

Constructing Climate Governance:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Danish Reports on Climate Effects (2020 – 2024)

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how environmental discourses are employed by the Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities in its Report on Climate Effects (2020 – 2024). Drawing on Fairclough's (1989) model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Dryzek's (2022) typology of environmental discourses, the paper examines how official climate discourses frame, prioritize and legitimize specific approaches to climate governance. The analysis finds that the reports predominantly draw on discourses of Administrative Rationalism, Ecological Modernization, and Economic Rationalism, positioning climate change as a governable and technocratic challenge compatible with economic growth and technological innovation. This framing is reinforced through quantified metrics, procedural roadmaps, and repetitive references to policy milestones, contributing to a depoliticized portrayal of climate mitigation as a matter of optimization rather than political contestation. However, traces of a Discourse of Limits emerge in later reports, reflecting a growing acknowledgment of uncertainty and complexity inherent in deep decarbonization. These moments introduce affective and urgent framings that partially destabilize the prevailing rationalist discourses. This paper highlights how strategic deployment of environmental discourses can function as a governance mechanism, structuring what is rendered thinkable, actionable and legitimate in Denmark's green transition.

Keywords: climate governance, critical discourse analysis, climate policy, Denmark, environmental discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION: CLIMATE POLICY AT A MIDWAY POINT

1.1 The 2030 Target and the Climate Act Revision

The year 2025 marks a juncture in Danish climate policy, as it represents both the midway point to the 2030 emissions target, a scheduled revision of the Climate Act, and the establishment of a new emissions reduction target for 2035 (Folketinget, 2025). This process unfolds amid mounting climate urgency as conveyed by successive Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports (IPCC, 2021; IPCC, 2022; IPCC, 2023).

The Reports on Climate Effects published by the Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities monitor progress toward the 2030 target, whilst delineating mitigation policies employed to achieve reduction commitments (MCEU, 2024). Therefore, they can provide a valuable empirical basis for interrogating actual emission reductions achieved by the ministry and examining underlying values, assumptions, and guiding principles of Danish climate governance. In light of the forthcoming revisions to the Climate Act, it is particularly timely to examine how the state articulates and operationalizes mitigation strategies.

1.2 Investigating Environmental Discourses in Danish Climate Governance

This paper aims to investigate how environmental discourses are employed by the Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities (MCEU) in the Reports on Climate Effects. Drawing on Fairclough's (1989) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Dryzek's (2022) typology of environmental discourses, the study seeks to interrogate the discursive underpinnings of official climate narratives, foregrounding particular forms of climate governance. In doing so, the research aims to illuminate how strategic utilization of specific climate discourses can function as a governance mechanism, structuring what is rendered thinkable, actionable, and legitimate in the context of Denmark's green transition.

2. BACKGROUND: THE CLIMATE ACT AND THE ROLE OF THE REPORTS ON CLIMATE EFFECTS

The Climate Act establishes a policy cycle through which progress is evaluated. It begins with The Climate Council publishing an annual status report each February, providing an assessment of the government's climate efforts, an evaluation of whether existing policies are adequate for meeting national and international climate objectives, and policy recommendations for the forthcoming year. In prior status reports, the Climate Council consistently underscore that the government's overall climate strategy does not convincingly demonstrate how the 70% emissions reduction target for 2030 will be achieved. This concern arises from a heavy reliance on unproven technologies, policy measures associated with high or moderate risks for a substantial portion of the anticipated reductions, and a strategy that aims to just barely meet the target, thereby increasing the likelihood of failure. The Council also highlights that, as 2030 approaches, the time available for implementing effective measures is rapidly diminishing, further limiting feasible options for just and efficient mitigation policies (The Climate Council, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024).

