> thing under one roof. That's just really convenient. I go there with my grandson and he loves it and it is a real item on our agenda of the day to go shopping […]. And I think a lot of people feel that way.

This example illustrates that powerful corporate and political decision-makers asking consumers to buy *organic* fails to acknowledge obstacles that depend on one's social position. Here, reasons for not wanting to buy organic products had nothing to do with affordability but with the desire to enjoy the 'shopping experience' offered by conventional stores. Messages that aim to rationally convince people of organic foods' climate benefits fail to reach people who value this shopping experience, with far-reaching consequences for planetary health. It is vital to understand these markedly different reasons why both elite and non-elite groups are not (yet) engaging in climate action. This study made a clear contribution to knowledge on this important issue.

7.3 Differentiating climate cultures: Responsibility, efficacy and knowing

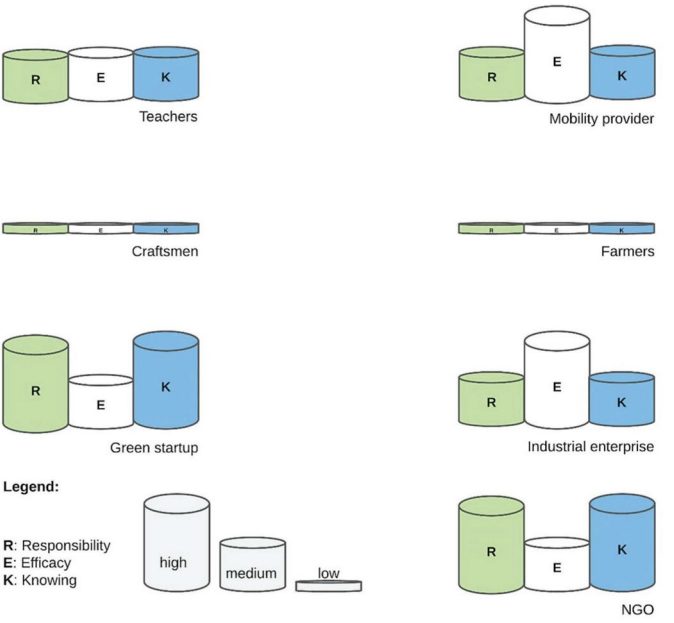
Specific combinations of responsibility, efficacy and knowing are what characterises the different climate cultures. As outlined in chapter 2, climate cultures are defined according to these three aspects and how they potentially translate into different forms of collective climate-related denial.

Members of elite climate cultures (see chapter 5) regularly indicated that it remains unresolved who in society should initiate climate action. At times, responsibility was ping-ponged from the political to the corporate, then back to the individual sphere, then again onto civil society. To an extent, this diffusion of responsibility (cf. section, 2.5, Norgaard, 2011) served to deflect attention away from the requirement to involve the whole of society, and especially one's own social sphere. Yet the need for climate action to become a society-wide effort was also recognised by some of the capital-richer participants: a clear tension emerged between political and individual responsibility, with more collectively oriented politicians acknowledging that all social spheres should contribute. In this view, society needs to come together and act responsibly under the lead of the political sphere. In contrast, more conservative politicians emphasised choice and autonomy and thus individual responsibility.

Within the realm of public climate cultures, opinions regarding climate responsibility also varied markedly, with two broad trends emerging: members of the public were either radically pro-climate action, strongly endorsing individual responsibility. They did think they themselves were influential (belief in consumer power internalised), setting them apart from the collectivist elite (sub)culture. Yet mem-

bers of other public climate cultures rejected personal responsibility to varying degrees, sometimes radically so: here, an outright questioning of any anthropogenic causes of climate change eclipsed one's own responsibility and efficacy. Where climate change is at least acknowledged as a problem, if anything, politics is held responsible.

Figure 5: Different constellations of responsibility, efficacy and knowing displayed by the focus groups, own presentation



As figure 5 depicts, different focus groups (see chapter 6) also occupied different positions regarding climate-related responsibility, -efficacy and -ways of knowing. Barrel sizes indicate the relative importance (in qualitative terms) ascribed to each concept by each group (but are not to be understood as quantitative indicators).

For instance, members of the NGO believed that it was morally out of question to travel by airplane. They had internalised individual climate responsibility to the point where it played an important role in their lives and even served as a means for self-identification. At the same time, within the industrial enterprise, flying was deemed to be a professional necessity that allowed one to work productively again the next day. In the latter case, climate action played an (at times quite important) role for a part of the group, whilst one participant plainly stated that she did not consider herself responsible. Her concept of responsibility simply did not include

any climate-related rationales. For her, responsibility was mainly related to the corporate structures that to her were particularly meaningful since she aspired to having a successful career in the company. The rest of this group, as well as the teachers and the green startup, were largely defensive about flying, indicating to varying degrees that they felt guilty about flying for private enjoyment. Yet, they all regularly continued to do so. By contrast, the mobility provider's employees were rather annoyed about the bad reputation flying was getting. What had become to be known as flight shame (*flygskam*) was thus only experienced by some of the more capital-rich focus groups, whereas those less privileged strongly rejected being responsibilised in this way. For instance, the craftsmen fundamentally externalised responsibility. They were not at all willing to forego private flying, stating that they simply did not care enough about climate change for doing so.

Efficacy expectations also varied considerably: members of more privileged focus groups generally viewed themselves as well-equipped to make a difference in society. For example, employees of the industrial enterprise considered their employer to be very efficacious, so much so that with the right amount of lobbying they could even escape political regulations (but that their company could also make a real difference if chosen to do so). This stood in stark contrast to less privileged members of the public who saw themselves as severely limited in their choices. The inefficacy climate subculture that emerged from the media analysis shows this particularly well (chapter 5), mirroring observations regarding the less privileged focus groups. Farmers, and to some lesser extent craftsmen, generally felt unheard and underappreciated in society, sparking resentment and distrust towards groups richer in (particularly cultural) capital. Farmers had extremely low efficacy expectations as individuals but also as a group which is particularly telling as the agricultural lobby's influence is in fact quite substantial.

