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Changing Public Discourse on the Environment.

Danish Media Coverage of the Rio and Johannesburg UN Summits

Lars Kjerulf Petersen *

Abstract

Environmental degradation and unsustainable development were addressed on a global scale at the UN Summits in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and Johannesburg in 2002. This chapter presents analyses of Danish television coverage of these two summits and related topics viewing the media stories as exemplary cases of wider public conceptions of the environment. Over a decade rhetoric about the summits and the environment changed, the agenda changed, and key environmental issues were re-packaged. These changes are further interpreted in relation to ecological modernisation and discussed as a possible development towards post-environmentalism. Already ecological modernisation can be perceived as post-environmentalist, but this article wants to suggest a downfall also for ecological modernisation as a prominent discourse and a more direct challenge to the legitimacy of environmental concern and thus a further break with environmentalism.

Introduction

Environmental concern and demands for sustainability have become strong narratives and strong discourses in many sectors of society, and an integral part of this development is and has been media coverage of environmental issues. The content of environmentalism as public discourse has however changed over the past decades. Different issues have been at the centre of environmental concern, from wilderness conservation to global warming, and the diagnosis and handling of environmental problems have been associated with different visions of social order.

Ideas of *ecological modernisation* (EM) are among those environmentally concerned social orderings that most successfully have entered into logics of society at many levels: in administration and planning, in production and technological innovation, *and* in images and narratives of public media. Ecological modernisation seeks to combine economic growth with environmental protection and to integrate environmental concern into established society. In that respect it may already signify a post-environmentalist state, because it differs from core understandings in (earlier) environmentalism such as limits to growth, restraints on consumerism, and the need

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for a break with established capitalist society. But there may in recent times have been a decline also in the prominence of ecological modernisation, thus setting a whole new level of post-environmentalism.

An understanding of a common global destiny has also been a recurrent theme in environmentalism and has been linked to notions of sustainable development – notions that differ from ecological modernisation in some ways but also share its idea of combining environmental concern and economic development. A post-environmentalist state can be seen in terms of a neglect of common destiny, i.e. when demarcations of public space and definitions of collective identity become less open and less including.

The questions are thus: 1) How has public discourse on the environment changed, in Denmark, from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. 2) Do these changes signify a post-environmentalist turn, and do they signify a change in the status of ecological modernisation? 3) Do changes in environmental discourse also imply changes in the definition of collective identity as part of a post-environmentalist turn?

The article presents a case study of Danish television coverage of the Rio and Johannesburg UN summits in 1992 and 2002 and of related environmental issues – climate change and the environment in general – the same years. This case is considered significant for several reasons: Denmark used to have a high environmental profile and was front runner in the development of ecological modernisation. The UN summits on sustainable development treated a collection of the most serious and emblematic environmental problems, they worked around a number of key concepts such as sustainability and biodiversity, they established environmental problems as a global concern, and they attracted considerable media attention. The UN-summits represented the essence and broadness of environmental discourse, and the related issues complete the picture by including a) climate change that has been a global environmental issue for more than two decades, and b) news stories that like the summit were about the environment in general.

The article will proceed with a theoretical discussion; first on societal communication, then on the characteristics of ecological modernisation, its role in public discourse and its relation to post-environmentalism. This feeds into an outline of criteria for what constitutes different discursive orderings of the environment. And this is followed by a presentation of the case study.

Societal communication

Telling news about nature and the environment in broadcast media are acts of societal communication.

Mass mediated societal communication can, inspired by John B. Thompson, be defined as "institutionalized production and generalized diffusion of symbolic goods" via the fixation and transmission of information, knowledge and symbolic content across distances in space and time (Thompson 1995:26). Actors in this communication are tied together by participating in it – producing, reproducing, organising, interpreting and being audience to the same information and knowledge. And they participate in the same communication on the grounds of sharing societal relations at large such as economic interaction, political institutions, location in the same geographical area, common language, and a collective memory of mutual myths and histories.

"The media are not simply involved in reporting on a social world [...]. Rather, the media are actively involved in constituting the social world" (Thompson 1995:117). Or put differently, the social world is – in part – constructed through *discourses* fixated and diffused by mass media. The concept of discourse is here defined in line with Fairclough (following the tradition of Foucault). A discourse is not just a speech act or statement; it is a shared way of apprehending social phenomena, a specific ordering of the world, a *system of knowledge and belief*. "Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough 1992:64).

Media texts, including images and non-verbal sound, are articulations of discourses, of discursive orderings of the world. The point of analysing a corpus of media texts, as is done later in this chapter, is to identify what sort of discourse is at work in these texts.

According to cultural sociologist James Carey there are two dimensions or functions – *control* and *ritual* – of societal communication, i.e. of constituting and ordering the social world through generalised dissemination of information and symbolic content (Carey 1989:13-36).

One function of societal communication is "the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control" (Carey 1989:15). Environmental

problems such as depletion of ozone layer or long term toxic effects of chemicals are beyond personal and tactile experience, so individual and collective knowledge about such dangers is only established through some sort of societal communication. In dealing with environmental risks, the control aspect of communication can thus in its outset be seen as a matter of publicly establishing the existence and gravity of dangers, defining them and distributing information about their importance and how to deal with them.

However, the notion of ‘control’ embraces a much broader spectrum of communicative practices with regulatory potential. Apart from 1) Warning about imminent or long term dangers and information about how to deal with them, it may imply: 2) Publication of laws and regulations to the affected populace. 3) Public campaigns – emanating from a broad range of actors, not just governments – seeking to advance or prevent certain forms of behaviour. 4) Involvement of mass media in political *agenda setting*, i.e. the framing of social issues in public media, thereby defining what issues should attract attention and forming the perception of them.¹ 5) Furthermore ‘control’ also regards guidance and even education and enlightenment, through which templates for everyday practices are established, thereby forming these practices. It should be noted that not just direct instructions but also entertaining formats of communication, such as story telling including news reporting, contain templates for behaviour and thought.

This also points to the *ritual* dimension of societal communication. ”A ritual view of communication is directed not towards the extension of messages in space but towards the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey 1989:18). Through the ritual of communication – the ritual of *risk* communication – social cohesion is established and confirmed. In other words, risk communication is also a matter of ritualising dangers: providing comfort, interpreting unknown dangers through well-known formulae and, very importantly, defining and confirming the community that shares these dangers.