As part of the annual cycle of the Climate Act, the Minister for Climate, Energy, and Utilities is required to submit a report on the effects of national climate policy to the Danish Parliament. This report is delivered in conjunction with a parliamentary debate and constitutes a key accountability mechanism, allowing elected representatives to question and assess the government's progress toward the legal obligations enshrined in the Climate Act (Rasmussen & Weng, 2024).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DISCURSIVE LENSES FOR ANALYZING CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

3.1 *Critical Discourse Analysis*

CDA examines how language both sustains and challenges existing social structures, with particular attention to how discourse contributes to the reproduction or transformation of social problems. As Fairclough (1989) argues, language practices are embedded within wider social practices and must be analyzed in relation to the material structures they help to sustain or contest. *Naturalization* refers to ideological representations that acquire the status of common sense, rendering their ideological character invisible. The task of CDA is *denaturalization*, revealing how social structures shape discourse and how discourse, in turn, reproduces those structures. This underscores the dialectical relation between micro-level linguistic choices and macro-level social formations, and how denaturalization can challenge taken-for-granted ideologies and social structures (Fairclough, 2010).

This orientation is particularly well-suited to the present analysis, which interrogates official climate policy discourse from a critical perspective. CDA offers a framework for examining how dominant environmental discourses shape both projected emissions trajectories and the climate futures deemed plausible, desirable, or legitimate. The study will consider the agency of actors within the reports, examining how linguistic choices position some agents as active or passive in the shaping of climate policy outcomes. Further, this analysis will employ the concept and analytical tools of modality to elucidate how desirable or necessary outcomes are linguistically constructed, specifically how the ministry's discourse articulates what should or must be, thereby contributing to the construction of social reality (Sulkunen & Törrönen, 1997).

3.2 *Dryzek's (2022) Typology of Environmental Discourses*

Dryzek's (2022) framework delineates ten environmental discourses. This typology is the product of several decades of research on environmental discourse, primarily across Europe, North America, Australasia, and the global arena. The following section presents the specific discourses applied in this analysis:

The Discourse of Limits is an environmental discourse grounded in the recognition that the Earth's ecosystems possess inherent biophysical boundaries and that continued human expansion risks exceeding these limits. This discourse is characterized by a focus on concepts such as carrying capacity, resource depletion, and ecological overshoot. At its core is the belief that the natural world operates within finite boundaries, and that transgressing these boundaries could lead to systemic collapse or irreversible environmental degradation.

Administrative Rationalism constitutes an environmental discourse that emphasizes the role of the state, expert knowledge, and technocratic governance in managing ecological issues. This discourse assumes that environmental challenges can be effectively addressed through rational planning, institutional control, and expert-driven decision-making.

Ecological Modernization constitutes an environmental discourse that centers on technological innovation, scientific advancement, and the principles of modernity. It constructs environmental protection as compatible with and even conducive to sustained economic growth. This discourse emphasizes the importance of technological solutions to the climate crisis.

Economic Rationalism is an environmental discourse grounded in classical and neoclassical economic theory, which emphasizes market mechanisms, individual choice, and economic efficiency as primary tools for addressing environmental challenges. Central to this discourse is the conviction that markets represent the most effective means for allocating resources and internalizing environmental externalities (Dryzek, 2022).

These discourses, representing a spectrum of environmental values and ideological orientations, will serve as the analytical framework for examining the reports to identify the discourses employed by the MCEU and their inherent assumptions regarding climate mitigation.

4. METHODOLOGY: ANALYZING FIVE YEARS OF CLIMATE EFFECT REPORTS

4.1 Research Design and Case Selection

The research design of this study is structured around a qualitative discourse analysis of five consecutive policy reports titled Reports on Climate Effects, covering the years 2020 through 2024. The Reports on Climate Effects are annually recurring publications authored by the MCEU, forming a consistent framework through which Danish climate governance is communicated and legitimated. These reports hold political weight in the formulation, monitoring, and justification of national climate policy, thus providing a valuable lens into how the ministry utilizes environmental discourses. Therefore, the Reports on Climate Effects were selected for analysis based on their function in assessing progress toward climate targets and emphasis on detailing mitigation policies. Given that the reports are originally published in Danish, all cited passages have been translated into English by the author. In some cases, the original Danish quotations or specific words are included when the analysis engages closely with particular phrasings or terms in order to ensure transparency.

