational form or behaviour. Thus, the “legitimation of a single entity [...] requires legitimacy work not only at the organizational level, but also at the level of the category and sometimes even the society” (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 461; see also Hannan 2005; Kennedy 2008). Organizations which are in the same sector and might therefore face the same external legitimacy challenges, might hence unite in a collective action-like attitude to legitimize their whole sector. Once this has been achieved, the organizations start differentiation efforts again to establish a good position in a newly legitimized sector (Barnett 2006).

The presented second approach to assess legitimacy analyses the process of legitimation, defining legitimation as “a structured set or sets of formal or emergent activities that describe how an actor acquires affiliation with an existing social order or category” (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 462). The legitimacy-as-property approach – presented earlier – assumes a universalism of legitimacy, meaning that certain attributes or ways of behaviour are more legitimate than others. In contrast, the legitimation-as-process approach is based on the assumption that there is no single best way of gaining and maintaining legitimacy. Rather, the legitimation of organizations must be “understood in its temporal context in which it is situated” (Walton et al. 2016, p. 2777). Another important difference between the two perspectives is the role of agency. By acknowledging the that legitimacy is a socially constructed outcome of ongoing social interaction between an organization and its environment rather than an outcome of the efforts of a single actor, who is limited in

its opportunities, the legitimation-as-process perspective emphasizes the role of agency much more.

However, the various implications and assumptions of this perspectives leave room for criticism. The assumption that there is no best way of legitimation makes nearly all the research of this perspective consist of case studies that cannot easily be compared. The pro and cons of case studies as a methodological research design is beyond the scope of this paper and will be discussed in the research design paper. However, the limitation of a research approach to a single methodological design is a criticism, the limitation-as-process perspective faces. Besides methodological limitations, a flaw of this approach is the simplified division of the world into actors, who have agency and audiences, who are restricted to perceiving and reacting to the actors (Bitektine 2011; Hofer & Green 2016). The simplistic view matters as it neglects the critical role of perception, social interactions and cognitive processes (Bitektine & Haack 2015; Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 463).

2.3. Legitimacy as Perception

The third research approach assesses the perceptual and subjective elements of legitimacy. The approach combines understandings from the legitimacy-as-property and the legitimacy-as-process perspectives. But instead of regarding legitimacy as a physical property, legitimacy is here seen as an assessment of an organizational product or practice. Furthermore, the attention lies on the processes of such assessments or judgments and not on the agent-oriented process of legitimating an organization. Thus, the legitimacy-as-perception approach focuses on individuals in the process of a social construction of legitimacy and not on the macro level (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 463). This does not mean that macro level effects do not matter. The basic assumption is just that it is individuals who percept and make judgements about organizations. These judgements can eventually produce macro level effects. To avoid extreme individualism, the perception-perspective develops a multi-level approach that – despite its focus on individuals – acknowledges the role of collective actors in the legitimation process (Bitektine 2011; Bitektine & Haack 2015; Hofer & Green 2016). The aim of this perspective is thus not to “psychologize the study of legitimacy, but to develop an understanding of legitimacy as cross-level

sociocognitive process that works through the interaction of individuals' cognition and supra-individual social processes" (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 463; Tost 2011).

However, this perspective has its roots in cognitive sociology. As Sherif and Hovland (1961) demonstrated, "a judgment always involves comparison between two or more stimuli" and that a judgment of an "item relevant to an attitude" rather needs to be compared to an appropriate scale than another item (p. 8-9). Such a scale can either be a psychological scale, that individuals form themselves or, on a macro level, social norms that determine a judgment. However, if no objective stimulus standards exist, such judgment scales are unstable and the placement of items on these scales are less accurate as the role of subjective factors increases. An illustrative example is the current perception of the media in certain countries. As parts of the population get influenced by political leaders who publicly reject established media organizations, their perception of the media is changing. Especially people who have always been critical of the media, are now receptive for such external influences that might lead to a radical perception of the news being fake even without evidence for spreading false news.

If an individual has an appropriate scale, their own standard on an item placed on the scale becomes an "anchor for judgments" (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 464). Everything close to that 'actor' forms the "latitude of acceptance" (Ibid.), whereas opinions outside that area fall into the "latitude of rejection" (Ibid.). A classic example is position of an individual in the political scale. A person who is in the political centre, might be open for both conservative and liberal arguments, but rejects both radical right and radical left opinions or action. A person who is further left in the political spectrum however, might rather accept radical left opinions than conservative opinions.

The work of Sherif and Hovland (1961) has been fundamental research for concepts such as the legitimacy threshold, presented in the previous section. The view of legitimacy as a perceptual and sociocognitive phenomenon differentiates substantially from previous views that legitimacy or collective approval is "independent of particular observers" (Suchman 1995, p. 574). As mentioned, legitimacy is conceptualized fundamentally multilevel: At the individual level, legitimacy is conceptualized as propriety judgment or an evaluator's assessment of

the acceptability of an item (i.e. organization, organizational behaviour) (Tost 2011; Zelditch 2006). Depending on the context, the collective level can either be defined as a group or organization (i.e. Greenpeace), a field or category (Environmental NGOs), or a whole society. Legitimacy occurs as a form of validity, when an opinion or judgment is shared and recognized by the majority of actors or by a recognized authority (Suddaby et al. 2017; Zelditch 2006).

As this perspective is based on validity, a concept which is not emphasized on in the other perspectives, it is important to clarify this notion to fully understand its implications for the research. One of the first scholars who did research on social conformity and validity were Solomon Ash (1958), Max Weber (1968) and Stanley Milgram (1974), approaching the concept from psychological (Ash; Milgram) and sociological (Weber) starting points. Experimental studies have demonstrated that validity has strong effects on legitimacy judgments. This shows that legitimacy judgments are subjects to social control and – at the organizational level – to isomorphism and institutionalization (Asch 1956; Bitektine & Haack 2015; Milgram 1974; Weber 1968). In specific this means that formulating a widely accepted (validated) opinion usually leads to social approval whereas an unpopular opinion may lead to social exclusion (Kuran 1987). Bitektine and Haack (2015) emphasize the understanding that validity exists objectively and is independent of a single evaluator's opinion. While one can agree on that the concept of validity goes beyond an individual opinion, the assumption that validity is objective can be questioned. In times of filter bubbles which nowadays exist on social media, different social groups might consider different collective opinions valid. One example is the debate about climate change. While most scholars and large parts of the society are convinced of its existence and agree on that humanity needs to react to that, certain social groups completely deny its existence and reject any scientific proof. Both groups are of significant size and influence and they each consider opposing opinions as valid. In terms of legitimacy, environmental organizations will always be able to legitimize their actions within the acceptance-group while legitimation might be very hard to achieve within the denying-group. However, Bitektine and Haack (2015) do recognize that the opportunity to influence legitimacy judgments of individuals by manipulating their perceptions of validity does exist. With respect to collective actors, it needs to be stated that legitimacy does not need to reflect the perception of the individuals within

a collective. Evaluators may “silence their [personal] judgments in a situation of conflicting validity perceptions” (Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 465). Thus, legitimacy objects can be highly valid even though not a single individual in the collective regards that object as valid or vice versa.

The general understanding of the legitimacy-as-perception perspective is that individual evaluators first perceive an organization, then consult others about these perceptions and in the end, make a judgment about perceived organization upon which the individuals will act. At the macro level, the focus lies on validity which strongly affects individual’s judgments. Thus, the research focus lies on “intraindividual antecedents of legitimacy judgments” (Ibid.) to analyse perceptions, attitudes and judgments, which are seen as micro-foundations of legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack 2015; Johnson et al. 2005; Suddaby et al. 2017). The legitimacy judgments at the micro level are diverse and made by heterogeneous individuals. Thus, scholars have questioned the capability of organizations to satisfyingly respond to all individuals or even all collective actors (Ashforth & Gibbs 1990). An additional reason for the questioned capability is the implication that even if the legitimacy judgments on the macro level are unanimous, the reasons among individual evaluators might differ (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). In short, the legitimacy-as-perception approach acknowledges the diversity of evaluators as well as the diversity of their judgments and reasons and regards legitimacy as their judgments on either the individual or subsequently the collective level.

To answer the question of how legitimacy occurs in this perspective, Suddaby et al. (2017, p. 466) formulate two subordinate questions: (1) How do individuals form their legitimacy judgments? and (2) How do judgments of individuals aggregate to form a macro level legitimacy opinion, that is, to form validity? Whereas the first question has received extensive attention in disciplines such as psychology, the second question has not.

In recent years, substantive research has been conducted to both develop the concept of how to capture the sociocognitive processes underlying legitimacy judgments and to empirically analyse the perceptions of evaluators. The conceptual development has thereby discovered sociocognitive processes and social judgments

that underlie legitimacy (Bitektine 2011; Bundy & Pfarrer 2015; Tost 2011) and projected how the social and institutional contexts of a setting affect evaluators through cognitions, emotions or legitimacy beliefs of other people (Haack et al. 2014). Theorizing that legitimacy cannot only be generated through an active cognitive process but also be the outcome of intuition (Tost 2011), empirical research has mainly used experimental manipulation of validity (Massey et al. 1997; Yoon & Thye 2011) to recently highlight the emotional basis of legitimacy judgments (Garud et al. 2014; Haack et al. 2014; Huy et al. 2014). Various other research contributed empirically by evaluating the effectiveness of legitimation strategies (Elsbach 1994) or examining hierarchies of conflicting legitimation accounts (Sitkin et al. 1993). More organization-focused research discovered ways for organizations to manage stakeholder perceptions and to protect themselves from negative legitimacy (Desai 2011; Haack et al. 2014).

The second question, asking how judgments of individuals aggregate to form a macro level legitimacy opinion, that is, to form validity, basically assesses the origins of isomorphism in legitimacy judgments from an evaluator's perspective (Suddaby et al. 2017, pp. 467). The assessment goes beyond the macro level approach of taken-for-granted institutions as it would be the case in the legitimacy-as-property approach. As mentioned, the question has remained underexplored so far. However, there are still two theories that deliver attention to it. On the one hand, economic theory has approached this question through an interest-based account of conforming behaviour. Kuran (1987, 1995) discovered that actors might base their judgment not on their individual propriety judgment but rather on the expected reactions they might experience. This can lead to situations where individuals publicly express opinions contrary to their own. A similar discovery was originally made by Asch (1956) who examined social conformity from a psychological perspective in an experimental setting. The value of these experimental settings for the legitimacy-as-perception perspective is significant as the second theory shows. System justification theory suggests an interest-free account of conformity. Jost et al. (2004) observed that actors can legitimate oppressive social orders due to "social and psychological needs to imbue the status quo with legitimacy and see it as good" (p. 887). Experimental studies have confirmed that these social and psychological needs can make

members of disadvantaged or discriminated groups accept their own inferiority (Jost et al. 2014; Suddaby et al. 2017, p. 467; Walker et al. 1986).

To sum up, this research stream regards legitimacy as a set of microsocial processes which will eventually aggregate to a collective judgment, that will form the validity of a legitimacy object (Bitektine & Haack 2015; Tost 2011). Even though its multilevel approach, the extreme focus on the micro-level in most research is striking. Thus, this the research in this approach runs danger to become detached from organizational studies and instead a research stream of psychology with a few sociological elements. Aggravating to this, the transition from micro processes to macro effects remains underexplored which limits the approach's relevance for research about (non-governmental) organizations. However, this perspective could serve as the theoretical background for an insightful control or intervening variable in a deductive research about organizational legitimacy.

2.4. Legitimacy of NGOs

How are the presented perspectives of relevance for NGO legitimacy? Which concepts work for NGOs and which do not? The research on NGO legitimacy has started to kick off after legitimacy concerns were raised in the late 1990s and early 2000s. With the growing financial capacity and the increased power of NGOs in many countries, representing 'good values' was suddenly not enough to be seen as legitimate actors anymore (Collingwood & Logister 2005, p. 179; Walton et al. 2016, p. 2769). Applying various perspectives, scholars have addressed legitimacy issues in the NGO sector in different ways over the past 15 years.

One of the first scholars in the research field about NGOs were Michael Edwards and David Hulme (1996). Their highly influential book *Non-Governmental Organisations – Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet* provided important definitions and conceptualizations for future NGO research. Their examination of NGO legitimacy was based on a technical approach that took some structural attributes into account as well as legal compliance of examined organizations. According to Edwards & Hulme, accountability was the key for NGO legitimacy. This was a first step towards further examinations of NGOs but completely neglected the organization's audiences

and the changing environments an NGO typically faces (see also Edwards 1999). Following management theories, early scholars began to adapt classic stakeholder approaches

Sarah Lister (2003) opened the debate about whether NGO legitimacy should be treated as a technical or rather a social construct. Building on established concepts from Suchman (1995), Scott (1995) and Woodward et al. (1996), Lister developed a model that applies types of legitimacy to different stakeholders and audiences of NGOs. The implementation of various stakeholders definitely shifted the focus to the different environments of NGOs and therefore provided a more thorough understanding of NGO legitimacy. However, by applying various types of legitimacy, that is regulatory, pragmatic, normative, and cognitive legitimacy, Lister followed the assumption of amongst others Suchman (1995) that organizations and their environments are stable. Thus, Lister did not explain how NGOs generate or maintain their legitimacy if their environments are changing and suddenly do not respond to a set of legitimizing attributes.

Picking up on this, Vivien Collingwood and Louis Logister (2005) were among the first who directed the debate towards the legitimacy-as-process perspective, stating that 'legitimacy is a matter of degree rather than an absolute quality, and where an international NGO lacks legitimacy in one area, it might gain legitimacy in another' (p. 189). Thus, they expand existing concepts by the aspect of NGO outcomes, meaning that NGO behaviour needs to be in line with the perception of their audiences and the context, within it occurs and that NGOs might be forced to make decisions on which of their various audiences to prioritize. This is an interesting thought as it opens up for a new dimension of legitimation. If gaining legitimacy among one audience means losing another's legitimation the question occurs whether actively neglecting one audience's legitimacy demands can increase the organization's overall legitimacy degree. This would thus be a new strategic challenge for most NGOs. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that NGO legitimacy is "not simply a matter of reforming management practices, but part of a wider debate" (Ibid.).

Walton makes the important differentiation between passive and active legitimacy, defining active legitimacy as getting support from immediate environments and

passive legitimacy as purely being accepted by an NGO's audience or by a society (Walton 2012, p. 24). Based on that differentiation, he identified four strategies, NGOs pursued. The subject of his research was two peacebuilding NGOs in Sri Lanka, which based on their pursued legitimacy (active vs. passive) chose different strategies in their legitimation process: (1) The organizations developed different spatial levels with politics; (2) they positioned themselves differently in relation to the arena of party politics (inside vs. outside); (3) they proposed different political agendas (developing alternative form of governance vs. reforming existing governance); (4) they conducted their work in different ways (voluntary based and tied to normative frameworks vs. professional identity, basing involvement on technical skillset and superior network). Furthermore, the two organizations responded differently to criticism (Walton 2012, pp. 24-25). Based amongst others on these observations, Walton and colleagues developed an ontological division between normative and sociological legitimacy. The normative form derives from norms and values, while the sociological form derives from the relationship among different groups who stand in a relation together (Walton et al. 2016, p. 2772). Scholars such as David Beetham (2013) have called these forms of legitimacy interdependent and the sociological form of legitimacy as imperative to induce change in the normative framework of international society (pp. 98-99). Hereby is it important to note that legitimacy challenges and thus strategies differ between national and international NGOs due to their range and variety of stakeholder, legal regularities and the variance in their environments (Walton et al. 2016, p. 2771; see also Yanacopulos 2005). However, legitimacy and the legitimation process as whole is fundamentally challenged and shaped by the NGO's capacity to conform to dominant discourses in a national and supranational context (Walton 2008, 2012; Walton et al. 2016). Thus, NGOs themselves may play an active role in shaping the process of legitimation by engaging in a wide range of context- and audience specific strategies (Bryant 2005; Doodworth 2014; Walton 2012). Speaking of legitimacy as 'moral capital', Raymond Bryant discovered that (non-governmental) organizations would reject funding or criticize political actors they might depend on to gain legitimacy on the ground (Bryant 2005, pp. 18-19). With this, Bryant confirms Collingwood and Logister's (2005) assumption of strategic legitimation tactics that may involve neglecting or opposing one audience's demands.

The presented literature on NGO legitimacy is highly interesting as it shows how the legitimacy-as-process perspective can be applied to the NGO sector. However, most literature has so far been about International NGOs and/or Development NGOs. Thus, it still needs to be tested whether this perspective can be applied to the NGO sector in the north, which mostly act in stable political systems, that can determine the influence of NGOs from a top-down perspective. The three approaches to assessing legitimacy that were presented in this paper show the development of the research field but also let one understand the conceptual ambiguity that prevails. The different backgrounds of scholars who engage in the different research approaches lead to different foci and different research objects. However, the three approaches do not necessarily need to be mutually exclusive but can provide the foundation for a multi-level analysis of a specific organizational behaviour. Hence, this research is furthermore going to illustrate the necessity of defining the conceptual context before defining the concept of legitimacy itself.

3. The environmental NGOs

The following chapter describes the two selected Norwegian environmental NGOs of this study. The NGOs are being analysed as single, independent entities. While collaboration between two or more organizations has taken place in the past, there is no formal partnership going on in this constellation. The following description of chosen organizations is based on publicly available documents. The aim of this chapter is to provide relevant information about the organization's history and organizational structure.

3.1. Framtiden i våre hender

Framtiden i våre hender is the largest of the three organizations. Founded in 1974 by Erik Dammann, a Norwegian business consultant and author, the NGO today has almost 30 000 members. *Framtiden i våre hender* is organized democratically with a general assembly as its highest organ. Coming together every other year, the general assembly votes a representative board, existing of nine board members and six deputy members. Of the nine board members, only three have assigned roles, being the chairman of the board, the vice-chairman, and the representative of the thirty employees¹. The employees stand for administration, communication, project coordination and research as well as staff responsible for the regional teams. The regional teams are the connection units between the 30 000 members and the NGO staff and the board.

The 26 regional teams coordinate various grassroots activities all over the country. Many of the activities are in connection to nation-wide campaigns as for example about sustainability in the everyday-life. In the three largest university cities, the NGO has official student organizations as well (Bergen, Trondheim, Oslo).

¹ Not including the chairman of the board who counts as both chairman and employee and one employee who is currently on parental leave

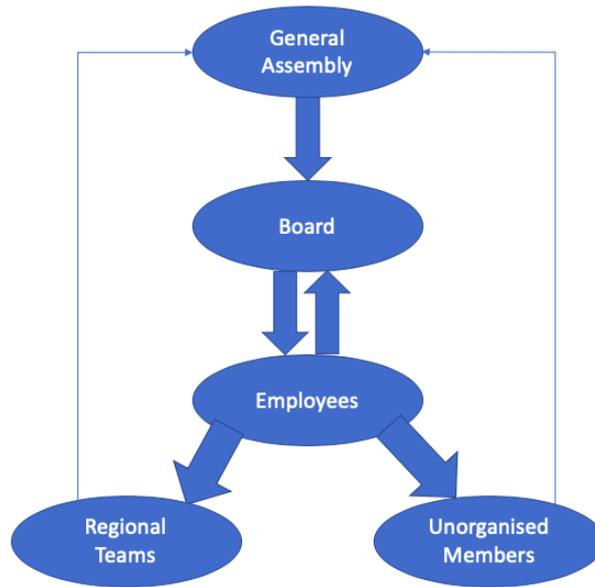


Diagram 2: Organizational structure FIVH

3.1.1. Financial overview

Financially, the membership fees add up to 44% of the organization’s income, followed by public funding with 32%, revealing a potential ground for conflict of interest as members’ interests do not necessarily coincide with interests of public institutions. However, both are substantially important for the financial survival of the NGO. As comparisons from 2016 show, both the share of membership fees (+2%) and public funding (+3%) have grown, while private funding (-6 %) has gone down, indicating a changing legitimization with various environments.

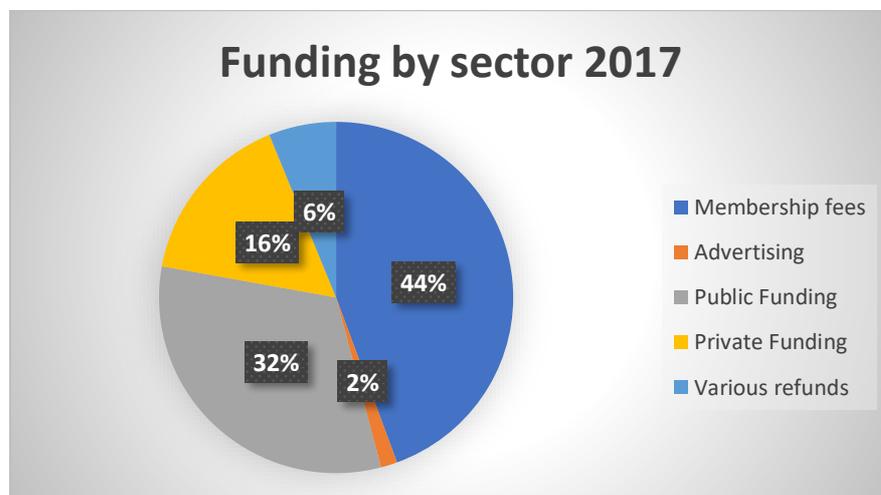


Diagram 3: Financial structure FIVH

3.1.2. Strategic focus

For 2017, the NGO had set itself four overarching goals. Each goal is based on a long-term strategy until the year 2040 and has intermediate goals for 2020. All goals are reflections of how the NGO thinks the world should be like in 2040.

