Chapter 7: The Idea of Social Movements and the Journey to Glasgow – What Is the Right Way to Live?

November 2020 – December 2021: On a theory of democratic grassroots movements that can change the world

The two worlds

What does it mean to live together freely as equals? To create social spaces in which everyone can live a life in dignity? What is life about, and what are the movements about? How can they change history – and how should they be organised internally?

Some of the young people of Mynttorget stand near the huge stage, looking into the crowd. Tens of thousands of their peers are standing in front of them in the main square in Glasgow. It is November 2021 and still astonishingly warm in Scotland. Once again, all the countries have gathered their delegations for the climate conference. Two years have passed since the meeting in Madrid.

NGO employees who support the grassroots movements are also present. But what are these NGO workers even doing here? This is officially an event for grassroots movements, especially youth movements. And so, the question arises: how can we organise the relationship between movements and NGOs without a few employees disrupting processes of democratisation or even making them impossible, by intervening too much in the movements? The young people of Fridays For Future already have enough to do, trying to organise democracy among themselves and especially at a global level, I say to myself: who can appear here on the stage in front of the world media? Who represents the movement? Conflicts have come about in the last few days,

important and necessary conflicts, including over the much too central role of the Global North.

Because at these COP meetings, which many young people describe as a kind of traumatic experience, as the world of adults in smart suits barely seems to take their future seriously, the question becomes especially important: how can we ensure that those people are heard who are most affected by the climate crisis and most vulnerable, in the Global South and in indigenous populations? They are barely allowed into the official halls of the conference, the "Blue Room", in contrast with the representatives of the fossil economy.

During these months, some of the privileged activists often refuse to give speeches when the UN and other organisations invite them to do so, and give other activists the chance instead. But then many organisers and media don't report on the speeches.

A few, mainly male employees from a few, mainly American or global NGOs (most NGOs help throughout these years in a way which the young people appreciate) have tried to put together a problematic kind of "Champions' League" of climate activism since summer 2019. Sometimes ignoring the movements themselves, they choose the "best" speakers and make others invisible in the process, often unintentionally. And usually, the ones who are chosen by the NGOs are young people who are already privileged and hold the most social and cultural capital, as well as being distinctly older than the 17-year-olds who continue to maintain the global structures and really participate in school strikes. This damages – from our perspective as activists in grassroots movements – the free and equal cooperation between young people. It is often justified with the argument that the Global South is being supported, although it indirectly means that employees in the Global North gain power. Given that I myself am in a similarly privileged position, this raises questions I have asked myself in the past few years: How can all possible actors help on an intergenerational basis, without intervening in the internal structures of the youth movement?

Behind the stage in Glasgow, I think to myself: if these children already have to be confronted with a world that's anything but democratically organised, where so many things are already shaped by privileges and the pressure to achieve, adults should at least respect the young people's internal democracy. At that moment, a new speech starts by the Global South activists and I wake up from these thoughts. In the audience, I can see so many of the Swedes who have travelled to Scotland. During the last months, they have succeeded in building strong structures as FFF Sweden, which is open to everyone under 26.

It is a counter model to the small elite groups of chosen ones: an autonomous grassroots movement of a hundred of children and young people.

But how does it work, and how does the whole movement work? In my university rooms I organise countless conversations with the FFF activists. What do you actually do when you're working on the climate movement, locally, nationally, and globally? A picture gradually emerges which shows not only how grassroots movements differ from associations, organisations such as NGOs, and political parties, but in a certain sense also what is really important in life.

Challenges for movements

Gradually, during the last year, the group of FFF activists has been renewed and doubled. The older ones from Mynttorget have stayed on, and everyone is happy to find that new people have turned up in many cities, including Stockholm, and have found their place: not only on the ground in front of parliament, but also in the chats online. It is the space in which the young people are connected, beyond all the concrete plans for strikes and without any pressure to perform. The main point: it's ok for people to admit that they don't know everything. For many of them, these FFF groups have become the best school you can imagine.

And now, so many of the members of these groups are standing in the audience in Glasgow, listening to their friends from across the world. They are talking about new oil pipelines being planned in their countries in the Global South, which are supported by European and American corporations (on these speeches, see Nakamura 2021).

And I am filled with a sense of despair. It can be seen in these months more generally, too: the structure of the grassroots movements, or of democracy in general, also has a vulnerable side. A few people from the outside, if they don't follow the "policies" for working together, can cause damage. A pattern becomes visible. There are a few principles which these directors of communications and strategists from NGOs keep applying again and again – at least, so it seems from my limited point of view. Most older organisers often help with good results by supporting the whole movement transparently at a global, national, or local level. In contrast with this, a few NGOs which are active globally have made it their mission to "support" the movements "from within". Their problematic strategy is expressed in various interconnected measures. As mentioned above, the NGO workers choose a few individual young activists

and declare them "spokespeople", whom they want to transform into globally recognisable faces in the media. They claim that this is the only thing that works in the long term. The movement itself has no say – either in the question of whether there should be spokespeople, or in the question of who these should be. The differences in the organisational structure become particularly clear when we consider that the children are taking a risk and are striking, while the adults are doing their work and earning money from this situation.

