THE ZERO WASTE MOVEMENT
A case study of mundane climate change activism in Denmark

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Abstract

The humankind uses more of earth’s resources than the planet’s ability to provide renewable resources (WWF 2016). This trend is also contributing to climate changes, which have been a topic on the global political agenda for decades. However, there has yet to be found a sustainable solution. People are becoming impatient of the politicians’ ability to solve the issue and through grassroot movements and activism a range of different approaches have been made to find solutions to climate changes.

Social media provides new opportunities to organize large groups of loosely connected people of interest towards a common goal, in this case to take care of the planet. Social media have also developed new forms of political engagement.

This thesis is a case study of climate change activism through the zero waste community in Denmark that based on framing theory (Goffman 1974), online observations of local Facebook groups and Instagram activity as well as in-depth interviews pursues to understand in what ways participants use social media to make their everyday climate activism meaningful. In this thesis, Bakardjieva (2009, 2012) concepts of subactivism and mundane citizenship combined with framing theory are used to understand the ways mundane climate change actions are perceived meaningful for the participants in the Danish zero waste community.

The study shows examples of how participants of the zero waste community in Denmark use social media in a variety of ways to make their mundane climate activism meaningful for them. They use social media to be inspired, share experiences and feel part of a community that emphasize climate change activism through mundane every day routines. Through online discussions in Facebook groups and on Instagram the participants create, challenge and negotiate a collective action frame of the zero waste movement, which proves useful in motivating and inspiring them to continue to do small acts in their everyday life.
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Introduction

For decades, scientists have warned us about global warming and the consequences it will have for the earth and our society. However, these warnings have not been taken seriously enough by politicians, although finding a solution to decrease the total human-made CO$_2$ emission, which is commonly agreed to cause global warming, has been on the global political agenda for decades. However, to reach consensus on how we can solve this issue is complex, and there is still to be found a solution after almost 30 years on the global agenda. In addition, environmental grassroots movements have been fighting the issue in many different ways such as ecology, veganism, and the simple society (Haenfler et al. 2012). The newest trend of environmental movements is the zero waste movement.

The zero waste movement has spread globally over social media with a few main characters/bloggers in front, who have shared how they manage to reduce their monthly and yearly production of their households’ waste to landfills to fit into a mason jar. Plastic production and waste to landfills are a major contributor to human-made CO$_2$ emission (Manfredi et al. 2009). These people independently of each other have inspired thousands of people across the globe to live with no waste by following the six R’s: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle, and Rot. The movement is still relatively small, but currently with 376,669 posts (May 22, 2017) under the zero waste hashtag on Instagram, and more and more Facebook groups concerning the zero waste lifestyle are emerging in different countries and languages. Something is clearly peaking an interest in people and starting a collective global movement driven by social media.

The zero waste movement is interesting because individual citizens are making deliberate choices to change their consumption patterns and habits to contribute positively to the reduction of the overall CO$_2$ emission. Even though one single person’s production of waste and household CO$_2$ emission cannot be seen in the overall calculation (Moser et al. 2016). However, there is a belief in and a motivation that changing consumption patterns will add up and eventually put pressure on politicians and industries to meet their demand to reduce plastic.
The aim of this thesis is to contribute to an understanding of ways the participants use social media to show their online support of an offline issue concerning the environment and climate change by sharing individual processes of changing habits and lifestyle decisions to “save the planet”. My research question is:

RQ: In what ways do participants in the zero waste community in Denmark use social media to make their everyday climate change activism meaningful?

To approach this research question, I study the zero waste movement in Denmark as a case of climate change activism through the theoretical lenses of framing theory (Goffman 1974). I used a digital ethnographic approach to study the Danish community by observing the interactions on social media in the zero waste community in Denmark and interviewing people interested in the zero waste lifestyle in Denmark, which helped to provide an understanding of the ways the participants make their daily climate change activism meaningful.

I have chosen to study the zero waste community in Denmark as a case because the movement in Denmark is still relatively small and new. There are over 2,000 members in the “Zero Waste Danmark” Facebook group. The focus on the zero waste community in Denmark is interesting because it is relatively small and mostly driven by social media, although there is a general focus on ecology and sustainability in the Danish media, and more and more green organizations, shops and initiatives are emerging. However, there is still a certain skepticism towards green living. This type of lifestyle is often considered to be hippie or self-righteous (“frelst”), which have negative connotations for many Danes, due to old unwritten norms, the who-do-you think-you-are-attitude (“Jantelov”) that you should not think that you are special or better than others, so it is better to stick to what you have always done than stepping out of the norm. The zero waste lifestyle can be seen as stepping outside of the norms to approach an intangible issue.

Throughout the thesis, I have reused and merged parts from a pilot study on the same research problem, which I conducted in the research methodology course paper.
Context

This chapter presents background knowledge that helps to place this study in a context of climate change and the development of new forms of political engagement.

The societal issue of climate change

The ecological footprint is a term that “represents the human demand on the planet’s ability to provide renewable resources and ecological services” (WWF 2016, pp. 13). Humanity’s demand on the planet’s resources continues to grow. In 2014, humanity needed a regenerative capacity of 1.5 Earth (WWF 2014) to provide the resources that are used each year. In the 2016 report, this had increased to 1.6 Earth (WWF 2016). According to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Living Planet Report (2016), this trend of unsustainable consumption and production patterns is “rooted in systematic failures inherent to the current systems of production, consumption, finance and governance” (pp. 13). Blühdorn (2007) further argues that the late modern society is threatened by a triple threat of unsustainable practices of the environment (resource shortage, climate changes), social (identity construction), and normative (self-referentiality) collapses (pp. 265). The way the consumer society is built and organized as well as the values, social norms, laws and policies that influence everyday choices are contributing to the complexity of the issue.

The consequences of the unsustainable consumption patterns in high-income countries affect people and nature other places in the world. The high earner consumers are not directly faced with the consequences of their everyday choices (WWF 2016). Today, it is generally agreed that the issue of global warming is clearly tied to human practices (Bennett 2012), and a radical change of the established system is necessary (Blühdorn 2007). However, this change seems yet to be out of the public and political will and ability to do (Blühdorn 2007; Bennett 2012). The situation does not become any less complex, when the opposition's attempts to find alternatives for carbon energy use have been hindered by corporate propaganda raising doubt about climate change and climate research, which has resulted in decreasing public belief about climate change in America, although in Europe the support for environmental protection has remained strong (Bennett 2012).
The issue of climate change was first put on the global political agenda at the Rio Earth Summit (1992). In the negotiation of the Kyoto protocol (1997), the parties agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on the premise that global warming exists and human-made CO₂ emissions have caused it (UN 1992). In the following decades, the rising issues of climate changes have been on the global policy agenda. Political leaders struggled to reach consensus at the UN Climate Conference (COP)15 in 2009, but in Paris at the COP21 in 2016, the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reached a landmark agreement. The new treaty lays out a fundamentally new course in the global climate effort by replacing the old framework in the Kyoto protocol’s differentiation between developed and developing countries with a common framework that all countries should put forward their best efforts in the years ahead and that all parties will regularly report their emission and implementation efforts (C2es.org, 2017).

The Danish context

In Denmark, focus on and demand for sustainability and green living are huge among politicians and the general public. In 2014, the WWF published a Living Planet Report, which ranked Denmark with the fourth largest ecological footprint per capita just passed by oil states such as Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (WWF 2014, pp. 38). Although, Denmark is seen as a frontrunner in renewable energy areas such as wind power to collectively lower the country’s carbon and ecological footprint, Denmark still ranks poorly in recent reports (WWF 2014).

However, the issue digs deeper and is more complex than merely switching people’s energy consumption to renewable energy. A change in consumption patterns, society structures, policies, norms, and governance at the regional and local level is necessary to make a change (Blühdorn 2007). The zero waste approach could be a possible step toward a more sustainable community. Therefore, I will use Denmark as a case to explore and understand in what ways the participants use social media to show and encourage lifestyle changes as a form of climate change activism.
“New” forms of political engagement

Political engagement and participation have historically been associated with party membership, ideologies, broad reform movements and participation in organizations, however, today younger citizens are moving away from this perception (Bennett & Segerberg 2012; Dahlgren 2009; Uldam & Vestergaard 2015), rather towards personal politics through lifestyle values (Giddens 1991; Bennett, 2012). New, alternative forms of political participation have been evolving since the rise of the internet and web 2.0 (Shirky 2010), and this is at a time when many Western democracies face a decline in citizens’ participation in politics (Dahlgren 2009). Uldam and Vestergaard (2015) define this new form of political engagement under the umbrella of civic engagement to be “engagement with political and social issues, an engagement expressed in a variety of ways that do not always adhere to traditional perceptions of parliamentarian politics” (pp. 17). This engagement can be both formal and informal. The definition of political and civic engagement is important to understand the kinds of participation in the zero waste movement which I will address later in the analysis, as well as to understand the use of social media and civic engagement.

New strands of research on political engagement have emerged such as subpolitics (Beck 1997), lifestyle politics (Giddens 1991), and lifestyle movements (Haenfler et al. 2012) that differ from traditional political engagement and social movements.

