

consumption decisions and accepted the moral obligation to protect the climate, in some ways these aspects were often overshadowed by other motives:

Every day we have to think so much about what alternatives there may be as all things that are fun are bad for the environment...

Denial strategies

One denial strategy employed by this group was the portrayal of worrying about climate action as being a 'luxury'. This made it seem rather unnatural instead of urgent:

B4: Simply because we are well off, we worry about this.

B6: I also think that it is a luxury to a certain degree that we get to worry about it and that it is a trend [...]. I have just recently spoken to somebody from India who campaigns for climate action, and he said that there this doesn't reach people, since they have completely different issues they have to concern themselves with. [...]

The most prominently applied denial strategy by this group consisted in the emphasis of individual freedom and the aversion against 'pointing one's finger' and accusing another of behaving hypocritically. At the end of the day, the majority of the group concluded that consumption decisions were everyone's personal choice. Flying (in contrast to e.g., driving an SUV within the city) was classified as a necessity without alternatives. This shows that there is a deeply rooted concept of autonomy and freedom of choice of the individual present in this group, even though one deeply cared about the climate.

I also travelled the world for a year and took thirty different flights. I am not proud of these flights, but I also do not want to miss having seen the world.

This exemplifies that here, the culture was one of well-educated young professionals that struggled to reconcile their past cultural experience that honoured individuality, progress, globalisation and freedom with a growing imperative to protect the climate as this collides with much that the group had been taking for granted in their lives so far.

6.4 There is no [basic human] right to travel by plane – NGO

Like the green startup, this group was also very connected to the topic of climate change, both privately and professionally. One was again deeply familiar with the

complexity of the issue. The employment of several technical terms and concepts showed that there had been deep engagement with climate action, which was further intensified through the occupational centrality of the topic. It was treated very much as a moral issue (*CO₂-compensation is like indulgence trade*). The level of reflection displayed in this group was so pronounced that its members were even aware of the ubiquitous tendency to deny (which can be seen as the opposite of the denial practiced in the other groups), which shows that there was hardly any denial in this group. Only the continued emphasis of information deficits can be seen as some indication.

Table 7: Overview: The NGO focus group

Group: Dimension	NGO
Responsibility	Very nuanced notion of responsibility, own responsibility perceived considerable, political responsibility stressed (<i>vis-a-vis</i> individual responsibility that was thought to foster diffusion); thus group tended towards regulation
Efficacy	Companies attested much efficacy (small businesses did more to protect the climate) but failed to adequately employ it for climate matters Individual only deemed efficacious in relational terms Highest influence thought to lie with politics, had to regulate corporate actors where they did not meet their responsibility Celebrities also deemed highly influential, yet group weary of the media
Knowledge	Very well informed (due to occupational centrality of the issue) At times emphasis on factual knowledge, at times focus on practical relevance in the everyday, increasingly encompassing notion of knowledge (incl. emotional messages)
Denial tendencies	Little denial, much reflection

Responsibility

The self-perception presented by the members of this group was interesting, since they attributed a lot of responsibility for climate action to themselves as employees of an NGO that held the advancement of climate action as one of its core aims. One participant asked: *If WE don't consume responsibly, who else is going to?* This shows how important climate action is for the members of this group. Flying was seen as a deeply moral issue:

B2: There is no right to travel by plane.

[...]

B6: I have stopped engaging when friends are speaking about where they went by plane. Because I could not stand it anymore when everyone goes: wow, cool! And I'm thinking, no, that's just not okay...

Or elsewhere:

B2: I find it extremely ironic that precisely those people raise the argument of social fairness when it comes to taxing flights, [...] who perceive it as their exclusive right [...] and then at the same time they defend those who do not have this right that they should continue to be able to book charter flights. [...] that's also the case with consumption. Yes, we want to feel happy. But there are other ways to feel happy than through consumption and flying.