Sometimes, some NGO employees even expose children to risky situations, without explaining the possible consequences. They then end up facing governments and the public and being flooded with hate and threats. Finally, a few privileged young people are often grouped into small elites for which separate channels are made available and meetings are arranged which others know nothing about – which sometimes hinders the young activists from building democratic channels of communication and decision structures. One effect of this dynamic is also that problematic power relations arise within the movement, between a few adults and this "elite group". It may be the case that officially in these groups no "formal" decisions are reached, but informal decisions are often taken, for instance regarding "narratives" which then shape the whole strategy. And all of this nourishes a way of thinking which leads away from the children's rebellious school strike and focuses on young adults who are involved in professional "campaigns". Children who have helped to build up the movement for years are ignored, and end up withdrawing.

This particularly affects those who cannot express themselves perfectly and who can perhaps not take as much stress, I think to myself, feeling the winter air in Scotland. And it does – that is the insight I've reached over these years – have consequences for world history. The basic structures of the movement become weaker. Of course, one can also argue: the NGO workers are doing excellent and effective work, and they only want what's best. That seems obvious. For some of the young people, especially in the Global South, the support of the NGOs is crucial, giving them the time, space and other resources to be activists and to reach a much bigger audience. And still, in Glasgow I can't help thinking: that also causes destruction; the idea of democracy itself is being destroyed, the very idea that we are all equally valuable and that young people in particular have the right to shape their world and their movement.

How to change history

But what is a grassroots movement? In the interviews with FFF activists which I conduct at Stockholm University, I try to understand the necessary ingredients. History shows: to change politics, we need grassroots democratic movements which are structured differently from associations, political parties or NGOs, but which can be supported by them. The second necessity: disruption, meaning not just demonstrations or "campaigns" but civil disobedience, strikes, and blockades. This combination of democratic popular movement (not small groups organised top-down) and disruption is explosive (Chenoweth in Thunberg 2022). Such movements were at the centre of most or almost all progressive social and political changes: the workers' movements, women's movements, and civil rights movements, XR, FFF and Black Lives Matter (and they are often not discussed enough in "European" theories of transformation, such as Göpel 2022 and Rosa 2020; detailed counterexamples are Celikates 2016 and von Redecker 2021).

But most people, I suspect during these months, do not really know what such democratic movements are (movements for adults, that is: XR, People For Future, etc.) or how they work – and perhaps that is why they don't join in the first place.

The logic of substantial democracy – what is a grassroots movement?

A large part of the research into grassroots movements seems to ignore two points, or barely to emphasise them. These become clear from the example of the FFF and XR groups: on the one hand, what I call the "non-instrumental" convivial logic of the relationships on which grassroots movements rely. And on the other, the fact that they are really something different from just a part of a "civil society", as mainstream sociology claims. This dimension seems to be much clearer in theories and reports from the Black feminist movements and from BIPOC communities, and to be captured better conceptually and in terms of social theory (Springer 2005; Rodriguez 1998; Garza 2020; Keisha-Khan Y. Perry 2016; Gomez et al. 2011).

Thus, Gene Sharp (1973), Graeber (2014) and Engler and Engler (2017), standard works on activism and nonviolent resistance, do explore how important movements are to progressive change in human history: with the

discovery that we can connect nonviolent direct action with the organisation of mass movements. But the internal organisation of these movements is only discussed very rarely, or only in technical terms relating to decision processes ("Self-Organizing Systems"; "Holacracy" etc.: Robertson 2016). This means that the core, the idea of non-instrumental relationships, is barely mentioned. Perhaps we could think about sociology and theories of democracy differently, starting from these movement structures. This could change the concept of democracy in the social sciences and humanities, which still don't pay enough attention to the crucial "substantial" aspects.

So what distinguishes the grassroots organisations that change history from other forms of organisation? In the research there is a good understanding of the fact that they are organised democratically on a grassroots basis, not hierarchically (with all the problems of informal power relations), although they address the masses, the broad population, which is invited to participate politically. They are devoted to a cause, something which must change, and they often tie this clearly to a political demand (such as women's suffrage). Additionally, this involvement of "ordinary" people takes the form of community building and organisation, often meaning that methods of strictly peaceful civil disobedience are applied, which at the margins of the movement may shift to forms of sabotage (Malm 2021) – including in the civil rights movement and among the suffragettes – but are never supposed to harm people but to respect the dignity of everyone.

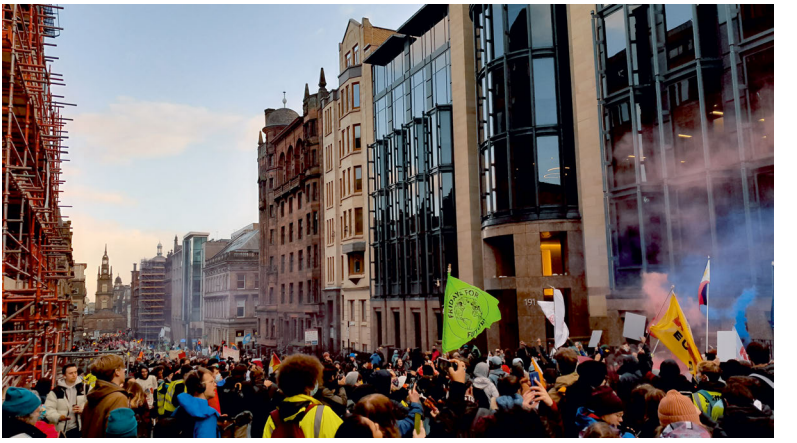
But what is first needed to make all this possible, I realise increasingly in my studies, is a different "social logic": the logic of "non-instrumental" relationships, to use Max Horkheimer's central concept from his Critical Theory (2013). This means not wanting to gain an advantage from other people; it means not using them, but affirming each other, caring. No one is profiting from the work of others; all of them can show themselves transparently in public and don't have to hide themselves as the people involved in the central organisation. In addition to that, no one has to prove successes to funders, as is the case for NGOs, which creates pressure to perform and even something like ableism. Being imperfect is fine, being ill is okay, and in fact it's okay to be lying in bed at home, as in the opening of Astrid Lindgren's *The Brothers Lionheart* – by listening, you can still be an important part of the movement, because someone is keeping you updated and telling you what's going on. This kind of community building can also become what Spade (2021), von Redecker (2021), and Garza (2020) argue is the centre of really transformative movements: mutual aid, helping each other, meaning that the living situation of the people involved