Beck (1997) developed the concept “subpolitics” as a response to the traditional view of the political landscape. It includes individuals representing a new dimension of politics “less institutionalized and built upon individual decisions given a political frame” (Beck 1997 cited in Haenfler et al. 2012, pp. 16). Bakardjieva (2009) defines Beck’s subpolitics concept to represent “a new mode of operation of the political, in which agents coming from outside the officially recognized political and corporate system appear on the stage of social design, including different professional groups and organizations, citizens’ issue-centered initiatives and social movements, and finally individuals” (pp. 94-95). In short, another word for personalized politics and consumer action. Personalized politics is not new, but Bennett (2012) argues that the difference today is that although “individuals may be the center of their own universes,” their networks can be very large due to the potential
of social networking online (pp. 22). It is less like traditional social movements with collective identity frames and strong central leaders; it is more an “individualized collective action” (Micheletti 2003 cited in Bennett 2012, pp. 26), which can be described as “loosely coordinated activities centered on more personal emotional identifications and rationales” (Micheletti 2003 cited in Bennett 2012, pp. 26).

The saying “personal is political” (Hanisch, 1970 cited in Gauntlett 2015, pp.28), which has been a popular phrase in the feminist movement since the late 1960s, highlights the importance of small steps into a changed world, and that politics are not only shaped by politicians, but rather by individuals’ marginal issues, which become central matters to the state (Gauntlett 2015, pp. 28; Acuto 2014). However, today the phrase has got a new life as scholars argue that the distinction between public and private is blurred due to the increasing use of social networks (Weinstein 2014). Gauntlett (2015) argues that real change begins in homes and workplaces of everyday life, even if those ethical changes and choices only affect one or two people. This will always be better, Gauntlett (2015) argues, than broadcasting a political message with an ethical sound to a large audience and not comply with these standards yourself in your everyday life (pp. 28).

Giddens (1991) argued that the idea of “personal is political” from the feminist movement opened a door to life politics, which is lifestyle politics. Giddens (1991) defines life politics to concern “political issues which flow from processes of self-actualization in post-traditional contexts, where globalizing influences intrude deeply into the reflexive project of the self, and conversely where processes of self-realization influence global strategies” (pp. 214), which along with the idea of personal is political asks the questions: who do I want to be? Moreover, how do I want to live my life? The process of identification and self-identity is a process that is never completed (Hall 1996, pp. 352); it derives from the project of the reflexive self (Giddens 1991), and is also, as Svensson (2011) argues, a motivational factor for political participation. Giddens’ (1991) concept of life politics also takes up ethical concerns of ecological concerns, such as the recognition that changing the deprivation of the environment depends on changing current lifestyle patterns (pp. 221).

Another strand of research has developed a new social movement tradition, which links culture and social movements by recognizing the role of culture and identity (Haenfler et al.
One such tradition is lifestyle movements (Haenfler et al. 2012), which struggle over “postmaterialist values, identities, and cultural practices rather than class-based economic concerns and material resources” (pp. 4), as traditional social movements. Lifestyle movements can be characterized by promoting a lifestyle as a tactic towards social change, the personal identity work is central, and often with a diffuse structure (ibid. pp. 2). The focus is on the individual’s actions which are often related to mundane aspects of daily life, and the individuals believe in the power of their actions to have an impact beyond their own lives, and “the power of non-coordinated collective actions” (Haenfler et al. 2012, pp. 6).

**Literature review of previous research**

This chapter includes a selected review of climate change activism, an overview of the zero waste movement, the zero waste movement as an example of subactivism and mundane citizenship, and lastly the role of social media in subactivism and mundane citizenship. A selected review of previous studies on climate change activism is important to understand what has already been done in the field of climate change activism, as well as to understand how climate change activism has developed over recent decades. Furthermore, a review of the history of the zero waste movement followed by an introduction to Bakardjieva (2009, 2012) concepts of subactivism and mundane citizenship helps to set the case of where to place the zero waste movement in literature. Lastly, a review of the role of social media in subactivism and mundane citizenship is important because this project studies how participants of the zero waste community in Denmark use social media to make their everyday climate change action meaningful.

**Climate change activism**

Many studies have been done on climate change activism (Middlemis & Parrish 2010; North 2011; Rootes 2012; Uldam 2013; Roser-Renouf et al. 2014; Bhagwat et al. 2016; Steentjes et al. 2017), ever since there has been a common agreement among scientists that human made CO₂ emission is altering the climate (Rootes 2012; Moser et al. 2016). Today, experts and scientists have advised political leaders that the globe’s carbon budget must be
limited to 2 degrees above pre-industrial temperatures to secure climate stability (Moser et al. 2016, pp. 2).

Climate activism has taken many forms from organization of mass marches, non-profit organizations (NGOs), environmental non-profit organizations (ENGOs) and campaigns, at the community and local to the individual level (Middlemiss & Parrish 2010; North 2011; Rootes 2012). One thing the different actors in the climate change movement have in common is the belief that climate change is happening and something should be done, however, there is less agreement on what should be done about it in their ‘repertoires of contention’ (North 2011, pp. 1589). North (2011) defines climate activism as

“a movement area composed of diverse ‘convergence spaces’ (Routledge, 2003), within which organizations, networks, and activists act independently, coalesce, act together, then disperse again, a space much like the ‘anti’, ‘counter’, or ‘another’ globalization ‘movement’, a set of similarly heterogeneous convergence spaces (Featherstone, 2008) from which many climate change activists emerged, and from which they take their inspiration” (pp. 1583).

The zero waste movement consists of loosely connected people who are acting independently to change their lifestyles to be more sustainable by reducing their individual and household’s production of waste to limit their impact on the earth’s resources and to decrease their individual CO2 emission.

The first public protests on climate change were made in 2000 at the COP6 in The Hague (Rootes 2012). However, mass marches against climate change have failed to gather a large number of people compared to other issues such as antinuclear, antiwar, and anti-globalization movements (North 2011). Many scholars argue that climate change activism should come from the bottom-up and that more grassroots activism can help set an example for policy makers (Bhagwat et al. 2016; Wachsmuth et al. 2016; and Middlemis 2010). However, critics question whether citizens excluded from positions of political or economic power can transform complex industrial systems just through the power of the good example, arguments or by developing demonstrations (North 2011), or whether individuals and community practices just are the latest trend of “symbolic politics” that make it seem like something is being done to challenge the “unsustainable consumer capitalism” (Blühdorn, 2007).
Another study pointed out that households are a major contributor to CO$_2$ energy-related emissions; these are often underestimated in the carbon emission calculation (Moser et al. 2016, pp. 2). Heating, mobility and travel, kitchen and food are some of the biggest contributors to household CO$_2$ energy emission, and not surprisingly, the biggest consumers are the highest earners (Ibid.). Maybe more surprisingly, Moser et al. (2016) found that the people who identify themselves as environmentally aware tended to have a larger carbon footprint than others (pp.3). Moser et al. (2016) argue that unless a family never air travel, which most people do nowadays, their carbon-footprint might not be much less than an average family in their area because transportation and air travel are some of the biggest CO$_2$ polluters.

One group of scholars made a parallel between the idea of climate change and a belief system arguing that the idea of climate change is influencing public opinion and spreading in the masses, like it was a belief system such as Christianity or Islam, but that climate change may require a focus shift from political leaders to grassroot actors (Bhagwat et al. 2016). Bhagwat and colleagues (2016) argue that scientists, media, individuals and communities have a certain role in the discussion of climate change. Especially the role of communities or “institutionalized rituals” have a considerable social significance to the members of climate action groups (Bhagwat et al. 2016, pp. 95). However, studies show that community-based organizations, local non-profit organizations and ad hoc social movements are often overlooked when discussing sustainability policy, because many of these groups do not frame themselves in environmental terms (Wachsmuth et al. 2016, pp. 393). Middlemis and Parrish (2010) explored the role of grassroot initiatives in creating low-carbon communities from two case studies. They found that grassroot initiatives could have a role in creating low-carbon communities by drawing on multiple capacities such as personal, infrastructural, organizational and cultural capacities within the community in a way that fits the community’s understanding of the world and in breaking current social boundaries by creating capacity for social change (Middlemis & Parrish 2010, pp. 7566).

Another group of scholars studied the social norms associated with climate change through acts of interpersonal activism (Steentjes et al. 2017). The study was based on a sample of college students from the US. They found that the students' lack of confrontation and social
disapproval of high-carbon emission lifestyle could be attributed to the lack of moral status connected to the issue compared to other issues such as racism. Their findings suggest that confrontation of high-carbon emission lifestyle can have a social cost that can be explained by a lack of the moral representation of high-carbon emission lifestyles, as people will be less inclined to socially distance themselves from someone who confronts another person on that issue (Steentjes et al. 2017).

My study looks at climate activism at the grassroots level by individuals attempting to decrease their personal household emission of CO\textsuperscript{2} and waste by making deliberate everyday actions to create a change and persuade more people to take similar actions in their household by being a good example offline and online.

**The zero waste movement**

The zero waste movement is based on the philosophy of a circular economy, where everything can be reused repeatedly to avoid throwing waste to landfills. The main idea is that, if a community cannot reuse, repair, recycle or compost a product, the industry should not be making that product in the first place (Connett 2006). The zero waste idea take up the issue of waste management at the front end, instead of asking how to get rid of waste when it is there, it asks the industry to design products that do not produce waste in the first place, by implementing reuse, repair, recycle or composting into the design of the product (Connett 2006).

