

THE BRUNDTLAND REPORT IN DENMARK

An Analysis of the Reception of the Brundtland Report in a Danish Political
Context

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ABSTRACT: This paper revolves around the history of Danish environmental politics in the late twentieth century. It investigates how *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report was perceived, debated, and used politically in the wake of its publication in 1987. The analytical framework of the thesis is inspired by the British intellectual historian Quentin Skinner, and the Cambridge School of intellectual history. This entails the application of linguistic contextualism – the idea of placing a text in its historical context, to better understand the intention of the writer. The paper specifically argues that the concept of ‘sustainable development’, which is established in the report, has no intrinsic meaning, and is instead a way of merging ecology and economy. It then argues that this merging is the defining feature of the danish reception of the report. By investigating the reception in consideration of the 1970’s growth debate, the paper argues that ‘sustainable development’ is used in the danish context as a way of promoting economic growth. Lastly it argues that the sustainability discourse that originated from the report, is a continuation and reproduction of the growth debate.

KEYWORDS: sustainable development, Danish environmental policy, Brundtland report, economic growth



Introduction

'Sustainable development' has become one of the core concepts in the modern environmental debate. The concept is deeply ingrained in both academic and public debates on the environment – both in a danish as well as an international context. In 1987 the UN-sanctioned Brundtland Commission published *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report. It is from this report that the concept of 'sustainable development' was popularized and brought into environmental debates and discourse. In the danish literature on environmental politics, the role of the Brundtland Report is decidedly unclear. Furthermore, it is unclear how the concept of 'sustainable development' is received and used politically. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore a largely unexplored chapter of danish environmental history.

This paper asks the following: What are the most important concepts and ideas in the Brundtland Report, how was it received, who was the main actors in this reception, and with what intentions were the report used politically? It is interesting to note that the report, and especially the concept of 'sustainable development' can be characterized as an arena of ideological contention. This paper will deal with this ideological contention by examining how the report is operationalized and ascribed different values and meanings by different political and ideological groups and actors.

The paper draws on the methodological framework of Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School of intellectual history. This entails employing what intellectual historian Mikkel Thorup calls Skinner's linguistic contextualism – situating a text in its historical context to better understand the intention of the writer (Thorup 2018: 2). For this paper, the methodology of Skinner enables an analysis that can take into account both the political intentions in the source material and the context from which these writings emerge, intervene, and attempt to change. This is done concretely by comparing the reception of the Brundtland Report with the environmental policy developments that preceded it. The linguistic contextualism comes into play in understanding the political intent in the reactions to the report in relation to the environmental policy trends before 1987.

Not much has been written about the reception and political utilization of the Brundtland Report and the concept of sustainable development in a danish context. Two noteworthy works in the danish literature are historian Bo Fritzboeger's *Sustainable Development of Denmark in the World, 1970 – 2020* (2022) and Oluf Danielsen's *Klimaet på Dagsordenen* (2015). Both these works deal with environmental politics around the time of the Brundtland report. However, they do not deal specifically with the implications of the danish reception of the report, and the ideological contentions that followed. Thus, this paper will focus on a largely unexplored chapter of danish environmental politics, with the intention of revealing some of the ideological contention that followed Brundtland Reports reception in Denmark.

The analysis in this paper is based upon different types of source material. The most important categories are newspaper articles and opinion pieces, governmental action plans, and the Brundtland Report itself. The paper is structured as a three-part analysis, that firstly deals with the background of the Brundtland report. It then takes on the Brundtland Report in the specific danish context, and lastly deals with the ideological contention in the report.

The background of the Brundtland Report in an international and a Danish perspective

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* from 1962 is considered by many as the intellectual foundation of the modern environmental debate. The book examined the adverse effects of pesticides in food chains, and sparked a significant debate on environmental harm in the United States (Danielsen 2021: 13). *Silent Spring* garnered considerable interest in both public and academic spheres, and can be viewed as a strong expression of the 1960s revitalization of academic interest in the environment (Seefried 2015: 381). During the 1960s and 1970s many of today's environmental movements such as Greenpeace and WWF emerged into the public debates on environment (Danielsen 2015: 7). Thus, the 1960s can be seen as the point of departure for a new environmental consciousness, or at least an increased awareness of the environmental degradation caused by human activity.

