CONTENTS:

1 INTRODUCTION

Local Agenda 21 originates from the UN process for environment and development. At the Earth Summit meeting in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 representatives from 178 national governments met to discuss the follow-up of *Our Common Future* (Brundtland Report), the report from the World Commission for Environment and Development from 1987. In Rio a majority of the participating countries signed 5 documents which indicated the actions and guidelines that were required for the world society in order to steer the development in a sustainable direction. One of these documents is Agenda 21; *the action plan for the realisation of a sustainable development.* Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 describes the important role local and regional governments have in the process towards implementations of a sustainable development. This chapter is today commonly known as 'Local Agenda 21'.

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) emphasises the need to find solutions to environmental problems through *discourse*. The core idea of Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 is that local authorities should undertake a consultative process with their inhabitants in order to achieve a consensus on an action plan or a 'Local Agenda 21' for the community. In this report I will link the discourse elements in LA21 to the theoretical perspective of discourse analysis. I will design a discourse framework from which I will study three Norwegian LA21 frontrunner municipalities.

At the core of *discourse analysis* is the idea of language as important. What is being said or expressed and in which context this expression finds place, is of vital importance for the understanding of a topic or a problem approach. Discourse analysis emphasises that our way of talking does not only mirror our society, our identities and social relations neutrally, but that it also plays an active role in shaping and changing these (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999).

In this working paper, I will start with a presentation of LA21 in a Norwegian context. I will focus on the status of LA21 and the problems that municipalities meet in their implementation work. Secondly, I will present discourse analysis as a research strategy and argue for why this is a fruithful way of studying LA21. Thirdly, I will set up a framework for the analysis. I will base my design on works from Fairclough (1992), Phillips & Jørgensen (1999), Hajer (1995) and Coenen (2001) I end this paper with presenting a short sketch for the empirical analysis.

The aim of this study is to tell a *story* of how the introduction of the concept LA21 influences policy in three municipalities. Doing this I will focus more on the dynamic *how* question than the structural *why* question. By this I mean that it is more important to understand (verstehen) than to explain (erklären). The potential of this approach is to say something about *when* and under what *circumstances* discourse *matter* for creating policies for a sustainable transition.

2. LOCAL AGENDA 21 IN NORWAY

The Norwegian government remained extremely passive in implementing Agenda 21s Chapter 28 after the Rio Summit in 1992. It was mainly a question of not being willing to recognise the 'value-added' aspect of the LA21 challenge (Lafferty & Eckerberg 1998, Lafferty et al. 1998). The reason for this lack of compliance is to be found in the *history* of local and regional environmental policy in Norway (Aall 2001). At the time of the Rio Summit, Norway was in the middle of a major reform entitled 'Environmental Policy in the Municipality' (EIM), and thus the timing for introducing a new – and to some extent competing – concept seemed poor (Lafferty et al. 1998). The reform was introduced in 1988 as a joint programme by the Ministry of the Environment (MoE) and Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (NALRA) involving 91 out of a total of 435 municipalities. The national authorities financed the appointment of a municipal environmental officer, while the pilot municipalities committed themselves to developing an environment-and-natural-resource plan. The EIM programme was followed up by a corresponding *reform* through the parliamentary White Paper 'On Municipal Environmental Policy' in 1991 (No. 34 1990-91), so that as of 1992 all municipalities with more than 3,000 inhabitants were offered state financing of an environmental officer. The arrangement with earmarked allocations terminated on 31 December 1996.

An important milestone in the introduction of LA21 into municipal environmental policy in Norway was the decisive 'Fredrikstad Conference' held in February 1998 (Aall 2001). More than 700 participants from 150 municipalities took part, discussing in depth the 'launching' of LA21 in Norway. During this conference the *Fredrikstad Declaration* was adopted. The Fredrikstad Declaration states a moral obligation to support the goal of sustainable development and signals the will to start LA21 processes. By April 2001, 247 of the 437 municipalities and all counties had signed the declaration.[1] A national survey conducted summer 2000 shows that almost 70 percent of the Norwegian municipalities have LA21-activities on going (Bjørnæs & Lafferty 2000), which makes Norway today amongst the leading countries with regard to LA21 work in Europe (Lafferty 2001).