The term zero waste first appeared in the 1970s when Paul Palmer, a PhD chemist, founded the company Zero Waste Systems Inc. in California, US. He defined zero waste as “a practical theory of how to wring maximum efficiency from the use of resources” (Zerowasteinstitute.org, 2017). Zero waste is about reusing everything over and over in order to reduce waste, which can only be done, if reuse is implemented into the design of the product (Zerowasteinstitute.org, 2017).

More and more zero waste communities are evolving around the globe. Canberra in Australia was the first city to announce a zero waste goal in 1996 as the local government passed a “No Waste by 2010” bill. Fifty percent of municipalities in New Zealand and San
Francisco have announced zero waste programs, and many communities around the globe are taking different zero waste approaches in their community (Connett 2006).

However, Palmer points out on his website that zero waste is not a lifestyle choice because individual choices will not make important, social changes. However, the main purpose for people following this movement is to reduce their use of single-used plastic as well as reducing their production of waste to landfills. The people within the movement strive towards a lifestyle with zero waste to minimize their impact on the earth’s resources. To do so, they are making many simple and more advanced changes to their lifestyle to substitute disposable items with reusable items, and sharing these steps on social media as inspiration and support for others to do the same, and to spread the message of zero waste.

The zero waste movement is an interesting case to study because it is a relatively new, forthcoming way of doing climate change activism that links acts of mundane citizenship, lifestyle decisions and social media to fight a cause that affect all of us, whether one believe in climate change or not.

The zero waste movement as an example of subactivism and mundane citizenship

In his book “Making is Connecting”, Gauntlett (2011) suggests to rethink the meaning of politics to “re-imagine and re-enable collective participation in public affairs – which in the ‘everyday’ contexts … involve finding new meaning within our own participation in society through creative making and sharing” (pp. 231). Gauntlett (2011) argues that the rise in the do-it-yourself (DIY) culture today is partly due to the increased awareness of environmental issues, and the acknowledgement that the manufacturing of endless goods is troubling for the earth’s resources (pp. 61), but is also a stand against the long time “sit-back-and-be-told-culture”, which evolved with the entrance of the television in the 1950s. The television developed an incorporated culture in the West of staying in and watching television instead of going out and doing things, which has been further reinforced by the increased consumer culture of instantly buying goods that are irrational but feels like a pleasure (Gauntlett 2011). He proposes a shift towards a ‘making and doing’ culture, where people feel more empowered to take actions and make things as he argues, people do not
feel whole, fulfilled or creative. This shift requires more effort from the individual, but also comes with great rewards (Gauntlett 2011, pp. 244-245). People have liked to make things for centuries and share them with others to give them a feeling of community, to converse, and receive support and recognition; the internet provides people a place easily to share their makings without any restrictions with like-minded (Gauntlett 2011, pp. 107). Bennett (2012) argues further that a DIY ethos of how “norms are guiding participation will emerge from the profusion of self-actualizing, digitally mediated DIY politics” (pp. 30).

A lot of studies and scholars have examined new forms of civic engagement and mediated citizenship (Jones 2006; Bakardjieva 2009, 2012; Shirky 2010; Dahlgren 2013) as a response to new forms of political engagement that technology and web 2.0 (O’reilly 2005) have brought. Jones (2006) argues that when people engage in politics, it should not be seen as “segregated as separate activities for the duty-bound “good citizen” but rather as interspersed and concomitant with the flow and rhythms of routine activities in daily life” (Jones 2006, pp. 550). Jones’s observation as well as the concept of “subpolitics” (Beck 1997) discussed earlier tie into Bakardjieva’s (2009) definition of subactivism as “a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life” (pp. 92), that comprises “small-scale, often individual and private decisions, discourses or actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference and never appear on the stage of social design, but on the contrary, remain submerged in everyday life” (Bakardjieva 2012, pp. 1358). Subactivism is a modest process of the individual’s construction of identity through every day political talk, actions and choices of daily routines and living, which have a wider social and political significance (Bakardjieva 2012, pp. 1359). However, Bakardjieva (2009) notes that the impact and consequences of subactivism through the internet have not been revolutionary or even modest, yet, however she argues that “subactivism must be recognized as an important dimension of democracy grounded in individuals' paramount reality, the point where they are capable of gearing into the world through talk, deed and interaction” (pp. 103). In regard to the themes and actions around the zero waste movement which have emerged from a growing concern within the public for global political issues such as climate change, pollution in all forms, overproduction and overconsumption and its harm for the environment. These concerns
have led individuals to take “practical action and choices regarding matter of daily living” (Bakardjieva 2012, pp. 1358-59).

Mundane citizenship is another important concept related to our everyday actions and our daily living that may or may not have a conscious underlying political motive, but at the same time are functioning as a form that help us create an identity in a shifting political and social context based on what we do (Bakardjieva 2012). Bakardjieva (2012) defines mundane citizenship from “the perspective of the radical-democratic model as subject-positioning and identity work within a dynamic context of intersecting and shifting public discourses and flexible collectives centred on social and political issues” (pp. 1,358). She argues that two characteristics of mundane citizenship concern the entanglement with routine activities and concerns of everyday living which is enabled by new media of communication (Bakardjieva 2012, pp. 1,356). When referring to the new media, she means the internet, which has made it possible for users from their comfort zone to challenge, change and reframe political positions which concern their daily life (Bakardjieva 2012, pp. 1,371). Mundane citizenship empowers ordinary people with no connection to political organizations, NGOs or social movements to engage, participate and sometimes have an impact on change of the development of social design (Bakardjieva 2012, pp. 1,371). The zero waste movement empowers ordinary people to take actions centered on social and political issues such as climate change, overproduction, overconsumption and activism against traditional capitalism, by taking active choices in their everyday living enabled by social media.

The role of social media in mundane citizenship and subactivism

Social media have provided citizens the opportunity to access the dominant public sphere (Uldam & Vestergaard 2015, pp. 22). Shirky (2010) shows many examples in his book “Cognitive Surplus” of alternative forms of political participation and how the web and social networks provide the opportunity to engage, participate, share, and be rewarded for trying. He concludes that the media world we live in today has changed to a world where the distinction between public and private media, and professional and amateur production, is blurred, where voluntary public participation has become fundamental, and where people
can connect globally across different areas of interests (pp. 211). Digital media have become an integral part of contemporary reality (Dahlgren 2009, pp. 3). The internet makes it possible for people to strengthen local connectivity and to network globally (Bakardjieva 2009, pp. 91).

Bennett and Segerberg (2012) further argue that individuals’ orientations and engagement with politics are an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances (pp. 743). These personal action frames are shared through social networks. However, these personal action frames do not spread by themselves. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that it is an “interactive process of personalization” where people show, share ideas, and create relationship with others through digital communication (pp. 746). Bennett and Segerberg (2012) identified the “logic of connective action,” which emerges when communication becomes the prominent part of the organizational structure. Digital media is the main agent through which communication takes place. They argue that connective action starts with the individual’s self-motivated sharing of personalized ideas with networks (Bennett Segerberg 2012, pp. 753). Nekmat et al. (2015) found that social networks have a role in the micro-mobilization of collective action on social media and that the level of “personalness” and invitations from people in one’s close network are most influential in motivating individual participation (pp. 1086). Mihailidis (2014) found in another study of American students an emerging disconnection between US student’s social media dependence for daily information and communication needs and their negative perception of social media’s value in their lives (pp. 1060). Bennett et al. (2014) argue that the strengths of connective movements are “the speed of mobilizations, the flexibility of mediated crowds to shift among issue foci and action tactics, and the capacity to reach large-scale publics” (pp. 233).

Bakardjieva (2009) studied the role of the internet to develop democracy through the everyday practices of citizenship. She found that “the motions of personal positioning and weaving of connections across erstwhile zones of anonymity the internet has proven a real blessing, but their consequences haven’t been revolutionary” (Bakardjieva 2009, pp. 103). In a later study, Bakardjieva (2012) argues that “new media have brought civic and political issues, and the possibility to deliberate and act on them into the everyday lives of
Bulgarians,” after studying three cases: a discussion of a political event online, a campaign of eco protests and activism from a website and a forum dedicated to motherhood (pp. 1356). She argues that “things in the internet-use practices of ‘apolitical’ citizens that are a valid indication of how the construction of a democratic internet and of a thoroughgoing democracy can enhance one another” (Bakardjieva 2009, pp. 103). As mentioned above, Bakardjieva (2012) argues that two defining characteristics of mundane citizenship are that it concerns routine activities and everyday living, and that it is “crucially” empowered by digital media of communication (pp. 1356). These two characteristics are crucial to the zero waste movement because people approaching the zero waste lifestyle are concerned about their routine activities to produce as little as possible or zero plastic and waste in their everyday living. The movement has spread globally through social media inspired by a few bloggers approaching this lifestyle, and now thousands of people worldwide are sharing their small acts of decreasing waste in their everyday life on social media.