5. ANALYSIS: DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORKS UNDERPINNING THE REPORTS

5.1 Governing Climate Change: Logics of Control and Institutional Continuity

Administrative Rationalism discourse is established from the outset of the first report in 2020, as evidenced by ministry statements as: “*In accordance with the Climate Act agreement, the government presents in this report the effects of climate policy /...*” (MCEU, 2020, p. 3), highlighting the moment as “*the Climate Act’s year zero*” followed by an assertion of the 2030 and 2050 targets (MCEU, 2020, p. 3). The tone is marked by technocratic confidence, exemplified through repeated invocations of

the Climate Act as a stabilizing framework positioned as ensuring continuous monitoring and oversight on policy initiatives followed by visualizations as graphs, figures, and tables showcasing policy initiatives, roadmaps to reach goals, and quantifiable outcomes in terms of emission reductions and costs in all reports (MCEU, 2020, p. 6; MCEU, 2021, p. 8; MCEU, 2022, p. 4, 6, 7; MCEU, 2023, p. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; MCEU, 2024, p. 5, 6, 7). Visualizations, metrics, and procedural roadmaps underscore a logic of control whilst invocations of the Climate Act and legally bounded procedures reinforce a depoliticized narrative where success is measurable and technocratically administered, aligning with Administrative Rationalism discourse. The commitment to documentational and procedural control is reflected in how the reports are presented as an objective account of Denmark's current position in the implementation track, whilst outlining the projected emissions reductions for 2030. In the 2024 report, a detailed roadmap toward meeting the 2030 goals is presented (MCEU, 2024, pp. 6–7). However, as The Climate Council has highlighted, these targets will only be met if all measures proceed exactly as planned, which is a highly uncertain prospect given the complexity of implementing large-scale climate policies, particularly considering the persistent overreliance on underperforming high-risk technological solutions (Climate Council, 2024). In this light, repetitions of numbers and figures can be interpreted as a reassurance more than as evidence of substantive control.

The emphasis on the roadmap and quantifiable outcomes exemplifies the technocratic logic at the core of Administrative Rationalism discourse that prioritizes linear progression and rational sequencing. Climate action is not framed as a site of political struggle or public debate, but as a matter of executing the right actions in the right order, under the right principles, as reflected in statements such as:

This means that both the lower and upper bounds of the 2025 target on 50 to 54 per cent reduction are estimated to be met, with a margin of approximately 4.3 million tons CO₂e and 1.2 million tons CO₂e, respectively. In addition, there is an effect from subsidies for methane-reducing feed, which will be consolidated in connection with the Climate Projection and Status 2025” (MCEU, 2024, p. 5).

In this way, the reports appear almost depoliticized, treating the climate agenda as a matter of optimization rather than complexity and ideologies. High modality expressions such as “In addition, there is an effect” (“Hertil kommer effekt”) and “which will be consolidated” (“der konsolideres”) convey a high degree of certainty, positioning the ministry as an actor who can assert truth and ensure specific future outcomes.

The reports exhibit notable instances of repetition, particularly in the reiteration of quantified outcomes and key policy milestones, such as “*The agreements of the past two years have contributed to reduce Denmark's greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 10 million tons of CO₂e in 2030*” (MCEU, 2021, p. 2) and “*Since the government took office, decisions have been made that reduce Denmark's greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 10 million tons of CO₂e in 2030*” (MCEU, 2021, p. 4). Through such formulations, the ministry constructs itself discursively as an acting agent, capable and purposefully driving climate progress, situating the government as an authority and executor of

climate action, reinforcing a narrative of control. Notably, the repetition of the phase-out agreement for oil appears in every report (MCEU, 2020, p. 3, 4, 6, 7; MCEU, 2021, p. 2, 8; MCEU, 2022, p. 7, 8; MCEU, 2023, p. 10, 11; MCEU, 2024, p. 6, 8). This repetition is particularly noteworthy given that the primary function of these reports is to monitor progress toward the 2030 climate target; as the phase-out of oil is scheduled for 2050, the policy in question contributes no emission reductions before that date. Consequently, these recurring references may serve less to indicate actual mitigation progress towards the 2030 goal and more to reaffirm governmental competence and ambitious action, constructing the ministry as an active agent, in alignment with the discourse of Administrative Rationalism.