If communication as ritual is a projection of a collectivity’s cohesion, this is however not just a projection of the consensus that unites the social grouping, it is also a projection of what divides it (Douglas 1997:129). *Dissension* can be an integral part of collective identity and of individual identities understanding themselves as belonging to one side or another in such a dissension. It seems for instance that an ongoing disagreement over the issue of abortion has become a defining trait of the

American public. Similarly the analysis below suggests a development of a division between environmentalist and economist worldviews.

The point then is that news stories about the environment contribute to the formation of public spheres and collective identities. As Susan Baker demonstrates (elsewhere in this volume), environmental discourse can be a building stone in the construction of an imagined community, more specifically in the construction of European identity – in its own right and as different from American. A similar point is presented in the work of Douglas & Wildavsky (1982). The selection of dangers and risks that are communicated publicly contribute to the construction of collective identity and differ according to cultural and social context. And vice versa: The choice of which danger society is more concerned with doesn't depend exclusively or even primarily upon an objective estimation of the precise urgency and scale of possible dangers. The choice of dangers, the selection of risks that become dominating issues for media attention and determine practices of individual and institutional actors depend upon societal organisation, rationales of social cohesion and community structure at large², and – it should be added – upon *shifting* ideological orientations.

Ecological modernisation

There are a number of different discursive orderings of nature and the environment (many of which are identified as ideal types in Dryzek 1997). For the purposes of this analysis only the discourse of ecological modernisation (EM) is going to be discussed in detail including how it differs from more far-reaching forms of environmentalism (survivalism, ecologism) and what its relation to post-environmentalism is.

Ecological modernisation is basically about the integration of environmental concern in central institutions of society. As Maarten A. Hajer writes: "[E]cological modernization can be defined as the discourse that recognizes the structural character of the environmental problematique but none the less assumes that existing political, economic, and social institutions can internalize the care for the environment" (Hajer 1995:25).

More radical forms of environmentalism understand the structural character of environmental problems as so profound that an actual break with industrial and capitalist society is required to effectively deal with environmental deterioration, and *limits to growth* has been a general understanding also in more moderate versions of

environmentalism. But the core of ecological modernisation is to combine economic growth with environmental protection. Not just as end of pipe-solutions for growing industry, but through incorporation of environmental protection into capitalist economy and into planning practices concerning waste management, energy, transport etc. (Hajer 1995:26, Hajer 1996:248-9).

Moreover, in ecological modernisation economic growth is perceived as necessary for the development of new, non-polluting technologies, and environmental concern is even established as a potential source of future growth, a driving force for technological and economic innovation. The environment becomes a dynamic market. "Capitalism is changing constantly, and one of the main triggers are environmental concerns and interests." (Mol & Spaargaren 2002:37).

Theories of Ecological Modernisation also point to institutional changes in government and administrative bodies. The integration of environmental concern into public planning and administration is linked to the development of policy styles that focus on voluntary and *communicative* measures, stressing the need to involve stakeholders and citizens in consultation and *co-production of collective images* (see the previous discussion of discursive control and ritual communication). State agencies, private companies, researchers and environmental grassroots organisations are all framed as partners in ecological modernisation contributing to proactive and preventive measures. (Mol 2000:46).

Institutional changes also involve a transfer of capacities for environmental policy making from the nation-state to international forum and institutions (Mol 2003:106). As Susan Baker demonstrates (elsewhere in this volume) ecological modernisation has become a central concept in EU's environmental management. But also the concept of *sustainability*, coined by the Brundtland Commission, has in all its multiple meanings come to serve as a common frame of reference for international environmental discourse and regulation, featuring ideas of growth and environmental protection that in some ways resemble those of ecological modernisation. Increase in population does not appear to be an issue for sustainable development, and it is recognised that developing countries have a right to economic growth in order to improve living standards. It is argued that poverty often is the cause of environmental degradation and thus that economic growth is a precondition for environmental improvements, and it is even argued that growth in the industrialised countries is necessary to facilitate growth in the third world. (Dryzek 1997:121-2).

There are however important differences between sustainability and ecological modernisation. Definitions and theories of the two vary considerably. Hajer sees the international endorsement of the Brundtland report and the general acceptance of Agenda 21 as a paradigmatic example of ecological modernisation (Hajer 1996:249). But Langhelle argues that sustainability and ecological modernisation shouldn't be conflated. Firstly, sustainable development attempts to address a number of issues, such as poverty and distribution of wealth, about which ecological modernisation has nothing to say. Secondly and more important the focus of attention for sustainable development is the future of the world, its population, its natural resources, and its biosphere, whereas ecological modernisation has its focus set on optimisation of industry, management and government (Langhelle 2000).

Across these different interpretations the point of this article is that there are enough common denominators between ecological modernisation and sustainability – especially the combination of economic growth and environmental protection – to group them together when trying to identify different media framings of the environment. Ideas that may be separated in other spheres can be linked together in the public sphere

The common good

While Mol basically relates his understandings of ecological modernisation to institutional changes in business corporations and administrative bodies, we need to understand more of its place in public discourse. German sociologist Klaus Eder discusses how environmental discourses are forming the public sphere. In fact, he understands ecological *modernity* – rather than ecological *modernisation* – as related to a re-definition of the common good as it is established in public discourse. In the form of ecological modernity environmentalism becomes a master discourse in the general public.

Environmental concern may have developed through a series of marginal, specialist and mutually unconnected discourses stretching from protection of singular species to dismay over toxic chemicals and the tale of limits to growth, but across these differences it has developed into a master discourse in the public space, establishing environmental concern as a somehow coherent project despite all differences. A master discourse with universal frames of reference pointing to the relationship between man and nature, not in terms of the inherent values of nature, but in terms of

a just distribution of natural resources. Nature is defined and valued as common good, as both resource and recreational value (Eder 1998: 247, 275) – which is in fine accordance with the Brundtland commission’s construction of environmental and developmental problems as mutual tying the world together in a common future.