is at the heart of the movement, along with the material and existential worries and resources which are shared. All of this describes the ideal case; in real life, platforms, chats, and central organisational places might last for one, two or three years. Then they have to be replaced with new inventions.

However, that does not mean that in grassroots movements we are present as private individuals, as some people might believe. Quite the opposite: someone who is there as a private individual will damage the movement, sooner or later. Because it is only when we operate as part of the movement (in that sense not dissimilarly to members of an association or a democratic workplace) can we see everyone as equal; not preferring some people and only interacting with them, or putting our own interests first, creating informal centres of power.

Challenges in Glasgow – unequal, but still equal

"Watch out, it's starting!" The crowd in Glasgow applauds when a new activist climbs onto the stage. And there they stand, talking to their friends from across the world, the Swedish group. They send pictures and messages to those who had to stay at home.



Across the world, activists are trying to create similar structures, confronting parallel challenges when it comes to building a global democracy. The working groups are useful when it comes to finding new global strike dates or

agreeing on a hashtag, but there is still a lack of structures that would make it easier to get involved globally, some activists say. And at the same time, there is the challenge that those young people who come from the regions, classes and sectors of society that are most severely affected ought to take on a leading role, but without just having the responsibility foisted on them by those in the Global North. That is what most of the conversations in the corridors of the COP are about. How can we organise ourselves as equals when some are so privileged?

How do you do that, I ask the young activists in our conversations about the development of Fridays For Future in Sweden: how do you try to meet each other as equals?

The development of Fridays For Future

They have created a code of conduct to structure the way they interact, as well as guidelines for the content of their cause, which they publish as a manifesto.

The crux of all this is the willingness to respect one another and set off on a path of learning and deepening democracy, in which people are prepared to question their own standpoints and help each other to understand themselves and others better.

They create democratic monthly meetings and "rotate" these, choosing different "facilitators" for each meeting, and establishing a clear agenda beforehand, along with ways to make decisions. Basically, they are consensus-oriented and only vote in an emergency, in which case a proposal needs 80 % agreement within one or two days. In this way, they avoid the process of fighting for majorities, which is so crucial for political parties and associations and for formal democracy in general.

These unifying organisational solutions are strengthened further by the strikes as a common form of action. The experience of the strikes, in which the young activists obstruct the status quo of the fossil society as equals, draws them together even more. Most of them describe how the weekly strikes, this form of civil disobedience, contain both a feeling of power, since they no longer just have to watch while their world is destroyed, and also a sense of exposure, which can be connected with hate from passers-by. This also leads to grief – and to the danger of burning out if that grief is not expressed and met with support.

In this context, their invention is all the more central: they have the chats, in which they can all participate as equals, and the physical places such as Myntorget where they can express grief and fear, too. This combines the logic of social relationships with specific aspects of FFF's organisation: the young people do not simply organise themselves decentrally, as Extinction Rebellion does. In XR there is no real central meeting point, but at most allotted rules and mandates, through what is known as the holacracy or SoS model (Robertson 2016; Extinction Rebellion 2023). This is what makes a crucial contribution to the strength of the movement, and works: a permanent exchange on an equal footing in a central location, which is also free of the pressure to be right or to excel. Without such a central place (ideally both virtual and physical), movements seem not to work, contrary to all theories of decentralised movements.

FFF and People For Future are in this sense a very specific form of social movement, because they combine the open democratic structure of a decentralised set-up with organisational solutions (shared meeting points) which enable much more direct and non-instrumental relationships with everyone. That solves (at least to a degree) the problem of other movements that in spite of the decentralised approach the same people generally decide what is to happen – the people who are the loudest and who have the most resources, often middle and upper middle class people (see Bourdieu 2010 for the dangers of classism within social groups which create informal ways of communicating – by mentioning some specific culture and showing a certain "habitus" – which allow only a few to feel truly included).

I look across at the apple trees in front of the university building and suddenly work out that this is actually about democratisation not just in terms of content, but also in terms of organisation. Sometimes outsiders understand this to mean that everyone should do everything, as if there shouldn't be any roles or mandates. But that is not the case. And it is also not about levelling down. It seems absurd to stop those people from making speeches who are the best at doing so, in the name of democracy; the point is that they shouldn't be the only ones who are visible. So it is about making sure everyone is involved without one person deciding how the others should behave; the older ones, in particular, should not be deciding that, since there is a power imbalance between them and the younger ones. That is why the independence and autonomy of the movement as a youth movement is so important to me. Instead, as People For Future for activists over 26, we build our own complementary structures.

How organisations can work together with children – new rules

A few of the older ones then intervene in relation to the role of the NGO employees. And with time, the bosses of these few organisations do see that something is going wrong in terms of the power relations. Many of them don't even have rules defining how their employees should interact with children, which ought to be standard and which is the case for most social organisations. The result of these interventions is a document which I write at the university. It is anchored and accepted in meetings with those responsible for the biggest global climate networks.