1. Climate friendly food consumption

Goal for 2040: Both food-production and -consumption should be climate- and environmentally friendly in a global resource perspective.

Goal for 2020: Meat consumption and waste of food in Norway show a positive trend.

2. Decent labour conditions throughout supply chains in sectors that produce consumption goods

Goal for 2040: All those who produce consumption goods shall have decent working conditions and livable wages, no matter where the goods are being produced.

Goal for 2020: The right to earn livable wages and have decent working conditions affects the people's shopping choices and is to a higher degree integrated in routines and policies of authorities and companies.

3. Ethical investments

Goal for 2040: The international financial system is a powerhouse for creating a just and environmentally friendly society.

Goal for 2020: Multiple Norwegian financial institutions have decided to move capital from fossil to renewable [sectors], thereby strengthening a more ethical investment practice.

4. Non-toxic everyday

Goal for 2040: No consumption goods shall contain environmental toxics and those who produce such consumption goods shall not be exposed to harmful chemicals.

Goal for 2020: Reduce the combined use and content of environmental toxics in consumption goods in Norway.

5. Reduced hunt for natural resources and reduced consumption

Those goals have not been included in the long-term strategy originally. However, the general assembly concluded in 2016 to prioritize them higher.

Goal 1 for 2040: Norwegian actors have terminated their activities in the oil- and gas sector and the exploitation and use of other resources happens by sustainable standards.

Goal 2 for 2040: The material consumption in Norway is reduced to a sustainable level.

Goal 1 for 2020: *Framtiden i Våre Hender* (FIVH) goes all in for a sustainable and just use of resources. Until 2020, FIVH choses one or more individual topic where we can see for us to develop an agenda of change.

Goal 2 for 2020: This is a superordinate goal for FIVH and the organization shall be the loudest voice for reduced material consumption. Within 2020, FIVH shall have compiled a clear agenda for this area.

In addition, the NGO chose a side campaign with another organization, whose goal is to make the parliament using 100% renewable energy. This was in connection to the Norwegian national elections in 2017.

3.2. Naturvernforbundet

The second organization for this study is called *Naturvernforbundet*. Founded in 1914, it is the oldest environmental organization in Norway. Due to their long history, it is little surprising that their 24 000 members are organized somewhat differently. Even though the organizational structure does not look very different in theory, the NGO is organized much more on the grassroot-level and therefore pursues a bottom-up structure. All members are organized in one of the 100 local branches, which again are organized in regional branches. Whereas the local branches typically work with nature- and environmental projects in their respective areas, the regional branches follow regional action plans and help coordinating the local branches. The local and regional branches meet in an annual convention which are the highest organ for these branches.

The highest organ for the NGO as a whole is the general assembly which is held every other year. Every local branch can send one delegate. In addition, the regional branches send their delegates, based on the number of members, a regional branch has. In addition, *Naturvernforbundet* has independent daughter organizations for children (< 15 years), youth and young adults, and seniors (> 60 years). In addition, the Rainforest Foundation Norway has been originally founded of *Naturvernforbundet*. However, today both *Naturvernforbundet*, all their daughter organizations and *Fremtiden i Våre Hender* have become members of the Rainforest Foundation. Thus, all daughter organizations and the Rainforest Foundation each send one delegate to the general assembly, as well as the organization’s employees.

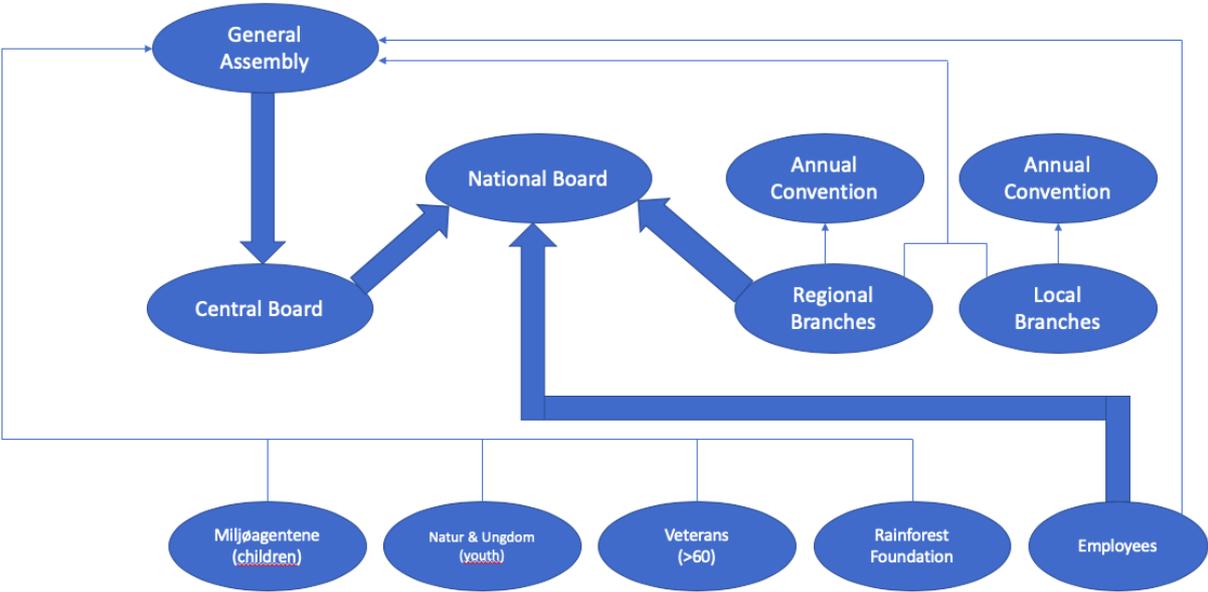


Diagram 4: Organizational Structure Naturvernforbundet. The thick arrows symbolize how an organ is constitutionalized. The thin arrows show who gets to send delegates to which assembly/convention

The General Assembly does not only determine the organization’s strategy, but also elect the central board, consisting of the chairman and the vice-president of the board as well as four unspecified board members who each have their deputy board member. The central board is responsible for the daily operations and the secretary, follows up political guidelines from the general assembly and the national board. The national board is the highest executive organ in between the general assemblies. IT consists of the central board, one representative from each regional branch and one employee. In addition, some but not all of the daughter organizations send different numbers of representatives, which was not possible to visualize in the illustration.

3.2.1. Financial overview

Naturvernforbundet's funding depends to a high degree on public funding. Together with private funding (donations, gifts) and other funding, 80% of the organization's revenue comes from these three income sources. Thus, *Naturvernforbundet* relies not that heavily on membership fees.

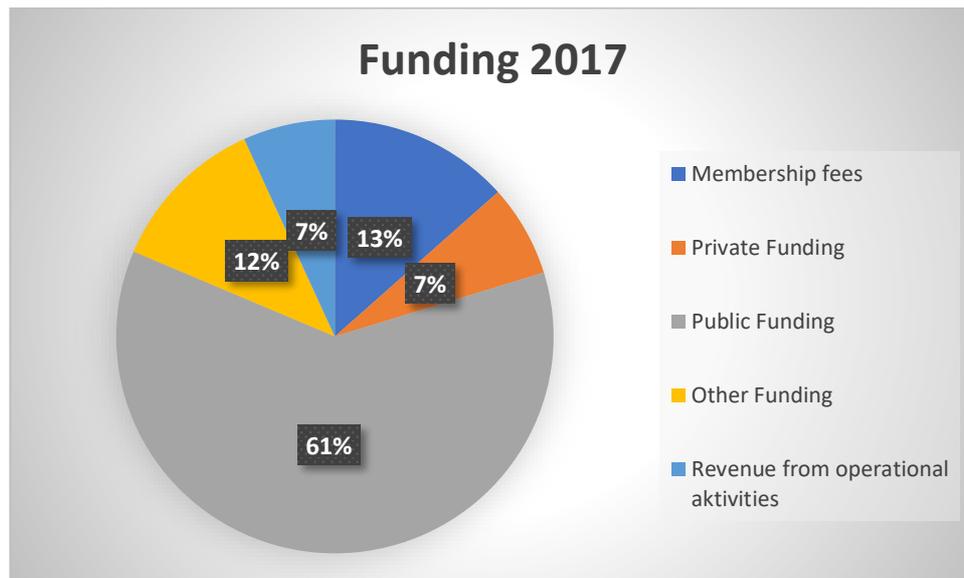


Diagram 5: Financial Structure Naturvernforbundet

The funding reflects the NGO's orientation to focus widely on local projects and to let their local and regional branches work with projects that are relevant for their respective areas. Due to this, many of those projects get funding from local authorities.

3.2.2. Strategic focus

Despite their strong regional and local focus, the organization has three overarching focus points that stem from the NGO's overall strategy. Each of these focus points in the strategy is divided into four categories: organizational goals, political goals, international goals, and communication and public relations.

1. 'Nature – Our life basis'

The first overarching focus point is to make different aspects of nature more present in the public discourse. Typically, subordinate focus points vary for individual local

and regional branches. In their action plan for 2016-2017, the NGO worked with raising awareness of endangered nature diversity in the Norwegian society. Besides the political goals, which had a strong focus on selected local projects, the organizations did not formulate measurable goals but rather developed guidelines their public appearance in these two years.

2. Green Change

The second overarching focus point is to actively prepare and implement a transition towards a society with no or almost no toxic emissions. The main goal is to reduce CO₂-emissions by 80% in 2030. The main goals are related to the oil sector and selected infrastructure projects as for example airports.

3. Environmentally friendly everyday

The third overarching focus point is an incentive to consume less and better in Norway. *Naturvernforbundet* calls on statistics that supposedly show that Norwegians' material consumption is higher than in the rest of the world. To change that pattern, the NGO works mainly with campaigns on regional and national level.

3.3. The legitimation of FIVH and Naturvernforbundet

The legitimation of the two presented organizations is the focus of this study. As the next chapter unfolds, this study follows a neo-institutional approach to assess legitimation. At the center point of that neo-institutional approach stands language and communication, assuming that “communication plays a performative role in the development of legitimacy judgements” (Hofer/Green 2016, p. 130). I aim thus to develop five independent variables for how environmental NGOs can legitimize themselves and their agendas.

4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the study. The study's objective is to analyse the legitimation of non-governmental organizations in the Norwegian environmental sector and to shift the unit of analysis of the process of legitimation. Below are listed the research questions that have guided the research process. Research questions should contribute to pre-existing academic literature and/or be of importance for the real world (King et al. p. 15). In this study, the research questions contribute to both by upholding the research objectives throughout the research process (Layder 1998, p. 31). Following the research questions is the theoretical model that provides the "theoretical lens" (Creswell 2007, p. 37). The model offers a deeper understanding of the concept of legitimation and breaks down important insights from the theoretical discussion in chapter two to more concrete variables.

4.1. Research Question

The first two research questions aim to assess the legitimation process on the more concrete sublevel, that is the relationship between the NGOs and each their audiences. The third research question brings back the focus on the more abstract, organizational level, which allows conclusions for further analytic generalizations.

1. How do the various rhetoric strategies contribute to passive legitimation?
2. How do the various rhetoric strategies contribute to active legitimation?
3. How do the selected NGOs engage in the overall legitimation process?

4.2. Active and passive legitimacy

Mark Suchman's (1995, p. 595) ground-breaking work about legitimacy strategies led to the awareness of differentiating between passive and active legitimacy. Passive legitimacy means that an organization seeks acceptance from most audiences. On the other hands seeks an organization active legitimacy when it aims for active support of targeted audiences.

On basis of this, Walton (2012) discovered that NGOs might apply different legitimation strategies, depending on whether they seek passive or active legitimacy, as was

described earlier in chapter two. While his observations stemmed from the analysis of two peace-building NGOs in Sri Lanka their applicability for this study is limited. However, the four categories to characterize the two forms of legitimacy can be adapted, as table 2 shows. However, the main difference is that this study does not presume that NGOs seek either passive or active legitimacy, but that they engage in both processes simultaneously. So, while some of the organizations' actions and communication can be labelled as passive, others might be labelled as active legitimation. To even go a step further, this study aims to discover whether some parts of communication affect both processes.

	Passive legitimacy	Active legitimacy
Goal	Seeking acceptance (non-interference) from most actors so that the NGO can perform the roles expected by its targeted audiences	Building support for its moral vision from the general population
Spatial relationship	Multi-sited; Drawing together interests and influence from public and private actors, both on international, national, and regional level	Focus on national level; concerned with transforming political system or society; emphasis on local arena
Positioning	Political insider; trying to be "at the table" as a respected actor	Outside, apart from "dirty-world" politics
Strategy	Contribute directly to reform of existing modes of governing	Developing and promoting alternative vision of governing
Conduction of work	Professional organizational identity; based its work on superior or international networks and technical skills	Based on voluntarism; engaging in politics justified by the claim that NGO represents a relevant community

Table 2: Legitimation strategies (Walton 2012)

As the table indicates, the two processes do not necessarily have to be mutually exclusive. A piece of communication can for example draw on the support of the general population to pursue its moral vision while at the same time suggesting policy changes and thus contribution directly to reforms of existing modes of governing. Another example might be that an NGO positions itself outside the political spectrum but still bases its work on an international network.

4.3. Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) Rhetorical Strategies of Legitimacy

The theoretic model for this framework is developed by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005). Their model is based on the idea that legitimation "is built upon language and uses language as its principal instrumentality" (Berger & Luckmann 1966, p. 64). Applying a communicative perspective of institutional theory, this research stream is often called "rhetorical institutionalism" (Cornelissen et al. 2015, p. 12; Hofer & Green 2016, p. 131).

The scholars examined "the role of rhetoric in legitimating profound institutional change" (p. 35). They examined a "contest over a new organizational form" (p. 36) by analysing mergers of accountant, management consulting, and law firms. Identifying proponents and opponents of these mergers, the scholars reviewed public communications of both parts. Even though the NGOs in this study have not undergone 'profound institutional change', the authors argue that rhetorical strategies are "key tools of institutional entrepreneurs" (p. 61). Furthermore, the environmental sector is a sector of change itself. Both the main object of the sector (climate change) and the proposed reactions (various changes of behaviour) are about a dynamic process of some kind of development. Parts of their model have further been used by Mynster & Edwards (2014) who analysed NGO communication strategies in Denmark as well as many times in management theory studies about legitimation of for-profit organizations (Palazzo/Scherer 2006, Nicholls 2010, Bitektine 2011). Offering an agentic view, Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) identified five rhetorical strategies in legitimation processes. Each strategy results in an independent variable for this study.

4.3.1. Ontological Theorization

Opponents of these mergers used “ontological rhetoric based on premises about what can or cannot exist” (p. 51). Using vocabulary such as ‘incompatibility’ or ‘fundamental’ can easily be used to shift a public debate about a concrete case on a principle-level. It is important to state that the presumed “incompatibility of the categories need no to be necessarily true. All that matters is that they form part of an argument [...] which assumes a conflict between the categories and that these are expressed in support of a particular position or standpoint” (p. 46).

In Suddaby and Green’s (2005) study, this rhetoric was used to delegitimize organizational change. However, it is also possible to point out the incompatibility of existing practices or policies with a generally accepted goal. From a logical-theoretical standpoint it might be true that two categories as mutually exclusive and cannot exist. But this distinction might be somewhat blurry in a real-world setting. In theory, environmental protection and policies or practices that harm the environment cannot coexist. In praxis, on the other side, this behavioural conflict can be observed quite often. This could be because someone wants to protect the environment, but simply hasn’t thought of that their behaviour actually is harmful. Other scenarios can occur, where other interests than environmental protection play a vital role. Even though an authority or organization has committed to environmental protection, individual decisions can still deviate from that position when other – often economic – interests – play a role.

Thus, the independent variable that is derived from this theorization strategy is *Delegitimizing existing practices or policies by framing them as being incompatible with environmental principles*. In this study, the environmental NGOs can clearly be identified as clear opponents to practices that are harmful to the environment and thus to actors that engage in such practices. Such practices can have a wide range from exploiting certain parts of the country or world for resources, reckless consumption or unfair treatment of humans or animals, as will be enlightened in further detail later.

4.3.2. Rational Theorization

The second rhetoric strategy proposed by Suddaby & Green (2005) was historic theorization. Appealing to traditions and established routines is rather a strategy to preserve an existing condition from being changed as “change is a break with the past” (p. 52). Hence, this strategy did not seem relevant for this study. Even though the goal of the environmental movement could be seen as preserving the world from climate change, it paradoxically is all about promoting change. The typical message from environmental NGOs is usually that nations have to change, societies have to change, our behaviour has to change in order to prevent climate from changing.

However, Suddaby and Greenwood mention an interesting thought, as they claim that “path-dependent change is presented as less risky and therefore more rational” (p. 54). Whereas environmental NGOs undoubtedly promote change, one way to do so is to addressing risks and benefits of change, acting as an actor who is driven by rationality more than fundamentality.

Thus, this theoretical strategy is adapted in a modified version. Instead of historical theorization, I chose rational theorization, arguing that it is crucial for environmental NGOs to act professional and rational when trying to convince actors and audiences from other sectors of changing their behaviour. The independent variable that stems from this rhetoric strategy is thus *Legitimizing environmental change by applying path dependency logics and rational arguments*.

This means that the environmental NGOs use arguments which are not necessarily all about the environment, but rather about potential financial gains or other incentives that are not necessarily related to the environment. By offering a rational strategy for tackling environmental change, NGOs can present themselves as serious agents that take concerns from other audiences into consideration. Avoiding delegitimization is a way to maintain legitimacy as well.

4.3.3. Teleological Theorization

The third strategy, teleological theorization argues that certain events occur within the context of a bigger picture or “ultimate objective” (Suddaby & Greenwood 2005, p. 46). Radical change is often justified with the benefits of such change in the long-term and risks and dangers of refusing to change. Every action is part of something bigger and in order to accomplish defined goals, small-scale change is necessary. The greater plan can either be a kind of crisis scenario which only can be averted by the proposed change. In such a scenario, the crisis scenario can be backed up with research to avoid legitimacy doubts of the scenario itself. In contrast to that rather dystopian perspective, one can just as well apply a utopian perspective where the ultimate goal is a much better situation than the status quo.

As Suddaby and Greenwood demonstrate, this strategy differs from the others for three reasons. First, actors applying teleology presuppose the need for “large-scale transformation” (p.55). The dooming scenario that is presented is so serious that small adaptations to the status quo are not enough. Second, directly contrary to the strategy of historic theorization, it implies “a need for revolutionary pace of change” (*Ibid.*). This strategy is all about acting now and acting fast. Anything else is off the table. Third, it promotes “a wilful construction of change in which actors, in pursuit of their goals, overcome their environment” (*Ibid.*). It calls for change from the actors themselves to avoid change because of having to adapt to a new external setting.

In the environmental context, the ultimate goal is kind of a mixture between utopia and dystopia, as the outcome of protecting the environment fits both perspectives. The crisis scenario – climate change having a negative impact on all of us – is widely accepted by a large part of the Norwegian population. Thus, it is just natural to argue for a ‘large-scale transformation’ that must happen sooner rather than later before change literally will be imposed by the environment. The danger with this strategy stems from the potential delegitimizing effects from historical theorization. The next independent variable that might lead to legitimation of environmental NGOs is *Being a relevant actor that can drive necessary change.*

4.3.4. Cosmological Theorization

A rather contrasting strategy is cosmological theorization. Change is displayed as a natural consequence that will occur inevitably, whether it is resisted or not. According to theist logics, an event (in this case change) is out of control of the actors that are involved in a scenario (Suddaby & Green 2005, p. 46). Change is not enforced by internal agency, but external circumstances. Resisting change “is futile, if not outright dangerous” (p. 55). Transferring these logics on environmental organisations could lead to two scenarios. It could either be interpreted as that climate change is coming either way and there no longer can be done something against it. Another interpretation is that behavioural change to stop climate change sets in, regardless of whether some opponent wants to resist or not. This would indeed award limited agency to the environmental NGOs.

However, the first interpretation is more in line with the logical perspective of this strategy. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it cannot be a relevant strategy anymore. Even though climate change will set in, it similarly to legitimation is rather a degree than an absolute property. The effects of climate change still can be controlled to some extent. As a great majority acknowledges both climate change and its more than powerful effects on all people, resistance to [behavioural] change can be ‘outright dangerous’. In praxis, cosmological strategy might be difficult to differ from teleological strategy. However, for this study it can be interesting to find out, how the selected NGOs present themselves. The fourth independent variable that could lead to legitimation of environmental NGOs is *Finding appropriate reactions to climate change*. This means that the NGOs can either get engaged in enforcing appropriate reactions themselves or by convincing others that it is necessary to react and that it could be dangerous to resist.