The government's formal starting point of the 'LA21 period' of municipal environmental policy in Norway, is to be found in White Paper No. 58 (1996-97) on 'Environmental Policy for a Sustainable Development (Aall 2001). In this, LA21 is included as one of four main target areas, and the government states that LA21 is to replace EIM as the new programmatic 'heading' for municipal environmental policy[2]. It is further stated that LA21 is to be understood primarily as a *planning process*, and that such planning should be conducted as part of the mandatory municipal planning authorised in the Planning Act (MD 1997). In the autumn and winter of 1997-98, the MoE followed up the White Paper by developing a national LA21 strategy in co-operation with NALRA. The strategy has been presented in several revised versions, with the current version dated April 1999.[3] The strategy deals primarily with giving priority to so-called 'LA21 relevant activities' in the MoE and the environmental directorates,

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[1] See http://www.agenda21.no/magasin/magasin.htm
[2] The other three areas are; protection of biological diversity, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and initiatives to limit emissions of environmentally harmful chemicals.
[3] See http://odin.dep.no/md/la21/strategi.html

but is also intended to draw up a framework for interaction between other ministries and with external actors.

Looking at what the municipalities have done, we find that even though almost 70 percent of the Norwegian municipalities have on going LA21 activities, the content of the municipalities work differ widely. In the national survey from 2000 (Bjørnæs & Lafferty) we find that few municipalities have; made a Local Agenda 21 plan, developed and integrated indicators for sustainable development or focused on broad issues of consumption and transport. The experiences so far indicate that we have to separate between the ambitions of the municipalities and what they actually do. When it comes to concrete results, the municipalities still have some way to go. The LA21 work in the municipalities differ from a 'traditional' municipal environmental policy, first and foremost, when it comes to the policy process involving *new policy partners* (Aall et al. 1999). In the most extensive case study of LA21-work so far (involving 7 municipalities) - 'The Sustainable Local Communities project' (SLC) - (see Aall et al. 1999) there are clearly evidence of a new , 'softer' policy approach in a Norwegian context. What is new is a type of de-bureaucratisation and de-institutionalisation by means of highlighting information and 'positive' policy measures, and focusing strongly on changing people's attitudes. We find less emphasis on the role of the municipality as a controlling and public-planning institution, and more emphasis on the role of a 'green model', giving priority to 'setting one's own house in order' before interacting directly with local business and households (Aall 2001).

The SLC project, and other projects and local initiatives as well, show – somewhat fragmented, but nevertheless inspiring – growing examples of ambitious and genuinely global oriented LA21 processes in both substantive and procedural matters. Many of the project-municipalities have also taken part in international activities set up by ICLEI[4] and others, such as taking part in or arranging international environment conferences, signing 'charters' like the Aalborg Charter and establishing twinning with third world municipalities. Most of this has happened with direct reference to LA21 (Aall 2000). We also find examples of municipalities taking up issues like energy, transportation and climate policy linked to a specific global context in their LA21 activities and LA21 planning processes.

However, experiences from the LA21 activities illustrate how municipalities have been pretty much left to themselves to sort out the difficulties and problems of sustainable development within the framework of LA21 processes. We see a paradoxical situation where the lack of policy co-ordination at the national level is being transferred downwards by prescribing stronger co-ordinating at the lower level (Naustdalslid 1994, Aall et al 2001). Even though the municipalities face obstacles at the national level, examples from the SLC project, and other municipalities indicate, however, a *willingness* to take action. The municipalities also seem optimistic about the future; only three per cent of the municipalities expect that their LA21 activity will be lower next year, where as 56 per cent expect the activity to be higher (Bjørnæs & Lafferty 2000:36). It still remains to be seen, however, whether a bottom up strategy like LA21, will result in policy changes at the national level which again can ease the municipalities' work.

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[4] International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI). In 1994 ICLEI was one of the principal organisers of the European Conference on Sustainable Cities and Towns in Ålborg, Denmark. At this conference the "Ålborg Charter" was adopted. The Charter was developed in order to find a common understanding of the challenges inherent in the work for sustainable development (Lafferty & Eckerberg 1998:11)

3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AS A RESEARCH STRATEGY

Discourse analysis has come to mean different things in as many different places. In the social sciences discourse analysis emerged in the context of the wider post-positivist interpretative tradition, but in fact has deep historical roots in the analysis of ideology, rhetorics, the sociology of science and language philosophy[5] (Hajer 1995:43).