It is called "Guidelines for cooperation between generations (NGOs and youth movements)," and it states that the movement must belong first and foremost to the children and young people, and to all of them, democratically – they have a right to self-organisation. Secondly, power relations must change, so that NGO workers communicate with the movement as a whole and do not intervene in the structures, splitting off groups and forming elites, and making the children dependent on them in an unhealthy way. Thirdly, children's attention must always be drawn clearly to the dangers of current and possible future situations, and they must be given information so that they can make informed decisions themselves. And fourthly, bringing everything together: the welfare of the children and their own position as political subjects must always have priority; adults must put this first.

During these years of intergenerational cooperation in the climate movements, it is astonishing how many adults do not want to commit to such formulations, talking of "ageism" and claiming that they are being discriminated against when they are asked to give young people precedence. In Sweden, already early on, since the 1970s, the playwright and theatre director Suzanne Osten (2009) was drawing attention to the unequal power relations between children and adults, and formulated this as an imperative for the whole of society: to make these very power relations visible, and respond to them in such a way that young people are not oppressed but are taken seriously as subjects. Roger Hart (1992) makes similar points for UNICEF in his text "Children's Participation – From Tokenism to Citizenship".

More than "civil society"

However, in a certain sense, through this limitation on the power of NGOs, an even bigger issue becomes obvious. Because what the young people of FFF and the adults of Extinction Rebellion have built up in the previous years is not at all appropriately described as "civil society", a term which applies more to organisations and associations. The concept of civil society and the theories behind it seem to belong to and contribute to an ideology which trivialises protest and weakens it into a friendly "deliberative discourse", to use Jürgen Habermas' term (see Chappell 2012).

But doesn't the term civil society – and often theories of "global governance" in relation to particular actors in sustainability transformation (see e.g. Linnér/Wibeck 2019) – come from a way of thinking that takes the sting out of these very movements by dividing society into four sectors – the public sector, the market, the private sector and the sector of civil society, which is more about ideas than about material concerns? And then, in such a "friendly" way, even gives these "ideas people" a seat at the table of "stakeholders", so that there can be a discussion at a "round table"?

But do movements such as FFF and XR not want to change the power relations, not just bring their arguments into existing discourses of those in power? So mainstream research problematically contributes to a process which endeavours to weaken the movements through its manner of describing them.

This seems to be a crucial difference to an (often right-wing) populistic movement that tries to speak for a fictitiously created "will of the people". In contrast, the democratic grassroots movements (even historically) are not fighting for the specific interests of one group in society (even if it looks like that on the surface), but for the inclusion of one group in the realm of the dignity of all people, the equality and freedom of all, beyond borders, ethnicity, gender etc. This is an aspect which gives the movement its democratic legitimacy. It is not about pretending to understand the "will of the people", or about asserting particular interests, but about creating real equity, justice, and humanity for all.

That is why it is so important, I think, that these groups use means which guarantee everyone's dignity, even the one of the persons who disagree. The danger is real to hurt the common fabric of dignity in the name of justice. In this sense, every movement needs – if one doesn't want to rely on the lucky constellation of people who have a strong informal power position and use it to include everyone and go beyond all forms of domination – a permanent learn-

ing process how to create such real substantial democracy, an open space for different analyses, real inclusion; learning, how to stop the concentration of power in the hands of few (see the chapter on education).

The "blue zone" and the negotiations in the COP rooms

After the protest march through Glasgow, activists of all ages sit together for the next days inside and outside the COP rooms. The local organisers have done an enormous amount of work, over many months. They not only organise the strike with tens of thousands of children and young people. They create a meeting point in the middle of the city where they can all gather: Dylan, Saoi, Sandy, and so many more. Some of the Swedish activists have met already in Brussels in March and in Lausanne in August 2019; all of them form the group of activists who keep in contact the whole time, organising the movement day after day, month after month, year after year, upholding the common structures and debates. Together with Mitzi, Marja, Sommer, Eric, Arshak, Annika, Theo, Patsy, Ianthe, Erik, Yusuf, and so many more from all five continents – who keep in contact with each other and many people on Mynttorget over all these years.

Often, during these two weeks of discussions in the Cryosphere Pavilion, the activists end up in the middle of what is known as the "blue zone" at the conference; a space which is cordoned off and guarded, in which the crucial negotiations also take place. This is where research on the melting ice is presented, and it is also where (far too few) indigenous activists from countries such as Canada report on the devastating consequences of the crisis for their livelihoods.

How do the young people actually feel here, in these COP spaces: included or excluded? How do they experience what is seemingly the most important meeting on the climate crisis, with their specific intersectional and regional backgrounds? Isabelle from Mynttorget is not only here as a strike activist, but also as a researcher. She began going on strike when she was in high school, and now she is finishing her studies. She has made it the goal of her final project at Stockholm University to gain a better understanding of her fellow activists globally.

While she records interviews, I walk over to the official negotiation room. They are sitting there together, the official delegates of all nations. They have the mandate to respond to the crisis with political decisions. They could theo-

retically – in conversation with governments – agree on real solutions, a crisis plan to stop emissions, keep fuel in the ground and protect forests, animals, and the soil.

I sit down towards the back of the huge plenary hall. One country after another takes the microphone. One after another, they describe their national situations. Proposals are presented for changes to a joint document.