4.3.5. Value-based Theorization

Emphasizing values by “appealing to [a] normative authority drawn from wider belief systems” (p. 56) is a strategy that directly or indirectly addresses the emotional side in a debate. Connecting proposed changes, practices or demands to what the general public might see as good or right is a strategy to attract audiences that do not care so

much about for example arguments of rationality. Value-based arguments often refer to ethical considerations, social accountability, or simply good vs. evil projections. For environmental organizations, this means connecting their agenda to established values in the society. However, to activate such normative authority, the organizations' audiences must develop that connection themselves instead of getting it dictated by the agent. As the audiences must have the impression that change is consistent with overriding values, the last independent variable for legitimizing environmental NGOs is *Connecting environmental agendas to established sets of values*.

4.3.6. Adaptions of Suddaby and Greenwood

As stated earlier, Suddaby and Greenwood's model has been developed further, amongst others by Hoefler & Green (2016). While their model provides an interesting dualism of the legitimacy-as-process perspective and the legitimacy-as-perception perspective, I decided against applying it in this study. This is mainly due to the reason that their impressive development of the model has led to a certain complexity at a level where I personally do not feel comfortable applying it any longer, as it adapts cognitive resource models, deriving from the field of psychology. Thus, I decided to go for Suddaby and Greenwood's rhetoric model despite its potential weakness as it "mistakenly conceptualizes listeners or audiences as passive evaluators of legitimacy" (Hoefler/Green 2016, p. 133).

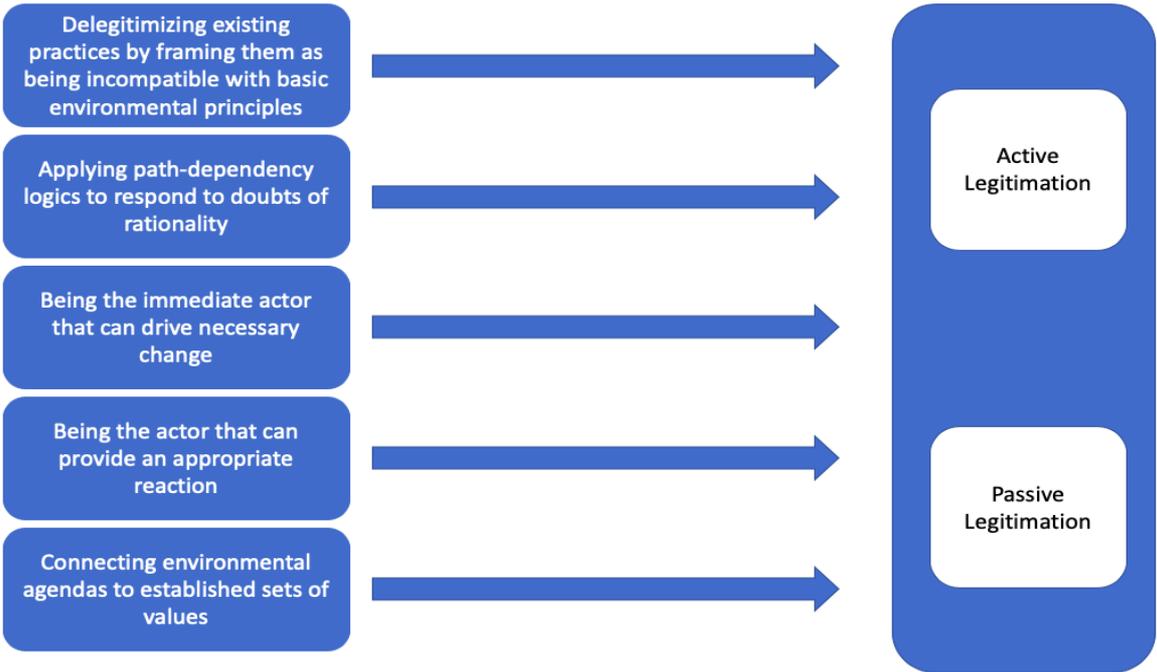


Diagram 6: Independent Variables

5. Methodology

The following chapter presents the research methodology that was used in this study. It describes first the unit of analysis and addresses operationalization issues. It further lays out the scope of the study and the case study type. The analytic strategy in this study is drawn from Yin (2014) and Bratberg (2018), who distinguishes between five approaches in text analysis. The chapter explains further the selected data source for this study and the way the data was analysed and concludes with addressing concerns of research quality.

5.1. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is *legitimation of environmental NGOs in Norway*. Choosing legitimation over legitimacy shifts the focus on the process instead of the threshold or attribute. Examining legitimacy as an attribute requires a technical definition of when an organization has reached that legitimacy threshold. Choosing the process as a unit of analysis acknowledges that legitimacy is not an attribute that cannot be lost, once an organization has acquired it. It is rather a steady ongoing process in which communication plays a vital role.

The next question that occurs when treating legitimacy as an attribute, is *legitimacy from whom*. It requires an exposition of definite audiences (or rather stakeholders) that are identified and controlled by the organization that has or has not legitimacy. Setting focus on the ongoing process instead, recognises a reality where at least parts of the audiences are either unknown or at least uncontrolled by the organization. One thing that both perspectives share is that various stakeholders or audiences do not necessarily have to matter equally.

Thus, the study is not answering whether the selected organizations have legitimacy or not but how their behaviour shapes their legitimation process. Choosing this unit of analysis bears danger to remain at an abstract level, not offering any contributions that are of relevance to the real world. First of all, this is not an unseen in qualitative studies. Despite having identified independent variables the study is of explorative

character. Hence, the previous literature rather “become[s] a guide for defining [...] the unit of analysis” (Yin 2014, p. 34).

At this point, it is important to refer back to Suchman’s (1995) distinction between active and passive legitimation, which are both essential parts of the legitimation process itself.

5.2. Operationalization of the legitimation process

Operationalizing the unit of analysis is not very helpful in this study. First, by finding indicators that are applicable for any operationalization, identified stakeholders almost inevitably get overemphasized. By for example using hard indicators such as financial resources, some stakeholders such as donors get more attention than others. Thus, the short overview of the organization’s financial structure was not for introducing such indicators, but for making their profile and organizational structure more comparable.

Second, an attempt to operationalize the unit of analysis might actually deflect from it as it might interpret legitimacy as a threshold or an attribute. This study is about how the selected organizations behave in their legitimation process, ergo what strategies they use as is to some extent measured by five independent variables.

5.3. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is defined by its temporal context, by the selected data, and by the theoretical framework. As a legitimation process technically goes on as long as an organization exists, it is important to set a temporal context that is analysed for the study (Walton et al. 2016, p. 2777). This study covers thus the period 2013 – 2017. Selecting such a time period might always be somewhat arbitrary. I have tried to find a year that was substantially important for both organizations, but this does not seem to be the case in the last twenty years. Thus, I chose 2013 as a starting point as this was the year, one of the organizations decided to implement a new communication plan. 2017 is a logic end point as this study is written in 2018.

The data collection will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter. However, it did define the scope of the study as well it was restricted to publicly available documents. This was due to significant differences in the level of access I got to the selected organizations.

The theoretical framework further sets the scope of the study as in that it guides the analysis. Directing the focus on communication and especially the rhetoric of the organizations does create a theoretical limitation of the study. This was due to two main reasons. The first reason was the access level to both organizations. Other factors in the legitimation process such as for example the internal awareness of legitimation strategies or non-public communication with some audiences could not be analysed thoroughly. The other reason was to offer some concrete results in an otherwise abstract study.

5.4. Case Study Type

The study on how environmental NGOs in Norway legitimize themselves was conducted within an embedded, multi-case design. Each organization is treated as an independent case. The subunits of the cases are the two processes, active and passive legitimation. Both cases and their sub-units will first each for themselves be analysed with help of the five independent variables. Subsequently, the results will be compared in aspects of the replicability (Yin 2014, p. 57). Embedded, multi-case designs bear the risk of analytical confusion. By overemphasizing the sub-units, it might get difficult “to return to the larger unit of analysis” (p. 55). While the first two research questions emphasize the sub-units in the two cases, the last question leads back to larger unit of analysis – the legitimation process of environmental NGOs in Norway. The diagram below tries to visualize the various dimensions of this study. Both cases (the two NGOs) with their sub-units are embedded in the main unit of analysis.

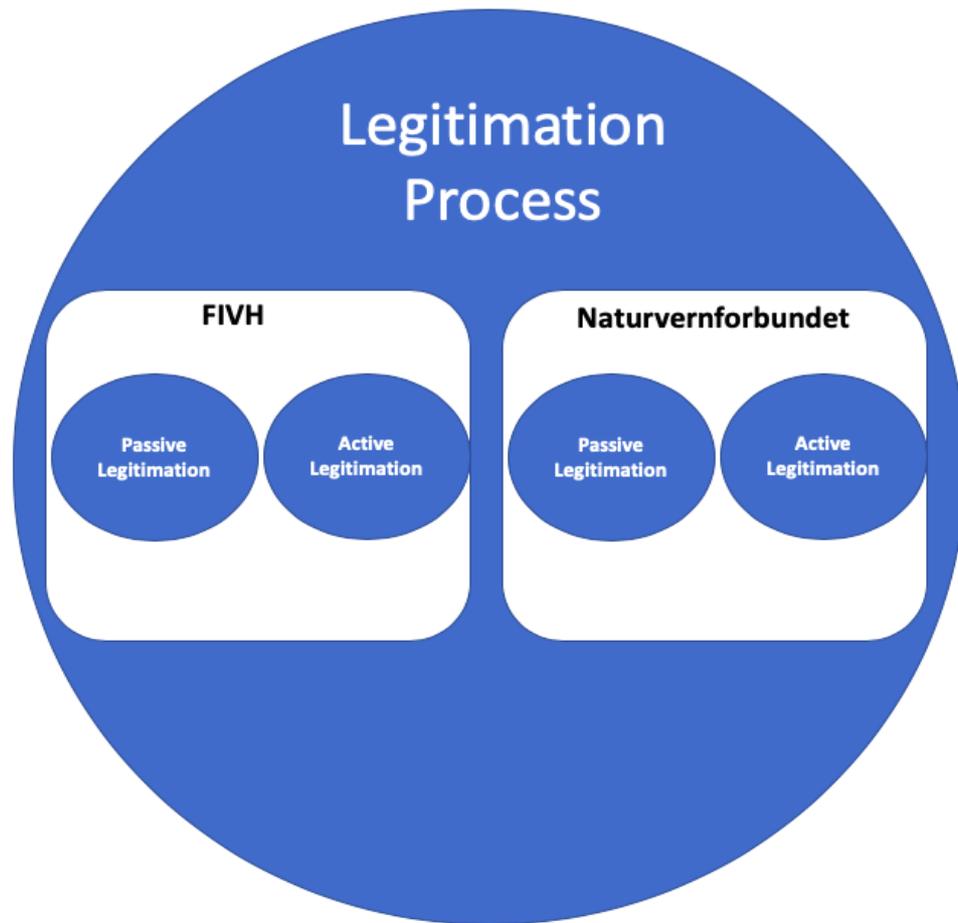


Diagram 7: An embedded, multi-case study. The circle aims to illustrate how the cases are integrated in the unit of analysis (legitimation process).

5.5. Analytic Strategy

The analytic strategy should be in place before the data collection phase even begins. Case Studies often run danger to get stuck when the researcher does not know what to do with the collected data at all or has not had in mind the research questions while collecting the data (Yin 2014). However, the analytic strategy in this study was to some extent determined by the data collection. Getting limited access to the organizations had a significant effect on the data collection as it got restricted to publicly available documents. Thus, the analytic strategy had to be chosen in accordance to the strengths and limitations of the study.

5.5.1. Adaptive theory approach

The plan was first to solely apply Layder's (1998) adaptive theory approach. This approach takes on existing theories and data, which then are complemented by new data and theoretical insights:

“Adaptive theory uses both inductive and deductive procedures for developing and elaborating theory [...] Adaptive theory both shapes, and is shaped by the empirical data that emerges from research. It allows the dual influence of extant theory (theoretical models) as well as those that unfold from (and are enfolded in) the research. Adaptive theorizing is an ever-present feature of the research process” - (Layder 1998, p. 133).

The study applies the adaptive approach as it both uses theoretical models and develops theoretical implications on legitimation within the context of NGOs. The synthetic composition of existing theoretical models and empirical data emerging from the research is shortly summarized in the following and addressed in further detail in the concluding chapter of this study.

The preliminary assumptions of this study are based on the studies of Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) and Hoefler and Green (2016), who established a theoretical model in which various agents adopt different rhetoric strategies to legitimize themselves or their agendas. Whereas Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) deduct their findings from the analysis of several intersectoral mergers, leading to the creation of new organizational forms, Hoefler and Green (2016) developed the model further on a pure theoretical level, attempting to balance the emphasis on “active and passive speakers and listeners” (p. 143-144). The study further employs theoretical insights from Suchman (1995) who proposed a distinction between active and passive legitimacy. This distinction is highly relevant as it reminds of the multiple dimensions of the legitimation process.

All of the theoretical implications stem from studies about organizations in the management sector. Studies from Collingwood and Logister (2005) and Walton (2012) are important contributions for projecting those implications on the NGO sector. Collingwood and Logister, who described legitimacy as a “matter of degree

rather than an absolute quality” (p. 189) did not quite emphasize the legitimation process perspective but pointed out a certain dynamic of gaining and maintaining legitimacy. Walton (2012) picked up Suchman’s (1995) distinction between active and passive legitimacy, leading to NGOs choosing different strategy approaches depending on whether they pursued active or passive legitimacy.

5.5.2. Analysing Documents

With only one source to data, namely publicly available documents, it is even more important to know, how that data source has to be analysed even before starting to collect the data. The main guidance for the document analysis was provided by Yin (2014) and Bratberg (2018), while additional insights were deducted from Mynster & Edwards (2014).

According to Yin (2014), documentary data provides only a sole basis of information which can serve for further data collection. He states that “because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case study research” (p. 107). At the same time, he warns of “potential overreliance on documents” (p. 108) and argues that the sole use of documents is contrary to a major strength of case studies, being the collection of various sources of data (p. 119). As he further warns of lack of construct validity (p. 121) and the lack of converging lines of inquiry (p.120), Yin helps with focusing on possible traps during the data collection and analysis process.

Bratberg (2018), on the other hand, provides a helpful guideline for analysing texts and documents in Social Science research. In his chapter about the analysis of rhetoric, he emphasizes the interaction of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Defining rhetoric as purpose-oriented, Bratberg argues that persuading effect of rhetoric depends not only on who presents an argument, how the argument is presented, or what the argument actually is, but rather on the combination of all three dimensions (p. 135). While Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) also worked with *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, the scholars focused mainly on transcripts of witness testimonials under public hearings (p. 41). Mynster & Edwards (2014) however, used only two types of documentary data: quarterly membership magazines and letters of appeal (p. 329).

Thus, the data was collected and analysed according to the context within it was published and the three primary forms of persuasive appeal *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

5.6. Qualitative Data Sources

Researching legitimation processes means analysing how an actor behaves in certain situations. Enforcing operationalization on such processes would not only be difficult, it would also be detrimental for the depth of the study. Legitimation is a complex concept as the theoretical discussion has shown. The lack of operationalization and the complexity of the theoretical concept require qualitative data sources in this study. It is not only that the quantitative measures and statistical analyses simply do not fit for this study but also that the research problem calls for an in-depth investigation.

The data was collected from one source, that is publicly available documents. At this point, it should be mentioned that six 45-minute, open-ended interviews have been conducted with NGO staff of one of the organizations in this study. However, as only one of the NGO staff of the other organization was ready to talk to me, the in total seven interviews had to be disregarded for this study. The same goes for several observations of the staff of the first NGO, which I was able to gain during the two days, I visited them. This disclosure tries to explain the choice of data sources. Nevertheless, the collected data allows a thorough analysis for the organizations' legitimation. Previous studies show the feasibility of robust qualitative studies with one source of data (Mynster & Edwards 2014).

I chose three types of documentary data, namely annual reports, thematic reports, and letters and public statements. Both organizations have a document archive, where these three forms of documentary data were available. Despite some differences in the organizations' structure to categorize their documents, the selected sources are comparable and available from both NGOs. I read all 284 documents and identified 584 relevant text segments. I chose liberal standards to determine whether a text segment was relevant or not. I excluded neutral fact sheets and scientific explanations that were not leading towards an argument but rather providing a basis of knowledge. This is without doubt contributing to some form of legitimacy itself, but not subject of this study that aims to find out how rhetoric strategies affect an organization's

legitimation. Apart from that, I included everything that could have an impact on legitimation. The theoretical framework clearly guided me in this process.

I furthermore included quotes as long as they could be considered relevant. I admit that this was a subjective selection, but I tried to develop some criteria as well. Quotes were included if they were from 'relevant' people, as in politicians, scientists, or persons of the public life. Quotes from private persons without any relevant background were not included.

5.6.1. Annual Reports

Both NGOs in this study publish annual reports, offering detailed information about organizational developments such as number of members, and strategical developments such as following up long-term goals. The annual reports were the main source of data in this study as they offer the most wholesome overview of what has happened from year to year. Following the temporal scope of this study, the annual reports from 2013 – 2017 will be considered.

5.6.2. Thematic reports

The second source of documentary data were thematic based reports. Both reports use them as a way of communicating and setting focus on selected topics. FIVH published 62 reports, while Naturvernforbundet published 13. The thematic reports address different target groups within the organizations and thus vary substantially in the way they are written. The reports are usually backed up with research and scientific insights to environmental issues. In course of the examined period, FIVH began to publish its reports more regularly. Both organisations eventually collaborated with other organizations in these reports, taking advantage of their broad, worldwide network.

5.6.3. Letters and public statements

The third documentary source will be letters and public statements. While FIVH has published six of those between 2013 – 2017, Naturvernforbundet published 193. Letters and public statements are a very direct form of public communication, usually

addressing one concrete policy or practice that the organizations feel they have to comment on. Of the 193 letters and statements published by Naturvernforbundet, several statements were addressing environmental policies or practices in other countries in order to support international campaigns or NGOs in other countries. Several of those statements were signed by both organisations. However, they were only published by Naturvernforbundet, which is why they were not included in FIVH’s data.

	FIVH	Naturvernforbundet
Annual Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 reports - Focusing on long-term strategies - Following up intermediate goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 reports - Focusing on organizational structure - Focusing on selected successful projects
Thematic Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 62 reports - One monthly regular report with varying topics - Updates on bigger projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 reports - Strong variety from simple fact sheets to guides for grass-root impact to scientific studies of infrastructure projects
Letters and Public Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 statements - Mainly statements about state budget proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 193 statements and letters - Covering both public and private entities - Both national and international focus

Table 3: Documentary Data Sources

5.7. Coding of the Data

As documentary data being the primary and sole data source, it was important to code them accordingly. While conducting the data, it was important to keep in mind the research questions in order to filter out “notations of ‘interesting’ answers or quotations” (Layder 1998, p. 53). After having conducted the data and having filtered out relevant segments, the next stage was to add provisional (Layder 1998, p. 53) or open codes

(Suddaby & Greenwood 2005, p. 43) to label relevant segments in way, they easily can be classified and reviewed later in the process.

To start with, the relevant segments were analysed according to whether the communication piece would affect the active legitimation process of the NGO, the passive legitimation process or whether it could be attributed to having an effect on both. The first label group was thus *active legitimation*, *passive legitimation*, or *mixed*. Simultaneously, all segments were coded according to one of the three forms of persuasion in rhetoric: *ethos*, *pathos*, or *logos*. This coding was a forced ranking choice. That means that if a segment could not be labelled with certainty, I labelled them according to which branch was most dominant. Here, I followed the coding approach of Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), despite the fact that they had a research team to randomly cross-check the reliability of their coding. I do not have such a team and thus, reliability of coding may be an issue.

Afterwards, the three groups were separated individually after their primary code (legitimation process) and analysed according to whether they could be attributed to one of the five rhetoric strategies presented earlier. On this stage, I had six codes: *ontological*, *teleological*, *historical*, *cosmological*, *value-base*, and *other*. Again, following Suddaby and Greenwood's coding approach, I expected the persuasion branches to help identifying the rhetoric strategies easier. Unfortunately, I did not share that experience to a significant extent which in retro perspective raises the question whether my coding simply was not reliable or if this data simply did not show a clear pattern between the codes. The latter would be object of a quantitative analysis.