Furthermore, the development of ecology/environmentalism as a new master discourse is connected to a significant change in modern societies: The explosion in supply of media texts, and the formidable expansion of a media sector with its own logics.³ Whereas other master discourses (of economic growth and political economy, of labour rights, of national security) are firmly rooted in their own institutions – of market and state, of industry and mass organisations – the ecology discourse does not have its own mass sociality or its own institutionalised sector. It has mainly proliferated through discursive actions in the public arena of mass media from an outset in less coherent and less institutionalised groups of issue entrepreneurs. In that respect environmentalism is a master discourse of the media age. (Eder 1996).

On one hand this makes environmental discourses more dependant upon and more vulnerable to shifting fashions in the public arena. On the other hand the claim of environmentalism to speak for the *common good* corresponds with the media sector’s status as exactly *commonly* accessible. The environment is an issue which fosters the role of collective symbols and beliefs in the organisation of public discourses and which represents and establishes the need to “protect common goods against the individual utilities that make demands on it” (Eder 1996:205). Or in other words, with environmentalism as a master discourse the ritual of communication establishes collective identity around the common good in humanity’s relation with nature.

Post-environmentalism

In Eder’s vision environmental concern has been fully integrated into the fabric of public discourse, thus re-establishing the rationality of the common good.

There is however a reverse side to Eder’s vision. There may have been an integration of environmentalist vocabulary into the core of public discourse, but environmentalist rhetoric remains detached from actual changes of societal practices towards sustainability and detached in the sense that environmental concerns don’t serve as general rationality but are reserved to their own limited field.

It is in a similar vein that Ingolfur Blühdorn understands post-environmentalism. He sees contemporary proliferation of environmentalist rhetoric, especially in terms

of ecological modernisation, as part of a development towards *simulative politics*. In general, *politics of simulation* entail: 1) A reshaping of the core values of modernity; e.g. the struggle for freedom turns into the struggle for free markets and consumer choice, and the struggle for equality is turned into campaigns for equal access to the market. 2) Implementation of policy instruments designed for the cost-effective management of the economic system's side-effects like environmental deterioration and social marginalisation. 3) Integration of these policy instruments into reformist discourses such as those of ecological modernisation. (Blühdorn 2004:45).

The discourse of ecological modernisation is part of that development in that it "simulates the possibility and the political will to achieve environmental justice, integrity and sustainability, whilst at the same time ensuring that established lifestyles, privileges and patterns of economic development are maintained." (Blühdorn 2004:45). [□ Jeppe] One could say that the ritual of environmental communication, creating collective identity around environmentalist rhetoric, is detached from the controlling aspects of the same communication, which isn't directed towards sustainability. Or even that the ritual of environmental communication carry contradicting messages and contradicting definitions of collectivity, both environmental responsibility and boundless self-realisation as core values. Herein lies the simulation.

When Eder finds that "[t]he environment is the issue that brings collective rationality back into the theory and practice of modern societies" (Eder 1996:216), then Blühdorn contradicts that vision suggesting that the images and stories of environmental concern have become tied to the politics of individual self-realisation. A further interpretation of this might suggest that the focus of environmental concern will move to issues of personal health and see nature as a site of amusement.

Another understanding of post-environmentalism sees it just and simply as a backlash for environmental claims and politics and a proliferation of *anti-environmental* claims. For instance, Frederick Buell tells how environmentalism has come under attack in USA: "The ozone hole was denied and trivialized, food and population crises were debunked, and global warming was hotly denied, doubted and dismissed as unproven." (Buell 2004:4; see also Lahsen 2005).

John Barry sees a similar development: "Powerful actors have successfully emasculated the green critique by normalizing it as controversy", and "attempts to

galvanize democratic publics behind environmental change has been blocked, delayed, watered down and otherwise prevented” (Barry 2004:181). Moreover, such attacks on environmentalism are inscribed in an overarching logic of ‘economism’ which sees “the earth/nature/environment as surrounded by and subordinate to the global [...] economy and free flow of capital, and the overarching imperative of economic growth at any cost, rather than the economy as a sub-system of the larger global ecosystem” (Barry 2004:190).

This logic is not uncontested, in fact Barry argues that radical environmentalism is alive and well, but it does signify a particular form of post-environmentalism, one where *anti*-environmentalist claims proliferate.

Eder makes it possible to conceive ecological modernisation/modernity not just as managerial adjustments and replacement of environmentalism with its simulation but also and at the same time as a powerful public discourse with a unifying appeal emphasising the common good, even across national borders – and with an appraisal of technological ingenuity that acknowledges its services to mankind rather than its services to personal self realisation.

The concept of *post-environmentalism* is in distinct contrast to this vision. It may signify the deterioration of environmental discourse into simulative politics. I.e. the rhetoric of sustainability combined with implicit and explicit acceptance of boundless growth and unsustainable practice – reflecting an inherent conflict in ecological modernisation. Alternatively post-environmentalism can be seen as a downfall of all forms of environmentalism, including ecological modernisation, as prominent discourses in the public media, and a replacement with other dominant discourses and other topics for public worry due to changes in ideological orientation and social cohesion.

Basis for the case study

The theoretical discussions above feed into interpretations of a selection of news stories from Danish television. The case study has examined changes in environmental discourses by analysing television news stories about the UN Summits on sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg, about global warming and climate change, and about the environment and environmental politics in general.

The material originally consisted of stories from prime time news programmes in both *DR* (Danish Radio) and *TV2*, the two national public service television channels in Denmark. The limits of this article only allow for a presentation of the material from *TV2*, but the station does offer an interesting and significant case.

DR began as a national radio broadcasting corporation in 1925. It started sending television in 1951 and had national monopoly on television broadcasting until 1988 when *TV2* started, and these two stations together remain dominant in the Danish television landscape. *TV2* is financially a hybrid channel funded by commercials for app. two thirds of the budget and one third from public license fees – with accompanying public service obligations. Only a few years after its start *TV2* as a whole and its news programme *Nyhederne* managed to become the larger of the two national television channels in terms of viewers and has kept that position to date (Hjarvard 2000:63).⁴

Proximity has consistently been the central feature in *TV2*'s and *Nyhederne*'s profile; proximity as a criterion in news selection and in the choice of angle and narrative style. This priority follows from the general self-conception of *TV2*, which has "made a conscious effort to form a contrast to the kind of 'top-down' news reporting that brought messages to the people from on high – from the central institutions of Danish society." Instead *TV2* perceives itself as a voice of the people, a channel of communication from ordinary people to the corridors of power and to society at large (Hjarvard 2000:65). Politically the station has leaned towards the right, but primarily its position is populist and construed around a contrast between common sense, ordinary people, the provinces, and the individual on one side and 'the system' and the metropole on the other (Hjarvard 2000:76).