We can place discourse analysis – within a social scientific perspective – in the transition from an ontological to an epistemological oriented orientation. With an ontological perspective we mean theories that focus mostly on objective criterias for the existence of things. It focuses on the possibilities we have for deciding whether a theory is true or scientific (Andersen 1999:13). Methodological aspects therefore become important; we need to find rules of procedure that can bring forward scientific acknowledgements. The epistemologic oriented scientific theory does not ask what something is, but *how* it is (Andersen 1999:13). It asks in what forms and under what conditions certain aspects of meaning (meaning, discourse, systems of communication) have been created. Epistemology is about observing how the world has come about, it is not just assumed to exist like in an ontological framework. Andersen (1999:15) calls this division a shift from methods to *strategy of analysis*. A strategy of analysis is not rules of methods, but a strategy for how we can construct ententities' (persons, organizations or systems) observations and descriptions of reality. The implications of this is that it is important to question matters of course.

Discourse analysis can be anchored epistemologically[6], but it does not represent a fully, clear cut school of theory. However, within a broad range of different discourse analytical perspectives, a natural point for departure is Michel Foucault. With his development of theories, concepts and through empirical research, he could be labelled the founding father of discourse analysis. Within almost all different directions of discourse analysis, Foucault has become a figure that one withholds to in one's work; a writer that one would like to comment, modify, criticize and quote (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999:21). In Michel Foucault's (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he takes as starting point the premises that there are a set of practices that renders possible production and maintenance of a set of assertions; *an archive* (Neumann 2001:13, Phillips & Jørgensen 1999:21). Foucault is interested in those rules that lie behind the expressions that are accepted as meaningful and truth worthy in a specific historical epoch. Foucault defines a discourse in this way:

> We shall call discourse a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation […]
> It is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of condition of existence can be defined.
> (Foucault 1972:117).

Foucault follows a tradition of social constructivism when he says that the truth is a discursive construction, and that certain regimes of knowledge point out what is true or false. The historical rules of the discourse imply prohibitions since they make it impossible to raise certain questions or argue certain cases; they imply exclusionary systems because they only authorize certain people to participate in a discourse; they come with discursive forms of

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[5] See Hajer (1995:43-44) for arguments, and placing, of these different perspectives.
[6] Other examples of epistemological perspectives are: concept history, discourse theory, system theory. See Andersen (1999:18-19).

internal discipline through which a discursive order is maintained; and finally there are also certain rules regarding the conditions under which a discourse can be drawn upon (Hajer 1995:49). Foucault's object is to uncover the structure in these different regimes of knowledge; the rules for what can be said, what can not be said, and the rules for what is true or false (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999:22). Most of today's discourse analytical perspectives follow Foucault's[7] view on discourses as something relatively regular, that define what is meaningful,– and they bring forward the idea that truth is something that is created discursively. However, a lot of the more recent discourse traditions tend to move away from Foucault's *monolism*. Foucault tends to identify one, and only one regime of knowledge in each historical epoch, and this understanding is now in most of the field of discourse analysis replaced by a more conflicted picture, where different discourses exist side by side or strive for the right to decide what is the truth (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999:22).

Following Foucault however, a central building stone is to bring out the institutional dimension of discourse, considering where things are said, how specific ways of seeing can be structured or embedded in society at the same time as they structure society (Hajer 1995:263). Studying discourses this way highlights that discourses and discourse orders are not just speech and text floating around, they have a *material and institutional anchoring*. Discourses are materialised in certain regularities: the material world (institutions, belief systems, 'economical laws' etc.) resists when one tries to change it. Neumann (2001:92) points out that understanding the social resonance and the reproduction of these, is one of social sciences' most important tasks. A social constructivist perspective like discourse analysis is then not a strategy for finding out what people *really* mean, or to find out what reality actually is like behind the discourse; discourse analysis is based on the assumption that you really can not grasp reality without the discourses, and it is therefore the discourse in itself that constitutes the object of the analysis. Based on such an assumption Hajer defines discourse as:

> ..a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that is produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities (Hajer 1995:264).