Since I did not have a research team to cross-check my coding, I had two cross-check phases myself. After all codes were assigned, I checked the two first groups one more time on whether they were assigned correctly in forms of the theoretical framework. During that first round, 72 text segments got new codes. 47 of the codes were from data that stemmed from FIVH and 25 codes from text segments from Naturvernforbundet. Most of them (59) related to the first group of codes and had originally been labelled as *mixed*. After cross-checking with the theoretical framework, I either labelled them as *active* or *passive*. The other false codes were either wrongfully labelled as *active* or *passive* during the first assignment or in three cases had the wrong

persuasion codes. Afterwards, I did the same with the third group of codes, the rhetoric strategies. Here, I reassigned seven codes to FIVH's text segments and four codes to Naturvernforbundet's. The cross-checking was done to enhance theoretical triangulation, which will be explained further in the next section of this chapter.

Nevertheless, the coding helped a lot with filtering out irrelevant data, organizing it, and preparing it for further analysis. It was especially helpful to having created a database with all the relevant segments that could easily be searched for both codes or other reoccurring terms as the analysis unfolded.

5.8. Concerns of Research Quality

With help of the research design, this study has led to relevant insights about the legitimation processes of environmental NGOs in Norway. Nevertheless, a research design should always be tested for its quality in order to make results more robust and more useful to future academic research. Yin (2014, p. 45) describes four principles of data collection that can guide a research phase:

1. Use of multiple sources of evidence
2. Creating a Case Study Database
3. Maintaining a Chain of Evidence
4. Exercising Care when Using Data from Electronic Sources

The first principle, the triangulation of data, was not followed in this study. This certainly affects the research quality and the robustness of the results. Therefore, it was even more important to be aware of traps and challenges during both the data collection and the analysis process. However, there are other types of triangulation as well, as Patton (2002) describes. Besides the data triangulation, an alternative can also be the investigator triangulation, where different evaluators are involved in the research process. This type was for example applied by Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) who had a team of researchers, cross-checking each other's evaluations (p. 44). As this type of triangulation was not realistic in this either, either methodological or theory triangulation could potentially enhance the quality of the research design. Thus, I tried to apply theory triangulation to some extent. As Kushner and Morrow (2003) argued

for “a constant grounding process at the level of data gathering and analysis, coupled with internal checks [...] on theoretical arguments” (p. 38). Whereas this type of triangulation might not be on the same level as data or investigator triangulation, it does sharpen the researcher’s focus on the theoretical frame during the data gathering and analysis. As described, this was first and foremost done during the coding of the data which had a significant impact on the following analysis. However, theoretical triangulation also played a substantial role when drawing together empirical evidence for answering the research questions. In addition, theoretical triangulation was present during most parts of the study due to the application of Layder’s (1998) analytic approach, requiring constant checks on both data, analysis and theory.

5.8.1. Construct Validity

An often-formulated criticism of case studies is that subjective judgements influence the researcher in the data collection phase. As a result, the researcher (un-)consciously overemphasizes data that confirm his or her opinion. Another criticism is that case studies lack operational sets of measures as commonly known in quantitative research (Flyvberg 2006; Yin 2014, p. 46).

Ensuring construct validity begins thus before the data collection phase and plays a vital role in defining the theoretical framework. A robust theoretical background provided not only clear definitions of the concepts being studied but in addition five independent variables that have been drawn from various cases in other contextual settings (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Further literature showed that the adoption of relevant concepts and theoretical models was possible (Collingwood & Logister 2005, Walton 2012). Furthermore, in this case, the type of data source might have an enhancing effect on construct validity. As the data is publicly available, subjective judgments can still influence the researcher, but are much easier to get detected by others. In this research design, the risk of misleading interview questions or subjective observations does simply not exist. This does not mean that the overall risk of subjectivity does not exist, but that situations in the data collection phase, where a researcher individually collects real-time data (open-ended interviews, observations), are limited to minimum, if they occur at all.

The challenge in this study was without doubt the coding phase, in which wrong codes can have been attributed to certain text segments. In order to enhance research quality, I assessed the codes two times after I had assigned them the first time, each time cross checking with the theoretical framework. During the first round, I reassigned 72 codes. While 47 of them were from FIVH's data, 25 were from Naturvernforbundet's text segments. The majority of reassigned codes were

5.8.2. Internal Validity

The second test concerns internal validity, which addresses the causal relationships of the study. It is mainly relevant for explanatory studies. However, in this case study, "the concern extends to the broader problem of making inferences" (Yin 2014, p. 47). Inferences are made every time an event cannot be directly observed. This is obviously the case in this study. No events have been observed directly. However, events are not of importance in this study, as it analyses the public communication of environmental NGOs in order to examine their legitimation process. This means that the collected data, which resembles the organizations' public communication, are the 'main event' of this study.

The risk is to not grasp the context in which the text segments were published. However, due to the nature of the collected documents, this risk is limited. The annual reports are typically characterised as both being somewhat neutral and presenting the respective organizations in a good light. The public statements and letters are usually direct reactions to policies or environmental malpractice. This leaves the thematic reports left as a challenge. Here I do not know, whether a topic was selected randomly or not.

5.8.3. External Validity

External validity refers to analytic generalisations that can be derived from the study's results. This is a common problem for case studies in qualitative research designs, as the small amount of cases can be too specific for a certain context, in which the study occurs.

This study aims to contribute to the academic literature by providing further evidence for the selected theoretical model. It certainly can be generalized to other environmental NGOs. While due to regional differences, world-wide generalization might not work, environmental NGOs in northern Europe and other parts of the Western world can be expected to behave similarly. It still needs to be stated, that not only further studies are needed to test the used theoretical model. This study as well has its limitations and needs to be extended beyond the theoretical frame and the data sources.

5.8.4. Reliability

Reliability is the last test and concerns whether the study can be repeated with the same results. This test is important to ensure that the study is free from errors or bias (Yin 2014, p. 49). Having a research protocol is essential for the reliability of the study.

The data source makes it without doubt easy to replicate this study as all sources are publicly available. In addition, the coding that was used in order to sort the data before the analysis, has both been illustrated and was inspired by a similar case study (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). As noted earlier, this does not eliminate the risk of mistakes in the coding process. However, the coding has been double-checked, which in a way was partly replicating my own study during the research process.

5.9. Challenges of the Study

This study has had several challenges that have occurred during the research process. The first challenge was of very practical nature and has been mentioned several times in the previous chapters. The whole study was planned and designed quite differently, including open-ended interviews with NGO staff. Several interviews have been conducted. The point where I had to recognize that I will not be able to conduct the rest of the interviews that were essential for this study came quite late, which is something, I have to take self-critique for. However, that recognition led to drastic changes in the whole study, which included changes in the theoretical framework and analytic strategy, a complete methodological redesign and finding new codes.

The second challenge was the measurement of legitimation. This challenge was anticipated as it is typical for that kind of studies. Measuring a process is nearly impossible without overemphasizing a certain outcome and it can be argued that analysing a process in fact contradicts measurement of any kind. However, as the (theoretical) focus was on the input side, offering five strategies, some measurement is provided in the study as the use of strategies can technically be quantified. This calls for further studies of the research problem, where quantitative or mixed-method approaches could offer some interesting insights.

The third challenge was the language barrier. The case study involved Norwegian organizations and while this thesis is written in English, it involves a communication analysis in Norwegian. In addition, some of the relevant background literature for analysing documentary data was also in Norwegian (Bratberg 2018). After having lived in Norway for three and a half years, I felt comfortable while conducting the research and I did not perceive the challenge as too difficult. However, it still remained a challenge that might have affected the overall quality of the study. I tried however, to tackle this challenge with strict coding.

6. Empirical Evidence of legitimation processes within FIVH

The following chapter presents relevant empirical evidence for the passive and active legitimation processes of the NGO *Framtiden i våre hender*. The data from this organization is presented and compared with the theoretical framework which has been outlined in chapter four. The data from the identified text segments is distinguished in two main categories – passive legitimation and active legitimation. In addition, the text segments that were not categorizable as either of the two main categories will be discussed briefly.

In chapter four, five rhetoric strategies were presented. During the data collection and analysis, they were helpful instruments to sort the segments. The first strategy was *ontological theorization*, which resulted in the independent variable *Delegitimizing existing practices by framing them as being incompatible with basic environmental principles*. This sort of radical strategy could often be observed when the NGOs were targeting other actors directly. These findings will be presented first in each section. The second strategy was *historical theorization*, which resulted in the independent variable *Applying path-dependency logics to respond to doubts of rationality*. This variable was adapted to some degree in order to fit for this study. Even though that variable does have not much left in common with the term *historical*, it certainly fitted in a way that the selected NGOs sometimes had to legitimize themselves by presenting them and their actions and ideas as rational. The third strategy was *teleological theorization* and resulted in the independent variable *Being the immediate actor that can drive necessary change*. Here, the NGOs presented themselves as the actors who can change something now. This strategy was used surprisingly infrequent as the organizations typically do not have the capacity to burden that kind of agency. The fourth strategy was *cosmological theorization* and led to the independent variable *Being the actor that can provide an appropriate reaction*. This strategy was somewhat more applicable as reactions can be on a smaller scale and limited to a certain region. The last strategy was *value-based theorization*, with the independent variable *Connection (environmental) actions or agendas to established sets of values*. This strategy was most common in international contexts where the impact of climate change on third world countries was focus.

Each section (active and passive legitimation) ends with presenting data which cannot be labelled as one of the five legitimation strategies and might lead to other legitimation strategies. The data from *Naturvernforbundet* will be presented in the following chapter.

6.1. Case 1: Framtiden i våre hender

The analysis of the NGO's documents resulted in 301 relevant text segments. 93 segments were labelled *active*, 35 *mixed*, and 173 labelled as *passive*. Distributed by documentary source, 26 segments were retrieved from annual reports, 10 from Letters and statements, and 265 from thematic reports. At this point it needs to be stated that in terms of pages, thematic reports accounted for almost 90%. Eventually, this makes the distribution more comprehensible. A quantitative analysis of correlation between codes and documentary source was not carried out in this study.

6.2. Passive legitimation

The first subunit in this case study is passive legitimation. A detailed conceptualization of passive legitimation was provided in chapter 4, following by a review on the subunits in chapter 5. Of the 301 relevant text segments, 173 were labelled as affecting passive legitimation:

Rhetorical Strategy	Relevant text segments
Ontological	65
Rational	28
Teleological	31
Cosmological	13
Value-Based	19
Undefined	17

Table 4: Distribution by rhetoric strategy – FIVH passive

6.2.1. Ontological theorization

Of the 65 text segments that were characterized as having an impact on passive legitimation and applying ontological theorization, 58 were found in thematic reports. FIVH made extensive use of ontological theorization by framing existing practices or typical patterns of behaviour as incompatible with environmental principles. The rhetoric was directed against a great variety of groups and stakeholders on a national and international level, such as the Norwegian Pension Fund, coal mining companies in Norway and other countries or the Norwegian society in general.

“If the Norwegian government were looking for an effective strategy to accelerate climate change, it wouldn’t have to look far. It could simply continue providing capital to an expanding coal sector through investments in the world’s largest miners and burners.”

Fremtiden i våre hender, 2014

As in this example, the NGO pointed out several times that current practices of the Norwegian government (through the state-owned Pension Fund) are not consistent with tackling climate change. Even though Suddaby and Greenwood (2015, p. 51) point out that ontological theorization is not based on empirical observation but rather on rationalized beliefs, the empirical observation in this example is not central in the segment. Instead, the focus is clearly on the government’s incompatibility with basic environmental principles. While Suddaby and Greenwood emphasized that this strategy is applied by actors who are resisted to change (p. 52), FIVH showed that this resistance can be used to delegitimize other actors.

In 2014, airplane traffic at Gardermoen [airport in Oslo] produced a total of 1,61 million tons in emissions. Of that, 1,15 million [tons], or 70%, stemmed from foreign flights. An extension of Gardermoen would take place in the same period as Norway is supposed to reduce its emissions by 40% of the 1990-level.

Framtiden i våre hender, 2017, translated from Norwegian

Another fairly common application of ontological theorization was to connect specific projects to commitments of superior authorities. The Norwegian airport corporation AVINOR is a state-owned corporation. Thus, FIVH laid out the incompatibility of

extension plans with commitments made by a superior authority, in this case not only the government but also the owner of AVINOR itself.

Whether FIVH addressed inconsistencies between an actor's rhetoric and its own actions or between an actor's plans and their superior mandates, FIVH actively and regularly applied ontological theorizations. The fact that FIVH did not use terms like *believe* in many of their ontological statements does not mean that their rhetoric is not ontological but rather that they base their work on networks and technical skills as most of their communication is backed up by either empirical evidence or other organizations and actors in that sector. Walton (2012) described this as a form of work conduction that contributes to being accepted from most actors or audiences. FIVH furthermore attempted to draw together various interests and influences from sources on various dimensions (private and public; national and international).

6.2.2. Rational Theorization

The second strategy was rational theorization and was the one that was modified the most for this study. Environmental organizations often face the critique that while their ideas sound nice, they are not realistically implementable. In order to avoid such delegitimizing critique, it is essential for environmental NGO to apply rational theorization which allows them to be respected by other actors. The use of this strategy was exciting to analyse, as one can observe a development of the organization's strategy over time. In 2013, FIVH supposedly did not enjoy a high degree of legitimacy as the organization adopted arguments of external experts to legitimize their positions:

In 2013, more than 200 billion NOK will be invested in oil- and gas extraction, while the UN's climate panel states that the world's fossil resources have to remain underground if the 2°-goal shall be achieved. Leading economists reached out in Aftenposten [Norwegian newspaper] and asked to limit activities in the oil industry. Hilde Bjørnland, professor for economics at BI, calculated that a 50%-decrease of the oil price would immediately lead to a loss of 30-40% at the Oslo stock exchange.

Framtiden i våre Hender, 2013 – translated from Norwegian

Building a professional identity with help of experts, FIVH became more respected and soon was able to apply rational theorization by promoting own contributions to existing governing modes:

To be quite clear, the suggested criteria are by no means radical. In the course of our research, we identified 51 further companies in the GPF's [Government Pension Fund] holdings that have some coal mining or coal power business. They were, however, not included in our data as they did not meet the defined thresholds. And, our research did not even attempt to capture specialized coal equipment and transportation companies. Truly cleaning all of the coal dust out of the Pension Fund's portfolio would require a much more aggressive approach. Our suggested criteria simply represent the very first step on the difficult road of realigning investments with climate stability. And while this first step is decisive, it is also one easily taken. Of all fossil fuels, coal is not only the most harmful, it is also the one easiest to replace. If implemented, our criteria would eliminate a significant part of the coal sector from the GPF's holdings. This would be an important step in the right direction.

Framtiden i våre hender, 2015

As the second segment shows, FIVH appeared much more confident, drawing on their own analysis of the GPF and suggesting exit strategies for some investments that were harmful of the environment. This suggests a different level of reputation among relevant parties such as the GPF or the Norwegian government, indicating that FIVH had become more of a political insider. This became even clearer in 2017, when the NGO offered a list of specific policies that were recommended to the new government for the legislation period 2017-2021:

Whether one wants to reduce consumption or push it towards a more environmental-friendly direction, specific political instruments are necessary. In this chapter we list 10 concrete propositions, Norwegian politicians can pass in the period 2017-2021. The propositions include tax politics, consumer politics and job politics. For each proposition, we have conducted a rough analysis on what impact they would have on material consumption (high, middle, low). [...] The economic cost will vary. While some of them will lead to an increase in tax

income, but might be unpopular, others will be the opposite. Several propositions will intensify each other.

Fremtiden i våre hender, 2017 – translated from Norwegian

Now it is not unusual for NGOs to release statements about recommendations to the government. The difference here is that FIVH took into account both potential economic and political effects, presenting itself as a serious and rational actor that is capable to see the bigger picture beyond its own agenda. Even though this study does not analyse legitimacy as a threshold, it is fair to say that FIVH gained passive legitimacy in course of the five years. This is important to acknowledge as the public communication of the NGO clearly shows a certain evolution. This indicates that FIVH has to some extent been aware of that development and has adapted their communication strategy accordingly.

6.2.3. Teleological Theorization

The third form was teleological theorization. Suggesting that “certain events must occur within the context of some ‘grand plan’ or ultimate objective” (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005, p. 46), stopping climate change and protecting the environment can in this context be regarded as the ‘grand plan’. It is not only suggested that certain events must occur but that FIVH furthermore is the actor who stands back those events. This strategy was used in a dualized way. In their annual reports, FIVH reported about small-scale events where it had been the driving force behind. In thematic reports, the NGO focused on large-scale impacts of single events:

Before the Pension Fund published its annual report, FIVH examined its investments in coal. [...] Our investigation was presented [...] and followed up by meetings with the Norwegian Bank and the Ethics council. In course of year were we able to celebrate the Pension Fund’s expulsion of Duke Energy, which we filed a complaint against through our coal campaign in 2015.

Framtiden i våre hender 2016 – translated from Norwegian²

² As apparent from the text segment, the event (filing a complaint) happened in 2015 and the fund sold its shares soon afterwards. However, the annual report of 2015 does not refer to that event explicitly which is the text segment was taken from the 2016 report even though the follow-up report was released in the same year

“A year ago, the Norwegian Parliament took a historic decision to move the Government Pension Fund Global (GPF) out of thermal coal. The Parliament determined that companies should be excluded if they “base 30% or more of their activities on coal, and/or derive 30% of their revenues from coal.” This was an important break-through as the 30% threshold established a new benchmark for divestment actions of large investors. Only months after the Norwegian decision, the world’s largest insurance company, Allianz, undertook a coal divestment action of its own based on the GPF’s 30% threshold. And other investors such as KLP and Storebrand, which had already undertaken divestment actions, have now tightened their thresholds to keep up with the trail blazed by the Norwegian Parliament.”

Framtiden i våre hender, 2016-11

The first segment is exemplary for the organisation’s long-term commitment and the clear role they played in the event. Even though it might not seem like as the radical change, teleologic argumentation usually focuses on, it certainly indicates a breach with past tradition (Suddaby & Greenwood 2005, p. 46), as the pension fund sold its shares after a clear recommendation from an environmental NGO. The second segment stands for a much more radical change and its large-scale impact. Even though FIVH does not clearly state their impact on that decision, previous reports and campaigns indicate a strong connection.

At the same time, both segments represent passive legitimation. In both situations, FIVH contributed directly to changes of governance, both on the national and international level as well in both the public and the private sector. Especially in the first example, the NGO’s investigation was based on technical skills while the second situation indicates a superior network that helped with impacting both the Norwegian Pension Fund as well as the other actors. This strategy did not reveal such a strong evolution of the organization in course of the investigated period. Nevertheless, it showed how successful projects impacted the organization’s legitimation, which indicates that FIVH was aware of their passive legitimation process.

6.2.4. Cosmological Theorization

As indicated in chapter 4, cosmological theorization might be somewhat challenging for environmental NGOs in terms of legitimation, as this strategy implies limited agency. Still, it seems like an obvious approach for environmental NGOs to focus on climate change and its effects on industries and societies. However, to present itself as a constructive agent, pure warnings of detrimental effects of climate change are not sufficient to actively engage in legitimation processes. A common way to propose changes for FIVH was pointing out the common responsibility of the society:

FIVH has calculated that every person in Norway cutting down eating meat once a week equal a decrease of emissions of 200.000 cars. This is a simple climate effort which in addition offers great health gains.

Framtiden i våre hender 2015-2 – translated from Norwegian

Drawing on own research (technical skills), FIVH found linkages between the society as a whole and specific industries such as the car industry and meat industry. In addition, it included potential health benefits in its argument, thus seeking acceptance (non-interference) from most audiences rather than building on support from the general population, as it was framing a potentially unpopular suggestion. The segment from above is an excerpt from the organization's commentary to the state budget, and later the NGO asks the government to create special financial incentives for a meat free day. However, the FIVH remains unspecific as 200.000 cars is not a standardized size. Whether FIVH refers to the yearly or daily emissions makes a huge difference. Diffusing examples might not necessarily help with an argument and seem thus rather populist.

Another way of applying cosmological theorization was to remind other powerful actors of their responsibility, once again drawing linkages between public and private sectors:

“As progress in government negotiations on climate change is still painfully slow, the decisions of investors may play a key role in determining whether our chance of staying beneath the 2°C limit are washed away by a black tide of coal expansion projects. In this dossier, we address the Norwegian Government Pension Fund as one of the world's most influential investors.”

Framtiden i våre hender 2015-18

Both segments show well the use of language and the type of persuasion, FIVH has used in these cases, namely *pathos*. Even though the mode of persuasion will be addressed further in a later section, it is a clear yet surprising observation of this section as this kind of persuasion and language would have been expected to play a greater role in active legitimation processes.

6.2.5. Value-based Theorization

The last pre-defined strategy was value-based theorization, where ethical evaluations play an important role. FIVH is through collaborations in international networks engaged in a variety of campaigns and not all of them are necessarily in relation to environmental issues. Still, it is no challenge to connect environmental issues to ethical considerations. However, it is challenging to connect ethical issues or morality to passive legitimation as the following example shows:

There are several ethical reasons for why the GPF should do more to solve the climate crisis: it is getting less and less defensible that Norway is using revenue from carbon-intensive oil extraction to invest in even more oil extraction globally. Climate change is already affecting societies and people all over the world and a lot of countries do not have the financial means to adapt to those changes. Basic human rights such as the right to live, health, shelter, and food are on the line for billions of people. The countries that are affected the most are the ones who have contributed the least to climate change.