TV2 and *Nyhederne* constitute a good and significant case for several reasons. Not only has *Nyhederne* maintained a larger share of viewers compared to *DR*'s *TV-Avisen*, throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, but *DR* has gradually adopted more and more elements of *Nyhederne*'s editorial policy (Hjarvard 2000:63). It is furthermore significant what a news programme which stresses proximity, individual stories, the popular, and the homely chooses to tell about global and general environmental issues. Such a case can show which understandings of environmental issues that are construed and send into the political-administrative system as being close to ordinary people and send into the general public as being common.

The media texts from TV2 have been taken through a number of basic analytic procedures scrutinising the stories for different features: 1) What binary oppositions and other contrasts are construed? 2) Narrative development and actors. 3) Images and their denotative and connotative content.⁵ All the meanings caught through these analyses are summarised in story lines following a set of questions asked to each of the stories analysed.

- What description and assessment of a problem – or if not conceptualised as a problem: of reality – is expressed and implied in the news story? How are the state, the cause and the effect of the problem understood, and what sort of action to address the problem is presented?
- How is community delimited? Who is "we" and who is "them"? On what is collective cohesion and sense of identity based?

The content of the media texts is further interpreted in light of the theoretical considerations unfolded above. These can tentatively be summarised as a set of criteria for what constitutes different discursive orderings of the environment.

Survivalism and ecologism: There are a number of environmental discourses that differ from ecological modernisation by more bleak perceptions of the environmental crises and more radical visions of sustainability. In this context they will be pooled together and identified by how they differ from EM.

- Causes: The way we live, society's basic structures, excessive consumption, population growth.
- Present condition and future effect: Massive and irreversible damages to nature and the environment, food supplies and health under threat, apocalyptic visions of environmental deterioration.
- Addressing: Insistence on limits to growth, radical changes of society, new practices in everyday life, new modes of production and government.
- Community: Man and nature are connected, common good is based in nature and the environment, grassroots against state and capital, solidarity across borders with those affected by environmental deterioration, solidarity with future generations.

Ecological modernisation/modernity and sustainable development:

- Causes: Same kind of specific causes, but perceived in terms of problems of the past and inexpedient practices rather than profound structural malfunctioning.
- Present condition and future effect: Serious problems but not irreversible damages, further deterioration of the environment can be avoided.
- Addressing: Combination of economic growth and environmental protection, focus on technological and managerial solutions, decoupling of strains on the environment from economic activity.
- Community: A unifying appeal, an outlook beyond national borders, and an inclusive definition of the common good related to environmental and developmental problems.

Simulation and self deception: Ecological modernisation can also be perceived as simulation of environmental awareness, i.e. an unreflective coexistence between inconsistent messages about both environmental responsibility and boundless expansion of markets and consumption.

- Causes: As above.
- Present condition and future effect: Schizophrenia between messages about the benefits of boundless growth and the need for environmental concern. Focus on health issues.
- Addressing: Environmentalism as life style consumption and dynamic market.
- Community: Establish means for individual self-realisation; nature as amusement site.

Anti-environmentalism: Implies direct attacks on the relevance of environmental claims.

- Causes: Environmentalists have gained too much power.
- Problem/present condition: Environmental claims are damaging; too much money is wasted on environmental regulation; markets are distorted; development and progress is blocked.
- Addressing: Disintegration of environmental concern from logics of production, consumption, and administration; economic logic: expenses for environmental protection are to be prioritised as all other expenses.
- Construction of community is not related to the environment.

From this basis we can proceed with the case study. The stories from each year are presented, first with a list of all the items in the sample, and with a summary of their story lines.

1992: Limits to growth and ecological modernisation

In 1992 there were 11 items on the selected topics.

- 26 Apr: UN-report anticipate mass extinction due to climate change
- 10 May: Climate convention reached
- 28 May: Prince Charles is deeply engaged in environmental debate prior to Rio and points to the problem of overpopulation. He is met with criticism.
- 30 May: Indigenous peoples from around the world have met for an alternative summit.
- 1 Jun: USA refuses treaty on nature protection. + Report about Danish forester in Brazil showing that the rain forest can be cultivated without disrupting nature.
- 2 Jun: The Rio-summit has started.
- 10 Jun: USA refuses biodiversity treaty. + Report about utilisation of the rain forest's resources and the common life in Belém, Northeast Brazil.
- 11 Jun: Problems with the climate convention. Massive criticism of USA.
- 12 Jun: More than 100 heads of state meet. Protection of the rain forest, conflict between north and south, report about rain forest timber.
- 13 Jun: Disappointment with the results of the Rio conference. + Interview with Danish tree merchant and consul to Belém: "Danish environmentalists are pathetic."
- 14 Jun: Interview with chairman of Danish people to people aid organisation: Evaluation of the conference.

Problem descriptions and assessments expressed and implied in these news stories are summarised below.

GREEN HOUSE EFFECT, GLOBAL WARMING, CLIMATE CHANGE

Heavy motor traffic and fuming power plants. Ever increasing consumption of fossil fuels. Massive timber felling in tropical forests.

→ Leads to climate change. Two understandings: Climate change is already happening and causing damage *or* Climate is still OK, preserve it as it is, prevent that it runs amok.

→ Future effects: Climate change will lead to irreversible damages: Mass extinction of all forms of life with which man shares the globe. Risk of scarcity in food supplies. Indefinite and immense damages.

→ Problem addressed through international climate convention. Two understandings: Characterised as weak with no binding commitments *or* Characterised as a start, a goal for global environmental politics. Proposal for global taxes and binding targets, but USA is blocking.

BIODIVERSITY, PRESERVATION OF RAINFOREST

Background: Rainforests are an important part of the global climate. Timber and soil are valuable, local resources can be used in global industry.

Causes: Global warming, pollution, overconsumption, increase in population. Increasing demand for tropical wood. + Bad agricultural techniques and ignorance.

→ Current situation: Rain forests of the world are threatened. Mass extinction of animal and plant species already on its way, one species is disappearing every hour every day. + Soil exhaustion and destruction of rain forest bio mass.