The growing environmental consciousness emerged from and existed in an economic growth paradigm, stemming from the economic boom that took place in the 1950s in the global north. The

nations of the global north were bound to an economic logic rooted in neoclassical growth theory, wherein economic growth was the ultimate measure of success and progress (Seefried 2015: 379). This economic logic fostered a growth discourse, through which the framework for societal progress was constructed (Ibid.: 379-380). However, by the end of the 1960s, the economic growth paradigm was challenged, and its otherwise robust theoretical underpinnings began to crumble. The growth discourse began to diminish in influence on the understanding of society, economy, and progress. A significant part of this paradigm shift was instigated by the environmental movements and the steadily growing environmental consciousness – this stemmed particularly from Western counterculture and the left-wing intellectuals of the 1960s (Ibid.: 381-382).

A single publication became seminal in the decline of the growth paradigm and in shaping the subsequent environmental movements. In 1972, the Club of Rome, an organization of influential business leaders, academics, and scientists, published the report *Limits to Growth*. Based on what was at the time highly advanced computer simulations, the report predicted a future where unrestricted growth would lead to pollution, resource scarcity, and population growth at such a level that it would lead to complete societal collapse on a global scale (Borowy 2014: 30). *Limits to Growth* was received with massive interest, was read all over the world, and translated into 30 different languages (Ibid.). In the aftermath, an extensive debate ensued regarding the feasibility of a future without economic growth, and whether zero growth or outright anti-growth was achievable. In the years following the report, a kind of consensus emerged in the discourse on growth. Rather than advocating for anti-growth, the focus shifted towards a qualitative dimension of growth. Elke Seefried astutely highlights in her article how this trend aligns with the sustainable development discourse articulated in the Brundtland Report:

This [qualitative growth] sought to maintain 'quality of life', thus integrating economic, environmental and social criteria in the understanding of growth. Hence, in this discourse the three 'pillars' of sustainability we speak of today were conceptualised for the first time (Seefried 2015: 383).

The growth debate and the agreement on qualitative growth in the 1970s had a large influence on the concept of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report. Internationally, two distinct ideological groups emerged in the environmental debate leading up to the Brundtland Report. The

first group questioned the consequences of continued economic growth, drawing inspiration from *Limits to Growth*. The second group, especially neoclassical economists, regarded economic growth as essential for societal well-being and indispensable for maintaining living conditions for people (Ibid.). In the international context, it is crucial to note how the framework for understanding environmental issues before the Brundtland Report is permeated by the growth debate. The analysis of the reception of the Brundtland Report must therefore take into account the growth debate of the 1970s in relation to the discursive frameworks that different ideological groups relied on when ascribing significance to the report.

In addition to the international perspective on the background of the Brundtland Report, the context of the environmental policy debate in Denmark must also be illuminated. One particular event symbolizes the entry of the environment into public discourse. In 1969, the first modern environmental movement in Denmark, NOAH, was founded. Established by natural science students at the University of Copenhagen, its purpose was to combat the causes of pollution (Danielsen 2021: 11). It is clear that the discursive framework for the entire environmental policy in Denmark at this time is defined by a very concrete idea of pollution in the human environment.

Evidently, the environmental policy debate in Denmark before the Brundtland Report paralleled the international debate. In the Danish debate, the question of growth prompted by *Limits to Growth* was prominent. However, the precarious economic situation in Denmark throughout the 1970s led to widespread political resistance to zero growth in the public debate. It makes sense to distinguish between growth skeptics and growth proponents in the Danish context, akin to the two ideological groupings previously outlined in the international debate.

In an intellectual history perspective, one could argue that the growth debate following *Limits to Growth* is key to understanding the environmental policy background of the Brundtland Report. *Limits to Growth* signifies both a departure from the economic growth paradigm that had prevailed since the 1950's and contributes to creating a new discursive framework for environmental policy. Growth is no longer consistently portrayed as inherently desirable, but rather as a process that also has significant environmental consequences.

Argument and ideology in the Brundtland Report

"Sustainable development" is undeniably the core concept of the Brundtland Report. This section of the paper will examine the set of ideas that was articulated in the report. Furthermore, it will uncover how the concept of sustainable development is constructed in the report. The common definition of sustainable development can be found in the first chapter of the Brundtland Report: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Commission 1987: 16). This interpretation of sustainable development has, for many, become synonymous with the Brundtland Report. This brief excerpt can be considered a summary of the popular understanding of the report (Borowy 2014: ix). However, the definition is not very concrete. It does not express what sustainable development looks like or how it can be implemented. A more in-depth reading of the Brundtland Report is necessary to uncover the actual content of the concept.