Discourse analysis is not to be counterposed with institutional analysis, but is rather a different way of looking at institutions that is meant to shed new light on the functioning of those institutions, how power is structured in institutional arrangements, and how political change in such arrangements comes about (Hajer 1995:264). Fairclough (1992) is especially interested in studying discourse and *social change*. Like Foucault he sees the relationship between discourse and social structures as *dialectical*[8]; On the one hand discourses are shaped and constrained by social structures (like class, law, education, norms etc.). On the other hand discourses are socially constitutive. Discourses contribute to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it; its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions that lie behind them. Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world,

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[7] We can, however, separate Foucault's work in an archaeological and a genealogical period. In his later genealogical work Foucault develops a theory about power and knowledge. Instead of looking at agents and structures like primary categories, Foucault now focuses on power. Power is to be understood as spread over different social practices, and not something that specific agents exert over passive subjects (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999:22).
[8] See Phillips & Jørgensen (1999:29). They place various discourse analytical perspectives in a continuum according to whether they see; discourse as constitutive; if the relationship is dialectical or; whether discourse is constituted.

constituting and constructing the world in meaning (Fairclough 1992:64). Fairclough (1992:65) argues that it is important that this relationship is understood *dialectically*. In this way we are to avoid the pitfalls of overemphasizing on the one hand the social determinism of discourse, and on the other hand the construction of the social in discourse. The former turns discourse into a mere reflection of a deeper social reality[9], the latter idealistically represents discourse as the source of the social. A dialectical perspective then emphasises that discourse is a way to study both explicit language and the material anchoring of language[10].

In my report I will focus on discourse analysis as a practical tool for doing an empirical study. For using discourse analysis as a practical tool, you need to work with what is being said or written, in order to be able to investigate what patterns that exists in the assertions – and what kind of social consequences different (discursive) presentations of reality get (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999: 31). My reason then for using a discourse analytical perspective is that text and language is an entry for understanding how things came about; in this case, how politics ended out the way it did. This does not mean that language or discourse explained why things happened. However, when one starts with text and language, one has a more open entry for finding out how things came about. A central premise in discourse analysis is that we are not autonomous and sovereign actors with fixed interests;- rather, our interests and motivation are dependent on the discourse context we enter. Discourse analysis is in this way less static than more interest or power based theories. It is a methodology that integrates an analysis of broader questions of social practice, politics and power, with the analysis of communications processes in everyday life (Phillips & Jørgensen 1999: 114). I will now focus on the theme of this report; Local Agenda 21. Why is discourse analysis fruithful for the study of LA21 processes in municipalities? In the next section I will start answering this be giving a sketch of the broader environmental discourse.

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[9] *Structuralism* comes to treat discursive practice and the discursive event as mere products of discursive structures, which are them selves represented as unitary and fixed. It sees discursive practice in terms of a model of mechanistic (and therefore pessimistic) causality (Fairclough 1992:66).

[10] Defining the material basis of text is not an easy question. We could start by saying that what kind of language one uses and what kind of book the text is in, is the materiality of the text. However when we move on from the materiality of text to the social access to the text, it becomes more difficult. Where does the text end and where does the social practice begin? Where does the materiality of text/language end and where does the materiality that is not language begin (structures) ?. Depending on the research object one can go on forever discussing the materiality of the text. The point though is to say something about what part of the text that has specific social ties to what kind of groups and institutional practices (Neumann 2001:84)

4. WHY USE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FOR THE STUDYING OF LA21 ?

The environment became a political topic in Western societies in the 1970s. Since that environmental discourse has taken many twists and turns, from the collective concerns about the prophecies of doom of a coming resource crisis that would bring the whole world to grinding halt, to the localized concern over pollution of water, soil, and air; from the concerns about the possibility that the modern world will come to an end with the bang of a nuclear catastrophe to the idea that western civilization is slowly ruining its heritage, now cathedrals and sculptures crumble away as the consequences of acid rains (Hajer 1995:73).