→ Future effects: Mass extinction of all forms of life. No more mahogany 10 years from now. Climate change when rainforest are cut down.

→ Problem can be solved through sustainable forestry. It is possible to utilise rain forest resources without ruining nature. + Address problem through convention on biodiversity: Shall protect animals and plants from extinction → Will preserve ordinary people's subsistence.

ENVIRONMENT IN GENERAL

Increase in population + over consumption in the rich world.

→ Lead to environmental problems.

→ Assessment, two opposing views (expressed in last story from the summit): Developing countries don't want to address the problem of population growth; they just want to be showered with money. *versus* Poverty is a cause of population increase, but the rich countries don't want to help with economic development in poor countries.

Developed countries, leaders and NGOs alike, are confused and not mentally prepared to protect the earth.

→ The globe is in crisis.

→ Indigenous peoples have alternative and sustainable technologies

Problem: Danish environmentalists understand nothing about the rain forest in Brazil.

Addressing: The locals have experience in taking good care of the rain forest.

A tale of limits to growth is clearly present. Especially a fear of overpopulation is prominent (26 Apr, 28 May, 14 June), but overconsumption in the rich countries is also mentioned several times as a problem in itself. "The report from World Watch

says that global warming, pollution, overconsumption and population increase will accelerate mass extinction of all those forms of life with which man shares the earth” (reporter, 26 Apr). The damages of overpopulation and overconsumption are thus lamented because nature has a value in and of itself, and mankind has a moral obligation to protect it, but also because material subsistence is threatened. ”There are places on earth where it is expected that global warming can lead to a catastrophe. The soil is under risk to be desiccated, because precipitation isn't sufficient to make up for increased evaporation due to higher temperatures” (engineer as expert witness, 26 Apr).

A sense of imminent environmental crisis is also established through the camera coverage. There are images of multi-lane motorways with endless rows of cars, energy plants with chimneys, wires and metal structures shrouded in smoke; and as contrast a humming bird (26 Apr). Similar pictures of roads and power plants are followed by the words: ”Industrialised countries must limit emissions of greenhouse gasses” (10 May). And images of dense traffic on a ten-lane road are followed by the words: ”the cause of these [climate] changes is the ever increasing consumption of fossil fuels, i.e. oil and petrol” (11 June).

Images of car traffic and fossil energy plants are simply established and confirmed as standard index for climate problems and ensuing environmental crisis, and the contrast to the humming bird establishes the beauty that the earth is about to lose.

In the stories from Rio a sense of imminent disaster is maintained: ”The secretary-general of the conference, Maurice Strong of Canada, says that the summit is ‘Earth’s last chance’ if future generations shall enjoy its riches” (reporter’s voice over 2 June). But to some extent the construction of an environmental crisis is supplemented and replaced with a conception of sustainable uses of nature’s resources.

Especially two stories express this sentiment. One is about a Danish forester who owns a piece of tropical rain forest on the Brazilian coast and runs a profitable farming business on the land (1 June). The journalistic framing of the story is that many rain forests have disappeared, but that it is possible, as the Danish forester shows, to ”exploit the rain forest in an ecologically sound way”. Accompanied by sounds and images from the rain forest – streaming water, chattering birds, forest covered hills – the forester tells about proper agricultural methods in rain forests and how to avoid deforestation and erosion.

Another story is about life in Belém (10 June). First the treaty on biodiversity is explained as "a legal document that shall ensure survival of the species – plants, animals, and ultimately humans", and it is explained how various fruits from the rain forest can be used commercially. This is followed by images of people working and a couple dancing by the river and by the words: "Nature provides work, but not always. Life here and many other places could easily be better, especially if the rich would give something for using their resources." In a third story it is stated that "Brazilians are probably more aware of these dangers. Therefore sustainable forestry is becoming more and more common, and there is research as never before in rain forests and their survival" (12 June).

Community is established in different ways in the 11 items from 1992, but there is an overall tendency to include the whole world in a common destiny. There are even signs of seeing man and nature as connected (26 Apr; 10 June), but mainly sentiments of community revolve around notions of a common human destiny and thereby a global "we". This is expressed in reports about how we all will suffer from climate changes and other forms of environmental deterioration. (26 Apr; 10 May; 2 + 11 + 12 Jun). The threat that defines "us" is the threat of global environmental crisis.

"We" is also established in terms of the rich countries/the northern hemisphere and as such endowed with responsibility and blame for the predicament in which earth finds itself mainly due to our overconsumption (26 Apr, 28 May), our demand for unsustainable products such as tropical timber (12 Jun), and our general confusion and lack of understanding for the earth (30 May). But also a kind of eco-imperialism is something that the rich countries can be blamed for when claims for environmental protection prevent poor countries from exploiting their natural resources (30 May, 12 + 13 June).

In continuation hereof sentiments of community are also established through constructions of who the others are. To the extent "they" are the poor countries in general or local and indigenous people of Brazil they are established both as victims of environmental deterioration and unjust trade – which we are to blame for – and as carriers of the good, endowed with knowledge of a sustainable path. Sentiments of solidarity are also implied in this construction of the others (e.g. 10 June).

Seen as *ritual* the 11 stories express societal cohesion around the notion that we as society are threatened by climate change and loss of biodiversity, that we *care* about the environment, that we are responsible for its deterioration, and that we are able to clear a path towards sustainability. The stories thereby seem to carry a unifying appeal across borders, and collective identity is established around notions of the common good in relation to environment and nature. (Considering TV2's preference for proximity this inclusive definition of community and outlook to the entire globe may seem remarkable, but it is precisely constructed around stories about individuals, or the royals, or ordinary people living in the provinces).

In terms of dissemination of knowledge and control there are no direct instructions in these 11 news stories. Any controlling potential lie in their agenda setting – or agenda *confirming* – capacities and in the templates for behaviour and thought that are implied by the collective images they produce. A public agenda is maintained around issues of environmental sustainability feeding into administration and politics. Also by showing and defining sustainable practice, the stories may serve as a potential basis for altering customs to protect the environment. It would, by implication of these stories, be meaningful for consumers to ask for sustainable products (for instance when purchasing wood).