In order to understand the concept of sustainable development, it is relevant to examine the use of 'development' in the report. Initially, the term is defined very broadly, "[...] the 'environment' is where we all live; and 'development' is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode." (Brundtland Commission 1987: 7) To develop is to improve living conditions. The concept is value-laden, in the sense that it points towards something that can be interpreted as universally desirable. The use of the term 'development' instead of a term like 'growth' can be questioned. In the report, economic growth seems to be an essential part of sustainable development: "What is needed now is a new era of economic growth – growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable." (Ibid.). It seems that 'sustainable development' could be used interchangeably with a term like 'sustainable growth', without a loss of meaning occurring. However, one could argue that the use of 'development' still plays a crucial role. In the context of the preceding growth debate from the 1970s, 'development' serves as a neutral position in the debate. It can be seen as a way to move forward and avoid embedding the new concept in the old debate. Furthermore, 'development' in the report includes a social aspect that 'growth' does not. The report identifies economic inequality between nations as part of the development concept:

Yet at the same time these developing countries must operate in a world in which the resources gap between most developing and industrial nations is widening [...]. This inequality is the planet's main 'environmental' problem; it is also its main 'development' problem. (Ibid.: 14)

This view of inequality is at the core of the concept of sustainable development. In sustainable development, there is thus an implicit understanding that economic inequality is the main cause of environmental problems. 'Development' is used in the concept to include inequality in how sustainable economic growth can occur. This points to one of the report's self-declared objectives, found in the introduction – to promote cooperation between nations at different economic and social development stages (Ibid.: 4). This view on inequality explicates that the Brundtland Report is a political document, as it appears normative and politically charged to advocate for increased economic equality and transnational cooperation.

This idea of economic inequality as the core issue in the environmental debate gives rise to a discussion of the relationship between ecology and economy in the report. In fact, it becomes clear in the first chapter of the report, that ecology and economy are not only interconnected but also mutually dependent:

We have in the past been concerned about the impacts of economic growth upon the environment. We are now forced to concern ourselves with the impacts of ecological stress – degradation of soils, water regimes, atmosphere, and forests upon our economic prospects. [...] Ecology and economy are becoming ever more interwoven locally, regionally, nationally, and globally into a seamless net of causes and effects. (Ibid.: 14)

In the report, there is a fundamental understanding that economy and ecology are inseparable, because a change in one factor entails consequences in the other. It is interesting to note what the reciprocity between the two factors means for the report. It implies that economic considerations must not just be taken to ensure environmental protection, but also to safeguard the economy itself. In the quote, consideration for the economy is presented as the most significant and pressing. It also becomes clear that the report exists as an extension of the growth debate, but with different emphasis, in that economic considerations are seen as just as important as environmental considerations because they are *inseparable*. This idea reveals an entirely new dimension of the report

and sustainable development – namely that it is all rooted in an economic logic. One can argue that the integration of economy and ecology is one of the fundamental ideas in the Brundtland Report. The entire concept of sustainable development rests on the idea that development, including economic growth, can occur hand in hand with the environment. However, this integration is also a discursive strategy, functioning as an expansion of the somewhat untenable consensus on qualitative growth that emerged in the growth debate of the 1970s. The complete integration of economy and ecology in the Brundtland Report realizes qualitative growth through the concept of sustainable development, and it resolves many of the contradictions in the growth debate. This can be seen as part of the transition from a growth discourse to a sustainability discourse in the environmental debate, as described by Elke Seefried (Seefried 2015: 377, 389). The integration allows the transition to a new paradigm that does not view ecology and economy as contradictory but rather as inseparable. This is evident in the introduction of the Brundtland Report, where the prospects for the future are addressed:

Our report, *Our Common Future*, is not a prediction of ever increasing environmental decay, poverty, and hardship in an ever more polluted world among ever decreasing resources. We see instead the possibility for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base. (Brundtland Commission 1987: 11)

Environmental problems are not just problems; they are opportunities for economic growth. This is a complete breakaway from the growth debate of the 1970s. The quote explicates the economic logic of the report, which views economic growth as a result of sustainable development. The environment is seen as an investment opportunity because it, with the right approach, has the potential to support sustainable economic growth.

Thus, the most central concept in the Brundtland Report is 'sustainable development.' The content of the concept is predominantly vague and does not contain a clear ideological core. Instead, it signifies the integration of ecology and economy. In the context of the preceding growth debate, the Brundtland Report and the concept of sustainable development can be seen as a fulfillment of the contentious idea of qualitative growth.