After I've heard three delegations, at most, I begin to get restless. Once again, the speaker begins to say that he – the room is dominated by men in suits – agrees with all the others and wants to commit to a "net zero goal for 2050", "as set out in the Paris Agreement". There's no point in even talking about that, I think to myself. And after half an hour I understand the strategy of almost all governments across the world.

Rather than focusing on the 1.5-degree limit in the Paris Agreement (or even on the "well below 2 degrees" target) or agreeing on concrete measures, they behave as if an abstract goal like "net zero in 2050" is enough for the situation. But the crux of this is the absolute quantity of emissions; naming a year does not define this at all.

First of all, countries ought to be aiming for quite different zero emissions goals, depending on their wealth and infrastructure, I say to myself. This global solidarity is set out in the Paris Agreement. And secondly, the whole CO2 budget for this limit will already have been used up in a few years, or in six or seven years, to be precise (Anderson et al. 2020) if emissions continue to remain the same. Used up forever.

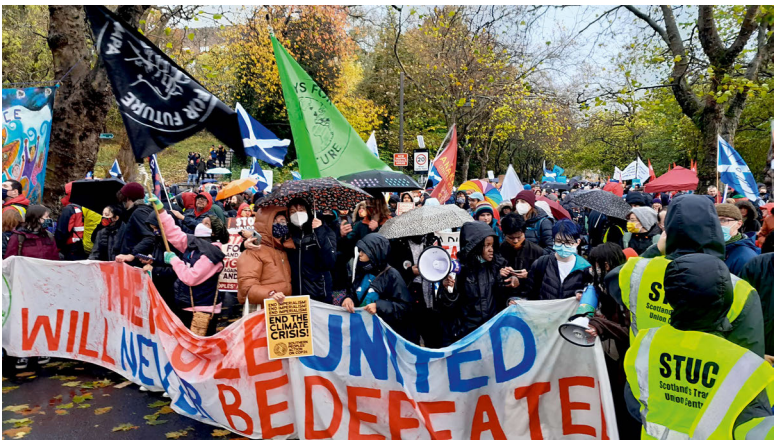
The speeches of these ministers on a 2050 goal in this huge hall seem to me to make a mockery of the young people sitting in the next rooms. And they are not even aiming for "almost" zero emissions, but for "net zero", a formulation which allows compensations and "offsetting", including enormous loopholes for measures such as carbon capture and storage, which are often impracticable or unjust, and which barely prevent emissions (Skelton et al. 2020).

The ministers from the two countries leading the negotiations collect the proposals. Then they withdraw, together with a few select representatives from groups of countries. Finally, they present a new text which will again be discussed in the plenary meeting – and so on, until there is a finished document.

The interesting thing about this afternoon are the descriptions of the concrete changes to the climate in all the different countries. One minister after another describes a nightmare: what is happening in Peru, in Australia, and so on. I become increasingly furious, and I want to yell: what's the point of all this? You ought to… But what? Stop the emissions, with clear crisis plans for the next

five years which are transparent and binding, and verifiable. Instead, the ministers continue their speeches on "net zero 2050" in their own countries well into the evening. Global justice and democracy are barely discussed at all. As the climate Twitter community keeps reminding us: emissions are still rising across the world, in spite of the 26 COP summits.

Following pressure from India – and in an undemocratic move at the last second under the direction of British politician Alok Sharma – the final document does not even include the phrase "phase out coal", but only "phase down coal", as if the world could just keep going on taking coal out of the ground and burning it. For the first time, and that shows the problems of these meetings, a fossil fuel is mentioned officially in the context of the COP. In the Paris Agreement, coal, oil, and gas are not discussed at all, even though they are at the core of the problem; the power of the corporations is so strong – or at least, this is one explanation – and the fear of the politicians is so great, or else their self-interest. And this goes for petrostates such as Saudi Arabia and Russia, just as much as it does for Germany's coal industry and for the Swiss financial sector. On Swedish public radio, the science reporter points out rightly that the conference seems to fall into two parts (Sverigesradio 2022): the self-promotion of the countries, and the sober observations by activists and scientists, who are practically in despair.



Accordingly, the young people mainly meet their friends from across the world outside the COP site and make this failure clear at "rallies" – sponta-

neous demonstrations; and they join and support the workers' strike which happens during these days. They give speeches and chant: "You can shove your climate crisis up your arse" (Nicholson 2021)! And they plan the next protest actions, at least looking back with good memories of the huge strike on Friday in the lanes of Glasgow with tens of thousands of young people; including many schoolchildren at their first demonstration.

And while the young people are already setting out, the older ones are still working on the movements which can build up the "people's power". In the evenings, we meet up with people in the pubs along the river Clyde, including trade unionists from the international umbrella organisation ITUC, and many others who are building grassroots movements, like the activists behind the Momentum movement in England, which anchors the idea of climate justice right in the local communities which are affected, and has renewed the workers' movement. How do you do that, I ask again and again: how do you organise locally and globally for this other, democratic voice of the populations?

Back from Glasgow – on questions about the class society

We travel back on the train to Mynttorget. At Stockholm University, I have to report back to my colleagues. How did it go for the young people and for us researchers? How is the global community reacting to the crisis?

The colloquium of my colleague Linnéa begins at our Department of Child and Youth Studies. "Critical Youth Studies" is the name of the event. And suddenly, as the discussion develops, I realise again what seems to me to be the central aspect of movements and the real challenge for a rapid transformation of society. Linnéa is leading the meeting. She has written some of the most important books about the children in Swedish society who live in precarious circumstances and are affected by poverty and violence, and about the policies which could prevent this (Bruno/Becevic 2020).