Further, frequently reiterated statements include emphasis on how The Climate Act ensure follow-up and/or procedural stability (MCEU, 2020, p. 5; MCEU, 2021, p. 5; MCEU, 2022, p. 6; MCEU, 2023, p. 8; MCEU, 2024, p. 4), and how policies enacted can ensure specific reductions: “*The climate agreements made in 2020 ensure /.../*” (MCEU, 2020, p. 4; MCEU, 2021, p. 5). In the context of mounting urgency (IPCC, 2021; IPCC, 2022; IPCC, 2023), repetitions serve to anchor a seemingly well-managed trajectory, in which the ministry can “ensure” specific outcomes despite actual large uncertainties. The verb “ensure” (“sikre”) expresses high modality, conveying certainty of outcome and institutional authority to guarantee it, establishing an asymmetrical relation of power between the ministry and the reader, in which assertions seem unchallengeable or depoliticized. Consequently, these repetitions can be understood as techniques of *closure*, forestalling critical engagement by presenting the problem as already competently addressed. Claims such as “*2021 has thus been yet another very successful year for climate policy*” (MCEU, 2021, p. 3) and “*/.../ climate history is being written*” (MCEU, 2021, p. 2) are not framed as opinions, but as conclusions, and in this way celebratory tones can act as discursive tools precluding alternative interpretations. This claim is especially interesting as enacted climate policy was contested in 2021 and 2022, exemplified by the Climate Council’s critique of the ministry for its failure to present a plan for mitigating approximately two-thirds of the emissions required to meet the 2030 target, as well as overreliance on unproven new technologies (The Climate Council, 2021; The Climate Council, 2022).

5.2 Performing Leadership: Denmark as a Green Frontrunner

In line with Administrative Rationalist discourse, Denmark is portrayed by the ministry as a climate frontrunner and an exemplar of how ambitious climate action can be reconciled with sustained economic competitiveness. It is emphasized that:

[W]e demonstrate as a green frontrunner, how high ambitions can translate to concrete actions, and that green transition can go hand in hand with growth and welfare, serving as inspiration for other countries” (MCEU, 2020, p. 3).

This dual achievement is presented as national success and as a replicable model for others, thereby advancing a form of green nation branding grounded in managerial efficiency and market-oriented environmental governance in line with Administrative and Economic Rationalist discourse. In this way, a normative leadership role is cultivated, projecting the domestic policy framework as both desirable and feasible for broader international emulation.

The government constructs a narrative of national leadership, positioning Denmark as a pioneering actor within both the European Union and the broader international climate governance landscape emphasizing that “/.../ *Denmark is a green frontrunner, who can inspire others to follow suit*” (MCEU, 2022, p. 3). The positioning of Denmark as a frontrunner through technological advancements aligned with Ecological Modernization discourse, is manifested through consistent emphasis on how Denmark can be a green pioneer by “/.../ *leveraging strengths in green technologies*” (MCEU, 2022, p. 3) and emphasis on Denmark as an international example of a well-led green transition, who “/.../ *develops and exports climate solutions needed by the world /.../ Denmark can be a central hub, taking CO₂ from neighboring countries*” (MCEU, 2023, p. 3).

Furthermore, Denmark is positioned as a frontrunner in climate diplomacy, reflected in the emphasis on advocating for ambitious international climate action. In 2024, particular attention is given to COP29 and Denmark’s political agreement on an agricultural CO₂ tax:

[W]e must remain a strong green voice in the world and push for ambitious targets and action in the international forums in which we participate. A good example of Denmark’s green voice in the world is something I have just experienced at COP29 in Baku. There was great interest in hearing about the carbon tax on agriculture, on which we, as the first country in the world, have now reached a political agreement on” (MCEU, 2024, p. 3).