The stories from 1992 show of course no complete match with any of the discourse types discussed above, but there are clear traces of both survivalism/ecologism and ecological modernisation. Outlining massive and irreversible damages to the environment and finding the causes in population growth as well as in overconsumption and general life style indicate a survivalist sentiment in the environmental reporting. But it is followed by depictions of how environmental protection can be achieved in unison with economic development and profitable business, and there is also a focus on research and technological solutions. This is supported by the ways community is constructed with a unifying appeal, a global outlook, and an inclusive definition of the common good related to environmental problems. There is some criticism of environmentalists, but it is of the doings of grassroots organisations, not of environmentalism as principle. It thus appears that environmental concern is conveyed as a theme in news stories on behalf of the general public rather than as an expression of opinions from special interest groups, grassroots organisations or oppositional experts.

Discourse on the environment moves from survivalism to ecological modernity.

2002: Environmentalism contested

The material from 2002 includes the two last months of 2001, because there was a general election in Denmark on 20 November 2001 leading to a new government and immediate changes in environmental politics. In the period 1 Nov. 2001 to 31 Dec. 2002 there were 18 items on the selected topics.

- 10 Dec. 01: Confrontation with environmental politics. Government plans a new institute to assess benefits of public environmental spending.
- 24 Dec 01: Giant ice floes break off from Antarctica.
- 26 Feb: The government has appointed Bjørn Lomborg⁶ as head of the new institute for environmental assessment. New principles for environmental politics.
- 27 Feb: Junior partner in government criticises the appointment of Lomborg.
- 1 Mar: Discord about the Kyoto agreement. Denmark risks additional expenses.
- 4 Mar: Denmark's problems with additional Kyoto expenses postponed.
- 9 Jul: Report from WWF predicting that the earth will be exhausted in 50 years' time, but report is met with criticism.
- 19 Jul: EU ministers for the environment meet in Denmark
- 2 Aug: Danish climate is changing and new exciting species are introduced.
- 12 + 13 Aug: Cloudburst and flooding in Prague and Central Europe. Causes for the unusual weather. Black cloud of pollution over Asia. (3 stories)
- 26 Aug: World summit has started in Johannesburg. Danish artist in protest action against USA and its polluting.
- 28 Aug: Lomborg provokes again: Politicians should address poverty rather than greenhouse effect.
- 1 Sep: Prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen arrives at the summit. Agrees with Lomborg. + Report about the summit proceedings.
- 2 Sep: Disagreement at the Johannesburg-summit about reduction of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, criticism of USA. + Report about PM Rasmussen's visit in Soweto, calls for concrete action in stead of just words.
- 3 Sep: Criticism of agreement on sustainable development. + Reporter's assessment of the conference: both success and failure.
- 4 Sep: Protests against USA. Reporters assessment of conference results: Lomborg was right.

These stories revolved to some extent around similar topics as in 1992, but purveying different messages and bringing in some new topics, especially the topic of priorities and expenses in environmental politics and administration. Problem descriptions and assessments expressed and implied in these news stories are summarised below.

GREEN HOUSE EFFECT, GLOBAL WARMING, CLIMATE CHANGE

Causes: Two positions: Natural variation *versus* Human activity + Emission of greenhouse gasses *may* cause global warming, which *may* cause extreme weather.

→ Current situation: Ice is melting in Antarctica. Extreme weather in Europe, massive precipitation, flooding in Prague and all over Central Europe, people evacuated. + Two understandings: Climate is changing, earth is getting warmer, the planet is exhausted *versus* Scare mongering and publicity stunt; no need to fear global change.

→ *Advantages* of climate change: Nice warm summers, interesting new species, good conditions for the beech trees (a national symbol). or *Problems*: uncertainty, loss of landscape types and species, more incidents of extreme weather.

Addressing: Waste of money to act against greenhouse effect; faster and more effective to provide clean water than to mitigate global warming. *versus* Greenhouse effect is a game of uncertainty, no one knows what might go wrong and how dire the consequences will be.

CLIMATE POLITICS

Denmark got a bad deal in the Kyoto agreement due to unfair calculation principles.

→ Tough negotiations in EU about the implementation of Kyoto.

→ Denmark faces additional expenses of 333 mill. € in meeting the Kyoto protocol.

→ Denmark must stand on its rights and insist on a fairer deal.

THE JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT

Description & assessment: Impossible to make decisions in such a large forum, summit is marked by pompous declarations and airy resolutions.

→ Concrete action is better than endless negotiations.

Problem: Poverty and underdevelopment.

→ Addressing: Poor countries must have opportunities to make money for themselves. + Economic growth is more important than environmental protection. *or* Economic growth will provide more means and better technology to lift people out of poverty and also protect the environment. *or* Economic growth is not enough to mitigate poverty.

Problem: Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is waste of money.

→ Faster and more effective to provide clean water than to mitigate global warming.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND POLITICS IN GENERAL

Current problem: We spend too much money on the environment, good sense and balance has disappeared, activists and tree-huggers have taken control. We make

decisions and prioritise with closed eyes. + Experts disagree about the state of the environment, their dispute is inaccessible for most people.

→ Two understandings: We need to develop a sound economic basis for making decisions. *versus* The "number-people" [i.e. economists] are taking over the environmental cause, only what pays will be accepted.

In 2002 there are several stories on global warming and greenhouse effect, but contesting it is now an integral part of framing this issue. Both the seriousness and the causes of the problem are contested. For instance a story about a WWF-report (9 Jul) was introduced as follows: "And from the humdrum of everyday life to something that resembles a prophecy of doom. The World Wildlife Fund has figured out that in 50 years' time our planet will be exhausted. Fortunately, one could say, there is some disagreement on the matter". Later in the story it is claimed that WWF's motive for publishing such scary reports only is "to get publicity", and "change is natural, it is unnatural to expect that everything remains the same" (economist as expert witness).

Other examples: "Here on Antarctica giant icebergs are breaking off. Some see it as a result of manmade climate changes, others as whims of nature" (presenter, 24 Dec). "Tropical nights and rain; the Danish climate is changing, and with these changes follow new exciting animals and plants" (presenter, 2 Aug) followed by images with connotations of good life in a warmer climate such as girls in a bikini jumping from a pier.

The tale of limits to growth was quite prominent in the stories from 1992, but is absent in 2002. In its place has come a criticism of high expenses and irrational priorities in environmental politics.