In 1983 the UN General Assembly decided, after pressure from the undeveloped countries, that a document that gave a more thoroughly overview over the global environment and development problems should be drawn up. The World Commission on Environment and Development, under the management of former Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, carried out the task, and in 1987 the end product, *Our Common Future,* was presented. The Report points at the fact that questions of environment and development are indissolubly tied together, and that both industrialised and developing countries have a common concern for correcting the path-way we are now going on. The Commission launched the concept of *sustainable development*[11] and since then the concept has remained as the guiding concept of how we are suppose to think in the matters of environment and development (Mugaas 1997:24). The concept of sustainable development is highly disputed, and it has been an object for comprehensive interpretation. At the same time, the concept represented and represents a historical and political milestone, in that the World Commission's report was unanimously adopted.

The Report did work as a catalyst for change. The broad consensus around the concept of sustainable development defined a common starting point for discussion. At the same time the discussions about sustainable development is a continuous struggle between various new groups and political coalitions, where both politicians, scientists, activists, journalists and media participate. Hajer (1995:13) refers to these groups as various *discourse coalitions*. They divide into different groups that uphold or develop new ways of seeing the problem; in other words, they are part of various discourses – certain ways of talking and thinking about environmental problems and the political actions required to solve the problems. The actors do not necessarily know each other, or may not even have met, but they place themselves around certain 'story lines' that they use when they engage in the discussions about environmental politics and problems. Hajer (1995:14) points at a paradox in this discourse: The coalition and the global consensus around sustainable development can only be held together if we have a broad and vague understanding of the implications of this concept. In this way, we find that the concept opens up for the possibility of a wide range of different actors to define themselves within this frame,– at the same time the concept asks for radical social change. As a consequence of this we find a lot of competing views of what should be

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[11] The Commission defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

done within the frame of a sustainable development; we have what Hajer calls a *discursive struggle*.

The discussion above shows that we do not disagree upon the fact that we have an ecological crisis, but it is the definition of and frame of understanding this crisis should be placed in that causes disagreement. In this way, the ecological crisis is *socially constructed*.

> 'We are all green now', politicians can be heard saying. Talking green no longer connotes a radical social critique, and here the image of the planet evokes sentiments that help to create and sustain a perception of a common global ecological crisis, which implies shared values and common interests (Hajer 1995:14).

Moreover, what is perceived today as the most serious threat of our existence is a problem that we can not even see; the climate change due to the greenhouse gas effect. We are faced with a problem that according to the scientists in the IPCC[12] requires immediate action, but if we do not act now, the existence of man will not be severely threatened for still a hundred years or so. In this way, the arguments, the perceptions and the way we put forward the cause, is of vital importance for what is being done with the climate change problematic. It is from this background we can look upon LA21. It is trying to manage a global oriented concern at the local level. In other word, trying to 'translate' global problems into local action.

LA21 is about trying to create a consensus through cooperation; it is about creating a local *discourse coalition* – but on the other hand, LA21 focuses on environmental change. LA21 can be looked upon as a new approach to changing the established structure of society. Its focus on cross sectorial integration and broad participation from the public represents a shift from the established and traditional sector responsibility in politics. In a time when the Norwegian municipalities complain over not having enough money, what happens when the environmental movements, the radical forces in politics and society come together with a local government that also has to think about presenting a responsible budget? What happens to the radical environmental critique when it challenges the established system? A possible outcome is that the radical environmental discourse is tamed; the discourse will not be a discussion about our industrial society and the goal of economical growth, which is so central in all its activity, but in stead a debate which is reduced to adopting environmental policy to the laws of the economy. In Norway we see that the environmental policy more and more is placed into a market ideology; it is met with a requirement that it has to be *cost-effective*. Such an idea stands in opposite to the normative goal of sustainable development, of thinking about the future generations, about global justice and of thinking in terms of long-time planning (Aall et al 2001). When a radical environmental policy is to be realized as state governance, the definition of policy becomes of great importance. When environmental initiatives are based on the definitions (the 'correct' definitions) of green politics or a policy of justice, the path is cleared for a special technocratic approach (Torgerson 1999). According to Torgerson, this leads to a simplification of policy that wipes out confusion and doubts; it is a way of adjusting new ideas to the established system. – However, on the other side, studies of LA21 in Norway also show that when the environmental movement cooperates with government, this can lead to an empowerment for these groups that can cause major problems for the local government if they do not present a policy the environmental movement is content with (Lindseth 2000).