At the same time, one was deeply aware of one's own bubble and the fact that not all of society felt that way. Where there was attribution of personal responsibility for climate action in society, this was also often denied, this group believed. One member made an analogy to how kitchen duty unfolded within the NGO: as it was often unclear who was actually responsible and the responsibility rested upon so many shoulders, it was very easy to escape one's responsibility. This denying of responsibility sometimes even occurred deliberately, when people had other things to do or simply did not feel like cleaning the kitchen. This, in this respondent's eyes, could also be applied to the diffusion of responsibility that occurred in relation to climate action within society. Therefore, like the green startup, this group noticed that focusing on individual responsibility often resulted in such responsibility diffusion.

Hence, overall, the group had a quite nuanced concept of responsibility that did not only include the role of the individual as consumer but also responsibility in terms of political participation. One group member criticised that these two dimensions were still mainly being treated separately. Therefore, a different form of campaigning for elections was demanded that actually took into consideration the everyday realities of the population by pointing towards how the individual could actually meaningfully contribute to climate action in order to counter feelings of inadequate self-efficacy.

However, this group did not display as much aversion against 'pointing-the-finger' as the green startup did – here, some members were even in favour of responsabilising others. This group had internalised the imperative to protect the climate to the point of it serving as means for self-identification. One saw oneself responsible as an individual (on moral grounds), as employee of a climate NGO and also as voter. However, politics was also seen as responsible to implement the mandate given by voters and enforce regulations and prices to advance climate action. The

group was convinced that voluntary action would not suffice as corporations who were also responsible for climate action did not meet this expectation. Further responsible agents were believed to be the media and the educational system. Public figures (like the YouTuber Rezo) also had a special responsibility in their function as role models:

Icons should represent this new (climate-friendly) lifestyle [...] so that in movies [...] the hero is not the Porsche driver any more...

Lastly, the scientific community was seen as responsible for effectively communicating their insights to the public.

Everyday efficacy

This group saw one strength of their role as NGO to lie in the communication of climate change, thus they considered a potential future cooperation between scientific bodies and themselves to be a particularly fruitful avenue to advance climate action. For their NGO, they thought it was more helpful to point towards attractive and manageable alternatives to climate-harmful behaviour instead of arguing for prohibitions and regulations. However, most efficacy was ascribed to the political sphere, that was however still lacking clear direction:

People don't believe in politics making a difference. What was meant to be a climate package was instead referred to as 'small parcel' by the press, which shows a certain amount of cynicism. Everybody knows this is not enough. And somehow, one just takes it as such.

Here for example, it was pointed to the kind of denial that subconsciously occurred amongst the population. Social fairness was further seen as a political hurdle and reason for political inaction (referral to the *yellow vests protests* in France). Different politicians had a different standing in the group. The overall efficacy of politicians was however further reduced by the short-term nature of political processes, the group concluded. Politics was also thought to have failed in regulating corporations, which was seen as urgently necessary since the latter were not meeting their considerable amount of responsibility (that their efficacy afforded them). The group also thought that in theory, corporations had considerable potential to make a difference for climate action.

It was then pointed out that currently, social and environmental costs did not feature in economic considerations. If these were actually considered, it would become obvious that less consumption and extended product lifecycles would consid-

erably advance climate action. Small firms were thought to do more for the climate than larger ones.

In terms of individual efficacy, the group was divided. In some instances, it was voiced that the individual did indeed have an influence, provided they were sufficiently informed about the consequences of their actions (information deficit thinking). On the other hand, the group also thought that people were often demoralised by their own lack of self-efficacy, which frequently resulted in the diffusion of responsibility. Therefore, the individual's relational efficacy was deemed more important as the group believed that feelings of belonging and one's social circle incorporated key roles for climate-relevant action. This group did not display such a clear aversion against 'pointing-the-finger' as the group of the green startup. Instead, this strategy was partially even endorsed. Thus, individual efficacy was here mainly conceived of in its relational form in terms of one's influence on others. Besides, as a single citizen, one could only achieve very little, which was thought to be further exacerbated through inconclusive information about how to best contribute to climate action. The moral imperative to adapt one's behaviour to climate change was however still unequivocally endorsed. The group believed that CO₂-compensation was not only morally objectionable but also inefficacious as the prices were thought to be far too low to really make a difference.