A 3-min. long story about confrontation with previous environmental politics (10 Dec '01) is introduced as follows: "What are we really getting from all the billions we spend on the environment? The new government will try to straighten that out by setting up an *independent* institute." Images of environment inspectors and their equipment are accompanied by the reporter telling that "*Brush prowlers*⁷ are getting ready for another day of *control*. There are thousands of them with their measuring equipment and speed boats", and they burden us with taxes. This is followed by a debater whose position is given credibility by reference to his environmental commitment: "In fact we have to choose between greenhouse effect and how many hips we want to operate, we have to find a way to talk about priorities."

Where images of aesthetically appealing nature in 1992 are used in stories about sustainable productions (in rain forests) or as illustration of what we are losing (a humming bird) that kind of imagery is in 2002 used to establish that nature is doing fine. Images of a pond encircled by trees and plants, low sun, a grebe swimming on the water, a swarm of insects caught in the sunlight, accompanied by reporter's voice over: "Lomborg says that maybe things aren't so bad on earth, and moneys for the environment could often be used much more sensibly, he thinks" (10 Dec '01).

Coverage of the Johannesburg-summit starts with a story about Lomborg who "provokes again" by stating that we shouldn't put our stakes on fighting greenhouse effect but rather on fighting poverty: "We must not just do what *feels* right in Europe, we must make sure that what we do in Johannesburg is that which *is* right for *all* the world" (28 Aug). This story mainly reports about the protests, also from government representatives, against Lomborg's statements. But already in the next summit story Lomborg's views are supported: "I think it has been entirely relevant of Lomborg to single this problem out [...] sustainable development is also about poor countries getting the opportunity to earn their own money" (Denmark's PM, 1 Sep). In the last story from the summit the reporter concludes in a similar way: "Possible conclusion: Clean water helps faster and more effectively than windmills and solar cells. As Lomborg said before the meeting" (4 Sep).

Rhetorically, concern with climate is aligned with feelings and concern with clean water supply is aligned with good sense. Lomborg's role seems to have developed according to mythic tales like that of Galileo (or that of Numskull Jack in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tale): First his opinions are met with disbelief and protest, but eventually he is vindicated.

This also points to a new understanding of the relation between environment and development. It is explained that "on one side you have USA and the developing countries who focus on economic growth and development, which is also the Danish prime minister's approach, and on the other side you have EU in general who focuses more on the environment" (reporter, 1 Sep). And the overall frame for it – the frame that is marked out by the development of the summit coverage from Lomborg's provocation to his vindication – is that addressing environmental problems and addressing poverty are alternatives to each other. A choice has to be made between them.

Community is constructed in several different ways, but tends to be limited to the national Danish "we" rather than to include the whole world. In reports from Johannesburg it is established around a lack of impression with the summit and its airy and pompous resolutions, either in relation to the doings of our Prime Minister, who sets things straight and calls for concrete action (1-2 Sep) – this is Danishness in action – or in relation to the reporters assessments of the summit as an event (1-4 Sep). And a Danish "we" is also constructed in opposition to the rest of Europe in two stories about Denmark's problems with the Kyoto protocol (1 + 4 Mar).

The Danish "we" thus constructed is however not set in consensus. The ritual setting of "we" is in most of the stories characterised by disagreement and established around dissension between what might be called environmentalist and economist world views, a division between the alarm over climate change and environmental degradation on one side and scepticism towards environmentalism on the other. This is the case where an alarming WWF- report is set up against an economical experts reassurances (9 Jul), where a need to develop a sound economic basis for environmental regulation is set up against a critique of economic rationality, and when opponents and supporters of Lomborg are pitched against each other (10 Dec, 26-27 Feb, 28 Aug, 1 + 4 Sep). To the extent that reports seem to resolve these differences "we" is constructed around a sentiment of ordinary common sense dismissing alarmist reports and environmental bureaucracy.

As part of such delimitations of community "the others" are defined, not as carriers of the good, but as world leaders indulging in useless negotiations, or "brush prowlers" wasting tax payers money.

As in 1992 the controlling potential of the 18 news stories in 2002 lies in their agenda setting and practice modelling capacities. An agenda of financial and economic consideration when dealing with environmental issues and an agenda of scepticism towards environmental claims, questioning their urgency, and pushing environmental concerns away from the centre of public life. The stories may consequently serve as potential basis for practices ignoring environmental concern, meeting environmental authorities with suspicion, and focusing on economic considerations.

In comparison with 1992 the stories from 2002 convey quite different messages. Overconsumption is no longer defined as the cause of environmental problems, it is the waste of money on environmental regulation that is defined as a problem, the causes of which is scare mongering from interest groups and a dominance of environmentalists in politics and administration. These are traits of an *anti*-environmentalist discourse, whereas ideas of ecological modernisation seem to be absent.

Handling environmental problems does not appear as an *integral* part of economic development, which is the message that was conveyed in 1992. Environmental protection is rather conceived as an extra cost, only affordable if economic growth is up and running, and provided that more important considerations have been given higher priority. Such a separation of environmental concern from the rationales of production, consumption and administration is precisely one of the criteria mentioned above for a *post*-environmentalist turn; a turn that goes beyond the simulative politics of ecological modernisation and resembles open anti-environmentalism.⁸

Another indication hereof is that the 2002-stories to a large extent are framed as controversies; between economic considerations and environmental concern, between the struggle against greenhouse effect and a struggle against poverty, between scary prophecies from WWF and a rejection of them. With John Barry (see above) it could be said that green critique is turned into controversy and thereby normalised.

Environmentalism seems to have lost its empowering link with the media sector, its link based on coinciding claims to common good, common sense and common accessibility. Speaking for the common good now tends either to be preoccupied with expense levels or locked in a conflict of priorities.

Comparison and conclusion: The demise of ecological modernisation

If the question of this article is whether and how public discourse on the environment has changed from the early 90s to the early 00s, the first answer is *yes*, judging from the presented case study discourse on the environment *has* changed. The comparison of Danish television coverage of the UN summits on sustainable development and related topics in 1992 and 2002 indicates considerable changes in how the environment is framed.

In 1992 there are clear traces of a survivalist framing of the environment with indications of limits to growth, bleak predictions of environmental disasters to come

and perceptions of man and nature as connected. And contrary to the discourse of ecological modernisation and sustainability the issue of increase in population is framed as an important problem for the environment.