She chooses a rather unusual way to begin the seminar, and suggests that if we want we should discuss our own "subject position". A subject position is – in the tradition of theorists such as Foucault – the socially and discursively defined interpretation of our position in society, particularly in terms of the interconnected dimensions of discrimination and privilege, such as gender, class, and so on. But today, the focus is on the class we come from and in which we live, and not on gender or ethnicity, which are so often discussed in the humanities and social sciences.

Many educators do speak about these dimensions sometimes in their lectures, but mainly just as an object of research, as something we should be thinking about during an analysis – not as part of our lives at the universities. And it is the same, I think to myself privately, it is exactly the same for us activists. Our positions in terms of class and origin seems almost to be taboo. In the seminar, many people hesitate. Something is happening here which goes against the norm. Usually, in the way that we speak and behave, we behave as if all of us belong to the same (upper) middle class. But how can we talk openly and sensitively about class, about belonging to a class and about oppression, without forcing anyone to say something they don't want to reveal? Without creating shame? Without excluding anyone – on the contrary – with the intention of drawing attention to processes of democratisation and the structures behind them?

Many of the adult activists themselves live on a very low income and in insecure, temporary work contracts, or else they are ill or unemployed. Travelling, for instance (to events such as the COP), is often only an exception made possible by support, and this goes even more for our colleagues from the countries most affected by the climate crisis. This makes it even clearer how even environmental NGOs differ from grassroots movements: a few NGO employees, though certainly not all, come from the middle class, fly around the world from meeting to meeting, drive their cars around and join cliques with similar people in which the boundaries between private friendships and economic interests, jobs and business connections become unclear – not so different from the cliques which cling on to non-sustainable forestry and agriculture. And at the universities it's not so different either. Many things are shaped by instrumental relationships, in relation to possible joint publications or jobs, for instance (see McGeown/Barry 2023). Our own position in society is not discussed very readily. And educational justice is generally lacking: it is mainly the same middle class which reproduces itself through the forms of education and the structures (Warren 2014).

The alienation in Glasgow is, I think to myself, not only an estrangement between the young people and what is happening on the COP site, but also between those who are committed to noticing intersectional injustice, including most of the young people, and those – including the delegates, but also the environmental lobbyists – who do not talk about this dimension. The topic is still mainly taboo – at the university, too. When someone like my colleague then begins a seminar by offering to discuss our position in society, most people remain silent. They look out of the window. Even the ones whose research fo-

cuses on people in precarious positions and on critiques of capitalism are not sure how to deal with such a situation.

Perhaps – that is my suspicion – this is rooted in the fear that we will suddenly have to step forward as private individuals and offer help to others, or that roles will get mixed up. Or that we will have to take responsibility for structural injustice and blame for the suffering around us.

But what is it really about? In the movement, many people say, "Yes, but we are all fighting to protect the environment and the climate. Everything else has nothing to do with that; in best case, it's private. We all have our worries and problems, let's focus on the most important thing." But that creates a problem. We cannot look past the structural, socially produced premises of these concrete life circumstances; the structures exist and are part of them. And these circumstances, as well as the poverty or fear which result from them, are connected with class origins, with the perception of skin colour, with questions of gender, with exclusion mechanisms in the existing, purely formal concept of democracy. And these are what make the privileged position of the upper and middle classes possible, locally and globally. Ignoring them is not an option, I say to myself. Because the left-wing and green government is not building any affordable housing, those who own houses and flats are becoming richer so much more quickly at the expense of those who have to pay rent. Because politicians are not ensuring, institutionally and through changes in teaching methods, that workers' children can study, white middle-class people have an advantage. And so on. Poverty and precarious situations might seem to be a private issue, but they are structurally necessary elements of a majority society which takes advantage of the status quo, the researchers around us show. And this only reflects, according to Nancy Fraser (2022), precisely what defines the basis of the climate crisis: that the modern economic system has always been built on this form of domination, on the exploitation of the precarious situation of the working class, of unpaid reproductive work carried out by women; on the exploitation of nature; and on the exploitation of the Global South. This is not collateral damage – according to this theory – but the conditions which make it possible for some people to be well off while others aren't.

At the colloquium, when I talk about the trip to Glasgow and the movement, this becomes clear to me: how easy it is to ignore this deeper understanding of encounters as free and equal people. Everyone quickly agrees with the demand for democratisation – but really reshaping relationships in concrete terms within structures is another matter. If this is to change, we have to start from within, in our own surroundings, at work or in activism, I conclude at

this meeting as a kind of research result. We need new centres for sustainable, substantial democracy, everywhere, in universities, movements, and cities.

In this sense, I do not understand the "Theory of Change" which claims that only a small upper class of oil barons and financial sharks are responsible for the climate crisis and that protests should be addressed to them – the "1 %" – even if it is true that they are responsible for a particularly large proportion of emissions and structures. It is also the middle class, and particularly the upper middle class, which maintains the often subtle structures which both destroy nature and build up privileges at the expense of poorer classes. That could be why "solving" the climate crisis is such a complicated undertaking. Two steps seem to build on each other: so that the upper ten or three percent of the population can be addressed as those who produce the most emissions, have power over the fossil society and prevent structural changes that would create a more sustainable society (through media, corporations, lobbying etc.), the fifty percent of people who belong to the middle class and upper middle class would first have to admit that their own relatively wealthy situation is based on the fact that the rest, the other half, are "kept down", dominated.