Framtiden i våre hender 2013-4, translated from Norwegian

The connection between environmental issues and ethical considerations becomes obvious, as well as the multi-sited spatial relationship, FIVH takes on in this segment. At the same time, it could be argued, that FIVH builds on support from the general population, even though there is no literal indication for that. What weighs most, however, is the fact that with such claims, FIVH seeks non-interference from most audiences in order to perform the roles expected by its partners. This segment is from 2013, where FIVH still was a strong opponent of the GPF rather than a potential consultant. Hence, it can be interpreted that the direct opposing language is not meant to get support from the general population, as that population which is referred to in

this segment, is far away from Norway. The use of language rather aims to delegitimize the GPF's investment practice in order to subsequently offer more rational alternatives as other segments in previous sections of this chapter have shown.

6.2.6. Creating a Professional Identity

As most of the text segments could be categorized as one of the predefined categories, several pieces did not fit. One pattern that was found was the use of experts, which did not seem to fit with any of the five theoretic strategies. In several situations, FIVH emphasizes the role of experts to create an argumentative foundation for the rhetoric strategy that followed afterwards. This was achieved either through interviews with experts or own research:

This report has a special focus on selected products as this will be FIVH's approach to the pollutant problem. [...] This report is thus to be understood as a technical foundation for FIVH's following work with pollutants.

Fremtiden i våre hender 2015-17, translated from Norwegian

The use of experts to remind all the organization's audiences of the importance and reality of climate change goes beyond the expected research that is embedded in the organization's regular communication. Such segments show the organization's focus on building a professional organizational identity and thus contribute substantially to the passive legitimation process. As the selected segments of this chapter show, FIVH managed to shape its passive legitimation process actively, establishing itself as a more and more professional and accepted agent not only in relevant debates but also in developing specific policies and approaches.

As the organization established its professional character as an outcome of the passive legitimation process, it also adapted its rhetoric strategies. More than half of all teleological statements were made in 2016 and 2017, indicating a stronger agency over time. Contrary to that declined the use of value-based theorization over time, indicating that both the NGO and environmental protection itself enjoyed greater acceptance over time.

6.3. Active Legitimation

The second subunit in this case study regards the process of active legitimation. A detailed conceptualization of passive legitimation was provided in chapter 4, following by a review on the subunits in chapter 5. Of the 301 relevant text segments, 93 were labelled as affecting active legitimation:

Rhetorical Strategy	Relevant text segments
Ontological	6
Rational	4
Teleological	26
Cosmological	19
Value-Based	32
Undefined	6

Table 5: Distribution by rhetorical strategy – FIVH active

6.3.1. Ontological Theorization

To assess the use of ontological theorization in active legitimation processes, it was assumed that national goals and vision reflect the general population's will to some extent. This might not be true for all countries, but in Norway with its functioning institution and a stable democracy (Freedom House Index 2018), policies can be considered to express the will of the general population. Drawing on support from the general population, FIVH showed off the incompatibility of Norway's declared policies and its political practices:

“The Norwegian investments in Indonesia’s coal production constitute a stark contrast to Norway’s declared environmental policy”

Framtiden i våre hender 2013-1

FIVH emphasizes the categorical distinction between policy and praxis, focusing clearly on the national level. From this segment it can even be interpreted that FIVH calls for an alternative vision of governance, namely one that takes into account collective commitments. This becomes even more clear in the next segment:

Future Norwegians' right to benefit from the oil revenue is fundamental for the administration of the Pension Fund. We want to point out that it is little long-term oriented to not take climate risks more seriously.

Framtiden i våre hender 2013-4, translated from Norwegian

Here, FIVH goes a step further and builds on support from future generations. In a way, FIVH justifies its engagement with indicating its representation of a community which exists of present and future generations. It is noticeable that both selected segments are from 2013. In total were four of the six segments from 2013. While the use of ontological theory could be observed in later years as well, it became less and less explicit in terms of categorical distinction.

6.3.2. Rational Theorization

FIVH did not apply rational theorization to a great extent in order to engage in active legitimization processes. Appearing as a rationality driven actor and advocating moral visions outside the political spectrum do of course not mutually exclude each other but the contextual situation in which this rhetoric strategy can be applied is limited:

A decrease in meat consumption in Norway is highly advantageous for the environment. Producing meat costs more energy, more land, and more water than producing vegetables. [...] In combination with recommendation from public health services [...] these factors have led to a rising interest in meat-free food in Norway. In 2016, both Coop and Norgesgruppen launched several vegetarian alternatives in their stores. [...] A study from FIVH in 2017 confirms that many Norwegians want to reduce their meat consumption

Framtiden i våre hender 2017-16, translated from Norwegian

Building on basic support not only from the general population but also corporations, FIVH addresses various beneficial factors for an evolution towards a vegetarian diet. Especially usage of energy and land are indirect indicators for economic benefits on both macro- and micro-level. At the same time, recommendations from the public health services serve as rational arguments for the general population itself.

6.3.3. Teleological Theorization

FIVH focused substantially on teleological theorization within its active legitimation process, for example through emphasizing on voluntarism by their members and the local communities all over Norway:

Ten of our local branches participated in this campaign to give people an overview over which parties have the best ideas for environmental policies [...] Vi spent a lot of time on this campaign, joining an alliance of more than 100 organizations in order to put environmental issues on the parliament's agenda.

Framtiden i våre hender 2013, translated from Norwegian

The campaign in the run-up to the national elections in 2013 was an event which had a bigger plan in mind, which was to put environmental issues on the political agenda. Even though FIVH based its work on a larger network, the goal was a movement on the grassroots-level. As the environmental NGO with most members in Norway, FIVH represented the (local) communities in which it engaged in.

In other situations, FIVH advocated its grand vision by building on support from the general population by emphasizing that the population just needed to demand change from some actors in order to pursue a bigger goal:

For a company of this size, actions are a lot more than just symbolic. Statoil is big enough to make a difference, if Statoil wants. [...] The choices are of course Statoil's choices. But they are our shared responsibility. The Norwegian state owns 2/3 of Statoil. Especially countries and corporations who have become rich with the production of fossil energy have a special responsibility to fight the climate crisis. As Statoil's owner it is up to Norwegian state officials and in a last instance us who elected those officials to endorse the choices, Statoil has taken and is going to take. [...] Statoil can become future-oriented energy corporation and use its size and expertise to contribute substantially to create a sustainable society. If Statoil wants to. If we want to.

Framtiden i våre hender 2015-10, translated from Norwegian

Teleologic rhetoric is a suitable strategy in the active legitimation process. In order to being able to credibly represent grassroots communities and to draw support from a

general population that exceeds these communities, a certain degree of agency is necessary. Embedding single events or specific actions in a bigger plan further enhances encouragement from a general audience. As Walton (2012, p. 24) puts it: “The organization did not simply need to be understood; it also needed to have value in its local context.”

6.3.4. Cosmological Theorization

The use of cosmological theorization as parts of the active legitimation process was carried by long-term scenarios in a global context. For this strategy, it is important to understand climate change as a process itself, as a degree rather than an attribute. Thus, despite of climate change inevitably setting in, various actors still have limited agency, determining the degree of the change’s impact.

The world’s climate is changing. Weather- and ocean systems are changing, biological diversity is threatened, humans lose their livelihood due to flooding, drought, and extreme weather. [...] These changes can become irreversible, but it is still not too late to limit temperature rise to two degrees – provided that emissions are cut substantially within a short amount of time.

Framtiden i våre hender 2015-10, translated from Norwegian

The ‘substantial emission cuts’ is a promotion of an alternative way of life, not just an alternative way of governance. That call is justified by the claim that humans lose their basis of their central needs in life, such as food, safety, or shelter.

In addition, FIVH claims to represent future generations who do not have a voice yet. Whereas this does not draw support from relevant audiences directly, it is a moral vision, many can identify themselves with:

There is a lot that affects the future. Maybe the most important precondition for nature and humans is the climate locally and globally. And climate is already changing. Fortunately, there is a lot of research on climate change. So much as that is already possible today to find out a lot about how climate change is going to affect our children’s future.

Framtiden i våre hender 2015-3, translated from Norwegian

Cosmological theorization has ambivalent effects on active legitimation. The limited agency, which is a central element of the strategy makes it difficult to build on support from a general population. FIVH responded to the agency challenge by including the general population in the agency, creating one collective agent with one grand vision, that is changing its way of living in order to limit climate change.

6.3.5. Value-based Theorization

The last strategy was value-base theorization, which seemed most suitable in an active legitimation process. Connecting environmental agendas or actions to established sets of values is ultimately creating support among a broad part of a population and lets the organization easily place itself outside the political spectrum to make itself part of a grassroots movement or a campaign.

United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that the world has to produce 60% more food than today, unless vi drastically change what kind of food we consume. [...] One third of all the food that is produced in the world never gets on a plate while at the same time 815 million people malnourished.

Framtiden i våre hender 2017, translated from Norwegian

Addressing the suffer of people who do not get enough to eat clearly has some kind of effect on many people. The intention of this text segment is not to propose proper solutions or make people change their minds right away but rather to influence their emotional attachment to climate change and its consequences. Even though concrete solutions are not the intention of arguments applying value-based theorization, responsible audiences can be identified, building support through the collective agency (civil society):

Nobody can manage to influence the conditions in the global cotton industry alone. Some actors will have a stronger influence and more ability to influence such a development in a positive direction than others. We direct our recommendations towards four groups of actors: consumers, clothing companies, public authorities, and civil society. [...] Workers in the cotton

industry in developing countries are amongst the poorest in the world, often marginalized and with little political power.

Framtiden i våre hender 2014-2, translated from Norwegian

Value-based theorization can be applied in many contexts, allowing the organization to claim being able of representing communities in which it is engaged in. Workers in the cotton industry, people suffering from malnourishment or marginalized groups that might be hit hard by effects of the climate change do not have political representatives, so NGOs can easily step in. In addition, it is fairly easy to gain support from the general population (in Norway) as it takes little to sympathize with those affected while the moral vision and transformation of the status quo remains diffuse.

6.3.6. Us vs. Them

Several text segments could clearly be labelled as affecting the active legitimation process while not fitting exclusively into one of the above-mentioned rhetorical strategies. While one of them was chain-reaction scenario, explaining how climate change might have affected the Arab Spring, most other segments aimed to shape an us-vs.-them identity, where FIVH placed itself clearly outside the political spectrum and focused its criticism on power hierarchies among political and industrial actors.

It is technically possible to achieve the 2°-goal. We have the knowledge, the technology and the necessary resources. But how realistic is it to hope for or to believe in that humanity wants and actually achieves this? For answering this question, it is no longer the technical abilities that matter. At this point, political will, power structures, and economic interests come into the picture and overrule most wishes and warnings.

Framtiden i våre hender 2015-3, translated from Norwegian

The bottom-up approach is a natural choice for an NGO in an active legitimation process, creating value both for its message and ultimately for itself. Thus, the organization was perceived more as a grassroots organization. The interesting observation in this strategy is that it was not used after 2015, which might indicate that FIVH chose to focus less on active legitimation.

6.4. FIVH's Strategrical Communication

The presented data in this case indicates that Framtiden i våre hender rather engages in passive legitimation processes than active legitimation processes, thus rather seeks non-interference from most audiences in order to follow its own agenda. The extensive citation of experts and scientific studies, the considerable amount of own research and the broad, international network allowed the NGO to appear as a professional actor in the environmental sector with the capacity to be a resource and a consultant to those who can change the current status quo. Not on a regional, but a global level.

Based on its communication, it seems like FIVH has in course of the examined period become more and more aware of its strengths and weaknesses and has found a way to utilize its abilities to get a place on the big table. At the same time, this development might bear some risk in terms of representing relevant audiences. As stated in chapter three, FIVH is the environmental organization with most members in Norway. As long as their members expect from FIVH to be politically successful and efficient in terms of measurable impact on both the government and certain industries, the NGO's strategic orientation makes sense. However, it must be aware of not losing its perception as being the organizational outcome of a grassroots movement. The organization has a magazine for its members. After having been a magazine which was directed towards its members but publicly available for many years, it became restricted to members in the end of 2015. Thus, it has not been included in this analysis which focused on public communication. In what way the internal communication with the organization's members takes place was thus not part of this study either. However, growing membership numbers over the past couple years indicate that the organization manages this potential challenge well.

In the next chapter, the data from Naturvernforbundet will be presented in the same order, before ultimately, the three research questions will be answered afterwards.

7. Legitimation Processes within Naturvernforbundet

This chapter presents the empirical evidence from the various forms of documentary data for the passive and active legitimation processes within Naturvernforbundet, following the same structure as the previous chapter. The first section unfolds the passive legitimation process, followed by the active legitimation process. Both sections address the same five rhetoric strategies as in the first case, *ontological theorization*, *rational theorization*, *teleological theorization*, *cosmological theorization*, and *value-based theorization*.

7.1. Case 2: Naturvernforbundet

The analysis of Naturvernforbundet resulted in 283 text segments. 182 were labelled *passive*, 91 were labelled *active*, and 10 segments *mixed*. Distributed by documentary source, 16 stemmed from annual reports, 222 from Letters and Statements, and 45 from thematic reports. Naturvernforbundet focuses mainly on Letters and Statements. In the year 2016, the annual report consisted of a pure economic report about the organization's finances and thus, this report did not have any text segments that were of relevance for this study.

7.2. Passive Legitimation

The first sub-unit is the passive legitimation process. Of the 283 text segments, 182 were classified as *passive*. The distribution between rhetorical strategies was fairly even, with only value-based theorization extremely underrepresented, while ontological segments were rather overrepresented.

Rhetorical Strategy	Relevant text segments
Ontological	57
Rational	29
Teleological	34
Cosmological	29
Value-Based	1
Undefined	32

Table 6: Distribution by rhetorical strategy – Naturvernforbundet passive

7.2.1. Ontological Theorization

The most used rhetorical strategy in Naturvernforbundet's passive legitimation process was ontological theorization. The organization chose several times to delegitimize existing practices or policies by framing them as being incompatible with environmental principles or, in several occasions, the law. Naturvernforbundet was continuously building a professional identity by referring to amongst others its superior and international networks and in some cases aimed to directly contributing to existing policies or plans:

SABIMA, WWF, Naturvernforbundet, and the Norwegian Botanical Union are positive towards Norwegian authorities being occupied with specific propositions for fighting climate change. But in this process, it is important to remember that the whole point with saving the climate is to preserve the nature. An intact nature with a rich diversity of species is the planet's immune defence and live insurance against immense environmental changes, as for example climate change. Thus, we must not destroy nature diversity in an attempt to stop climate change!

Naturvernforbundet 2013-2, translated from Norwegian

This statement was released in response of the Norwegian authorities' suggestion to plant monocultures in order to restore forests. The alliance of environmental organizations saw a sever threat to diversity and nature biomes that had grown over decades and centuries. By proclaiming that not all nature is good nature, the organizations emphasized a categorical distinction between protecting the environment and artificial forestation.

Many of the public statements were responses to a certain action by the public administration or certain corporations that in eyes of the NGO were not compatible with environmental principles or the law:

The oil-and energy department allowed a [...] powerline though the Sjørdalen-reservoir without seeking granted exemption from protection regulations in advance, as it is required. This is a clear violation of §48 Nature Diversity Law.

Naturvernforbundet 2014-2, translated from Norwegian

“[...] We claim that it is a violation of the Mining Waste Directive, articles [sic.] 7.2 that Norwegian authorities have granted permits to use [...] as mining waste facilities without waste management plans (article 5) included in the application for waste facilities.

Naturvernforbundet 2017-22

Whether a violation of laws and directives is a categorial distinction in terms of theistic logics (Suddaby and Green 2005) can certainly be discussed. These theorizations usually “involve statements based on a priori premises about what can or cannot co-exist’ (p. 46). In praxis, a law and its violation obviously can co-exist. But from a logical standpoint, both cannot have legitimacy, as a violation of a law delegitimizes the law. At least, if the violation is discovered but does not carry along a sanction or consequence. Thus, Naturvernforbundet’s statements are of ontological nature as they make violations of laws and directives public, indicating an inherent incompatibility between praxis and law. In similar situations, the NGO’s rhetoric was more interpretative but not minder clear about the discrepancy between a policy and a law:

Such a proceeding would create unacceptable conditions and a big risk, especially for building developers. This can impossibly be the legislator’s intention.

Naturvernforbundet 2013-3, translated from Norwegian

It is little surprising that Naturvernforbundet engages in ontological theorization, when referring to laws and regulations. The organization shows both technical (juridical) skills and contributes directly towards reforms or changes of existing and planned projects. Thus, it appears as a political insider and an accepted player in these contexts.

7.2.2. Rational Theorization

Another form of establishing itself as an accepted actor is through rational theorization. Naturvernforbundet took, in several situations, financial and social economic into account, offering specific measures for swift adaptations to the status quo.

Such a demand will secure increased material recycling from for example paper/plastic or organic waste. Such a demand can be aligned in a way that sorting of fractions for recycling undergoes socio-economic beneficial standards

Naturvernforbundet 2014-1, translated from Norwegian

Building environmental-friendly is a long-term investment. As municipalities often are both building developers and users [of those buildings], they can earn a lot by building under considerations of low running costs. Thus, all building projects has to be considered in terms of long-term costs, which includes energy demand and environmental impact.

Naturvernforbundet 2015-3, translated from Norwegian

As those two segments show, Naturvernforbundet focuses often on long-term effects. Even though the first example might indicate an active legitimation process, as it would be logical for the general population to support socio-economic benefits, the context is important here. It stems from a letter which was signed by several environmental organizations and sent to the environmental department. That the letter got published makes it a public document, but nevertheless the letter was intended to be read by a small audience, which is the political elite. The organization's arguments were obviously well received, as the mayor of the Gran municipality stated:

Naturvernforbundet gave us a thorough introduction in what issues should be taken into account in a climate- and environmental protection plan. No argumentation and scary propaganda, just neutral, well documented information and a few guidelines for how this process can be tackled.

Naturvernforbundet 2016-1, translated from Norwegian

Naturvernforbundet applied rational theorization regularly throughout all years, mostly in public statements or letters. This makes sense as those documents were usually directed towards relevant actors in the environmental sector who tend to have expertise. As the mayor of Gran implied, he was surprised by the organization's rationality and professionalism. This indicates, that environmental organizations in fact are advised to apply rational theorization in order to get accepted by public officials.

7.2.3. Teleological Theorization

The third rhetorical strategy is teleological theorization. As single events are part of a bigger plan (which in this case always is to protect the environment), Naturvernforbundet emphasizes its own agency that allows the organization to support both national and international agendas through its expertise, access to Norwegian authorities, and global networks:

“An increasing number of environmental problems are global. International cooperation and agreements are essential to solve them. By cooperating and building alliances the environmental NGOs will be able to exercise stronger influence on international regimes and major international operators. [...] Naturvernforbundet is in a special position to influence international environmental politics. We have good opportunities to present our views to the national authorities, who often are willing to launch new ideas in international environmental negotiations.

Naturvernforbundet 2013-2

This statement of Naturvernforbundet is legitimating in various ways. The NGO both calls for a stronger alliance [are essential to solve them] and strengthens its own position [able to exercise stronger influence] among other actors as it can already refer to a broad international network. In addition, it claims a leader role within such alliances due to its accessibility to the Norwegian authorities.

In other contexts, Naturvernforbundet applied teleological theorization linked to the Norwegian government:

Attached follows Naturvernforbundet’s detailed input to how a budget can be set up which follows these goals. We especially want to emphasize three new ideas – which we hope the government will take into consideration – that will contribute to emission reductions, less consumption and waste, and protection of the environment. These are suggestions we expect will be making the budget greener and we hope the government is going to take ownership in.

Naturvernforbundet 2017-2, translated from Norwegian

The input to the government's budget is the real event in the bigger context, which is to get state guarantees on environmental protection. Even though Naturvernforbundet does not have full agency as it does not decide about the budget, it uses its influence and expertise to present detailed suggestions instead of just making claims, thus establishing its position as a political insider further.

Teleological theorization was applied most in 2013 and 2017, which were election years. Whether this is coincidental or not cannot be stated with absolute certainty, but it indicates that the organization's rhetoric focuses more on the ultimate objective in these years while at the same time emphasizing its own capacities in order to not lose its political access after the elections.

7.2.4. Cosmological Theorization

But how does Naturvernforbundet engage in discourses where it only has limited agency capacity? Cosmological theorization is based on exactly that. The fundamental argumentation is that change will come eventually and resisting or ignoring it might be detrimental or even dangerous. Transferred on the environmental sector this means that climate change will come or has already started and not responding to it now will lead to severe consequences. Hence, having limited agency is not the point. Somebody has the power to do something about this challenge and organizations such as Naturvernforbundet are reminding them about their responsibility:

By emphasizing valuable nature, fishery, tourism, and climate over short-term oil interests, the government has taken a first step towards evolving Norway from a fossil nation to a sustainable nation. [...] We ask you as oil- and energy minister to listen to the world's climate scientists and the government's own research divisions and ensure reduced oil extraction.