Summing up, there seems to be several reasons for why discourse analysis is fruithful for studying LA21. *First* of all, because the environmental field easily can be viewed as socially

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[12] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

constructed, and LA21 is a part of a common international regime that opens up for a broad debate in the community for defining and translating global problems into local action. We will expect the ambiguity and the uncertainties of the meaning of the concept 'LA21' to create some differences in the views on what kind of local action that should be undertaken. *Secondly*, because I'm interested in what happens to the debate when it is transferred into local politics. Discourse analysis focuses on the coalitions that gather around certain arguments, and the struggle between these coalitions is vital for understanding how change comes about. *Thirdly*, discourse analysis offers a fruitful entry into the intermingling of power and language and for the understanding of change. It does not say that language in itself has the power to change things, but it focuses on the representation of language; discourses always have a material representation. For understanding change we need to know more about the representation of language in institutions, norms, belief systems and so on.

Before I focus more explicitly on the study, I will sketch some of my analytical tools that I will use later on.

5. DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A DISCOURSE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

My main focus with LA21 is to find out more about which kind of discourses that contribute to change. Questions of sustainable development intervene in all sectors of society, and some claim that almost all questions involve environmental aspects. A study of environmental change, must however, be limited to a practicable material. I will, studying change, mainly focus on political decisions in the local council and administrative procedures. This does not mean that I will not also be occupied with things like business practice and public opinions,- but they will always be placed in relation to the political sphere. Stating this, the challenge lies in saying something about (mainly) institutional effects at a point in time where these changes are still in being. This means that we have to, somehow, separate between discourse and practice. Hedrén (1994:33) states that this is a problematic field[13], but that the relation ought to be understood as a dialectical game; the point is to understand practice as something that is created and upheld through the discourse, and that discourse is generated by and works through the practices. Following such an assumption we must, as a starting point, direct our attention towards the observation of language and communication and ask: How does the local society talk about Local Agenda 21? In order to structure (such a) debate, Phillips & Jørgensen (1999:147) suggest that we can install a *discourse order;* a frame that defines what is included in the debate and what is not part of the debate. The analytical strategy is then to objectify society as communication; how does problems, actors, interests come into existence in discussions on LA21? (see Andersen 1999:18)

In the earlier presentation of LA21 in this paper, it was pointed at the major difference of what LA21 was intended to be – as a task given to municipalities all over the world by the UN assembly in Rio – and what LA21 has come to mean in Norwegian communities. In the national survey from 2000 (Bjørnæs & Lafferty 2000) we find that few municipalities have; made a Local Agenda plan, developed and integrated indicators for sustainable development or focused on broad issues like consumption and transport. Moreover, even though there have been made efforts for defining what kind of work that is 'entitled' to be labelled LA21 work (see Bjørnæs & Lafferty 1999), it is difficult to operate with a clear-cut definition of what goes under the label LA21 and what that does not. The main picture in the Norwegian municipalities is that the LA21 work is fragmented and divided into a range of different small projects, and where the sum of this is called LA21. Since my focus is on the municipalities' perceptions of LA21, a natural starting point is to find out what each municipality *label* as part of its LA21-approach. In other words, my starting point is the projects, meetings, processes of planning and topics that are part of the LA21 strategy in the municipality.

However, the experience from LA21 so far in Norway also show that the meaning of the concept LA21 often causes confusion amongst the population, and that politicians and officials therefore choose not to use LA21 as label for their work, even though their activity is part of their LA21-strategy. I will therefore not just look at what the municipality label as LA21-

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[13] Habermas (1985:243) for instance criticises Foucault with relation to this point: "There is some unclarity, to begin with, regarding the problem of how discourses – scientific and non-scientific- are related to practices: whether one governs the other, whether their relationship is to be conceived as that of base to superstructure, or on the model of a circular causality, or as an interplay of structure or event".

work, but also take a look at the broader picture and; try to encapsulate what is part of the broader debate on *sustainable development* in the municipality. This raises of course the question of how we can define exactly what is sustainable development and what is not. Since my task first of all is to analyse how one talks about sustainable development and LA21, the question of whether this and that is sustainable or not, is *not* a matter which will be of primer interest. First of all it is of interest *how* things are presented and how people talk about sustainable issues like climate, energy, transport and biological diversity, not whether what they say is LA21 or sustainable development fit the 'correct' definition of these concepts.