**Summary**

A lot of studies on climate change activism have been made. More recent studies highlight the need for more grassroot movements to initiate the change, however critiques question whether individuals outside of the traditional political sphere can have an influence on global politics. Supporters think that grassroot and lifestyle movements can influence individuals’ perception of how they live their daily life as well as challenge the social and moral norms connected to climate change as part of the process of the reflexive self (Giddens 1991). Bakardjieva (2009, 2012) concepts of subactivism and mundane citizenship suggests that individuals’ engagement in political and social issues in their everyday life is now empowered by social media. The zero waste movement is a lifestyle movement (Haenfler et al. 2012) where individuals change their lifestyle to become more sustainable by changing habits and making sacrifices from their previous lifestyle. Social media function as an important factor in the engagement with the movement, as people share images of their everyday life and routines to show that they are part of making a change and to find inspiration from each other.
The analytical theory

I have decided to use framing as the analytical theory because framing is a good theory to use when studying meaning-making, as the implication of my research question is a study of how participants of the zero waste community in Denmark use social media to make their everyday climate change activism meaningful. Framing theory can be used to study social movements and their collective action frames to understand sets of beliefs and meanings, which inspire and validate the activities of a social movement organization (Benford & Snow 2000). Benford and Snow (2000) define collective action frames as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of social movement organizations” (pp. 614). However, Scheufele (1999) and others argue that research on framing has been theoretically and empirically vague because of a missing theoretical model. Framing theory has been used to study both media frames and individual frames. Many studies of social movements have used the concept of frame derived from Goffman (1974). Frames can help to give meaning to events and experiences and function to guide actions (Benford & Snow 2000). Benford and Snow (2000) define framing as meaning construction that “denotes an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction” (pp. 614). For Goffman (1974), frames help people “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” events through a “schemata of interpretation,” although they might not be aware at the time of the event or experience of how to describe it (p. 21).

However, “collective action frames are not merely aggregations of individual attitudes and perceptions but also the outcome of negotiating shared meaning” (Gamson 1992, pp. 111 cited in Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 614). A collective action frame can be characterized by its problem identification and direction of attribution; its flexibility and rigidity, and inclusivity and exclusivity; its variation in interpretive scope and influence; and its resonance (Benford & Snow 2000). The problem identification and direction of attribution refers to what problems or issues are addressed and who can be attributed for blame. This is how a social movement addresses the issue, which they aim to change (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 618). The flexibility and rigidity, inclusivity and exclusivity refers to the number of themes or ideas that are incorporated and expressed in the movement (Ibid. pp. 618). The
variation in interpretive scope and influence refers to whether the scope is limited to the interest of a group or is associated to a set of related problems (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 618). Benford and Snow (2000) refers to “master frames, when the scope of a collective action frame is quite broad in the scope to influence the orientation and activities of other movements (pp. 618). “Rights frames”, “choice frames”, “injustice frames”, “environmental justice frames” and “hegemonic frames” are examples of such master frames (ibid.). Resonance refers to “the issue of the effectiveness or mobilizing potency or proffered framings” (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 619). The resonance of collective action frames varies to the degree of the credibility of the frame and its relative salience. A frame’s credibility relies on frame consistency, the empirical credibility and the credibility of the frame articulators or claim makers (Benford & Snow 2000, pp, 619). The relative salience of a collective action frame’s resonance refers to its “salience to targets of mobilization” (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 621), which refers to its centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity (Snow & Benford 1988 cited in Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 621). Centrality concerns how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas connected to the collective action frame is for the mobilization of the movement (ibid. pp. 621). Experiential commensurability concerns whether the movement's framings are congruent or resonant with personal, everyday experiences or if the framings are too abstract and distant for the targets (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 621). The narrative fidelity concerns how the offered framing is resonant with the culture (ibid. pp. 621).

Snow and Benford (1988) identified three core framing tasks; diagnostic framing, prognostic framing, and motivational framing (Snow & Benford 1988 cited in Benford & Snow 2000 pp. 615). Diagnostic framing refers to identifying the problem of what is in need of change, and attributing who or what is to blame for the problem (Ibid. pp. 615). Different case studies and scholars have referred to “injustice frames”, “boundary framing” and “adversarial framing” as the diagnostic frame (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 615-616). Prognostic framing refers to delivering a plan and strategy to solve the problem (Benford & Snow 2000, 617). Prognostic framing approaches the question: What is to be done about the problem, which is mainly how social movements differ from each other (Ibid. pp. 617). Motivational framing provides a ‘call to arms’ engaging collective action and development of “vocabularies of motive” (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 617), which can be socially
constructed vocabularies. These are compelling accounts that engage and sustain the participation in collective actions (Ibid. pp. 617).

Furthermore, discursive, strategic and contested processes are overlapping the core-framing task in developing frames contributing to the negotiated shared meaning (Benford & Snow 2000). Benford and Snow (2000) define the discursive processes as the talk and conversation by the members that happens in context or in relation to movement activities (pp. 623). This is how the people talk about the zero waste lifestyle with each other and to others. The discursive processes are generated by frame articulation and frame amplification (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 623). Frame articulation refers to how different elements and experiences are “spliced together and articulated” to give new meaning (ibid. pp. 623). Furthermore, frame amplification “involves accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others” (ibid. pp. 623). Discursive processes can be expressed through the discourses within and about the movement to others, as well as slogans that a movement uses.

The strategic processes are frames that are developed and deployed towards a specific purpose. This can be ways of attracting new people to the lifestyle, or to organize supporters. The strategic processes aim to align the interest of the social movement with prospective supporters; Snow et al. (1986) called these processes the “frame alignment processes”. They developed and identified four alignment processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation. Frame bridging refers to “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 467). Snow et al. (1986) gave examples of how movements got in contact with prospects in the 1980s by using direct mail. Today, a lot of such contact is happening on social media. Frame amplification refers to “the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem or set of events” (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 469). This refers to the values and beliefs associated with the issue as well as it connects to the resonance of the collective action frame. Frame extension is when a social movement extends its primary frames to include other issues or concerns to appeal to potential new followers (Snow et al. 1986, pp. 472). This is how a movement’s framing processes are extended and negotiated.
within the movement of its participants. Lastly, frame transformation involves “generating old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones” (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 625). This can be done by providing statistics on the issue, which also tend to support the empirical credibility of a frame (ibid. pp. 625). Contested processes are the development, generation, and elaboration of collective action frames (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 625).

I think that framing theory is a proper theoretical framework to use to understand in what ways participants in the zero waste movement in Denmark use social media to make their everyday climate change actions meaningful because the theory concerns the meaning-making processes of individuals and groups.

The methodology

This study employed a digital ethnography methodology approach to explore in what ways people use social media to make everyday climate change activism meaningful by studying the case of the zero waste community in Denmark (Collins 2010, pp. 126). The reason for making a case study is to focus on the nuances of reasons and ways the participants engage with the movement and lifestyle and not to focus on statistical generalization (Collins 2010, pp. 146). I chose digital ethnography because this approach balances the digital media in relation to other elements of the topics. This way, Pink et al. (2015) argue that “we are able to understand the digital as part of something wider, rather than situating it at the centre of our work” (pp. 11). Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) further argue that digital ethnography is a way “to engage with the central role of digital technologies in everyday life, and also to understand the importance of field construction, reflexivity, and the development of tools as key elements of the ethnographic endeavor” (pp. 9).

My research question concerns how social media is making every day offline climate change activism meaningful. Deuze (2011) argues that digital media has become so emerged into our daily life that we no longer live with, but in media (pp. 137). Therefore, I believe that digital ethnography is a proper approach to answer the research question. There are many ways to do digital ethnography because each research design is unique to the research question it is responding (Pink et al. 2015, pp. 8). I have employed a participant observation method together with in-depth interviews to get a variety of empirical data.
These two methods are at the core of ethnographic fieldwork, and through this combination it is possible to discover practices and social interactions (Davis 2008, pp. 58), and “gain access to people’s way of life, not only by observing behavior but also by sharing their daily life routines and social meanings” (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz 2014, pp. 2). The use of semi-structured in-depth interviews also functions to understand the perceptions and meanings which the respondents attach to their actions (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz 2014, pp. 13). By doing a qualitative study of the zero waste community led by the field of study, through participant observation and semi-structured interview, and framing theory, I have applied an abductive research strategy to understand “the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions that people use in their every lives, and which direct their behavior” (Blaikie 2009, pp. 89). This is important in relation to my research question because I try to understand how the participants of the zero waste community in Denmark make use of social media to make their everyday climate change actions meaningful.

The observations

I observed the interaction and activity on Instagram and in two Danish, zero waste Facebook groups together with six qualitative semi-structured interviews to get an understanding of the underlying reasons and motivations for joining the zero waste movement (Collins 2010, pp. 134). I followed the zero waste community in Denmark on Instagram and Facebook by following 44 zero waste themed Instagram accounts. These were mostly Danish accounts on Instagram and two Danish zero waste Facebook groups, a local “Zero Waste Kbh” with 431 members (May 18, 2017) and the national group “Zero Waste Danmark” with 2,337 members (May 18, 2017), to observe people’s activity and ways of using social media.

I created a blog (https://rethinkingmywaste.wordpress.com/) and an Instagram account (@rethinking_my_waste) for sharing my own experiences and journey towards a zero waste lifestyle as well as to connect with other members of the zero waste community. The blog and Instagram account functioned as an online field note diary in the project. I chose to take a participant observation approach to meaningfully emerge into the community, by continuously starting to change my own habits, approaching the zero waste lifestyle and
sharing own experiences with the community online via the blog and Instagram account (Ardevel & Gomez 2014, pp. 2).