Reception of the Brundtland Report in the Danish debate

The idea of sustainable development quickly gained support in the Danish Parliament after the publication of the Brundtland Report. This is evident in a parliamentary debate on January 26, 1989, where a proposal for the development of an action plan was discussed:

The Parliament urges the government to implement the initiatives in the action plan for the environment and development, including [...] initiating a broad public information and activity campaign on the recommendations of the Brundtland Report for sustainable development, and providing the Danish Parliament with a status update on the realization of the action plan by April 1, 1990. (Danish Parliament 1989: Translation: Magnus Dahl)

The proposal receives massive support, with 105 votes in favor and 15 against. The right-wing populist party, Fremskridtspartiet, is the only party to vote against the proposal but is significantly outnumbered (Ibid.). The proposal on January 26, 1989, was prompted by a parliamentary debate that took place the previous year, on January 21, 1988. In this debate, the Brundtland Report was discussed in detail, primarily in relation to the increase in foreign aid following the recommendations of the report. Already at this stage, the majority of the Parliament was positively inclined regarding the report, and it was decided to gradually increase foreign aid towards 1% of the GNP (Danish Parliament 1988).

Based on the debate in the Danish Parliament, it is clear that the Brundtland Report is positively perceived and supported. However, the debate following the report's publication reveals that its content is valued and interpreted in different ways. The following sections will show that particularly two interpretations are dominant in the reception of the Brundtland Report in Denmark.

Growth-based interpretation

In an article in the newspaper *Information* on February 6, 1988, the then Minister of Education and Research, Bertel Haarder, comments on the Brundtland Report:

Today, economic growth and environmental considerations are no longer contradictions. On the contrary, we know from the Brundtland Report that the path to a better environment goes through balanced growth. (Haarder 1988: Translation: Magnus Dahl)

Haarder's comment shows that the integration of ecology and economy has a place in the Danish debate. For Haarder, the Brundtland Report is a clear argument for economic growth. It is even economic growth that serves as the primary solution to environmental issues. In the article, he also uses Eastern Europe as an example to argue that economic growth and capitalism are necessary for the environment, to avoid "stagnation in outdated production methods and to pollute the soil, air, rivers, and the Baltic Sea." (Ibid.: Translation: Magnus Dahl). In Haarder's view, the Brundtland Report proves that economic growth mechanisms are *necessary* for the environment.

The argument for growth as a solution to environmental problems points to the technological optimism and economic logic of the Brundtland Report. The report often emphasizes investment in technology as an integral part of sustainable development and that this investment can 'pave the way' for a new era of economic growth. (Brundtland Commission 1987: 16) The optimistic view on technological solutions is evident in Haarder's article:

We have successfully initiated the use of alternative energy sources. And with biotechnology and information technology, they pave the way for a society that is simultaneously freer, richer, and more considerate of the environment. (Haarder 1988: Translation: Magnus Dahl)

Haarder's article is an example of the economic logic that integrates ecology and economy, pointing to economic growth as a central mechanism for environmental improvements. However, this viewpoint faces criticism in the public debate. An example is journalist and left-wing debater Knud Vilby, who, in a piece in *Information* a few days after the article, accuses Haarder of misusing and 'fudging' the recommendations of the Brundtland Report. He points out that Haarder does not consider the Brundtland Report's call for multilateralism and its focus on social and economic inequality on the global scale (Vilby 1988). According to Vilby, it is a misunderstanding to interpret the report as an argument for growth in a prosperous nation like Denmark. He believes the focus should be on developing countries and promoting economic growth there.

Haarder's article is the earliest and most concise example of the growth-focused reception of the Brundtland Report. Another example can be found in the Government's action plan for the environment and development from December 1988, a follow-up to the parliamentary debate on

the report earlier that year, prompted by the newly elected government in June of the same year. In this, Prime Minister Poul Schlüter aptly begins by asserting that economic progress is possible without depleting the environment (Danish Ministry of the Environment 1988: 5). Economy and growth are the main focal points in the Prime Minister's interpretation of the report. Schlüter also claims that it is a wrong interpretation that economic growth should predominantly occur in developing countries, citing environmental degradation: "The natural resource base deteriorates, perhaps especially in our part of the world." (Ibid.). The official response of the government to the Brundtland Report can be considered an exponent of the growth-focused interpretation. The Conservative government under Schlüter can be identified as a significant actor in the growth-oriented reception of the report.