But this is exactly what is not happening. And for this to be covered up and suppressed, aspects such as our own subject positions within society have to be taboo at universities. "We are all equal, after all." But that is not true; some have advantages at the expense of others; and there shouldn't be (political, economic and societal) structures which create different classes after all, if we want to live as equals, in democratic relations, one could argue. This is not just about classism: that middle and upper middle class people speak and act in ways that exclude working class people from movements, for instance (Bourdieu 2010). It is about the economic structures which produce classes – and the interdependent sustainability crises (Fraser 2022). And in grassroots movements, this whole topic becomes especially striking. In a certain sense, they break through this taboo. In them, people can meet on an equal footing, because everyone can admit and deal with the fact that the democratic structure of "meeting each other as equals" is not yet a given. (In this sense, the demand for basic income and basic services – see appendix – aims not only to counter injustice in terms of gender and class, but also to enable more people to become active in movements and political, democratic work without being chosen and paid by organisations.)

What distinguishes transformative grassroots movements – a new theory (on social logic, organisation, and communication)

With this perspective in mind, we can revise the existing theories about what distinguishes grassroots movements, movements that have changed history and which are the only means known to us of potentially changing history in a democratic direction; from liberation movements to the civil rights movement around Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, from the suffragettes to Black Lives Matter, as well as the newer climate justice movements.

The core, I propose, can be described as a threefold process of democratisation.

The first level is that of "inner social logic": contrary to the theory of Chenoweth (2021), Sharp (1973) and Engler and Engler (2017), it is not only about combining three aspects such as "direct action", mobilising a politically participatory mass movement, and nonviolent resistance, although this analysis is already fascinating.

This is about the fundamental question of how and to what extent these movements internally allow and encourage grassroots democracy. In this context, democracy means more than consensus orientation and a lack of hierarchical structures; it means real encounters on an equal footing, radical inclusion and affirmation; seeing through micro-transactions of domination and establishing relations beyond them. This is their secret centre and in a way the core of their strength. It has probably also been underplayed in research because researchers often don't really have an insight into the everyday democratic challenges which are connected with the building of movements. The key strength of democratisation means, more specifically, that FFF and XR were successful precisely when they acted as grassroots democratic movements and gave the public the opportunity to join them as equals – so that every child, in every village, had the sense of being able to contribute and "own" the movement, not being disturbed by NGOs working behind the scenes and preferring some "chosen" young people.

The second level is that of organisation. The general level of the "will to democracy" is reflected on this second level: how are the movements structured and organised internally? Decentrally, like Extinction Rebellion, with holacratic elements through which roles and mandates are distributed? Or through other non-hierarchical models which distribute power and at the same time regulate how responsibility can be taken on? Because this is the challenge: how do we ensure that particular work processes can be approached

in a structured way? Without every task either being doubled up or forgotten? If there are no bosses to hand out tasks, supervise them and coordinate them, how can this lead to anything but improvised chaos? More and more organisations turn, at this time, to the model with roles and mandates (Robertson 2016): by defining roles with particular mandates (role: "responsibility for press contact"; mandate: "can write their own texts"), work processes are organised transparently for all, without this being tied to bosses or to particular people at all. Roles can be switched; someone can take on two different roles and so on, as long as this is communicated openly.

But something seems to be missing from these models and from the organisational theories behind them: namely the idea of a shared "place of exchange", like the Mynttorget or the chats, which exist beyond specific achievements, mandates, or roles, and enables something like the spread of information and a playful way to meet one another as equals. All models of holacracy do assume that central meetings will take place, but these only serve to decide and redefine roles and mandates, meaning that they are purely work meetings. A shared democratic "playground" is something different. If it is missing, it is difficult for people to take care of each other, because there is no concrete understanding of the challenges.

In many widespread theories of organisation (including those discussing parties, trade unions, and corporations), there is often a lack of understanding for these deeper processes of intersectional democratisation, which are emphasised by authors such as Garza (2020) and Spade (2021).

The final, third level on which the process of democratisation can emerge as the core of grassroots movements is that of communication: leading and conducting meetings, creating a "code of conduct", and structuring consensus-orientated decision processes. What still tends to be ignored in that context seems to be the aspect of democratic leadership (see the chapter about education). It is about the fact that creating democratic spaces is active work, leading to radical inclusion; making everyone's dignity visible. It does not just mean remembering principles, but actual leadership, encouraging people, freeing up resources which will mean that space and time can be allocated fairly, and stopping domination; distributing power, especially as the ones who possess the most informal power, as well as resources of all sorts, including cultural and economic capital. As a small example, the older ones can show that different approaches to the world's problems are possible (see the chapter on education for a detailed description of democratic leadership).

To summarise, the hypothesis is as follows: if all these three levels of democratisation are combined, that of social logic (non-instrumental relationships beyond domination), organisation (creating shared spaces), and communication (democratic leadership), then a quite unique energy can unfold and change the world. This is to some extent what happened when XR and FFF emerged in autumn 2018, and since then it has been the daily task for those who work in them or in similar grassroots movements. Substantial democracy should be created, internally and externally. That provides the compass, motivation, and strength.