After one has framed the debate in such a discourse order, one has to find out what kind of different views, or *discourses*, we can find within this order. In doing this one has to look for incidents of communication. Neumann (2001:67-68) suggests that we search for; in which medias do we find the discourse; in what kind of social areas; who the main leaders of opinion are and who is the main target group of the discourse. However, discourses can be more or less political (Neumann 2001:173). The political can be defined as the struggle for the fixation of the discourse in such manner that the effect becomes this and that. The political is the struggle about changes that make a change: some effects are more overwhelmingly important for man's life situation than others. Following such an assumption my strategy for studying LA21 is then also to try to point of what kind of issues and cases within this field that seem to make the most 'noise' and cause the most attention in the municipality. As Hajer (1995) wrote, the discourse coalition on sustainable development is held together by a vague understanding of what the meaning of the concept is. Within such a discourse order on local sustainable development, we will expect to find a variety of different opinions on what needs to be done. If all the different discourses on sustainable development share the same matters of course, we have a stable discourse order (Philipps & Jørgensen 1999:148). If the discourse order on sustainable development contains different discourses that all compete for making sense to the area in different ways, then we have an *unstable* discourse order.

At the core of my study is the question of social change. Fairclough tries to capture this process by using the word *ideology.* Fairclough (1992:87) understands ideology to be significations/constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, social identities) which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination. That means that only those discourses that take an active role in reproduction or transforming society are ideologically invested (Fairclough 1992:91). When a discourse is ideologically effective,   it has managed to *naturalize* a certain understanding: it has managed to win accept as a common sensual understanding. The point for Fairclough is to *denaturalize* such an opinion. This entails showing which interests and what perspectives that lie behind such a dominating or *hegemonic* understanding. A study of reproduction and change, can according to Fairclough, be studied through an analysis of relations between the different discourses in a discourse order and the struggle between these discourses. Fairclough (1992:10) uses the combination of the concepts of *intertextuality* and *hegemony* to understand how changes come about: which prior texts and text types are drawn upon in a given instance (a discursive event), and how they are articulated, depends upon how the discursive event stands in relation to hegemonies and hegemonic struggles. Change is most likely to happen when one uses existing discourses in new ways. An example of this is

Thatcher's political discourse (Fairclough 1992:93). This can according to Fairclough be interpreted as:

> … a rearticulation of the existing order of political discourse, which has brought traditional conservative, neo-liberal and populist discourses into a new mix, and has also constituted and unprecedented discourse of political power for a woman leader. This discursive rearticulation materializes a hegemonic project for the constitution of a new political base and agenda, itself a facet of the wider political project of restructuring the hegemony of the bloc centred upon the bourgeoisie in new economic and political condition.

When studying discourses in the environmental field, Hajer (1995) and Coenen (2001) is of great interest. In studying the discourse on acid rain in the UK, Hajer (1995:164-165) constructs two main story lines in the controversy: The 'Traditional Pragmatic' story line and the 'Ecological modernisation' story line. Hajer sorts out the various arguments, statements and policy proposals that can be placed in these two storylines and he tries to trace the effect of these discourses in policy. Coenen (2001) is inspired by Hajer's work when he tries to capture the development of Local Agenda 21 in the Netherlands. Coenen structures the debate according to three storylines; 'LA21 as discourse on local democracy and interactive policy-making'; 'LA21 as local self-responsibility in environmental policy'; 'LA21 as discourse on administrative renewal'. Coenen (2001:17) finds that all of these three storylines contribute to the understanding of LA21 in the Netherlands, but he also says that it is difficult to answer why certain storylines prevail.