Through such showcases, the ministry promotes its model of climate governance, positioning itself as an efficient and normative example that implicitly sets standards for how other nations might reduce emissions and defines which strategies are considered globally legitimate. This self-representation constructs a narrative that seeks to reconcile the urgency of the global climate crisis with a display of national competence. For example, Denmark’s upcoming presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2025 is framed as a pivotal moment in which Denmark is expected to shape EU climate and energy policy and contribute to formulating an ambitious European position ahead of COP30:

In 2025, Denmark will have a particularly important role in relation to the EU’s climate and energy policy, when Denmark assumes the Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2025. During its Presidency, Denmark will support the EU’s role as a global climate leader and work toward an ambitious outcome at COP30, where we will coordinate the European contribution” (MCEU, 2024, p. 3).

In this way, the MCEU strategically employ a constellation of environmental discourses to construct a coherent yet selective narrative of Danish climate governance. The dominant framework of Administrative Rationalism position climate change as a governable and technocratic challenge, casting the MCEU as a competent steward of a green transition that even promises economic gain in line with Economic Rationalism and Ecological Modernization discourses. On these grounds, Denmark is championed as an international climate frontrunner.

5.3 New Narratives of Urgency: Emerging Tensions

A discernible shift emerges in the 2022 report, reflecting an alignment with the Discourse of Limits. The foreword underscores the alarming findings of the UN Climate Report, emphasizing the inadequacy of current global mitigation efforts to meet the targets outlined in the Paris Agreement:

With the UN's latest climate report, one thing is clear: we are running out of time. The report emphasizes that the current climate commitments from the world's countries are not sufficient to meet the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting the global temperature increase to below 2 degrees and preferably below 1.5 degrees. If temperatures rise further, it will have significant consequences for lives, biodiversity, and values, for instance, because we will experience more extreme weather" (MCEU, 2022, p. 3).

In contrast to the optimistic tone of previous reports, a more urgent and somber narrative is adopted, drawing attention to the profound consequences of unmitigated temperature rise. This rhetorical repositioning marks a significant departure from the narrative consistently framing Denmark as a green frontrunner, implicitly suggesting that the nation is already fulfilling its obligations. The 2022 foreword disrupts self-congratulatory tones by acknowledging that substantially greater efforts are required. In doing so, it signals an initial convergence with the broader scientific consensus regarding the scale, urgency, and insufficiency of prevailing climate action. This moment introduces a degree of reflexivity into the narrative, challenging the previously dominant impression of adequacy and gesturing toward a more critical understanding of enacted mitigation policies.

Moreover, the socio-economic implications of pursuing ambitious climate objectives are explicitly acknowledged, stating unambiguously that the attainment of national climate targets will neither be straightforward nor cost-neutral. The inevitability of profound societal change is emphasized, invoking the need for a "*.../ fundamental transformation of society*" (MCEU, 2022, p. 3) and affirming that "*we cannot promise that it will be neither easy nor without costs to reach the climate goals, as a thorough transition of society is not done easily*" (MCEU, 2022, p. 3). This recognition constitutes a discursive rupture marking a departure from the dominant paradigm of Administrative Rationalist discourse, presenting the green transition as a matter of technocratic rational management. The foregrounding of concepts such as effort, difficulties, and transformation signals higher recognition of the complexities of climate governance. It reflects an emerging recognition that mitigation will not merely involve technical adjustments, but also societal negotiation and trade-offs. This rhetorical shift may also be interpreted as an indirect response to the tangible consequences of climate policies initiated in 2020 and 2021, suggesting that their effects are beginning to manifest in ways that compel the state to address their broader implications for citizens' everyday lives (MCEU, 2020; MCEU, 2021; MCEU, 2022). However, the acknowledgments of the urgency and severity of the climate crisis are swiftly followed by a reassertion of Administrative Rationalism discourse, as it is conceded that the government will secure that political ambitions turn into reality and that climate goals are met (MCEU, 2022, p. 3).