The interviews

I adopted a purposive sampling strategy (Meyer 2008, pp. 78) because the participants should be engaged with the zero waste lifestyle. The interviews were recruited by posting two messages in the Facebook groups. In the messages, I introduced myself, the study and asked all members of the groups, who had pursued the zero waste lifestyle for a long time, those who had just begun, or those who were in the middle of it to talk to me about their approach to zero waste. The aim was to get a range of participants with alternative approaches to the zero waste lifestyle (Davis 2008, pp. 59; Meyer 2008). The initial action in the groups and the messages posted was made to make contact and motivate members of the Facebook groups to talk to me (Davis 2008, pp. 60). The members who were interested in participating were encouraged to respond directly on the post or by sending me a direct message. I contacted the people who had responded to arrange interviews. From the first post on April 18, 2017, I recruited two interviewees, but from the second post on April 27, 2017, generated more respondents, and the interest for participating in the study was in general higher from the Facebook groups.

I reached data maturity around the sixth interview, and it was not possible to conduct more interviews due to the time limitation of the study. The interviews were conducted in person, over the phone or through a video call with respondents depending on their proximity to Copenhagen. An informed consent was received verbally at the beginning of each interview. The interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes, and each interview was recorded for subsequent transcription of the oral data into written text for analysis (Meyer 2008). The interviews were designed to be semi-structured guided conversation asking open-ended broad questions on different topics such as climate and environment, zero waste, political engagement and their use of social media to motivate the respondents to express themselves at length (Collins 2010; Meyer 2008). See the interview guide in appendix 1. The questions outlined in the appendix were used as a guideline in the interviews, although the specific order and wording varied accordingly to the respondent’s answers and direction in the interview. Depending on the interviewee’s interest some questions were elaborated more
explicit than others. Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) argue that the in-depth interview is “unique setting where research participants can reflect aloud on their own practices and express their thoughts, emotions, and feelings related to their experience” (pp. 13). The choice of open-ended questions was to encourage the interviewee to expand, elaborate or raise a discussion on questions they felt needed more time or interested them more. I conducted a total of six interviews, and because of the qualitative approach, the open-ended questions, and length of the interviews, they produced rich data for further analysis.

The sample of six interviewees consisted of four females and two men ranging from 25 to 36 years of age. Occupations of the interviewees included two mothers, two students, and four full-time employees. This ratio of four females to two males comply well with the Facebook groups, where the majority of the members are females. Specific demographic statistics of the Facebook groups were not available; however, I observed that the majority of the active members were women. The emphasis on mothers is also relevant because there seemed to be a majority of mothers in the Facebook groups, who are concerned about the health and future for their children.

**The analysis process**

The research process was an ongoing collection and analysis process of interviews and daily observation material such as images, videos, and texts from posts and discussions in the Facebook groups and Instagram. The data was generated during the research process (Davis 2008, pp. 60). Blaikie (2009) argues that in an abductive research strategy the “research becomes a dialogue between data and theory mediated by the researcher” (pp. 156). Transcribing each interview from the recordings was very important for the analysis process because it allowed me to go over the conversation again by both listening and afterward carefully reading and re-reading the interviews to become familiar with the data. From the observation, I had a variety of data archived from screenshots of Instagram posts related to zero waste and their commentary below, together with screenshots and texts from discussions in the Facebook groups, and the Facebook groups’ online descriptions and guidelines for new members.
Based on the collected observed material, the interview transcripts and by taking notes when reading the material closely, a number of themes and ideas emerged from the data. This process of “open coding” involved “breaking the data down into categories and sub-categories” (Blaikie 2009, pp. 211). The themes and categories that emerged from the data were interest in climate and environment, education and self-education, consumerism, conscious choices, other related lifestyles, community, and social media. Ardévol and Gómez-Cruz (2014) argue that “the role of the ethnographer is to meaningfully explain the studied universe, taking into account the vernacular categories of their research subject (emic) and developing theoretical frameworks that help to organize them (etic), so that they can bring some light to their research question” (pp. 15-16). The categories that emerged from extensive note-taking of the transcript interviews and the observed material from the social media platforms were organized and connected on the basis of framing theory to create a “thick” description for a better understanding of the ways the participants use social media to make their daily climate change activism meaningful (Blaikie 2009, pp. 212).

The analytical tool

My data was analyzed with the analytical approach of framing theory (Goffman 1974) through the categories and themes that emerged from extensive note-taking of the interviews and observed material to understand the collective action frame developed by the participants of the zero waste movement in Denmark. The collective action frames are negotiated shared meaning, which is an ongoing development. The core framing tasks diagnostic, prognostic and motivational with the overlapping discursive, strategic and contested processes, as described in the theory section, all contribute in developing and generating the collective action frame (Benford & Snow 2000).

I operationalized these concepts in the analysis by examining the transcripts and the observed archived material together with the themes and categories that had emerged from the material. The core framing tasks mainly concerns these following questions or tasks. Diagnostic framing approaches the questions: What is the problem? What is in need of change and who is to blame for the problem? Prognostic framing approaches a solution, namely the question: What is to be done about the problem? Furthermore, motivational
framing concerns the development of social constructed vocabularies that motivate people
to engage in the collective action (Benford & Snow 2000).

The discursive, strategic and contested processes concern dynamic processes that interact
with the core framing tasks in developing meaning. The discursive processes are expressed
through the discourses, how people talk within and about the movement to others, as well
as the use of slogans in the zero waste movement. The strategic processes are constituted
through the four alignment processes. This is how the movement approaches new followers
by aligning different ideological connected issues, by extending its primary frame to
include potential new followers, by associating the issue with values and beliefs, and by
transforming old understandings to new meanings supported by statistics (Benford & Snow
2000). The contested processes concern the development, generation, and elaboration of the
collective action frame (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 625).

When examining the transcripts and the archived observed material, I looked for ways in
which these steps and processes in developing a collective action frame were described and
shown by the interviewees and in the Facebook groups and on Instagram. However, there
were not an explicit answer to every step in the framework; it was more or less intersected
and entangled in each other. For example, I looked for cues in the transcripts and on social
media of the language used and discourses expressed as well as how the interviewees
experienced the discourse around and within the movement. I looked for indications of
different values and beliefs expressed. I looked for ways the movement and the participants
approached potential new supporters. I also noted when other issues were included in
different discussions in the transcripts and on social media. As well as, I looked for hints or
ways in which old understandings are challenged and replaced by new meanings, for
example, how the participants described the threat of plastic.

**Ethical considerations and reflections on the study**

With any methodology approach, there are ethical considerations. With digital
ethnography, several ethical concerns must be considered when studying the use of social
media. According to Townsend and Wallace (2016), the key areas of concern for
researching social media include considering private vs. public data, informed consent,
anonymity, and risk of harm. These were important considerations for the research project as the Facebook groups were “closed” groups, which means that only members of the group can see the content and participate in the discussions in the group. To gain access to the groups, I contacted the administrator of the groups through their official Facebook page, which is the zero waste association of Denmark. I introduced the study and myself and asked for permission and informed consent from the admin to observe, ask questions and talk to members of the groups for the purpose of the study, as well as promising to the best of my ability to keep the members anonymous.

The admin explained that the groups are closed because people can then share tips on private matters without everyone in their network knowing e.g. what type of menstrual cup they use. This is to provide a safe online forum to discuss everyday matters of the zero waste lifestyle. However, she emphasized that the group's content is not sensitive, secret or closed as the conversations and discussions are rather mundane. Most of the discussions in the groups are in Danish. Therefore, when presenting the material, I have replaced the names with gender and provided my translation of the content. This way, the members will not be easily identified, when searching the web for the content. It is an important consideration to keep the members anonymous and to prevent risk of harm. On Instagram, users have the option to have a public or private account. When private, the user must accept a request from the user that wants to follow them before that person can see their account. When public, anyone can see the account and the images or videos uploaded. I decided to follow 44 public accounts, because the users had made an active choice to allow anyone to see. Also, I decided to make my account publicly available to show transparency. However, I noticed that many of the suggestions of other Danish zero wasters’ accounts that Instagram showed me, when following the Danish zero waste organization, were private Danish accounts.

With a digital ethnographic approach, there is a risk of being too subjective and unrepresentative on a macro level (Davis 2008, pp. 61). However, this is also one of the strengths of ethnography because the researcher acknowledges own subjectivity and therefore are more explorative and make fewer assumptions (Davis 2008). Another weakness is that ethnography traditionally is a slow science; ideally, it takes at least one
year to make a study (Ardévol & Gómez-Cruz 2014, pp. 10). As this thesis has been carried out in less than 10 weeks, it has been subject to limitations. In addition, the activity on my blog and Instagram account as well as lifestyle changes were modest due to time restraints.