Fear and (informal) power

So it is not enough just to point out what is wrong about informal or structural relations of domination. That is only the beginning of the process of getting out of them and bringing about democratisation. And that is where an insidious sociopsychological mechanism comes in. The same goes for a family dominated by a "good" "Pater familias", and for an economy which structured by "caring" capitalists who "create" jobs, as well as for "caring" NGO workers who prevent democracy in grassroots movements by forming elites and exercising power themselves (even by establishing a "tyranny of the good" so that everyone has to think alike).

For those who are closest to the people with more power, it is often about important personal relationships based on trust. In that context, to suddenly say, "That is a form of well-meaning, but still subtly violent domination; please leave the organisation to all of us as equal members," is difficult, often almost impossible. And for those who are furthest away from the people in informal power positions, there is the threat of being stigmatised: suddenly you are criticising a whole system if you demand non-instrumental relationships, and the building of a broad bottom-up, substantial democratic learning community.

For that reason, in my research, it seems particularly important that there should be explicit democratic leadership in all groups (and centres of knowledge where everyone can explore the principles of seeing through domination and create humane relations, making the dignity of everyone visible), whether in the family, at school and university, in society as a whole or in social movements.

Can we delegate climate activism?

The definition of these democratic grassroots movements then becomes clearer somewhat later in comparison with the other groups emerging, particularly in Europe, and gluing themselves to the streets. They all belong to a loosely connected network called A22. What many people simply see as a new kind of climate activism, a kind of continuation or complement to XR and FFF, turns out to be something quite different from the standpoint outlined here. It does not connect the two components which are so crucial for historic change: broad people's movements which are democratically organised and accessible to all, and disruption.

That is ignored by the media debate – and also by many debates in the movements themselves. Criticism is quickly focused on the form of protest action – people gluing themselves to the ground (even if I have difficulty understand how methods which exclude most people from engaging, disturb the working class, and potentially lead to violence should be effective). But the problem, measured against the yardstick of democratisation, seems also to be one of internal organisation. These are small groups, often – not always – organised "top down". The theorists and practitioners around the A22 network ("Just Stop Oil", "Last Generation", and so on), partly financed by the Climate Emergency Fund, have quite a different understanding of movements. Some of them have left the XR and "For Future" movements because they don't believe that the difficult work of democratic grassroots processes is effective. Crucially, they are also distinguished by the fact that large sums are being invested in recruiting and paying individual activists (Milman 2022). I keep on thinking: if they would only support the grassroots movements, their actions would have more benefits. Because their cause and the knowledge behind it is the same as in the grassroots movements. They do put the crisis on the agenda; and with great urgency. In that sense, they deserve solidarity. But how are we going to change the political approach in our societies just through small disruptive action groups? They can make a contribution, but without popular mass movements such as FFF, XR and Scientists For Future, the project seems hopeless; and lacking the focus on substantial democratisation which can be the core of the movements and the politics they fight for.

Conversely, there are also those who want to go in the opposite direction; just as problematic, it seems to me. For example, when Sven Hillekamp (2023) declares before a For Future general meeting that FFF is the opposite of A22 because the young people do not involve themselves in civil disobedience, that

is also not true. FFF and XR were successful because they are both: they are grassroots movements, and they are disruptive. The school strike was an act of civil disobedience. If there had not been children who were required to attend school and refused to do so, coming back to Mynttorget week after week, society would hardly have reacted. It is by acting against the law – but with legitimacy – that the whole movement becomes a topic of conversation and gains force.

That is why I sometimes criticise the For Future groups of older activists who only support the young people and do not take action themselves to show non-cooperation with the fossil society, or at least take an "Emergency Break" on Fridays, even if it's just for an hour – if they are in a situation which allows it. They are pushing the movement into the realm of harmless activity within civil society. In London, hundreds of thousands demonstrate in these months in front of parliament. "The Big One" is the name of the first non-disruptive action by XR – which is entirely ignored by the media and by politicians, and by the people behind the fossil industry and the financial system. But at the same time, it seems that professionally organised top-down actions by a few people do not really create social change either.

And so, the fundamental question arises: which methods and forms of action would be fit for popular movements, disruptive but not exclusive; methods which do not reinforce existing privileges; ensuring that those who are most affected by the crises and dominated by the people in power are able to take the lead? Are there forms of non-cooperation, for example? It should be possible for all concerned people to join in these forms of action – and still put an indefinite stop to "business as usual". Stopping on a Friday works as a signal: the approach of grassroots movements consists in ensuring that inner and outer aspects of the movements correspond to each other. What we are fighting for, intersectional, substantial democratisation of society and a sustainable life, must be reflected in the structure of the movement and in its collective actions.

The new year begins

After the trip to Glasgow, a new time begins, for the global grassroots movement, a time of mobilisation. Information meetings are organised. The UN climate conference is coming up in Stockholm, and so are the first elections in four years, since the beginning of the strike.

While some members of the Swedish movement are commenting on the election campaigns by the political parties, others are preparing for their friends from Brazil, the Philippines, and Uganda to visit Stockholm and thus also realise global grassroots democracy.

> New guidelines for cooperation between generations (NGOs and youth movements) – developed at the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Stockholm University: Firstly, the movement must belong to the children and young people – to all of them, democratically. Secondly, power relations must change, meaning that NGO workers must communicate with the movement as a whole and not intervene in structures, splitting up groups and forming elites, and thus making the children dependent on them in unhealthy ways. Thirdly, children's attention must always be drawn clearly to the dangers of a situation, and they must be given information so that they can make informed decisions themselves. And fourthly, bringing all this together: the children's welfare and their own position as political subjects must always have priority; adults have to put this first.