While the climate crisis is briefly framed as unpredictable and pressing, the government simultaneously positions itself as a reasonable actor possessing resources to govern the crisis. This

dual positioning arguably serves to contain potential destabilization introduced by climate urgency within a narrative of manageability and institutional competence (MCEU, 2022).

5.4 Breaking the Story of Linear Progress: Uncertainties in the Emission Reduction Pathway

In 2023 and 2024, the discourse of Administrative Rationalism continues to dominate the reports; however, a subtle discursive shift becomes discernible. For the first time, there is an implicit acknowledgment of uncertainty regarding the trajectory toward achieving the 2030 climate targets, in which it is stated that significant gaps remain between policy decisions and their translation into concrete societal transformations for example:

Yes, uncertainties remain, and there is significant work ahead in ensuring that political decisions lead to real-world change. But it is worth pausing to take stock: we are in a better place, and the green transition is well underway /.../” (MCEU, 2024, p. 3).

This signals a tentative departure from the previously prevailing narrative of assured technocratic control, suggesting a growing recognition that not all variables can be fully anticipated, calculated, or managed. The acknowledgment of “uncertainties” and “significant work ahead”, as well as highlighting that decisions must be implemented, introduces a lower modality, indicating a more tentative stance toward the efficacy of political action, in contrast to prior formulations asserted with high modality that governmental measures surely will produce specific outcomes.

Despite this moment of reflexivity, the narrative quickly moves back to familiar ground, reaffirming that Denmark is progressing well in its green transition and gestures toward a symbolic closure, noting that the Climate Act will be renegotiated in 2025, marking a new era for Danish climate policy. Yet, embedded within this reaffirmation lies another subtle discursive rupture: *“The effort to reduce Denmark’s emissions does not end in 2030. A tremendous task lies ahead of us on the path toward climate neutrality in 2045”* (MCEU; 2024, p. 3). This statement extends the temporal horizon of the reports, introducing how urgency, uncertainty and achievement are distributed across time.

The most challenging emissions cuts are those that remain after more accessible and cost-effective measures have been exhausted, thus confronting the limitations of linear, technocratic and market-based trajectories. This admission complicates the otherwise orderly narrative of sequenced and manageable progress, introducing a measure of uncertainty and temporal depth that contrasts with earlier representations of control and predictability. In this sense, the rationalist discourse begins to fray at the edges, momentarily conceding the intensifying complexity of the path ahead and breaking the otherwise linear and optimistic storyline of rational, sequenced progress.

Thus, while Administrative Rationalism remains the dominant mode of discourse, structured around planning, targets, and technocratic confidence, there are moments of hesitation including subtle acknowledgments of uncertainty such as difficulties of deep decarbonization and meaningful real-world policy implementation.

5.5 Climate Impacts: The Affective Turn of Ministry Discourse

In 2023, the articulation of urgency becomes markedly more pronounced, foregrounding the immediacy and local relevance of the climate crisis, reflecting a Discourse of Limits. For the first time in the report series, climate change is framed as a present and unfolding phenomenon, rather than a distant or abstract future risk:

The past six months have been marked by record-high temperatures and extreme weather. The global average temperature hit a record in July. Alongside high temperatures, we have witnessed forest fires and flooding – around the world and in Denmark” (MCEU, 2023, p. 3).

This marks a significant discursive departure from earlier reports, which abstained from mentioning tangible manifestations of climate change. Accompanying this shift is an emphasis on the imperative to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. The 2024 report intensifies this emergent narrative, as it opens with the most vivid and emotionally evocative depiction of climate change to date:

When we look out the window, it is clear that climate change is here, and that it will have serious consequences for all of us in the coming years. Most recently, we have seen terrible and fatal floods in Spain, where the area around Valencia was hit particularly hard. The images of entire streets filled with crushed cars remain etched in our minds. Here in Denmark, we have experienced repeated cloudbursts with extreme amounts of rain and subsequent flooding” (MCEU, 2024, p. 3).