In the Growth-based interpretation, the Brundtland Report is thus received and used as an argument for economic growth. The economic logic of the Brundtland Report, which integrates ecology and economy in the concept of sustainable development, is utilized by proponents of growth to reproduce the 1970s debate on growth and legitimize its continuation.

Environmental protection-based interpretation

The second prominent interpretation focuses on urgent environmental protection. In this interpretation, the Brundtland Report is seen as a call to immediate action on environmental issues. On May 29, 1987, long before the Brundtland Report is discussed in the Danish Parliament, David Rehling, head of the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, writes an article with the alarming title *Fremtiden er nu* (The Future is Now). The article urges the implementation of various initiatives, especially a shift to a more environmentally friendly energy policy. It strongly emphasizes that this must happen immediately: "In time, in time, someone will say, and we will address everything. But that is precisely what the Brundtland Commission emphasizes the most. We do not have time to spare." (Rehling 1987: Translation: Magnus Dahl). For Rehling, the Brundtland Report is primarily a warning and a call to action. He points out that the necessary action to avoid environmental harm that could be "extremely costly" or "impossible" to rectify, is to drastically reduce consumption. (Ibid.) This proposed solution is often reiterated in the debate about the report. In the aforementioned article by Knud Vilby, a reduction in energy consumption

is also crucial. Vilby also questions the technological optimism in the Brundtland Report, which he believes only plays a small part in a larger response to environmental problems. (Vilby 1988)

The idea of reducing energy consumption becomes integral in the interpretation of the report that focuses on urgent environmental action. Many emphasize the seventh chapter of the Brundtland Report, where energy consumption and efficiency are discussed. (Brundtland Commission 1987: 167). This section in the report that is arguably about energy efficiency becomes the base for the idea to halve energy consumption in the Danish debate. This is expressed, among other places, in an article by the Danish Society for Nature Conservation on February 10, where it is claimed that halving energy consumption is necessary for the environment and that such halving can be implemented "without impairing our standard of living." (Larsen 1988: Translation: Magnus Dahl). Similarly, parliamentary candidate Ruth Dalsgaard writes in an opinion piece on June 16, 1988, that "we must significantly reduce our overconsumption and halve our energy consumption over the next 30 years." (Dalsgaard 1988: Translation: Magnus Dahl), with a reference to the Brundtland Report. Thus, there is a tendency to want to comply with the recommendations of the Brundtland Report while simultaneously framing them as urgent. The idea of economic growth and investment in new energy technology, which is prominent in the Brundtland Report, is largely overlooked or ignored.

During 1988, the possibility of halving energy consumption gained traction in parliament. An article in *Information* on May 7, 1988, indicates that the social liberal party, Radikale Venstre would commit to halving energy consumption. (Information 1988). Lone Dybkjær from the Radical Left, who shortly thereafter became the Minister of Environment in the KVR-government¹ stated in the article that the idea of cutting energy consumption in half would play a significant role in the new government. (Ibid.) The commitment faces criticism, including from Social Democrat and former Minister of Energy Poul Nielson, who refers to Lone Dybkjær's promises as "airy". (Information 1988). The interpretation of the Brundtland Report as a call for urgent action gains traction in the political debate, where in the media landscape, particularly Radikale Venstre and organizations like

¹ Conservative party (Det Konservative Folkeparti), Venstre and Radikale Venstre.

the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, employ the slogan of cutting energy consumption in half.

The interpretation of environmental protection, like the growth interpretation, must be seen in light of the growth debate of the 1970s. In a perhaps less radical version, many similarities can be observed between those who interpreted the Brundtland Report as a call to action and a warning signal, and the zero-growth or growth sceptical position of the 1970s. Both can be said to operate within the discursive framework established by Limits to Growth, where growth and consumption have clear consequences for the environment and must therefore be limited to avoid irreversible damage. As a parallel to the growth skepticism of the 1970s, the Brundtland Report is used by some as an argument to halt and reduce consumption. This position is skeptical of the report's technology and growth optimism and frames environmental issues from a growth-skeptical discourse rooted in Limits to Growth.

The Brundtland Report and 'sustainable development' as an arena of ideological contention

Newspaper articles, action programs, and the proceedings in the Danish Parliament indicate that the Brundtland Report was received almost exclusively positively. The two distinct interpretations outlined in this paper show that despite widespread acceptance, there has been an underlying dispute about the meaning of the report. It can even be argued that the debate over meaning and attributing value to the report is the primary characteristic of its Danish reception.