The process of changing one’s lifestyle to zero waste, as well as studying the zero waste community is challenging and personal because you start to reflect on your own life and habits to understand the need for a change. However, it is necessary to keep a distance and look with a critical eye at what they are doing to make sense and understand the mutual knowledge of their social actions and connect it with theory. However, this process of digital ethnography is also very important as Pink et al. (2015) refer to O’Reilly’s (2005) definition that digital ethnography “acknowledges the roles of theory as well as the researcher’s own role and that (sic) views humans as part object/part subject” (O’Reilly 2005, pp. 3 cited in Pink et al. 2015, pp. 3). Therefore, being able to understand my own role and feelings experienced during the research is also an important part of the research process in order to understand better, how the social actors may feel.

The analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the observed online interaction and in-depth interviews with participants of the zero waste community in Denmark through the analytical tools of framing theory.

The problem

Overall, the problems addressed in the zero waste movement are plastic, the amount of waste we produce, and the impact our ways of living have on the environment. These issues are framed on social media such as Facebook and Instagram by sharing articles, videos, statistics, studies, and these texts are often intended to start discussions about the different issues as well as how to get to an alternative solution. The topics that are debated in the Facebook groups and Instagram range from eating, transportation, cleaning and household as well as consumption. Some people pursuing a zero waste lifestyle have dedicated their Instagram or created a blog to be a window for others to follow their zero waste journey. They and environmental NGOs such as “Plastic Change” also share facts and statistics
about why plastic and the amount of trash produced every year is a big problem for the environment to educate people who are not aware, but also to remind those who follow the lifestyle why it is important what they do. These facts are also shared on Facebook in forms of articles, links and videos.

**Excerpt Facebook post:**

*Female 1:* Call for discussion – Challenge: Are you flying on vacation – then forget everything about microplast and sorting waste, taking the bike, etc. etc. Air travel is polluting and there is only one solution – to stop using it… or what?

[Graphic] This much CO₂ does a regular two motor airplane produce in an hour with 150 passengers on board.

20 comments more

*Female 2:* [Link] – Carbon Footprint Calculator – Driving, Flying and Eating

*Female 3:* Drop short vacations. If you need to fly, then do it properly and stay away for a few months. That’s my opinion.

*Male 1:* The bigger motor, the more CO₂ emission. There is a lot you can do yourself. But if you want global, then I suggest you start at Mærsk. [Link] Freight ships deduce twice as much CO₂ as airplanes. – The engineer.

**Instagram post**

“Denmark’s national bird on a nest of waste in the middle of Copenhagen. We need a Danish plastic policy.”

*Figure 1. Examples of issues discussed on Facebook and Instagram.*

These posts about why plastic or air travel is so bad for the environment are also part of the movement’s development of their collective action frame, as they have developed the diagnostic frame that plastic and other unsustainable practices are bad for the environment
and should be avoided. They use statistics, studies and images of hurt animals or plastic in the nature to transform people’s view on plastic from something that is used every day without thinking further about it, to something that is considered harmful for the environment. These tools also strengths the “empirical credibility” and “experiential commensurability” as people can relate to these images because they also can experience and see it in their daily life. These tools furthermore support the movements' resonance of the collective action frame (Benford & Snow 2000).

Most of the interviewees expressed a keen interest in the climate and the environment. Some had had the climate and environment on their radar for many years - all their adult life. To others, it was a newer interest, which had pushed forward more and more lately due to the increasing attention from the media. Many of the people that I talked to had been introduced to the zero waste movement through education. They were either introduced to it from other students or from having worked with problems such as how to produce something more efficiently, studying environmental science and many of the current problematics, working with animals and researching, studying risk management with a focus on the humanitarian issues, and from own interests and curiosity to know more and educate themselves. The people that I talked to were well educated and had spent time on studying what they could do in their everyday life to reduce their impact on the world’s resources, as well as the background for why it is important to make a change. The same pattern emerged from observing the Facebook group: People ask questions about sustainable alternatives that they consider implementing in their everyday life to hear other people's experiences, to learn more about the product or method, and to share new experiences or findings with the community.

The conscious choices

Consumerism or anti-consumerism was one of the biggest themes from all the people that I interviewed and from what I observed online. For many, it had started as a frustration from what the local supermarket had to offer or not had to offer, mostly groceries wrapped in too much plastic. Based on self-education, individual research on how harmful and damaging plastic is, and online support from the international zero waste community, many of the
Interviewees had started to take educated and conscious choices in their everyday life regarding different areas such as grocery shopping, hygiene, and household. Some items are now deliberately avoided due to their plastic wrapping or harmful ingredients such as palm oil.

**Interviewer:** What do you do in your everyday routine to live with less trash?

**Interviewee:** “There are some things which I deliberately do not buy anymore. I am very conscious about my shopping. I buy everything I can in bulk” (Female, 32, my translation).

These deliberate educated decisions in the everyday routines are an example of the prognostic framing of the zero waste lifestyle. These deliberate choices are part of the solution to the huge amount of trash and plastic produced every year, if just every individual makes specific and conscious consumption choices to reduce plastic in their daily life.

Many of the interviewees expressed that they feel that they have a responsibility as a consumer. It is their duty as a citizen as part of the democracy to show their stand through what they purchase and what products they support or do not. They feel they have a responsibility to make these deliberate choices because no one else is doing it, as there are no current policies regarding plastic in Denmark.

**Interviewer:** What is zero waste to you?

**Interviewee:** “I always try to make the choice that is most sustainable and not just sustainable at my level, but also in terms of the production chain. To me, zero waste is to make informed choices about my consumer spending, and it has brought many things along” (Female, 36, my translation).

Social media is a very important factor of the movement because most of the communication is here. However, the use of social media to spread the message of plastic-free living would clash, if the participants did not comply with the ethical standards themselves, and it would hurt the lifestyle movement’s credibility and resonance (Benford & Snow 2000). This also refers to Gauntlett’s (2015) argument that real change begins in homes of everyday life.
As already mentioned above, for some these choices are clear political actions or statements through what they spent their money on, for others it is less of a political engagement and more of a hobby to shop products without plastic.

**Interviewer:** What does the zero waste lifestyle give you? What does the aesthetics on Instagram mean to you?

**Interviewee:** “To me, zero waste was also a chance to play with the creative thought process, design and the aesthetic on my Instagram. For me it is not so much about reducing waste, it’s more how I can make this simple and easy, and perhaps reduce my own consumption” (Male, 26, my translation).

There was a wish for some of them to go back to the natural way of living, some of them expressed that they feel that the way society is structured is far from being natural, however, it has become the natural way of doing things, which they want to change.

**Interviewer:** What does zero waste mean to you?

**Interviewee:** “To me, zero waste is the natural way to live, and this I try to implement with my son and my way of parenting. I try to get back to a more natural way because the way we are living today is very unnatural for our planet and our bodies, the way we work and do stuff” (Female, 34, my translation).

As the interviewee explains here, the zero waste lifestyle can be seen as a more holistic approach because it involves many aspects of life. This refers to the zero waste lifestyle’s flexibility and rigidity and inclusivity and exclusivity because the themes and ideas expressed in the zero waste discourse are not only limited to zero plastic and null waste. It also involves “going back to natural”, minimalism, veganism, health, ecology, parenting, and much more.

However, as much as they wish to make a change in society through their consumer choices, there was overall frustration about how difficult it can be to shop this way; It can be very time-consuming as many have to go to different shops to buy groceries, because the traditional supermarkets do not fulfill their needs to shop without plastic yet. In addition, the price of the products has a role to play, since most of the plastic-free wrapping is more expensive than its traditional equivalent.

**Interviewer:** Would you consider yourself to live zero waste? Why, why not?

**Interviewee:** “I just learned about the concept a few months ago. Accordingly, there can be a substantial difference between zero waste/null waste and being
environmentally conscious, because many small initiatives may be made. Therefore, what you call it doesn’t matter, and I’m working towards being completely zero waste. But it can be very difficult with the supply that’s available to consumers” (Female, 34, my translation).

The conscious consumer must make a conscious or deliberate choice in everyday life. A common belief is that small deliberate choices make a difference, “if you can’t do everything, just do a little bit in your everyday life and you are making a difference”, this is the mantra for many, and it is emphasized on social media. The slogan or mantra of the zero waste lifestyle is the six R’s, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repair Recycle, Rot.

![Image](https://example.com/6Rs.png)

Figure 2. Examples from Instagram on how to make less trash.

This mantra of the six R’s is an example of the movement’s discursive processes of communicating the possible solution that individuals can do on their own. This is also an example of the movement’s strategic and contested processes of developing the collective action frame by emphasizing the belief that every modest action in one’s daily life makes a difference beyond the individual’s personal life. To emphasize that every little action is better than no action, they try to appeal to people, who might otherwise be critical or skeptical about making changes to their life and convince them that even small and very
simple things are a step in the “right” direction. This belief of making a difference beyond one's own life is also one of the characteristics of a lifestyle movement (Haenfler et al. 2012), as discussed earlier.

The zero waste lifestyle is for some seen as a lifestyle that merely approaches living without trash and plastic, for others it is a more holistic approach to a sustainable lifestyle. The many deliberate choices in the everyday life that help reduce one’s production of plastic and waste are for many a rearrangement of many incorporated habits. Anyone can do it; it just depends on your attitude is the common belief. However, there was an overall acknowledgement from the interviewees that going zero waste is a journey – a process.

*Interviewer:* It could be that it is, or maybe it is not that different, but I do not think it is the easy choice, or maybe not in the beginning at least? What do you think?