But the bleak perceptions of serious environmental crisis lead to understandings of how environmental problems can be handled by applying the proper methods and technologies and at the same time build profitable businesses. Thus, there is a development from a survivalist discourse to a discourse of ecological modernisation, the former leading to the latter. Furthermore, environmental problems become the central concern in a unifying appeal which tends to include the whole world in a common destiny.

In 2002 ecological modernisation no longer seems to be prominent, or more to the point, it has become invisible. Rather than a development of survivalist positions leading to ecological modernisation, environmentalist positions of a survivalist character are pitched against open anti-environmentalism with the latter established as good sense. Furthermore, it appears that an economist discourse has become more prominent in framing environmental questions. Environmental concern is not construed as integral to economic growth (or as Barry puts it: the earth is subordinate to global economy). And protection of the environment no longer occupies the same position as foundational common good. On the contrary, the rationality and priority of environmentalism is directly attacked. There are no traces of a discourse of ecological modernisation in the sample from 2002.

Eder's vision of a new ecological modernity centred around a common good rooted in humanity's relationship with nature does not find much support by this development. On the contrary it rather signifies a post-environmentalist turn.

Post-environmentalism can be conceived in terms of an inherent inconsistency in ecological modernisation between boundlessness of economic growth and the limits imposed by environmental concern; an inconsistency that leads to a detachment of environmental symbols and rhetoric from actual ecologically sound practice. Perceived in these terms traces of a post-environmentalist development might be imminent already in 1992, where the idea of sustainable growth is explicitly brought forward. Though at that point it is still also substantiated with distinct examples of how sustainable practices can be combined with economic development, and ideas of sustainability are linked to a unifying appeal and an inclusive definition of the

common good centred on man's relationship with nature – rather than to images of individual self-realisation.

A decade later, the detachment of environmental considerations from economic development amounts to more than a simulation of environmentalism, it resembles a distancing from it. Post-environmentalism simply means that the relevance of environmental claims are attacked, that environmental issues leave the centre of public concern, that they no longer are foundational in defining the common good, and that they are overshadowed by other dominant discourses – an economist discourse for instance – and other topics for public worry.

This turn is not necessarily permanent, in fact there are strong signs that an environmental outlook is becoming more prominent again – albeit with a significant element of simulation and build-in schizophrenia between environmental concern and the desire for boundless growth – and the timing of these shifting media sentiments may be specific to Denmark. But the character of anti-environmentalism is not particularly Danish, and the fact that it turns up in Denmark with its previously high environmental profile suggests that environmentalism still has a long way to go, also on a global scale.

Ecological modernisation or other and more radical forms of environmentalism may rise again (in the Danish public). But one lesson from this development could be that the discourses of environmentalism in general and ecological modernisation specifically are not vehicles for or defining elements in a new modernity. They are just discourses, or even master discourses, that are in contrast, strife and alliance with other (master)discourses as part of socio-cultural and ideological changes and pursuit of vested interests.

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¹ The agenda setting role of general public media has been widely theorised, e.g. by Dearing & Rogers (1996) defining it as a political process "in which the mass media play a crucial role in enabling social problems to become acknowledged as public issues" (p. 22, here quoted from Ørsten, Andersen & Arpi 2005). A process that is facilitated by issue entrepreneurs from power institutions as well as public campaigners, (on issue entrepreneurs and environmental issues see also Anderson 1997).

² Douglas & Wildavsky's analysis does however run counter to theories of ecological modernisation (see next paragraph) since they understand environmental concern as belonging to a sectarian rationality at the borders of society rather than in the centre.

³ See for instance Luhmann (2000) who opens his theory of mass media by noting that: "Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media" (p. 1).

⁴ In the relevant weeks, and a few randomly selected additional weeks, shares were on average in 1992 34 % for *Nyhederne* at 19:00 (26 to 39 %) and 21 % for *TV-Avisen* at 19:30 (20 to 37 %). In 2002 average share was 19 % for *Nyhederne* at 19:00 (15 to 21 %) and 16 % for *TV-Avisen* at 21:00 (13 to 22 %), not counting the two weeks there was a strike). Despite the significant drop in shares for both news programmes from 1992 to 2002, they remain the biggest national television news programmes, if not the only. The channels DR and TV2 had a combined total share of 80 % on average in the selected weeks in 1992 and 68 % in 2002. (Gallup TV-Meter online weekly press releases <http://tvm.gallup.dk/tvm/pm/> (8 May 2006)).

⁵ There is a point to applying a broad selection of analytic procedures, in order to discern which discourses are at work in the text sample, because even a short format like news stories constructs meaning in many different ways: 1) Systems of knowledge and belief can be ordered in binary oppositions, so identifying such binaries gives an insight into the discourse. What categories are set in opposition to each other, and which qualities are they aligned with? E.g. when economy is set in opposition to environment and the first is aligned with sense and the latter with feelings (cf. Harland 1993). 2) Much news reporting is organised as narrations in which knowledge and belief are ordered in relation to the course of events and the involved actants. What follows from what? What are the initial state, the moving force, and the consequences? To whom and what are the roles of acting subject (hero), pursued object, helper, opponent (villain) etc. ascribed? E.g. when 'sensible priorities in environmental politics' is the pursued object, Lomborg is the hero, and environmentalists are the opponent. (cf. Greimas 1974). 3) In television much of the meaning is carried by images – by their denotative and connotative content established in connection with spoken words and narrative and rhetoric developments of the story. What is shown, what surplus meanings might the images carry, and which meanings are settled in the combination of images, words and sounds? (cf. Barthes 1990). Particular images can serve as *index* of wider phenomena which means that the image as sign carries traces of what it signifies (cf. Peirce 1983). A picture of a fuming chimney can for instance be an index of economic activity as well as environmental deterioration; it carries traces of and can signify both.

⁶ The same Lomborg who became internationally renowned for his disregard of environmentalism in his book *The Sceptical Environmentalist* (2001) and countless media appearances.

⁷ A direct translation of the Danish word 'kratluskere'.

⁸ In fact there seems to be a disclosure of the summits simulative character a couple of times in the Johannesburg-coverage when it is characterised as airy and pompous (2 & 3 Sep.), but only to carry simulations into a new field when the prime minister's call for concrete action is followed by a report that focuses on the *statement* he gives while visiting Soweto rather than on the specifics of the concrete project he visits.