Following Hajer, and especially Coenen, I will try to present the LA21 work in the municipalities as *discourses*. All the time LA21 is about creating positive change, I will try to sort out those ideas, arguments, policy resolutions etc (see Hajers definitions of discourse). that represent *strategies* for sustainable development in each of the three municipalities. My next point is to go behind each discourse (understood as a strategy for change), and analyse it. I will try to distance my self from the discourse,- not by literally stepping out of the discourse, but from within. The point is to take a critical look at the discourse' characteristics and question; what appears to be taken for granted, is obvious or is presented as something normal. Two things will be highlighted: (1) What kind of interests and actors gather around the discourse? (2) To what extent can we trace the discourse in political resolutions and administrative procedures, meaning; What kind of impact has the discourse on the environmental policy and on the broader political agenda in the municipality? The last question also leads me to studying whether the discourse order on sustainable development compete with other discourse orders, for instance a discourse on economical development: To what extension does the discourse order on sustainable development influence other sectors of politics that not originally had anything to do with the environment? Are environmental arguments valid when we discuss where to build a new school or decide what kind of businesses that are to be allowed to settle down in the municipality?

Change involves forms of transgression, crossing boundaries, such as putting together existing conventions in new combinations, or drawing upon conventions in situations which usually preclude them. Doing this one defines the possibility of change of power relations, relations that set frames for different actors access to different discourses (Fairclough in Phillips & Jørgensen 1999:85). The point of this study is to tell a story of how the introduction of the concept LA21 influences policy. However, in doing this I will focus more on the dynamic *how* question than the structural *why* question. By this I mean that it is more important to understand (verstehen) than to explain (erklären). My point is not to establish precise explanations for why things happened like it did. Rather- results will be investigated and interpreted in relation to the process. The potential of this approach is to say something

about *when* discourse matter for creating environmental change. Such an understanding of science and methodology has roots back to Aristotle and the intellectual deed of phronetics: practical wisdom and practical ethic. Flyvbjerg (1991:73) states that phronetics is about the analysis of values with a basis in practice. Phronetic research is then pragmatic, variable and depends on context.

6. PRESENTATION OF THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The three municipalities that I will study in my report are all part of a project called 'Frontrunner municipalities in LA21' (Foregangskommuner i Lokal Agenda 21) The project is a two year cooperation (2000-2001) between The Ideas Bank[14], and the six municipalities; Grong, Lier. Moss, Oppegård, Stavanger and Ål. In addition to this, the local community of Grefsen-Kjelsås in Oslo is also participating.

The aim of the project is to show that it is possible for Norwegian municipalities to meet the broad challenges the Agenda 21-document puts forward. That includes:

–   The establishment of a broad, democratic discussion about the future of the local community, where both local authorities, businesses, organizations and inhabitants participate.

–   To set clear and ambitious goals for the reduction of the use of resources – and to follow them up

–   To give the global engagement a concrete content – for example through cooperation with local communities in the South [15]

These municipalities that are invited to participate in the program have already showed will and ability to go ahead on one or several of these areas. Participation in the program presupposes that the municipality also is committed or will commit to continue and strengthen their LA21 activity in the years to come[16]. With respect to my study, this shows that the work is anchored both politically and administratively in the municipality, and in this way the municipalities can be looked upon as 'critical cases' for LA21. They offer a chance to study LA21 under circumstances that are 'good' and where we will expect to find a certain activity and will to create a change towards a sustainable development.

I have chosen to do a more in depth study of three of these municipalities: Lier, Stavanger and Ål. *First,* I will present the work with LA21 in each municipality in general through a historical overview. I will focus on LA21 from the time the concept first was introduced in the municipalities and I will trace the work onwards until today. I will focus on the official strategy; what does the municipality say is included in their LA21-approach? I will look at what kind of issues and cases that are the focus of the work. *Secondly*, I will try to sum up the main views and identify various discourses. Some guidelines for structuring the debate into discourses will be the work of Hajer (1995) and Coenen (2001). *Thirdly*, I will analyse the various discourses, also looking at the discourse order of sustainable development in comparison with other discourse orders in the municipality: What kind of discourses are prevailing? Why is this so? In order to study this I will draw on the theorists I have already presented in this paper. However, knowing whether a discourse analysis is successful or what is of interest, one can only find out by actually carry out a specific discourse analysis.

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[14] The Ideas Bank is a private foundation devoted to the search for futures in which sustainability, global equity, democracy and a spirit of community prevail.
[15] See www.idebanken.no
[16] See www.idebanken.no

My concluding section, after I've looked at each municipality will be a comparative section between the three municipalities. Hopefully the empirical data from all of the municipalities will lead me to say something about the possibility of LA21 as a catalyst for change.

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