

Abstract

The Environment has become an essential ingredient in many corporations' discourse due to new demands from customers, political bodies, NGO:s and shareholders. Even though the aim, form and character of this discourse may vary the need for legitimacy is a recurrent argument from corporate representatives describing their motives for including environmental issues in their communication. According to Ulrich Beck (1998) society is undergoing a transformation due to an increase in the global risks facing humanity leading to new expectations and (re)actions. Complexity, multiplicity, uncertainty, and ambivalence have become dominating principles in a society moving from modernity into the second or reflexive modernity. Risks, where environmental ones play an essential role, create expectations for reflexivity - self-questioning - on an individual as well as organizational and structural level. Further, the changing nature of roles and positions taken by politicians, citizens and corporations pose fundamental questions on who is responsible and for what. Often there are situations where boundaries "become not boundaries so much as a variety of attempts to draw boundaries" (Beck, Bonss, and Christoph, 2003, p. 19). In these circumstances, corporate environmental communication is not necessarily a response to political demands but could likewise be a response to economical ones due to an increasing appetite for products with higher environmental performance. Or it could be both. In this paper we aim to discuss the role of corporations as providers of information on environmental risks based on the notion of the dissolution of boundaries between public and private actors in terms of mission and responsibility. We will do so by examining environmental discourses based on a notion of market and political rhetoric provided in the annual reports of 20 corporations listed on the Stockholm stock exchange - Large Cap.