Naturvernforbundet 2013-4, translated from Norwegian

Naturvernforbundet praises the government's decision to take climate change seriously, but at the same time feels the need to remind the responsible minister what consequences that brings with it. Building on the reputation of climate scientists and the government's own research, the NGO established a network of expertise that backs up their claim. This is especially important in this scenario, as

Naturvernforbundet does not have any capacity to enforce any specific steps that would reduce oil extractions in Norway. However, expertise does not always lead to the desired results and sometimes. Naturvernforbundet thus applies more direct language when warning of consequences of climate change:

Climate change will further increase pressure in the nature. If the average temperature increases by two degrees, up to 20-30% of all known species can go extinct. Climate change will have serious effects for humanity. We do not have time to wait for a global climate treaty before we act. Countries like Norway must step up and cut their emissions. This means especially that we start with making the Norwegian economy less dependent on oil and rather create new, green jobs.

Naturvernforbundet 2015-39, translated from Norwegian

These are lot less specific suggestions and rather an encouragement to restructure the country's economy. While this can almost be seen as a new vision for Norway, it is rather a multi-sited adaption of already existing policies, drawing on both national and international interests, as for example the Convention for Biological Diversity, to which this statement is referring to.

Cosmological theorization is challenging, as the organization admits its limited agency. Hence, it seems surprising that Naturvernforbundet applied this strategy so often (30 times) within its passive legitimation process, where an organization rather seeks to build a professional organizational identity. This might have something to do with the organization's basic strategy. As previously mentioned, Naturvernforbundet constantly publishes statements directed at public authorities. It has become the main element of engaging in the public discourse and it does not necessarily require a high level of agency as the power relation between the Naturvernforbundet and the receiving audiences is constituted. Thus, the organization is performing a role that is expected by many actors such as members, donors and all the regional and local branches.

7.2.5. Value-Based Theorization

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, value-based theorization was not applied by Naturvernforbundet at all. There is just one segment which barely classifies as value-based and is suspected to affecting passive legitimation:

The Russian organizations, also those who are not yet in the register, experience substantial increase in public, hostile attacks. The partners Naturvernforbundet cooperate with to close old nuclear reactors experience this in particular. They have been faced with several attacks on basis of their cooperation with Naturvernforbundet/ Friends of the Earth Norway, and are in public accused of being agents, that they are promoting the interest of Norway and NATO in Russia

Naturvernforbundet 2016-3

Naturvernforbundet has for a long time had active partnerships with Russian environmental NGOs. Those are now negatively impacted by a Russian law against 'foreign agents'³. With its report, Naturvernforbundet tries to raise attention for their situation, which actually rather classifies as active legitimation. However, the report is based on the international network of environmental organizations. Furthermore, the ultimate goal is non-interference from most actors (Russian authorities) so that it can perform the roles that are expected by its partners. However, this was the only situation where Naturvernforbundet remotely applied that rhetorical strategy.

7.2.6. A different battleground

Many of the public statements were directed towards ministries of bureaucracies. While several statements were based on one of the first four rhetoric strategies, others applied a different strategy, which seemed like a combination of all four. All segments could have been forced into the pre-set categorization pattern, but this would not have assessed the character and intention of these statements properly. While Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) analysed mainly testimonials, where witnesses either read out prepared statements or answered to questions. This is a major difference to the statements in this study, which are prepared responses in reaction to a certain activity.

³ Explained in detail in the same report from Naturvernforbundet (2016-3)

We see for example that this is happening with investments that undermine efforts of preserving the rainforest. Naturvernforbundet kindly asks the foreign secretary to contribute to that the government will hire an independent contractor in the future who can work out statements about coherence in Norwegian development policy. The political goals in this sector must be clear so that it will be possible to know which results to assess in context of established goals.

Naturvernforbundet 2013-12, translated from Norwegian

The statement applies ontological [investments that undermine efforts], teleological [hire an independent contractor] and rational [assess results in context of established goals] rhetoric. But more than that, it is an evaluation of the governmental work, which changes the character of the discourse substantially.

In Norway too, electric power from natural and environmentally friendly sources has a great potential to make fossil energy redundant. The amount of energy necessary for this should primarily be acquired through increased commitment on energy efficiency. Naturvernforbundet means that Statnett [state-owned power enterprise] has too little emphasis on potential energy efficiency and too much emphasis on energy production.

Naturvernforbundet 2015-12, translated from Norwegian

The second example again applies various rhetoric strategies, such as rational [great potential of environmental-friendly energy; commitment on energy efficiency] and teleological [Naturvernforbundet means that Statnett should...; great potential]. This signals that despite its limited agency, Naturvernforbundet still engages in this topic and that the singular event of emphasizing energy efficiency is actually part of the ultimate goal, which is to make fossil energy redundant and to protect the environment.

There are several other segments of the same character, but the pattern stands out. Trying to influence these policies and activities directly, Naturvernforbundet is shooting with everything they have. The combination of several rhetorical strategies might in a larger context become messy, but these responses are typically time critical and have a very specific scope, which is why they in fact might work. As the title of this section indicates, this strategy is only effective in connection with whether the organization

picks its battleground wisely. The more ‘aggressive’ the NGO communicates, the more it is important to not be sloppy. Otherwise, the organization can easily run danger of delegitimizing itself by ‘trying too hard’. Nevertheless, it seems consequential to focus on fewer strategies but to rather combine them if necessary, as the selected segments indicate.

7.3. Active Legitimation

The second sub-unit in this case regards active legitimation. Walton (2012) described the intention of active legitimation as building support for an organization’s moral vision from the general population. In order to do so, NGOs emphasize their basis on voluntarism and their connection to parts of the society on a grass-root level. In this case, 91 text segments were labelled as *active*:

Rhetorical Strategy	Relevant text segments
Ontological	15
Rational	8
Teleological	38
Cosmological	14
Value-Based	7
Undefined	9

Table 7: *Distribution by rhetorical strategy – Naturvernforbundet active*

7.3.1. Ontological Theorization

Naturvernforbundet actively applied ontological theorization, while claiming to represent certain groups of society in order to build support among the general vision. For this, it is important to engage in local projects. Emphasizing local and regional arenas makes it easier to create a personal attachment to certain projects among certain communities.

Naturvernforbundet shares the climate- and energy strategy’s concern against increased road capacity, which is planned into Oslo from the West. This can lead to an increase in traffic beyond the city borders of about 50%. In addition,

the 40-50 billion NOK that are estimated for the new E18 goes strongly against most political parties' goals to prioritize collective transport.

Naturvernforbundet 2015-47, translated from Norwegian
Arguing that most political parties reject this project can under some circumstances be a form to build support among the general population as large parts of the population have party preferences. Naturvernforbundet thus does not necessarily claim that this project cannot be carried out but rather that it is categorically distinct with the political will. In addition, the priority of collective transport can be interpreted as a long-term vision of Naturvernforbundet.

We fear that the implementation of this project with emission grants will carry along the biggest contamination scandal in recent times in Norway. We strongly want to advice against ratifying that decision, considering environmental consequences locally and for our common ocean, consequences for food safety, local businesses, Norway as a seafood-, tourist-, and environmental nation, the future for Sami businesses and culture and the commitments, Norway has towards Sami as indigenous people.

Naturvernforbundet 2017-23, translated from Norwegian

This statement in a case about mining rights in the North of Norway draws strongly from the claim that Naturvernforbundet is representing both local communities and especially the Sami. Whereas the reference to Sami culture can almost be interpreted as value-based theorization, Naturvernforbundet insists that not only this culture, but also local businesses, Norway's status, food safety and other categories cannot exist, ergo get destroyed in a scenario where mining rights will be granted.

Both segments are exemplary for Naturvernforbundet's use of ontological theorization within its active legitimation process. Rather than fully committing to a grand vision, there is a great focus on local arenas and on representing local and regional communities in all of Norway. Furthermore, the organization is not placing itself fully outside the political spectrum as it acknowledges the public officials' capacity in the selected cases. Nonetheless, the NGO is certainly delegitimizing existing practices as pointing out how such practices are incompatible with basic environmental practices.

7.3.2. Rational Theorization

Presenting itself as a rational actor usually walks along better with passive legitimation as NGOs try to become a political insider by building on both networks and technical skills. However, it is equally important to engage in local project and to build support for environmental protection from both local communities and the general population.

Climate change is global, but both reasons for it, damages and solutions can be found locally. Thus, it is of high relevance, what kind of political style is applied in each and every municipality. The municipalities can do a lot to reduce emissions. [...] Our suggestions involve many win-win effects. A decrease in energy consumption can let us use the energy-surplus for other projects, so that we can as well reduce emissions in other places. Alternatively, this could lead to that we do not need to produce so much energy in the first place, which can be beneficial to nature and landscapes. That the municipality can save money is another valuable outcome. Decreasing the amount of oil that is used for heating contributes to less air contamination. [...] Naturvernforbundet has local branches all over the country. We collaborate with and influence municipalities.

Naturvernforbundet 2015-3, translated from Norwegian

Despite the teleological character of the last sentence, Naturvernforbundet applies a multi-dimensional rationality in this segment. First, it explains why it is important to focus on the local level at all, arguing that at this level, real solutions for climate change can be found. It does not just focus on the local level but also holds them liable. Second, its suggestions show how both municipalities and local communities would benefit both in a short-term and long-term perspective. In the short-term, municipalities save energy (and money) and might eventually be able to engage in other projects which could not have been started yet due to lack of energy and other capacities. The local communities would benefit from cleaner air, and more recreational zones as the nature will potentially be exploited less. In the long term, the cleaner air can have beneficial health effects which both is a socio-economic benefit and obviously is in the interest of the individuals of a community as well.

In this first statement, Naturvernforbundet's vision – protecting the environment – was very clear. Even though this vision does not always stand out explicitly, it is important

to understand that it usually is implied whenever the NGO voices their concern or disagreement:

Naturvernforbundet kindly asks the climate- and environmental department (KLD) to prioritise climate concerns in context of this ban. Hence, we are critical to a ban that solely includes [private] housing owners and where non-residential [areas] and district heating – which attribute for most emissions and most emissions sources – basically are able to continue with fossil oil heating as of today. It is paradoxical if a ban would be strictest for the part of the population where the costs of energy conversion – as shown in the impact assessment – are highest, whereas emissions of climate gasses, technological competence, and the requirements for successful phasing out are lowest.

Naturvernforbundet 2017-42, translated from Norwegian

Naturvernforbundet has for several years called for terminating heating with oil as this praxis both contaminates air and because underground oil tanks have come to an age where they are on the edge of bursting, which would in addition contaminate the soil. However, the NGO recognizes that uncalculated activism does not provide a solution either. The segment stands exemplary for a neutral analysis of the situation. While this is segment certainly does have an effect on the passive legitimation process as well, it certainly can be seen as a promotion for environmental protection. As heating with oil – according to Naturvernforbundet - still is a wide-spread form of heating, it can be said that this concerns the general population, which is how Naturvernforbundet builds its support.

Still, rational theorization remains challenging for environmental organizations, who want to build on support from the general population. However, Naturvernforbundet shows that it can be possible to appear as a rational actor by promoting its vision through local, small-scale projects. Through this, the organization connects to relevant communities on the grassroots-level without placing it too far outside the political spectrum.

7.3.3. Teleological Theorization

As hints of teleology have so long resonated in several segments, it is little surprising that this rhetoric strategy appeared the most in the analysed documents. Arising as an actor with significant agency and an ultimate plan is necessary to get heard by people who usually do not have too many points of contact with the environmental sector. Naturvernforbundet's infrastructure with local and regional branches all over the country certainly helps with that:

Due to its nearly 100 local branches, Naturvernforbundet has a good overview over and insight in how today's regulations are administered and applied locally, including the test municipalities in the northernmost parts [of Norway].

Naturvernforbundet 2013-30, translated from Norwegian

Naturvernforbundet is increasing its effort in the North and has from 01. February a full-time representative in Tromsø. We are going to light up fires all over the whole country to warn about the dangers of oil drillings. We have many on our side when we say that we will fight harder than ever before to protect oil-free areas, and we encourage everybody who cares about Norwegian nature and dangerous climate change to join our team!

Naturvernforbundet 2013-34, translated from Norwegian

Following up local administrations is one of Naturvernforbundet's main activities. As explained in other sections of this chapter, the NGO believes that solutions have to be developed at this level. However, as the second segment shows, Naturvernforbundet knows how to shift actions on the national or even international level, if necessary. The rhetoric during this campaign created a narrative where the NGO stood out as a stronghold against dangerous climate change and for protection valuable nature. In principle, nobody would admit of being against the environment, so it would be natural to join Naturvernforbundet in this 'battle'.

Applying teleological theorization often means to embed single events into the bigger picture or the ultimate objective. Single events can be following up local administrations or opening a new office to increase regional representation. The important note is that everything happens for a reason, as there is a deliberate strategy behind:

Since 2008, Naturvernforbundet has driven the climate project Oljefritt through outward information work, websites, and collaborations with municipalities, counties, and businesses makes it easier for private housing owners to replace fossil oil heating. To us, it is highly important that the leading principles behind that ban are maximum emission cuts, in addition to that it will be easy to comply and control.

Naturvernforbundet 2017-42, translated from Norwegian

Teleological theorization is applied both as a main rhetoric strategy and as a side strategy to underline agency or a deliberate strategy. When applied as a main strategy, Naturvernforbundet emphasises its connection to the society on a grassroot level through its many local and regional branches, often reminding of their voluntary engagement.

7.3.4. Cosmological Theorization

Climate change is threatening with an ecologic catastrophe! Norway has to take responsibility both at national and international level for cutting emissions. We need less fossil and more renewable energy. In order to solve the climate crisis, producing renewable energy is not enough. It needs to replace the fossil energy, which today stands for more than half of Norway's energy consumption. [...] Today, all for little is done to reduce energy demand and to replace fossil energy in building, the industry, the energy- and the transport sector. This weakens the trust in renewable energies as a climate solution.

Naturvernforbundet 2013-26, translated from Norwegian

Cosmological theorization is built on the assumption that change is inevitably approaching and resisting or refusing can be dangerous and harmful. Naturvernforbundet puts this assumption in the centre of its communication in order to strengthen its position and to hold the government accountable for (not) reacting sufficiently to that change. According to Naturvernforbundet, simple adjustments are no longer enough and instead an energy revolution is required. Promoting alternative visions of governance of the status quo is a common mean to gain support from the population. It does not necessarily have to be realistic (in a short-term perspective) as

some people always desire change. This has been a part of collective thinking and collective action research. As individuals within a society ask themselves what could be, organizations, advisors, or other key individuals can affect individuals and ultimately societies by showing them what can be (Brown and Harris 2014). Based on this logic, it might also be possible to set an impulse by showing what could be (energy revolution) before later showing what can be (concrete ideas and propositions). The following segment is from a different context, but shows anyways how this second step could look like:

“The reactors have to close sooner or later, but there is no decommissioning plan for the old nuclear reactors. In 2008, Naturvernforbundet and our partners published a “Concept of a Decommission Plan for Old Nuclear Power Reactors. Guiding principles from Environmental NGOs”, to engage authorities, nuclear industry and the general Russian public in a discussion on timely planning of safe decommissioning of nuclear power units. The concept has been spread to a wide range of stakeholders, and stimulated debate and discussion.”

Naturvernforbundet 2013-2

The first segment of this section presents a scenario that points out, what could be and what eventually must be done in order to limit consequences of climate change. The scenario is somewhat unprecise and thus not very realistic. But it lets the recipient of the message think, maybe even dream about how a future might look like. At the same time, the recipient also understands that this scenario even might have to be necessary. At this point, offering too many specifics might not be helpful as this might open up for debate too soon. However, when a collective thinking process has started, it is important to follow up and present ideas for how to implement the original vision, as the second segment shows. This does not mean that the NGO must have the capacity to implement concrete propositions itself. If the collective thinking has already begun, developing guidelines and pointing them in a certain direction might be enough. Obviously, this might be much easier in Norway than in Russia. However, the second segment illustrated much better the logics behind such a communication strategy, which is why it was picked in this section.

7.3.5. Value-based Theorization

Naturvernforbundet widely neglected value-based theorization in its active legitimation process as well. Of the seven segments that could be identified, three were from the same report and basically building on and referring to each other:

“Despite that the oil from the Niger Delta generates 96% of the foreign income and 85% of the state revenues in Nigeria, the region remains one of the poorest in the country. In the process of oil exploration the area has suffered severely from devastating environmental degradation and impoverishment of local communities. The oil fields in the Niger Delta have recorded the worst continuous incidences globally;”

“Eventually, failure to adhere to the warnings and frequent government reprisal attacks and human rights violations resulted in the death of hundreds of Ogonis.”

“European people might still have the luxury to afford not believing in climate change and its consequences, but this luxury is not available to the Tajik population.”

Naturvernforbundet 2013-2

The three excerpts show how Naturvernforbundet builds up its argument over time. In the beginning of the report, a short overview over the situation in Nigeria is presented. This underlining message of the overview are the negative effects of oil extraction, not just environmentally but also from a human rights perspective. This message is then intensified by examples of even more extreme violations. In the end, the link is drawn to European societies, who “have the luxury to afford not believing in climate change.” The build-up is typical for value-based theorization as the reader who most likely has a modern, established set of values, first gets involved at an emotional level since the overview pictures a situation which poses a conflict with the established set of values. Later on, that conflict is connected to an environmental agenda as the report describes how this story is associated to the consequences of climate change.

Whereas Naturvernforbundet creates some value-based narratives in Norwegian contexts, as for example democracy deficits at the administrative level that harm the

environmental movement (Naturvernforbundet 2013-3), value-based theorization is not in the spotlight of the NGO's rhetoric.

7.3.6. Missing Effort

The remaining segments only showed a weak pattern, as the NGO in some situations criticized various authorities for not doing their due diligence when planning certain infrastructure projects or for answering insufficiently when responding to questionnaires from (environmental) organizations. In sum, Naturvernforbundet dealt out criticism for low effort. Although having an impact on the active legitimation process, the nine segments did not stand out in a form that would lead to the identification of a different strategy.

The government's energy report neither shows how to achieve a low-emission-society, how electricity can replace fossil energy, or how to protect vulnerable nature. Naturvernforbundet is especially disappointed of the lack of emphasis on energy efficiency and of the extension of protected watercourses.

Naturvernforbundet 2016-15, translated from Norwegian

Despite applying some kind of cosmological or sometimes ontological techniques, these statements could not be classified as one of the predefined forms of theorization. However, neglecting and not including them would not have been accurate either. In contrast to the organization's passive legitimation, the unidentifiable segments did not play a substantial role.

7.4. Naturvernforbundet's Strategical Communication

The most eye-catching observation is that Naturvernforbundet almost completely neglects value-based theorization. This is understandable as the organization – despite its international network – does not have a strong focus on the international dimension. The NGO's clear message is that the solutions for climate change are found at the local level. This message is very consistent with the Naturvernforbundet's organizational structure with its almost one hundred local branches.

Thus, it is not surprising either that a large part of its communication involves local cases and incentives. This leads to a high degree of agency that is very beneficial for

building support from the general population for its vision. Interestingly, Naturvernforbundet still manages to develop passive legitimacy, shaping that process through cleverly appearing as a political insider on the local level. According to Walton (2012), passive legitimacy is acquired through political participation mostly on the national and international level. However, as this study shows, the relevant political stage highly depends on the political context and the organization's intention.

Within its passive legitimation process, the organization draws on technical skills more than networks to build its professional organizational identity. This technical skill is less climate science than a high degree of juridical expertise which lets the NGO engage in both litigation and legislation.

As the data has now been presented for both NGOs, the cases will be compared in context of the three research questions in the following chapter.

8. Comparing FIVH and Naturvernforbundet

This study compared the two largest environmental organizations in Norway in terms of their communication strategies. The collection of documentary data resulted in a comparable number of relevant text segments. The study aimed to answer three research questions about how environmental NGOs engage in legitimation processes. The first two questions regarded the application of rhetoric strategies in active and passive legitimation processes. The third question regarded the organizations' overall legitimation. The following sections present a comparison of the two cases, summarizing the use of rhetoric strategies and the public presentation of the NGOs.

8.1. Passive Legitimation

The first research question focused on the passive legitimation process: *How do the various rhetoric strategies (ontological, rational, teleological, cosmological and value-based theorization) contribute to passive legitimation?*

Framtiden i våre hender had a strong emphasis on building a professional organizational identity through scientific reports and a broad international network. The NGO focused mainly on ontological, rational, and teleological rhetoric which stood for more than 70% of all relevant public communication in course of the five years. Through combining ontological rhetoric (government's strategy to accelerate climate change), rational rhetoric (our criteria are not radical) and teleological rhetoric (FIVH examined investments in coal), the FIVH created a narrative where certain actors such as the government or international enterprises harm the environment through existing policies and where FIVH would stand out as the actor who can contribute to improve the status quo. That narrative was to some limited extent complemented by cosmological and rarely value-based theorization.