*Interviewee:* “Well, I wouldn’t take this option, if it was difficult. Well, yes, it is not easy at the beginning because there are some boundaries and new habits to be created, but when these habits and boundaries are first broken and moved, and you and your surroundings have accepted it, then it just rolls from there” (Male, 26, my translation).

As the interviewee indicates, the transition to a zero waste lifestyle is challenging, I can also acknowledge and recognize this from my own experience of going zero waste. However, this is also used as a motivational factor that anyone can do the small changes such as switching to a cloth bag instead of a plastic bag, when grocery shopping, bringing your own water bottle and coffee cup, when you are on the go, instead of buying plastic bottles and single-use coffee cups.

**“Every little thing makes a difference”**

One of the biggest challenges was the resistance from one's closest network, family or partner. This challenge was biggest for those living with a partner or roommate who do not share the same values or readiness to change. Another challenge, as already mentioned, is that it can be very time-consuming because you have to go to different shops to get your groceries with no plastic. This is challenging because we live in a society today where everyone is busy all the time. However, most of them share the feeling that the conscious choice and transition towards zero waste gives them a feeling of calmness. The small things
made every day give them a sense of happiness and the feeling of actively doing something for the environment instead of just leaning back and wait for the politicians to act.

The belief that every little thing makes a difference is part of their motivational framing and contested process of developing a collective action frame: If we all do just a little bit, we can all make a bigger change. This feeling of doing something actively for the environment towards the better was expressed by most of the interviewees as a motivation for making these changes, as well as the belief that every little action matters, and it is better to do a little thing instead of doing nothing.

*Interviewer:* What do you think that we can do about the plastic issue?

*Interviewee:* “Every small act counts. Even if you choose to take just a little bit of plastic away from your daily life and slowly increases it over time, it makes a difference. Yes, it might be more of a go-do-it-yourself, and you do not have to be a member of a political party to do it. You can just do something on your own. You can do something just by talking to your friends and family about it because often it’s not because people like to throw out plastic, it’s just the way they have always done it” (Female, 25, my translation).

These small acts of letting go of plastic in everyday life for ethical reasons and taking care of our planet are examples of mundane citizenship (Bakardjieva 2009, 2012). As the interviewee describes it, it is not required to be a member of a political party, anyone can do it and share it, if they want to on social media to inspire or support others in approaching a zero waste lifestyle.

Social media was an important factor for the people that I interviewed. According to most of them, they use social media to get inspiration on zero waste, but also to share their own experiences with the zero waste community and to spread the message and lifestyle to the rest of their network.

*Interviewer:* How do you use social media?

*Interviewee:* “I decided to make my Instagram public because I’d like people to get inspired. It only takes one person who says, aah, I will also bring a cloth bag with me next time I go shopping to make a difference. Even small things make a difference, so if I could just help to inspire one person, then I think it would be awesome, and therefore, I decided to make my Instagram public and more zero waste themed” (Female, 32, my translation).

*Interviewer:* What do you feel that you get out of sharing images on Instagram?
**Interviewee:** “It might be that 99% of what I post on Instagram does not come any further than to the six other zero wasters who already live this way, but if just 1% moves a little further, then something has happened.” – (Female, 36, my translation).

The two interviewees wish to inspire and spread the message to their network by being good examples. When they talk about and show their lifestyle to their network on social media, they illustrate the discursive processes of the movement.

The development of the “Zero Waste Danmark” Facebook group was an important step in the development of the zero waste community in Denmark. One interviewee, who was one of the founders of the Facebook group, explained that she and six others who were interested in the zero waste lifestyle started the association “Zero Waste Danmark” because they wished to get the message out to more people, and by creating an association this became easier.

**Interviewer:** What do you feel about zero waste on Facebook?

**Interviewee:** “I am still amazed that we seven people who started in a kitchen in Aarhus have created a Facebook group with more than 2,000 members. These 2,000 people have in one way or another decided to make a conscious choice to live more sustainably, and that is amazing. Even though it might not be groundbreaking things, but I believe that even small things make a difference” (Female, 36, my translation).

Most of the communication in the zero waste community in Denmark now takes place in the Facebook groups. The association started the national group, but also several local groups that represent different cities and areas in Denmark. The idea behind the division into smaller groups is that people can discuss and share with other people in their area what is available to them or what kind of local difficulties they face. The Facebook groups and the organization of the association are examples of the community’s discursive processes and strategic framing (Benford & Snow 2000). The association and the many local Facebook groups are a strategic tool to invite and engage more people to approach the lifestyle by making it local, it becomes more tangible for people to participate, as well as it supports the movement’s resonance (Benford & Snow 2000). One of the founders of the Facebook group explained that the association also has monthly meetings in different parts of the country to create an offline community of like-minded people.
Many of the things that are shared on Instagram under the zero waste hashtags and discussed in the Facebook groups are very broad about the lifestyle and reasons behind it. However, they also share very concrete things that people do or wish to do in their everyday life to make a little or bigger difference, or how to handle everyday life situations with no plastic such as the example below. The DIY mentality is shared within and out of the zero waste movement.

**Facebook excerpt:**

Female 1: Curry on a white shirt 😊

Does anyone have a good advice for how I can get the yellow color of? I have tried to soak it in soap water, a combination of vinegar and baking powder, which almost took it all. I have washed it.

Does anyone have a good advice, or should I just give it a new purpose? 😓

12 comments more…

Female 2: I have just bought it, and now I read that there is palm oil in it. 😓 It is soap, which is made of ox bile, it breaks down stains with protein like blood. The producer of Ecoegg has produced a stain remover, that you can get at Sustain, which is effective. I don’t think there is palm oil in it either.

Female 3: You can try this on: [link] Homemade stain remover with baking soda - YouTube

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New post:

Female 4: What do you do with clothes that can’t be worn anymore? It is over washed, has stains and wholes, so I can’t give it away. Recycling maybe?

**Figure 3. Example from the Facebook group of how to remove curry from a white blouse.**

However, as much as they want to spread the message and the lifestyle, the people that I talked to and those in the Facebook group discussions were much aware of the language tone used when talking about the zero waste lifestyle to avoid being associated with the “crazy, angry vegan people”. The people I talked to were much aware of how they talk about their lifestyle to their family, friends and colleagues.

*Interviewer:* Do you tell people about your lifestyle, when the conversation turns to sustainability? Why, why not?
Interviewee: “I don’t want to be too instructing because it is my choice and people should make their own choices, but you can always inform and use a sense of humor to soften it up a bit, so it doesn’t get too serious” (Female, 34, my translation).

Interviewer: How do you handle it, when people are skeptical about your lifestyle?

Interviewee: “Just because I have found what I believe to be the absolute truth, does not mean that it is the absolute truth for other people. So, trying to push those towards something that they are not ready for will create a counter effect, I believe” (Female, 36, my translation).

These accounts from the interviewees relate to Steentjes and colleagues' (2017) study on social norms associated with climate change through acts of interpersonal activism. As their findings suggested, confrontation on a high carbon-emission lifestyle could have a social cost. This is also what the interviewees experienced and which they are much aware of. They feel that they have to be careful about how they talk to their network about their lifestyle decisions in order not to be perceived too preachy.

However, it was a general experience from the interviewees that being a conscious consumer and making deliberate decisions in everyday life sets a good example for others when shopping or doing other things. It is a new way of being a consumer, one said. There was an overall wish that the rise in the number of conscious consumers, preferring one item over the other, will have a ripple effect so that, eventually, it will create a requirement on stores and producers to produce items packed in no or at least less plastic.

Interviewer: How have you inspired others to start the zero waste lifestyle?

Interviewee: “To be a good example, a good inspiration, by doing it yourself that is what has worked best, especially towards my boyfriend, just by making these choices a natural part of my everyday life” (Female, 36, my translation).

The example above illustrates the movement’s frame amplification because the interviewees highlight the aspects that are most significant (Benford & Snow 2000) in that she explains how these habits have become a natural part of her everyday life and have influenced her closest personal network. Being a good example and influencing those in one’s personal network to the extent that they influence people in their personal networks illustrate the findings in the study of Nekmat et al. (2015), namely that social networks have a role in the micro-mobilization of collective action.
Discussion

The aim of this study is to contribute to an understanding of the ways participants in the zero waste community in Denmark use social media to make their everyday climate change actions meaningful. I found that the participants of the zero waste community in Denmark use social media in a variety of ways both for finding inspiration and support, but also to share their own everyday mundane action against plastic. The online social network provides them a sense of community and a sense of “not being alone, there are others out there too, who care about our earth and environment”. This sense of being part of something bigger that is not just them, a single person, who wants to avoid plastic for the sake of the planet. This movement, which they can see, when scrolling through Instagram and Facebook under the zero waste hashtags, gives them motivation, inspiration, and meaning to continue their everyday routines towards less plastic in their life.

“Personal is political”

The zero waste movement is a lifestyle movement (Haenfler et al. 2012), the main communication of which is enabled by social media. People who are loosely connected by the same interest across the world drive the movement. They have an intrinsic motivation to participate (Shirky 2010), which is centered on their personal and emotional identifications and rationales (Bennett 2012, pp. 26). Their acts of participation are shown in a variety of ways online and offline (Uldam & Vestergaard 2015). However, whether the interviewees perceived their participation as political varied.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that it is political, what you do? Why?