The *Fridays for Future* movement was believed to have significantly advanced climate action, as was the YouTuber Rezo. Celebrities were thought to have a lot of influence overall. Towards the media, the group was however rather sceptical.

Embodied information practices

This group was very well informed about climate change. Its notion of knowledge was however not uniform. At times, information deficit logics were endorsed:

B3: To a large extent we don't only have a responsibility problem, we also actually have an information problem (overall agreement)...

On the other hand, the efficacy of information about the climate impact of everyday practices was questioned:

I think, this is so far removed from the everyday reality of some people [...]. I think people must be addressed directly in this respect. I don't know whether numbers on the packaging will make such a difference...

That knowledge also operates in less palpable forms had been internalised:

At some point a critical mass became aware that smoking is harmful. Then, these things kind of rumble in public knowledge...

Thus, it was also stressed that factual knowledge by itself did not mobilise people and thus some connection to people's everyday realities had to be established. In the course of the interview, an increasingly wholesome notion of knowing developed, that also rested upon the role of emotional messages and cultural aspects:

I think this is a really good example for information not being able to change everything. We all know how bad flying is and we still do it (as a society).

Extent of denial

At times this group employed information deficit thinking by demanding more information about the consequences of certain individual behaviour for the climate. However, as discussed, such apocalyptic rhetoric had in fact not resulted in more effective climate action (refer to chapter 2). As has been discussed, instead this often leads to resignation and denial as a kind of self-protection mechanism instead, which keeps people from experiencing negative emotions (cf. Norgaard, 2011). For example, one group member recounted a situation, where the NGO had held a workshop with children about climate-friendly nutrition that resulted in the children making fun of ingredients being wrapped in plastic. The group believed this ridiculing (humour as denial strategy) was an overreaction by the children to avoid having to feel the fear that would otherwise have resulted from the prior information input about the potential catastrophic consequences of climate change, especially for *their* lives. With respect to flying the group had also already noticed a certain tendency towards denial as some people were deluding themselves by habitually taking considerable effort for climate action in their everyday lives and then cancelling out all of this achievement by still taking some vacation flights.

Denial strategies

This group did not deny climate change, instead it had internalised the issue to the point where it served as means for self-identification. One group member even noticed in himself that he sometimes manipulated pieces of information so that they could more easily be denied:

B6: ... every time I read about [...] the catastrophe, I think, I also still have so many blind spots. But I don't do anything about them. [...]

I: Why not?

B6: I don't know. Because I'm too lazy. [...] I am informed about the bigger picture.

But then again, I wonder, what was the deal with upcycling? My jeans are ripped.

B4: Where do you go?

[...]

B2: But that's precisely the aspect where politics has to do something. Because if the path of least resistance were the most environmentally friendly, then you'd take this laziest and at the same time most environmentally friendly [one].

Thus, this group displayed such a deep level of reflection that it was already making a conscious effort to become aware of these pitfalls in order to avoid such denial. Only the overemphasis of information deficits pointed towards some form of denial.

6.5 Climate just exists and cannot be changed – Farmers

Table 8: Overview: The focus group of farmers

Group: Dimension	Farmers
Responsibility	Diffusion of responsibility + pronounced externalisation (politics, corporations, media, science); trust in the steering ability of the market (e.g., price mechanism)
Efficacy	Little individual efficacy expectation, little trust in decision-makers, masking of the substantial influence of own interest group in Germany and the EU
Knowledge	Patchy climate knowledge, comparatively large extent of trivialisation or denial, emphasis on practical everyday competences + knowledge about nature. References to urban-rural gap with respect to knowing; training of young farmers criticised for being productivist and thus 'climate blind' vs. relativising of said training by focusing on positive developments;
Denial tendencies	Pronounced denial + blaming of other actors outside farming; much frustration that own professional group was being held responsible for climate change

The members of this group leaned towards tradition and conservatism. The group unequivocally believed that the topic of climate action featured much too prominently in public debates and that the extent to which young people were responsabilising the public was hypocritical and overstated. Consequently, climate action was somewhat ridiculed rather than taken seriously. One participant had extensively prepared herself and presented a comprehensive conspiracy theory that was however largely passed over by the rest of the group. Overall, one was very critical of