Naturvernforbundet did chose a different approach in its passive legitimation process. Its complete negligence of value-based theorization automatically put a stronger emphasis on the other strategies, which are much more equally distributed than it was observed under FIVH's communication. The reason for that is the strong emphasis on statements and letters compared to FIVH's focus on thematic reports.

Naturvernforbundet has a much more responsive communication than FIVH. The many statements and letters are usually held short and do not provide extensive scientific explanations but are rather meant to provide input to selected projects at the local level. Thus, the context determined the rhetorical strategy to a higher extent. Consequentially, the undefined segments should a pattern of mixing the four strategies.

Whereas FIVH's use of strategies corresponds with Walton's (2012) criteria for passive legitimation to a high degree, Naturvernforbundet's rhetoric deviates slightly. Both FIVH and Naturvernforbundet sought acceptance and non-interference from most actors in order to perform the roles they were expected by its partners. While FIVH more and more created a narrative in which it would be essential as an advisor in various realms of private and public sectors (Walton 2012, p.24), Naturvernforbundet did not have a strong focus on its positioning. This does not mean that it would position itself "outside of, and apart from, the 'dirty world' of politics (*Ibid.*), but that it rather had no strong preference according to its rhetoric.

8.2. Active Legitimation

The second research question focused on the active legitimation process: *do the various rhetoric strategies (ontological, rational, teleological, cosmological and value-based theorization) contribute to active legitimation?*

Framtiden i våre hender employed teleological, cosmological, and value-based theorization in its active legitimation process. These three forms of rhetoric stood for more than 80% of all relevant public communication in course of the five years. At this point, it is important to remember that FIVH is the environmental organization in Norway with most members, which was underlined in several situations (ten of our local branches participated in this campaign). Interestingly, when applying cosmological rhetoric, FIVH rather focused on international contexts and the responsibility for future generations (climate change is going to affect our children's future) instead of drawing on its connection to local communities all over the country. Due to the international and cross-generational focus, flowing transitions between cosmologic and value-based theorizations could be observed in several occasions.

Naturvernforbundet had a very strong focus on its connection to local communities through its own local branches. The organization applied mostly ontological, teleological, and cosmological theorization, which stood for almost 75% percent of all relevant public communication. However, it seemed like the rhetoric strategies were subordinate to the emphasis on local communities. Whether Naturvernforbundet chose ontological theorization (Road project in Oslo-west contradicts political agenda), teleological theorization (Due to nearly 100 local branches, Naturvernforbundet has good access to many local administrations), or cosmological theorization (In context of the administration plan for the North Sea and Skagerrak, climate change and ocean contamination are biggest threat to all parts of the eco-system), the NGO overwhelmingly embedded its arguments into the local arena.

The two organizations did not only apply different strategies, they also created different narratives through embedding their rhetoric in different settings. This resulted in largely different ways of engaging in an active legitimation process. FIVH framed its vision more like a responsibility towards international communities and future generations, thus hoping to build support for its vision (environmental protection) among the general population. Naturvernforbundet on the other hand committed fully to the local arena, building support on the grassroot-level among the communities, it engaged in and claims to represent, thus hoping for the support to spread beyond these communities.

8.3. Passive and Active Legitimation

The third research questions in the study aimed to bring back the focus of the study to the unit of analysis: *How do the selected NGOs engage in the overall legitimation process?*

Suchman (1995) differentiated between passive and active legitimacy as in that passive legitimacy would build on acceptance and non-interference whereas active legitimacy would seek to “mobilize active commitments.” (p. 775). This original distinction was then developed further and adapted for the NGO sector by Walton (2012), who suggested that pursuing passive legitimation would mean to seek acceptance from the most audiences in order to being able to perform the roles that were expected by the organizations’ partners. The goal in active legitimation processes

on the other hand, would be to build support for a (moral) vision from the general population (Walton 2012, p. 24). Walton furthermore established four distinctive categories that would affect either active or passive legitimation: (1) Spatial relationship; (2) Positioning in the political context; (3) Political strategy; (4) Conduction of work.

As data from both organizations showed, active and passive legitimation are not mutually exclusive but might rather be interdependent on each other. Both FIVH and Naturvernforbundet interact in multi-dimensional environments which require the NGOs to join both legitimation processes. Although both NGOs engage actively in both processes, their methods and strategies vary substantially. FIVH builds on a strong organizational identity that is established through scientific expertise and a broad international network. As this study has shown, FIVH has undergone a continuous development towards establishing itself as a serious consultant for both corporations and public institutions. Despite some effort on emphasizing on its members and local branches, FIVH mainly focuses on a value-based vision, that is the responsibility towards future generations. This may raise the question which relevant audiences FIVH is representing today in order to build support among the general population. However, both their growing number of memberships and their financial structure indicate that focusing mainly on passive legitimation certainly works for FIVH.

Naturvernforbundet on the other hand, has a different form of legitimizing itself. Not only the rhetoric strategies, but also the two legitimation processes are subordinate to the local arena. Naturvernforbundet only rarely engages at the international level despite being integrated in international networks as well. Whether applying elements that Walton (2012) described as affecting passive legitimation or elements from active legitimation, the context mostly regards the local arena. This does not mean that all the NGO's communication affects active legitimation. In fact, a majority of the relevant segments were labelled *passive*. It rather indicates that his category does not apply to only affecting active legitimation. As Naturvernforbundet has shown, gaining and maintaining passive legitimation is possible in both local and national arenas. In addition to embedding most communication in local arena contexts, the responsive communication style of the Naturvernforbundet creates a much more context-dependent communication, as often others set the agenda.

In their conceptualization of legitimacy, Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack (2017) mention the “uniqueness paradox” (p. 461), arguing that “the need to be isomorphic and to be different are both driven and achieved by processes of legitimation” (*Ibid.*). In the context of this study, this means that FIVH and Naturvernforbundet cannot be too similar to each other but cannot be too different from each other either. This study has shown how two NGOs in the same sector can achieve that. Both organizations advocate the same vision, but both have found their way of developing a unique identity by engaging in different arenas and choosing different forms of communication.

8.4. Mixed segments

As stated earlier, several of the segments that were identified could not be labelled *passive* or *active* unequivocally. Those few segments were not analysed in terms of rhetoric strategies but rather whether they impact the organization’s legitimation process in any way. Thus, a short overview is presented for completeness.

The documentary data of both FIVH and Naturvernforbundet revealed segments that were affecting the passive and active legitimation process. Typically, these segments were building on moral visions and technical skills or international or superior networks. Each of those segments is not too crucial if assessed individually but might indicate flowing transitions between the two legitimation processes. As Collingwood and Logister (2005) suggested, strategic legitimation might sometimes involve neglecting or opposing an audience. Even though the two legitimation processes are not competing with each other, conflicts about which audiences to prioritize might still emerge. The mixed segments might be an attempt to find a balance in situations that have potential for such conflicts.

In order to investigate this further, the unit of analysis must not have an organizational focus but needs to be about environmental cases, as for example the rhetoric strategy of an environmental NGO in context of the oil sector. However, with this research design and the goal of this study, it was not possible to gain scientifically relevant findings.

9. Comparing FIVH and Naturvernforbundet

This study compared the two largest environmental organizations in Norway in terms of their communication strategies. The collection of documentary data resulted in a comparable number of relevant text segments. The study aimed to answer three research questions about how environmental NGOs engage in legitimation processes. The first two questions regarded the application of rhetoric strategies in active and passive legitimation processes. The third question regarded the organizations' overall legitimation. The following sections present a comparison of the two cases, summarizing the use of rhetoric strategies and the public presentation of the NGOs.

9.1. Passive Legitimation

The first research question focused on the passive legitimation process: *How do the various rhetoric strategies (ontological, rational, teleological, cosmological and value-based theorization) contribute to passive legitimation?*

Framtiden i våre hender had a strong emphasis on building a professional organizational identity through scientific reports and a broad international network. The NGO focused mainly on ontological, rational, and teleological rhetoric which stood for more than 70% of all relevant public communication in course of the five years. Through combining ontological rhetoric (government's strategy to accelerate climate change), rational rhetoric (our criteria are not radical) and teleological rhetoric (FIVH examined investments in coal), the FIVH created a narrative where certain actors such as the government or international enterprises harm the environment through existing policies and where FIVH would stand out as the actor who can contribute to improve the status quo. That narrative was to some limited extent complemented by cosmological and rarely value-based theorization.

Naturvernforbundet did chose a different approach in its passive legitimation process. Its complete negligence of value-based theorization automatically put a stronger emphasis on the other strategies, which are much more equally distributed than it was observed under FIVH's communication. The reason for that is the strong emphasis on statements and letters compared to FIVH's focus on thematic reports.

Naturvernforbundet has a much more responsive communication than FIVH. The many statements and letters are usually held short and do not provide extensive scientific explanations but are rather meant to provide input to selected projects at the local level. Thus, the context determined the rhetorical strategy to a higher extent. Consequentially, the undefined segments should a pattern of mixing the four strategies.

Whereas FIVH's use of strategies corresponds with Walton's (2012) criteria for passive legitimation to a high degree, Naturvernforbundet's rhetoric deviates slightly. Both FIVH and Naturvernforbundet sought acceptance and non-interference from most actors in order to perform the roles they were expected by its partners. While FIVH more and more created a narrative in which it would be essential as an advisor in various realms of private and public sectors (Walton 2012, p.24), Naturvernforbundet did not have a strong focus on its positioning. This does not mean that it would position itself "outside of, and apart from, the 'dirty world' of politics (*Ibid.*), but that it rather had no strong preference according to its rhetoric.

9.2. Active Legitimation

The second research question focused on the active legitimation process: *do the various rhetoric strategies (ontological, rational, teleological, cosmological and value-based theorization) contribute to active legitimation?*

Framtiden i våre hender employed teleological, cosmological, and value-based theorization in its active legitimation process. These three forms of rhetoric stood for more than 80% of all relevant public communication in course of the five years. At this point, it is important to remember that FIVH is the environmental organization in Norway with most members, which was underlined in several situations (ten of our local branches participated in this campaign). Interestingly, when applying cosmological rhetoric, FIVH rather focused on international contexts and the responsibility for future generations (climate change is going to affect our children's future) instead of drawing on its connection to local communities all over the country. Due to the international and cross-generational focus, flowing transitions between cosmologic and value-based theorizations could be observed in several occasions.

Naturvernforbundet had a very strong focus on its connection to local communities through its own local branches. The organization applied mostly ontological, teleological, and cosmological theorization, which stood for almost 75% percent of all relevant public communication. However, it seemed like the rhetoric strategies were subordinate to the emphasis on local communities. Whether Naturvernforbundet chose ontological theorization (Road project in Oslo-west contradicts political agenda), teleological theorization (Due to nearly 100 local branches, Naturvernforbundet has good access to many local administrations), or cosmological theorization (In context of the administration plan for the North Sea and Skagerrak, climate change and ocean contamination are biggest threat to all parts of the eco-system), the NGO overwhelmingly embedded its arguments into the local arena.

The two organizations did not only apply different strategies, they also created different narratives through embedding their rhetoric in different settings. This resulted in largely different ways of engaging in an active legitimation process. FIVH framed its vision more like a responsibility towards international communities and future generations, thus hoping to build support for its vision (environmental protection) among the general population. Naturvernforbundet on the other hand committed fully to the local arena, building support on the grassroot-level among the communities, it engaged in and claims to represent, thus hoping for the support to spread beyond these communities.

9.3. Passive and Active Legitimation

The third research questions in the study aimed to bring back the focus of the study to the unit of analysis: *How do the selected NGOs engage in the overall legitimation process?*

Suchman (1995) differentiated between passive and active legitimacy as in that passive legitimacy would build on acceptance and non-interference whereas active legitimacy would seek to “mobilize active commitments.” (p. 775). This original distinction was then developed further and adapted for the NGO sector by Walton (2012), who suggested that pursuing passive legitimation would mean to seek acceptance from the most audiences in order to being able to perform the roles that were expected by the organizations’ partners. The goal in active legitimation processes

on the other hand, would be to build support for a (moral) vision from the general population (Walton 2012, p. 24). Walton furthermore established four distinctive categories that would affect either active or passive legitimation: (1) Spatial relationship; (2) Positioning in the political context; (3) Political strategy; (4) Conduction of work.

As data from both organizations showed, active and passive legitimation are not mutually exclusive but might rather be interdependent on each other. Both FIVH and Naturvernforbundet interact in multi-dimensional environments which require the NGOs to join both legitimation processes. Although both NGOs engage actively in both processes, their methods and strategies vary substantially. FIVH builds on a strong organizational identity that is established through scientific expertise and a broad international network. As this study has shown, FIVH has undergone a continuous development towards establishing itself as a serious consultant for both corporations and public institutions. Despite some effort on emphasizing on its members and local branches, FIVH mainly focuses on a value-based vision, that is the responsibility towards future generations. This may raise the question which relevant audiences FIVH is representing today in order to build support among the general population. However, both their growing number of memberships and their financial structure indicate that focusing mainly on passive legitimation certainly works for FIVH.

Naturvernforbundet on the other hand, has a different form of legitimizing itself. Not only the rhetoric strategies, but also the two legitimation processes are subordinate to the local arena. Naturvernforbundet only rarely engages at the international level despite being integrated in international networks as well. Whether applying elements that Walton (2012) described as affecting passive legitimation or elements from active legitimation, the context mostly regards the local arena. This does not mean that all the NGO's communication affects active legitimation. In fact, a majority of the relevant segments were labelled *passive*. It rather indicates that his category does not apply to only affecting active legitimation. As Naturvernforbundet has shown, gaining and maintaining passive legitimation is possible in both local and national arenas. In addition to embedding most communication in local arena contexts, the responsive communication style of the Naturvernforbundet creates a much more context-dependent communication, as often others set the agenda.

In their conceptualization of legitimacy, Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack (2017) mention the “uniqueness paradox” (p. 461), arguing that “the need to be isomorphic and to be different are both driven and achieved by processes of legitimation” (*Ibid.*). In the context of this study, this means that FIVH and Naturvernforbundet cannot be too similar to each other but cannot be too different from each other either. This study has shown how two NGOs in the same sector can achieve that. Both organizations advocate the same vision, but both have found their way of developing a unique identity by engaging in different arenas and choosing different forms of communication.

9.4. Mixed segments

As stated earlier, several of the segments that were identified could not be labelled *passive* or *active* unequivocally. Those few segments were not analysed in terms of rhetoric strategies but rather whether they impact the organization’s legitimation process in any way. Thus, a short overview is presented for completeness.

The documentary data of both FIVH and Naturvernforbundet revealed segments that were affecting the passive and active legitimation process. Typically, these segments were building on moral visions and technical skills or international or superior networks. Each of those segments is not too crucial if assessed individually but might indicate flowing transitions between the two legitimation processes. As Collingwood and Logister (2005) suggested, strategic legitimation might sometimes involve neglecting or opposing an audience. Even though the two legitimation processes are not competing with each other, conflicts about which audiences to prioritize might still emerge. The mixed segments might be an attempt to find a balance in situations that have potential for such conflicts.

In order to investigate this further, the unit of analysis must not have an organizational focus but needs to be about environmental cases, as for example the rhetoric strategy of an environmental NGO in context of the oil sector. However, with this research design and the goal of this study, it was not possible to gain scientifically relevant findings.

10. Concluding Analysis and Discussion

This study has examined how environmental NGOs in Norway engage in various legitimation processes. The first part of the theoretical framework for this study was derived from Suchman (1995) and Walton (2012) who laid out the conceptual fundament for passive and active legitimacy (Suchman) as well as developed it by testing it in a real-world setting (Walton). The study contributed to the provided framework by testing it further and showing that the conceptual exclusivity of passive and active legitimation may depend on the context in which the study is carried out. Both NGOs in this study engaged in passive and active legitimation processes.

The second part of the theoretical framework stemmed from Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) who identified five forms of theorization, organizations can apply as part of their rhetoric strategy. These five forms of theorizations served as independent variables in the case study. The study contributed to Suddaby and Greenwood's work by further testing the forms of theorization in a different setting. It shows that their model is applicable in other contexts as well, even though one form of theorization was modified.

The study furthermore contributed to the work of Collingwood and Logister (2005) who suggested that strategic legitimation can involve neglecting or opposing an audience in order to gain or maintain legitimacy with another audience. As the study showed, the selected NGOs engaged in dynamically addressing various audiences such as the private and the public sector or at the local and national level. Lastly, the study contributed to Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack's conceptualization as it confirms the suggested uniqueness paradox.

The following sections will focus more specifically on the analytic generalizations of the study and the theoretical contributions. In addition, the following sections conclude the analytic strategy by demonstrating how the combination of multiple sources of theory and data contributed to the outcome and findings of the study.

10.1. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study involved two environmental organizations in Norway. Despite the fact, that the theoretical foundation of this study was mainly derived from management studies and thus from a for-profit-sector context, the study did not include any business. Neither did it involve any governmental organizations. Thus, the findings of this study are meant to be regarded in context of non-profit sectors. Nevertheless, the study has shown that for- and non-profit-sectors might not necessarily as different from each other as they used to be seen. However, the findings are mainly to be applied to other NGOs. In addition, the environmental sector in Norway is unique. Political stability, extensive access and a positive standing of NGOs among the civil society is not given for many other NGOs in the world. Walton (2012) for example, came to the result that NGOs either sought passive or active legitimation. While this study showed the multidimensionality of passive and active legitimation, this might only be correct for NGOs in industrialized free democracies.

The second limitation of the study regards the design and the objective of the study. It is an embedded multi-case study, where the two environmental organizations each for their own are one case. The collected data in this study was analysed qualitatively. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) applied mixed-method approaches as their data not only was analysed qualitatively but also quantitatively. The high number of text segments would allow testing for correlations between rhetorical strategies and legitimation processes or the form of persuasion. As stated earlier in this study, forms of persuasion were included in the coding but did not reveal any patterns under qualitative aspects. Thus, this is data which remains not analysed.

The limitation on qualitative data and analysis requires thus so-called “analytic generalization.” According to Yin (2014), analytic generalization is based on “corroborating, modifying, rejecting, or otherwise advancing theoretical concepts [...] or new concepts that arose upon the completion of [the] case study” (p. 41). Analytic generalization must not be confused with statistical generalization from quantitative designs. Similarly, Layder (1998) characterized analytic generalization as a “move from the concrete and particular [...] to more general and abstract concerns and ideas” (p. 100).

10.2. A theoretical framework for passive and active legitimation

The study applied Walton's (2012) categorization of passive and active legitimation as a foundation for the theoretical framework. This categorization was based on Suchman's (1995) distinction between active and passive legitimacy. Furthermore, the extensive discussion of legitimacy perspectives following Suddaby, Bitektine, and Haack's (2017) conceptualization of legitimacy lead to the unit of analysis, in which the legitimation process was chosen over legitimacy as a property or legitimacy as perception. This study has shown the applicability of Walton's model to some extent. While the individual categories have been proven useful, the categorical distinction between active and passive legitimation was rejected. Both NGOs engaged in passive and active legitimation processes. In many situations, flowing transitions between passive to active legitimation processes could be observed. Thus, this study rather suggests an interdependence of the two processes than an almost ontological exclusivity.

The legitimation processes were assessed by focusing on the organizations' rhetorical strategies. The dependent variables for this were derived from Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) empirical analysis of merging business sectors. The authors analysed witness testimonials and identified relevant text segments, which then were examined and identified as belonging to one of five rhetorical strategies. This study showed that these rhetoric strategies can also be applied in different settings. The findings indicated that the five rhetoric strategies might not be exclusive and that other forms of theorization might occur in different contexts. However, no new form of theorization could be identified in this study.

10.3. How do environmental NGOs engage in legitimation processes?

This study demonstrated how environmental NGOs engage in legitimation processes. Based on the assumption that active and passive legitimation processes are exclusive to each other, the NGO's communication was examined separately for active and passive legitimation. The study finds that organizations apply various rhetorical strategies depending on which process they are engaging in. The cross reference between active and passive legitimation processes and the presented rhetorical

strategies has not been examined before, which is why the study presents findings that both confirm and reject certain parts of the theoretical framework.

10.3.1. Passive Legitimation Processes

Passive legitimacy is the outcome of a process where an organization seeks acceptance or non-interference from most actors in order to being able to perform the roles that are expected by its partners (Walton 2012, p. 24). Within this legitimation process, an NGO can choose between various strategies. First, the NGOs can draw together interests and influence from international, national, or local levels. Second, the NGOs can position themselves inside the political spectrum, appearing as partners rather than opponents. Third, the NGOs can aim to contribute directly decision-making processes. Fourth, the NGOs can try to gain a professional identity based on broad networks or expertise.

