

fers in society between capital rich climate cultures and those whose members are underprivileged, climate action will remain no more than an *elite project*.

This study thus addresses the following research questions:

- Which societal actors are held responsible for climate action by the public?
- Which societal actors are perceived as efficacious when it comes to climate action?
- Is there a discrepancy between this attribution of responsibility and the expectation of power/influence/efficacy?
- How could this discrepancy be decreased? What is the potential role of information in reducing observable gaps between responsibility and efficacy?

1.2 Structure of study

After this introductory chapter (**chapter 1**), a critical review of leading literature is presented to identify gaps regarding the treatment of cultural phenomena in the context of climate change and climate action (**chapter 2**). This starts with a detailed examination of different scholars' takes on the three central notions of responsibility, efficacy and knowing. For the synthetisation of an alternative, more comprehensive knowledge concept, it draws on Bourdieu's *habitus* and subsequent thinking on *embodied knowledge*. Staying true to Bourdieu's tradition, Kari Mari Norgaard's revolutionary research on the social organisation of denial is then attended to and subsequently built upon, yielding this study's own definition of climate cultures that makes a clear distinction between attributions of responsibility and efficacy and their actual manifestations in people's everyday lives.

Chapter 3 presents the study's research design and methodological framework. These rest on the conviction that a social-scientific enquiry of collective societal patterns requires a particular (relational) mode of investigation. As a result, two out of the three empirical steps focus on what was being said *between* people and how they react and relate to each other. The other previous empirical step consisted in semi-structured (individual) expert interviews.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter. Here, with these initial expert interviews, the objective was to investigate the current state of (official) knowledge. This was approached through semi-structured interviews with scientists, politicians, government- or NGO executives and one teacher. The chapter describes these experts' thoughts on responsibility, efficacy and knowing related to climate action.

In a conscious effort to move beyond elite perceptions, a second empirical step (media analysis) captured views of the public on social media (in addition to a second set of elite discourses). This is covered by **chapter 5**. As Udo Kuckartz writes, it is clear to see that knowledge about climate change stems from mass media (2010, p. 147).

Here, the climate cultures are however not merely differentiated by climate-related knowing in terms of content but instead on how this is employed and applied in practice in German media discourses.

Media attention to climate change, including its consideration on social media (Schäfer, 2012), is strongly event-related (Neverla et al., 2019, p. 23; Schäfer and Bonfadelli, 2017, p. 11; Schmidt et al., 2013) – either being triggered by meteorological or even more significantly by (supranational) political events. Hence in this study, the time surrounding the 2019 European election is taken as temporal focus. To determine which competing climate cultures coined public discourse at that time, an innovative mode of investigation (flow model) was employed to observe the climate-cultural standpoints and (discursive) practices of different public actors linked to climate (in)action, like politicians, scientific experts, prominent public figures and the public themselves.

Schäfer and Bonfadelli find fault with the fact that “the social context, within which the user concerns themselves with climate related media content, as well as their motivation and their interpretations of said content have not been investigated sufficiently” (2017, p. 12). This is precisely what this study aims to address. As “culture, just like climate, is hard to see and harder to measure” (Hulme, 2015, p. 2), focusing on the media landscape provides a promising way to make the cultural variations linked to climate change visible.

As a manifestation of conventional media reporting, climate cultures featuring in three political talk shows in German prime-time television, print- and online news-reports linked to these same TV-programmes were considered. Secondly, the social media engagement corresponding to these talk shows on Twitter and Facebook as well as videos by YouTubers like Rezo and Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim were examined to see how the public was habitually reacting to these elite discourses. The latter were included because they embody new forms of science communication and suggest that it may be becoming somewhat *cool* in youth culture to talk and be concerned about climate change (cf. Lüdke, 2015).

That these debates and views (i.e., ‘non-elite’ climate cultures, including sceptical and even denialist voices) were so thoroughly invisible in everyday life presented a major puzzle. Hence, in a third empirical step (**chapter 6**), it was investigated how climate debates unfolded in a professional context. Here it was of particular interest whether (and how) the occupational field had an influence on collective interpretation and handling of the current societal imperative to protect the climate. Another motivation for this step was to find out whether the sceptical statements encountered in the social media discourses also existed in the public beyond social media.

The preparation, implementation and analysis of these focus group discussions followed Kari Marie Norgaard’s (2011) design that she developed and tested in her social-scientific research on climate perception in Norway (and the US). Through the deliberate deployment of focus groups, this approach goes beyond the limiting as-

pects of conventional science previously mentioned. By analysing social factors like group dynamics and internally harboured conflict potential, new insights were won that go beyond the mere responsabilisation of the individual consumer. Corner and Randall emphasise in this context that “the efficacy of group-based programmes for promoting durable pro-environmental behaviour change has been demonstrated on numerous occasions” (2011, p. 1011; see also Sahakian et al., 2021) which shows that more attention must urgently be paid to these mechanisms since they embody a potentially fruitful future avenue for effective climate action.

Chapter 7 then offers an in-depth discussion of the empirical findings. Here, a series of discrepancies are identified. One type of these divergences consists in the gap between official attributions of responsibility and efficacy (often seen in elite discourses) and the lived responsibility and actual efficacy that people experience in their everyday lives. The other type of discrepancy consists in the often encountered divergence between the two notions of responsibility and efficacy that different societal agents are either attributed or endowed with. It is shown that more of the public could be reached if these significant discrepancies were recognised. The necessity to link both cognitive and emotional aspects of knowing in the context of climate debates and action also emerges as a key challenge to those interested in advancing climate action.

Chapter 8 then provides some concluding remarks and a future outlook.