*Interviewee:* “No, not really. I think, I just will say that I fight my own battle with what I can do on a personal level” (Male, 25, my translation)

*Interviewer:* Do you feel that you are politically engaged through your lifestyle choices? Why?

*Interviewee:* “Yes, for sure. The person who said that you can vote with your money, that is so true. It is political in so many ways. I believe that I am as political as I can be that taking educated decisions about my consumption is a political way of doing things, so yes definitely!” (Female, 36, my translation).

*Interviewer:* Do you consider your lifestyle choices to be a political statement? Why?
Interviewee: “I wouldn’t call it a political statement because I don’t think I have ever been that, but I will rather say that it is a mix of who I am as a person, and that I am very conscious of the way I want to inspire people” (Male, 26, my translation).

Interviewer: Do you consider your lifestyle choices to be a political statement? Why?

Interviewee: “I think it became political for me because I’m so passionate about it. I think deep down in my stomach that it is the right thing to do, and everyone should do it” (Female, 34, my translation).

For some, it is a clear and very conscious political statement of how they choose to live their lives and how they choose to spend their money. However, for others, it is more blurred whether they think their everyday lifestyle is a sign of political or civic engagement, as this engagement does not adhere to traditional perceptions of parliamentary politics (Uldam and Vestergaard 2015). People have many reasons for changing their lifestyle to zero waste. One focus that appeared in all the interviews and across social media is the consciousness on consumer choices and the deliberate choices in the everyday life that for some are clearly a political or civic engagement, where others consider it more as a hobby, part of who they are, their lifestyle, or integrity and ethical responsibility as a human.

Figure 4. Examples of Instagram posts showing mundane practices such as grocery shopping.

These everyday choices in their daily life can be related to the concept of subactivism and mundane citizenship because many of these acts are emerged into their daily living,
depending on how far in the process/journey they are. They are either political or have an ethical reference to the environment, another personal motivation, or a perceived responsibility as a consumer. Furthermore, most actions are often done at home or in their everyday routines, which they then share on social media, or find inspiration and support for alternative ways of doing things without plastic on social media (Bakardjieva 2009, 2012).

People’s rationale for joining the zero waste journey takes many forms as regards interest and values, from climate and environment awareness, animal welfare, personal health, personal experience, education, self-motivation or a wish to see a different world, or a combination of other lifestyles such as veganism, organic food, or minimalism that fits together with the zero waste lifestyle values.

**Interviewer:** How did you become aware of the zero waste movement?

**Interviewee:** “I’ve travelled a lot and simply seen, very directly, where trash ends and that made me think about, when I was travelling, where does my trash end? I throw it in a dumpster, but what happens afterwards? (Female, 25 – my translation).

**Interviewer:** How did you get started with the zero waste lifestyle?

**Interviewee:** “My city started a waste sorting system, which I thought was really exciting. Therefore, I started sorting all my waste on the back stairs in my apartment, but very quickly, I realized that it would take long time for the city really to implement the waste sorting system, and all the plastic and trash just grew to a huge pile on the back stairs. It was like right in front of my eyes, all the trash and plastic that I used and produced. Therefore, I started to research it, and then started to avoid plastic as a consumer” (Female, 32 - my translation).

These reflections by the interviewees illustrate how being confronted with the issue very directly, as they were, can make you critically reconsider, if how you are living is the best way for you and nature. Moreover, from there making a change to self-actualize and self-realize yourself as part of the reflexive project of the self (Giddens 1991), which also became a motivational factor for political participation (Svensson 2011).

Along with this is also a DIY ethos of go-do-it-yourself - some of the interviewees expressed frustration of just waiting for political action, which has motivated them to start to do something themselves, even if that something is just a little bit.
*Interviewer:* What do you think that you can do about the plastic issue as an individual?

*Interviewee:* “We can do a lot of things by ourselves… actually; I think we need to do something. I think that perhaps we in Denmark generally tend to expect that issues are being solved for us, and that the politicians will make the change…. But I think we need to make fundamental changes in our society, and those changes we cannot expect that the politicians will make” (Female, 36, my translation).

This also relates to the "personal is political" approach that politics is not only shaped by politicians but also by citizens as to how they choose to live their life and spend or not spend their money (Gauntlett 2015, pp. 28; Acuto 2014). This account and expressions from more of the interviewees that a fundamental change needs to happen to counteract on climate changes, support Blühdorn (2007) and Bennett (2012) argument presented earlier that a radical change of the established system is necessary, but that it seems out of the public and political will and ability to do. However, with the rise of the zero waste movement a bigger will from parts of the public becomes present, which puts demands on businesses and politicians to do something about the plastic and waste issue because many of the people approaching the zero waste lifestyle seems to support that change needs to happen on multiple levels (Blühdorn 2007).

The do-it-yourself mentality is on different levels. From consciously changing lifestyle and habits to be the change, they want to see in the world, to very concretely creating and producing their own items, such as soap, toothpaste and other hygiene products, to cook and grow food from basics, to reuse and upcycle different items such as clothing and furniture to avoid throwing anything out. This is also a response and a stand against the consumer culture in the Western society today. Many of the pictures that are shared on Instagram are images of homemade or homegrown food, and a variety of DIY projects.
Interviewer: Why do you think that it is worth it to make your own oat milk?

Interviewee: “I definitely think it is worth it. Of course, it is more demanding than just going down to the shop and buy it, and someone else has made it for you. It is just something completely different, the pleasure you get when you drink your homemade oat milk, I just attribute it a completely different value” (Female, 32, my translation).

As the interviewee expresses the feeling of reward and the accomplishment, she feels when drinking her homemade oat milk. This is an example of what Gauntlett (2011) talked about in his book *Making is Connecting* - that people like to create things and share it with a group of like-minded as it gives a sense of community, recognition, a place of support and inspiration, and the internet provides a place to easily share it.

Since this study was conducted as a case study, it only provides little insight into the situation at this specific point in time (Collins 2010), and the study only provides insight into people that I talked to and observed within the movement. Blaikie (2009, pp. 192) argues that it is not useful to generalize from a single case study, this was not the purpose of the study either, but to get a better understanding of how participants of the zero waste community in Denmark use social media to make daily climate change activism meaningful. However, the people that I talked to had generally experienced that this lifestyle is something that will spread. It is not just a trend. I think this is an interesting and developing area of research, which would profit from further research into online and offline social dynamics, civic participation and social norms. It would also be interesting to
do more case studies with local communities around the world to understand how they perceive zero waste to be meaningful. But this lifestyle also raises the question what effects do these small mundane changes really have on climate change? Further research can be done on whether these changes in people’s lifestyle really have an impact on climate change, and how social norms can affect people's decision to alter their lifestyle.

**Conclusion**

This case has attempted to illustrate the many ways that people participate in and make their contributions to the zero waste community in Denmark meaningful. They use social media to be inspired, share experiences and feel part of a community that emphasize climate change activism through mundane every day routines. Bakardjieva’s (2009, 2012), concepts of subactivism and mundane citizenship provide a better understanding of why the many small acts in people’s daily routines and everyday lives that may seem pointless in a broader perspective make a difference. Bakardjiev (2009) argues, it is precisely these small, ordinary acts “grounded in the individual’s paramount reality” that is an important dimension of democracy (pp. 103), and as many of the interviewees repeatedly expressed the belief that every little act matters further supports this stand, and provide reasons for why their mundane climate change acts become meaningful to them.

Social media plays an important role for the participants of the zero waste community and for acts of mundane citizenship (Bakardjieva 2012). It is through social media many learned about the lifestyle, as well as the awareness of the lifestyle is spread through social networks. It is through the online discussions in the Facebook groups and on Instagram that the participants create, challenge and negotiate a collective action frame of the movement that inspire and motivate them to continue to do small acts in their everyday life (Benford & Snow 2000). Social media provides individuals, who have an intrinsic motivation, the opportunity to engage, participate and share personal ideas (Shirky 2010). Social media also provides the option to just scroll through in the news feed and perhaps become hooked. This way the use of social media becomes an “interactive process of personalization” (Bennett & Segerberg (2012), creating identity and relations that are meaningful to the individual.
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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Interview guide

The following is a translated guide of the questions and themes for the interviews. These questions were used as a guideline in the interviews, although this specific order and specific wording varied accordingly to the respondents answer and direction in the interview. Depending on the interviewee’s interest some questions were elaborated further than others.

How old are you?
Where do you live?
When do you use social media for? For what, and why?
What does climate and environment mean to you?
Do you think about how you can live more environmentally friendly? How?
What do you do in your everyday life to live more sustainable?
Do you consider yourself politically engaged? Why, Why not?
Where do you find inspiration to live sustainable?
What is zero waste for you?
How long have you lived zero waste?
Why did you start to live zero waste?
What has been the biggest challenges approaching zero waste?
What has been the best thing about approaching zero waste?
Where do you find inspiration for zero waste?
What is your friends and family reactions on you living zero waste?
Do you talk to your acquaintances about zero waste and sustainable lifestyle? How?
Do you try to persuade your acquaintances to live zero waste?
How much is zero waste in your daily life?
Do you experience yourself to be part of a group? Why, why not?
Tell me about your experiences with zero waste.