These examples introduce a newly affective dimension to the discourse, rendering the consequences of climate change both viscerally tangible and geographically proximate. This shift aligns with the Discourse of Limits and with theory on risk perception and communication that associate emotional engagement with vivid depictions of climate impacts (Salas Reyes et al., 2021). This shift may be interpreted as symptomatic of a broader destabilization of the previously dominant discourse of Administrative Rationalism. As the material effects of climate disruption become increasingly visible and harder to disavow (MCEU, 2024; IPCC, 2023), the communicative strategies of the ministry change. The growing prominence of affect, urgency, and embodied experience in official discourse suggests a potential discursive rupture, at which the language of technocratic control can no longer fully contain or legitimize the realities of the climate crisis.

Despite highlighting the climate crisis as an ongoing and partially uncontrollable phenomenon, the government simultaneously positions itself as the rational and competent authority capable of managing the transition (MCEU, 2024, p. 3). It is underscored that Denmark has set some of the most ambitious climate targets in the world and will continue to take the necessary actions to meet them. This is supported by detailed references to quantified emissions reductions and policy milestones, reinforcing the narrative of a state that not only understands the scale of the crisis but is also firmly in control of the tools needed to address it. This juxtaposition between the Discourse of Limits and the rhetoric of Administrative Rationalism illustrates a tension within the policy narrative between

acknowledging systemic disruption and asserting administrative order. The state emerges both as a witness to the unfolding crisis and as a manager of its resolution, navigating terrain between the climate realism of Discourse of Limits and managerial optimism characterized by Administrative Rationalism discourse.

6. CONCLUSION: UTILIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES IN DANISH CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

This study has examined how environmental discourses are mobilized by the MCEU in its Reports on Climate Effects (2020 – 2024), finding that the ministry primarily draws on the discourses of Administrative Rationalism, Ecological Modernization, and Economic Rationalism. Collectively, these discourses construct climate change as a governable challenge, emphasizing technocratic management, economic growth and technological innovations. Climate governance is rendered commensurate with market mechanisms and bureaucratic administration, reproducing and legitimating institutional logics underpinning the Danish climate policy field. The recurrent articulation of quantifiable metrics, high modality statements of certainty, and a depoliticized rhetoric of optimization, these discourses naturalize particular policy trajectories and consolidate power relations, positioning the ministry as the central acting agent capable of ensuring specific measurable outcomes, often down to the precise tonnage of carbon dioxide reductions.

Bäckstrand and Lövbrand (2015) similarly identify the discourse of green governmentality, characterized by strong elements of administrative rationalism, as a longstanding and influential discourse in global environmental politics. Moreover, they highlight ecological modernization as an influential discourse post the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, framing climate mitigation as a “win-win” strategy that reconciles environmental protection with economic growth. This resonates with the findings of this study, where ecological modernization is one of the main discourses utilized by the ministry. In line with this, Methmann (2010) conceptualizes “climate protection” as an empty signifier in global climate governance, arguing that prevailing discourses enable its integration into governance discourse without acknowledging the structural transformation of underlying economic and social structures needed to achieve actual “climate protection”. This dynamic is reflected in the high prevalence of ecological modernization discourse in the reports, where potential contradictions or tensions between climate mitigation, export and growth remain largely unacknowledged. Lastly, recent analyses of Latin American lithium-exporting countries’ resource governance discourses reveal how discursive strategies construct imaginaries of “green extractivism” (Voskoboynik & Andreucci, 2021). Such narratives underpin ecological modernization discourses in countries like Denmark, which depend on a supply of critical minerals for the production and export of green technologies, highlighted as a key component of climate strategies in the reports.

The emergence of Discourse of Limits later in the reports introduces a subtle shift by acknowledging uncertainty, systemic complexity, and material immediacy of climate impacts. This opens discursive space for affective and embodied articulations of climate risk, which recalibrate boundaries of political accountability – what the ministry, and Danish climate policy, can be held accountable for.

The emergence of the Discourse of Limits may be symptomatic of a conjuncture in which intensification of climate impacts and material consequences, as well as an acceleration of enacted policies to reach 2030 targets, that increasingly affect citizens' everyday lives, compel the state to communicate risks and urgency in more affective and immediate ways.

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