The study expanded Walton's theoretical frame by Suddaby and Greenwood's theoretical strategies. The data revealed that the organizations pursued different strategies in the passive legitimation process. FIVH predominately sought to build a professional organizational identity which then would help with positioning as a political insider. For this, the NGO strongly emphasized ontological, rational, and teleological theorization. Cosmological and value-based theorization was rather used complementary. Naturvernforbundet on the other hand, pursued a multi-sited relationship by drawing together interests at the international, national, and especially local level. It was also aiming to become a political insider, however mostly on the local level in municipalities around the country. In order to achieve this, the organization completely neglected value-based theorization and focused more on all other forms of theorization. This became especially clear in about thirty situations where text segments involved characteristics of multiple theorization forms.

10.3.2. Active Legitimation Processes

In contrast to passive legitimation, engaging in active legitimation processes means building support from the general population for a moral vision (Walton 2012, p. 24). The four strategies, organizations can choose from in this process, are basically the

opposite of the four passive strategies. First, NGOs can focus on the national level while emphasizing the local arena for spreading their message. This strategy often occurs in connection with calls for transformations of the political system. Second, NGOs can place themselves outside the political spectrum. Third, NGOs can aim for developing and promoting alternative visions of governance. Fourth, NGOs can base their engagement on voluntarism and justify it with the claim of being capable of representing its communities.

FIVH promoted its vision of environmental protection with the claim that future generations will suffer from this generation's convenience. Despite its strong member basis, local arenas were not used in the organization's communication to a great extent. During the organization's engagement in active legitimation processes, the main rhetorical strategies were teleological, cosmological, and value-based theorization. Naturvernforbundet strongly emphasized the local arena, often referring to its local branches all over the country, thus hoping for synergizing effects in a form that the organization's vision of environmental protection would be spread through the local branches, mainly on the grassroot-level. In order to promote its vision, Naturvernforbundet applied ontological, teleological, and cosmological theorization. Neither of the organizations promoted alternative forms of governance or tried to position itself outside the political spectrum. This might be a context-specific observation due to the political and societal situation in Norway.

10.3.3. Passive and Active Legitimation

The study discovered that NGOs in this context do not engage in passive or active legitimation processes but in both processes simultaneously. This shows that environmental NGOs in Norway are present in several dimensions of the civil and political sphere. The extension of Walton's (2012) framework by Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) theorization model delivered limited results. On the one hand, it showed that these two strategy models can be combined in order to create more comprehensive multidimensional research designs. However, from a qualitative standpoint, it is difficult to draw concrete generalizations, as both organizations chose different contexts and adapted their theorization forms accordingly. Additionally, FIVH and Naturvernforbundet engaged in different styles of communication. While FIVH tried

to actively shape the discourse by publishing a great number of reports, Naturvernforbundet mainly focused on responsive communication in means of public statements as a reaction to for example a policy.

To sum up, the study demonstrated that the usefulness of the theoretical framework of Walton (2012) depends on its context. In certain parts of the world, NGOs might in fact have to choose between active and passive legitimation. However, this does not apply to all contexts. Nevertheless, the suggested strategies did to some extent fit to the behaviour of the organizations in this study. As the study demonstrated, it is possible to ask the question, how an organization applies these suggested strategies. This was answered by the application of Suddaby & Green’s rhetorical strategies.

10.4. Blending of Theories in Research

A central characteristic of Layder’s (1998) adaptive theory approach is the combination of multiple sources of theory and data into a research mix, as adds new perspectives to the research and thus increases the robustness of the theoretical analysis. As one source of theory or data is expanded by another, the study can become more descriptive and at the same time point out weaknesses or gaps of the original theoretical models.

Theoretical Sources	Empirical Sources
<p>Conceptualization of Legitimacy</p> <p><i>Managing Legitimacy</i> from Mark Suchman (1995)</p>	<p>Extant Data</p> <p>The Politics of NGO Peacebuilding in Sri Lanka from Oliver Walton (2012)</p> <p>Rhetorical Strategies of Legitimacy from Roy Suddaby and Royston Greenwood (2005)</p>
<p>Perspectives on Legitimacy</p> <p><i>Legitimacy</i> from Roy Suddaby, Alex Bitektine and Patrick Haack (2017)</p>	<p>Research Data</p> <p>Findings presented in chapters 6-8</p>

Table 8: Adaptive Theory Research Mix

The main conceptualization stemmed from Mark Suchman (1995) who first established a distinction between active and passive legitimacy. This conceptualization was complemented by the abstract discussion about various perspectives on legitimacy. As the discussion showed, defining and perceiving legitimacy can have a tremendous impact on further studies. Thus, the main perspectives were presented and discussed regardless of their actuality for this study. This was to emphasize the risk of conceptual ambiguity.

Moving on to the theoretical framework, empirical sources supplemented the previous discussion and brought the study from an abstract level to a more concrete level where then a theoretical model for the study could be developed. This is why the theoretical framework ultimately was derived from empirical sources as it introduced a shift back to the 'real world'. The theoretical framework then guided the data collection phase as well as the analysis. The findings of the study, which were presented in chapters 6-8 both added new perspectives and revealed gaps of the study, which were discussed in chapter 9.3.

10.5. Future Research

Future research is necessary to further test the compatibility of the extended theoretical framework both in similar and other contexts. It would be interesting to see in which contexts organizations engage in both active and passive legitimation processes and in which contexts organizations can or must pick one. Furthermore would it be interesting to adapt a mixed-method-approach in this study to include quantitative analysis. This could lead to findings about correlation between Walton's (2012) strategies and Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) forms of theorization. Another possible finding would be the inclusion of modes of persuasion. In general, further investigating the role of ethos, pathos, and logos in this context might result in useful findings.

Another additional research could be to analyse the discourse of an environmental policy, as for example the Norwegian Pension Fund. Financed through oil revenue and investing in environmentally shady companies, the fund has for a long time been a natural opponent to environmental organizations and large parts of the documentary

data in this study involved the fund. Thus, it could be interesting to analyse how the communication has evolved in course of the time. One finding of this study was that FIVH seemed to have undergone an organizational evolution in course of the five years, establishing itself more and more as a serious consultant to various actors. Based on these findings, one could examine whether this evolution is observable in a thematic context.

Finally, further research could be done on the abstract level of this study. As Hoefler and Green (2016) suggest, existing models for assessing legitimation do not take into account agency capacity of the audiences that receive the message from the organizations. As explained earlier in this study, I do not have the capability to assess these forms of communication from a cognitive and potentially psychological perspective. It is however, similar to the legitimacy-as-perception perspective which was introduced during the abstract discussion in chapter 2. Hence, further research, both on a theoretical and the empirical level are important to bring more clarity in the still diffuse world of legitimation.

10.6. Conclusion

This study has presented an embedded multi-case study of two environmental NGOs in Norway in order to examine their legitimation processes. The selected NGOs are the largest environmental NGOs in Norway, based on number of members, which is why they provided an interesting foundation for this study.

This paper does not only cover the study itself but also describes in great detail the process which led to carrying it out. The process was like a journey with several unforeseen challenges. The greatest challenge was without doubt, not getting access to one of the organizations after interviews had already been conducted with the other one. However, it taught me a good lesson in improvising and adapting the research plan for such a project. Thus, it is fair to say that this paper nevertheless provides several elements which are of academic interest for future research and can be used by non-governmental organizations in Norway and similar countries.

First, this paper offers an extensive discussion of various perspectives of assessing legitimacy. This discussion is as up-to-date as it can get, with including studies and research from the 1980s until 2017 and 2018. Second, it offers a new attempt of assessing active and passive legitimation as these two concepts were no longer seen as distinct but rather as being interdependent. This opens up for further research. Third, the study offered a research mix of existing and new data, following Layder's (1998) research approach. Fourth, as a result of that research mix, the paper offers an aggregation of Walton's (2012) legitimation strategies and Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) rhetoric strategies.

Most NGOs probably do not think too much about either various legitimation processes or rhetoric strategies. Maybe, they do not even spend too much time thinking about legitimacy and reputation management at all. However, those have an impact on not only their communication but their whole organizational behaviour. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) stated, research questions should ideally contribute to the existing literature and be of relevance for the real world (p. 15). As this does not only apply to the research question but to the study as a whole, I hope that this case study was able to both contribute to the existing literature on legitimation processes and has been of relevance to some NGOs in the real world.

11. References

- Aldrich, H./Fiol, C. (1994) Fools Rush in? The Institutional Context of Industry Creation. *Academy of Management Review* 19 (04), pp. 645-670.
- Asch, S. (1956) *Studies of Independence and Conformity*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ashcraft, R. (1991) *Locke: Critical Assessments*. London, Routledge.
- Ahsford, B./Gibbs, B. (1990) The Double Edge of Organizational Legitimation. *Organization Science* 1 (02), pp. 177-194.
- Bansal, P./Clelland, I. (2004) Talking Trash: Legitimacy, Impression Management, and Unsystematic Risk in the Context of the Natural Environment. *Academy of Management Journal* 47 (01), pp. 93-103.
- Barnett, M. (2006) Waves of Collectivizing: A Dynamic Model of Competition and Cooperation over the Life of an Industry. *Corporate Reputation Review* 8 (04), pp. 272-292.
- Baum, J./Oliver, C. (1991) Institutional Linkages and Organizational Mortality. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 36 (02), pp. 187-218.
- Beetham, D. (2013) *The Legitimation of Power* (2nd ed.) Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Benford, R./Snow, D. (2000) Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (01), pp. 611-639.
- Berger, P./Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.
- Berger, J./Ridgeway, C./Fisek, M./Norman, R. (1998) The Legitimation and Delegitimation of Power and Prestige Orders. *American Sociological Review* 63 (03), pp. 379-405.
- Bitektine, A. (2011) Toward a Theory of Social Judgments of Organizations: The Case of Legitimacy, Reputation and Status. *Academy of Management Review* 36 (01), pp. 151-179.
- Bitektine, A./Haack, P. (2015) The Macro and the Micro of Legitimacy: Towards a Multi-Level Theory of the Legitimacy Process. *Academy of Management Review* 40 (01), pp. 49-75.
- Brown, V.A./Harris, J.A. (2014) *The Human Capacity for Transformational Change: Harnessing the Collective Mind*. London: Routledge.
- Bryant, R. (2005) *Nongovernmental organisations in environmental struggles: Politics and the making of moral capital*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bundy, J./Pfarrer, M. (2015) A Burden of Responsibility: The Role of social Approval at the Onset of a Crisis. *Academy of Management Review* 40 (03), pp. 345-369.

Charnovitz, S. (2006) Nongovernmental Organizations and International Law. *American Journal of International Law* 100 (02), pp. 348-372.

Charnovitz, S. (2007) Two Centuries of Participation: NGOs and International Governance. *Michigan Journal of International Law* 18 (02), pp. 183-286.

Collingwood, V./Logister, L. (2005) State of the Art: Addressing the INGO 'Legitimacy Deficit'. *Political Studies Review* 3 (02), pp. 175-192.

Cornelissen, J.P./Durand, R./Fiss, P./Lammers, J.C./Vaara, E. (2015) Putting Communication front and center in Institutional Theory and Analysis. *Academy of Management Review* 40 (01), pp. 10-27.

David, R./Sine, W./Haveman, H. (2013) Seizing Opportunity in Emerging Fields: How Institutional Entrepreneurs Legitimated the Professional Form of Management Consulting. *Organization Science* 24 (02), pp. 356-377.

Deephouse, D. (1996) Does Isomorphism Legitimate?. *Academy of Management Journal* 39 (04), pp. 1024-1039.

Deephouse, D./Carter, S. (2005) An Examination of Differences between Organizational Legitimacy and Organizational Reputation. *Journal of Management Studies* 42 (02), pp. 329-360.

Desai, V. (2011) Mass Media and Massive Failure: Determining Organizational Efforts to Defend the Field's Legitimacy Following Crises. *Academy of Management Journal* 54 (02), pp. 263-278.

Dodworth, K. (2014) NGO Legitimation as Practice: Working State Capital in Tanzania. *Critical African Studies* 6 (01), pp. 22-39.

Douglas, J. (1976) *Investigative Social Research. Individual and Team Field Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dupuy, K./Ron, J./Prakash, A. (2014) Who Survived? Ethiopia's Regulatory Crackdown on Foreign-Funded NGOs. *Review of International Political Economy* 22 (02), pp. 419-456.

Edwards, M. (1999) Legitimacy and Values in NGOs and International Organisations: Some Sceptical Thoughts, in: Lewis, D. (Ed.) *International Perspectives on Voluntary Action: Reshaping the Third Sector*. London, Earthscan, pp. 258-267.

Edwards, M./Hulme, D. (1995) *Non-Governmental Organisations – Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet*. London: Earthscan.

Elsbach, K. (1994) Managing Organizational Legitimacy in the Californian Cattle Industry. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39 (01), pp. 57-88.

- Elsbach, K./Sutton, R. (1992) Acquiring Organizational Legitimacy through Illegitimate Actions: A Marriage of Institutional and Impression Management Theories. *Academy of Management Journal* 35 (04), pp. 699-783.
- Flyvberg, B. (2006) Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12 (02), pp. 219-245.
- Garud, R./Schildt, H./Lant, T. (2014) Entrepreneurial Storytelling, Future Expectations, and the Paradox of Legitimacy. *Organization Science* 25 (05), pp. 1479-1492.
- Gourville, J.T./Rangan, V.K. (2004), Valuing the cause marketing relationship. *California Management Review* 47(01), pp. 38-59.
- Haack, P./Pfarrer, M./Scherer, A. (2014) Legitimacy-as-Feeling: How Affect Leads to Vertical Legitimacy Spillovers in Transnational Governance. *Journal of Management Studies* 51 (04), pp. 634-666.
- Halström, K./Boström, M. (2010) *Transnational multi-Stakeholder Standardization: Organizing Fragile Non-State Authority*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Hannan, M. & Carroll, G. (1992) *Dynamics of Organizational Populations: Density, Legitimation, and Competition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hathaway, J. (2012) "Professional Colleagues and Almost Like Friends": The Development of Interorganizational Trust within a Partnership of Three Norwegian NGOs. Bergen, Norway: UiB. Department of Administration and Organization Theory.
- Hofer, R./Green, S. (2016) A Rhetorical Model of Institutional Decision Making: The Role of Rhetoric in the Formation and Change of Legitimacy Judgements. *Academy of Management Review* 41 (01), pp. 130-150.
- Hudson, B. (2008) Against All Odds: A Consideration of Core-Stigmatized Organizations. *Academy of Management Review* 33 (02), pp. 252-266.
- Huy, Q./Corley, N./Kraatz, M. (2014) From Support to Mutiny: Shifting Legitimacy Judgments and Emotional Reactions Impacting the Implementation of Radical Change. *Academy of Management Journal* 57 (06), pp. 1650-1680.
- Johnson, C./Dowd, T./Ridgeway, C. (2006) Legitimacy as Social Process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 32 (01), pp. 53-78.
- King, B./Whetten, D. (2008) Rethinking the Relationship between Reputation and Legitimacy: A Social Actor Conceptualization. *Corporate Reputation Review* 11 (03), pp. 192-207.
- King, G./Keohane, R./Verba, S. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Kuran, T. (1987) Preference Falsification, Policy Continuity and Collective Conservatism. *Economic Journal (Oxford)* 97 (387), pp. 642-665.
- Kushner, K.E./Morrow, R. (2003) Grounded Theory, Feminist Theory, Critical Theory: Toward Theoretical Triangulation. *Advances in Nursing Science* 26 (01), pp. 30-43.
- Langley, A. (2007) Process Thinking in Strategic Organization. *Strategic Organization* 5 (03), pp. 271-282.
- Layder, D. (1998) *Sociological Practice. Linking Theory and Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lipset, S. (1959) Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy. *American Political Science Review* 53 (01), pp. 69-105.
- Lister, S. (2003) NGO Legitimacy. Technical Issue or Social Construct? *Critique of Anthropology* 23 (03), pp. 175-192.
- Maguire, S./Hardy, C. (2009) Discourse and Deinstitutionalization: The Decline of DDT. *Academy of Management Journal* 52 (01), pp. 148-178.
- Massey K./Freeman, S./Zelditch, M. (1997) Status, Power, and Accounts. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 60 (03), pp. 238-251.
- Milgram, S. (1974) *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Mynster, A./Edwards, L. (2014) Building Blocks of Individual Biography? Non-Governmental Organizational Communication in Reflexive Modernity. *Management Communication Quarterly* 28 (03), pp. 319-346.
- Navis, C./Glynn, M. (2010) How New Market Categories Emerge: Temporal Dynamics of Legitimacy, Identity, and Entrepreneurship in Satellite Radio, 1990-2005. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 55 (03), pp. 439-471.
- Nicholls, A. (2010) The Legitimacy of Social Entrepreneurship: Reflexive Isomorphism in a Pre-Paradigmatic Field. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 34 (04), pp. 611-633.
- Noblit, G./Hare, R. (1988) *The Idea of a Meta-Ethnography: Synthesizing Qualitative Studies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Palazzo, G./Scherer, A. (2006) Corporate Legitimacy as Deliberation: A Communicative Framework. *Journal of Business Ethics* 66 (01), pp. 71-88.
- Parsons, T. (1960) *Structure and Process in Modern Societies*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Radberg, Ø (2018) *Tekstanalyse for Samfunnsvitere*, 2nd eds. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.

- Reimann, K. (2006) The View from the Top: International Politics, Norms, and the Worldwide Growth of NGOs. *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (01), pp. 45-67.
- Risse, T./Sikkink, K. (1999) The Socialization of International Human Rights Norms into Domestic Practices: Introduction, in: Risse, T./Ropp, S./Sikkink, K. (Eds.) *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (pp. 1-38). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Røvik, K. (1996) Deinstitutionalization and the Logic of Fashion, in: Czarniawska, B./Sevon, G. (Eds.) *Translating Organizational Change* (pp. 139-172). New York, NY: DeGrueter.
- Runte, M., Basil, D.Z. and Deshpande, S. (2009) Cause-related Marketing from the Nonprofit's Perspective: Classifying Goals and Experienced Outcomes. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* 21 (03), pp. 255-270.
- Rusca, M./Schwartz, K. (2012) Divergent Sources of Legitimacy: A Case Study of International NGOs in the Water Services Sector in Lilongwe and Maputo. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38 (03), pp. 381-397.
- Scott, W. (1995) *Institutions and Organizations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Scott, W./Meyer, J. (1991) The Organization of Societal Sectors. In Powell, W./DiMaggio, P. (Eds.) *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, pp. 108-140. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Seitanidi, M.M. and Ryan, A. (2007) A Critical Review of Forms of Corporate Community Involvement: From Philanthropy to Partnerships. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 12 (03), pp. 247-266.
- Sherif, M./Hovland, C. (1961) *Social Judgment: Assimilation and Contrast Effects in Communication and Attitude Change*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Sine, W./Lee, B. (2009) Tilting at Windmills? The Environmental Movement and the Emergence of the US Wind Energy Sector. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 54 (01), pp. 123-155.
- Sitkin, S./Sutcliffe, K./Reed, G. (1993) Prescriptions for Justice: Using Social Accounts to Legitimate the Exercise of Professional Control. *Social Justice Research* 6 (01), pp. 87-111.
- Suchman, M. (1995) Managing Legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review* 20 (03), pp. 571-610.
- Suddaby, R./Bitektine, A./Haack, P. (2017) Legitimacy. *Academy of Management Annals* 11 (01), pp. 451-478.
- Suddaby, R./Greenwood, R. (2005) Rhetorical Strategies of Legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50 (01), pp. 35-67.

- Tost, L. (2011) An Integrative Model of Legitimacy Judgements. *Academy of Management Review* 36 (04), pp. 686-710.
- Tyler, T. (2006) Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology* 57 (01), pp. 375-400.
- Vaara, E./Tienari, J. (2011) On the Narrative Construction of Multinational Corporations: An Antenarrative Analysis of Legitimation and Resistance in a Cross-Border Merger. *Organization Science* 22 (02), pp. 370-390.
- Walton, O. (2008) Conflict, Peacebuilding, and NGO Legitimacy: National NGOs in Sri Lanka. *Conflict, Security and Development* 8 (01), pp. 133-167.
- Walton, O. (2012) Between War and the Liberal Peace: The Politics of NGO peacebuilding in Sri Lanka. *International Peacekeeping* 19 (01), pp. 19-34.
- Walton, O./Davies, T./Thrandardottir, E./Keating, V. (2016) Understanding Contemporary Challenges to INGO Legitimacy: Integrating Top-Down and Bottom-Up Perspectives. *Voluntas* 27 (06), pp. 2764-2786.
- Weber, M. (1968) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. New York, NY: Bedminster Press.
- Yanacopoulos, H. (2005) The Strategies that Bind: NGO Coalitions and their Influence. *Global Networks* 5 (01), pp. 93-110.
- Yin, R. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yoon, J./Thye, S. (2011) Theoretical Model and New Test of Managerial Legitimacy in Work Teams. *Social Forces* 90 (02), pp. 639-659.
- Zelditch, M. (2006) Legitimacy Theory, in: Burke, P. (Ed.) *Contemporary Social Psychological Theories* (pp. 324-352). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.