The intentions behind the ideological dispute about the report and the direction in which the dispute developed can be discussed. The publication *Miljø og Økonomi* (Environment and Economy) from 1990 by the Ministry of the Environment reveals that the growth-focused interpretation is deeply embedded in the political agenda. The publication aims to highlight the connection between the environment and the economy, and in the preface, Minister of the Environment Lone Dybkjær addresses this:

To integrate the environment and the economy in order to place the environment and nature on the agenda wherever decisions are made. Our economic and political rules, as well as the market economy,

must fundamentally reflect human and ecological needs (Danish Ministry of the Environment 1990: 7.

Translation: Magnus Dahl)

The integration of economy and ecology, which is prominent in the Brundtland Report, holds significant weight in Dybkjær's preface. The idea that the market economy should reflect environmental needs can be considered a guiding principle for how the Brundtland Report and the concept of sustainable development are employed. For Dybkjær, it is interconnected in such a way that "the environment and nature are capital for the economic system" (Ibid.: Translation: Magnus Dahl). The economy should reflect the environment by attributing economic value to nature and the environment. This becomes the concrete way in which the economic logic of the Brundtland Report is applied in the Danish context. This is also evident in the interpretation of sustainable development in *Miljø og Økonomi*.

The way sustainable development is used can be seen as a way to address the environmental debate without compromising a desire and a strong economy. This point is underscored by Elke Seefried, who sees the overwhelming success of the sustainable development concept as a result of its vagueness (Seefried 2015: 377). Seefried precisely points out that the concept's vagueness made it a perfect arena for ideological contention—it became attractive to use as a political goal because the lack of intrinsic value in the concept allowed it to be filled with various political agendas. In this case, the agenda was the idea of continued economic growth.

Lone Dybkjær and the Ministry of the Environment's use of the Brundtland Report gives rise to a discussion of the paradigm shift from a growth discourse to a sustainability discourse. After the decline of the growth discourse in the 1970s, the idea of sustainability takes over as a general political objective (Ibid.: 398). This transition certainly applies to Denmark. However, based on the reception and the influence of the growth-focused interpretation, one could argue that the sustainability discourse in Denmark should be seen as a revitalization or adaptation of the growth discourse. The global environmental awareness and the associated movement that grew through the 1960s and 1970s managed to introduce various ecological issues into the political agenda. This success was significant enough that those who desired continued growth had to come up with new

arguments and solutions. The Danish case is an example of how the growth discourse managed to incorporate these issues under an economic logic, thereby legitimizing continued growth.

Conclusion

This paper, drawing on a methodological framework from Quentin Skinner and the Cambridge School, has examined the Brundtland Report from 1987 and its reception in Denmark. It is evident that 'sustainable development' is the undisputed central idea of the Brundtland Report. Sustainable development as a concept does not have a single intrinsic meaning or value but represents a comprehensive integration of ecology and economy.

The reception is almost entirely positive, but the interpretation varies significantly. Two interpretations dominate the debate following the report's release. The first interpretation focuses on the growth aspect of the report, particularly its integration of ecology and economy. In this interpretation, the Brundtland report is used as an argument for economic growth. Several prominent right-wing politicians, including Bertel Haarder and Poul Schlüter, advocate for this growth-focused interpretation. The second interpretation focuses on environmental protection, seeing the report as a call to urgent action. This interpretation views reducing consumption as a natural extension of the Brundtland report. A concrete idea of halving energy consumption is disseminated and is incorporated in political agenda.

Lone Dybkjær becomes a central figure in the reception of the Brundtland report as the Minister of the Environment. Dybkjær and the Ministry of the Environment use the concept of sustainable development to argue for a comprehensive integration of the environment and the economy. Economic growth is solidified as an important and indispensable part of sustainable development.

It can be concluded that the reception of the Brundtland Report in Denmark should be understood in the context of the growth debate in the 1970s. There is a direct continuity between the positions in the growth debate and the two interpretations in the Danish reception of the report. Advocates of growth use the Brundtland Report to address the environmental challenges introduced into the debate by the environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s. There was a particular need to confront the report *Limits to Growth* which challenged the hegemony of the growth discourse. The

growth discourse, rooted in the 1950s, was replaced by a sustainability discourse with the Brundtland Report. This study, based on a Danish example, has shown that the sustainability discourse is not a breakaway from the growth discourse but rather a direct extension. It overcame the dichotomy between the environment and the economy in the growth debate, and legitimized economic growth.



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