'Like spiderman: With a lot of power comes a lot of responsibility'[7]

What stood out when initially speaking to the experts (see chapter 4) was their rather unanimous and implicit assumption that societal responsibility for climate action must be contemplated in terms of the actual power an agent holds. From the outset of undertaking this research, it became clear that the link between responsibility attributions and efficacy expectations is crucial for effective climate action.

Several experts also remarked that responsibility was originally conceptualised *in terms of* efficacy: the more power and resources someone held, the more responsible (s)he was to act accordingly. Even German basic law (Article 14) states: ownership is an obligation. Yet one of the experts (academic sociology and sustainability) observed a deep divide in society today between the two notions (refer to section 4.3).

7 Statement from one of the experts interviewed.

This study confirms this: discursive variations highlight a clear decoupling of responsibility and efficacy across a number of climate cultures. For instance, individual consumers are routinely blamed for not doing enough for the climate, including by climate activists (see chapter 5), which places the burden of responsibility on the shoulders of those actually least able to act. Yet others reject the idea that their individual efficacy is marginal, believing that 'green' consumption can be an essential part of successful climate action.

Decisive discrepancies

In the following, these discrepancies between responsibility and efficacy found in the data are delineated in some more detail as they characterise the different climate cultures: conservative politicians, for instance, display such a discrepancy: they generally attribute considerable efficacy to themselves, yet they do not necessarily see it as politics' responsibility to advance climate action through regulations or prohibitions[8]. Such refusal to expand climate action from these political directions often rests upon the argument that the market is better equipped to solve the issue (see chapter 4). References to the disagreeability and alleged unpopularity of regulations amongst voters (as made by one of the experts, politician Freie Wähler) allow the diffusion of responsibility (cf. Fox and Rau, 2017). This goes hand in hand with an ever more entrenched individualism that unsurprisingly meanders into less sense of community and collective fate. This is exacerbated by less capital-rich groups also being weary of any kind of authority, thus often being politically disenchanted. Politicians are frequently perceived as inefficacious, presenting again a large discrepancy between responsibility and efficacy that is likely to impact on climate action: "There is a growing erosion of trust in the social institutions that undergird democracy, as many citizens feel that their visibility and voice are losing political impact" (Dahlgren, 2012, p. 3). Dahlgren also observes "a growing literature on how citizens are apparently disengaging from the political system, coupled with feelings of powerlessness and cynicism towards the power elites" (ibid.). It is then particularly harmful if decision-makers who are openly engaged in responsibilisation are publicly perceived as hypocritical. In fact, accusations of hypocrisy surfaced repeatedly in this study, particularly regarding public statements by members of elite climate cultures. Although these politicians potentially take an interest in climate matters and express this in their political participation, in many cases they fail to foreground the 'big points' (Bilharz, 2007) like flying. Yet this also shows

8 This is illustrated, for instance, by the conservative party's (CDU) public outcry over German financial minister Christian Lindner (FDP) announcing his plans to reallocate 60 billion Euros to climate action (cf. Kubina, 2022). These funds had originally been assigned to relieving the Corona pandemic, yet they had not been retrieved at the end of 2021.

that the political offloading of responsibility onto the consumer has worked, at least to some extent, as the responsibility is then again demanded back from some individual politicians or other societal agents. This occurs instead of questioning the system itself or interpreting the issue as a structural problem. In fact, accusations of hypocrisy reflect the need to attribute responsibility.

Political calls to climate action thus still responsibilise the public in questionable ways (see for instance chapter 2, Julia Klöckner's campaign Echt kuh-l![9]), which significantly contributes to the current lack of progress in this regard. This diffusion of responsibility from a politician with obvious influence over outcomes onto not only individuals but in fact *children* (of all people) is deeply problematic: can children in Germany really personally decide to switch their diets from one day to another and spend their 'considerable disposable income' on plant-based food that is often more expensive than meat from mass production[10]? Or will they face considerable headwind from their families that have been eating a certain way for decades? As Norgaard argues, this "focus on individuals is more than a theoretical choice, it has the political function of leaving government and corporations unaccountable" (2018, p. 4).

Two of the experts interviewed for this study were politicians (with individualist outlooks) that were part of the government at the time of the interviews: one held a ministerial position in the Bavarian government, the other one was part of the Bundestag (federal government). They both attempted to justify in the interviews why they did not prioritise the topic of climate change more by elaborating on the many hurdles they reportedly saw themselves confronted with.

The analysed media material also showed that powerful political actors were repeatedly being portrayed as too self-interested or dependent on election outcomes to act decisively on climate change, despite their actual capacity to do so. Besides, participants who actually held considerable influence themselves repeatedly emphasised that climate change was a global challenge. This (perceived or professed) inefficacy of established actors, besides the pronounced levels of responsibility they are endowed with by the voter, results again in a marked divergence between responsibility and efficacy. This is similar to what Norgaard observed in the Norwegian community she studied (refer to section 2.5). Other political and civil society actors then often utilise this to challenge dominant scientific and 'official' climate cultures and to advance counterarguments, thereby rendering the successful implementation of climate action ever more unlikely.

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9 Questionable ways beyond merely the name "Echt kuh-l!" (this is a wordplay on the words 'cool' and 'cow'; the German word 'Kuh' [spoken '*ku*] means 'cow').

10 Side note: as a vegan myself, I could fill this entire chapter with reports on the real obstacles one faces in familial and social settings where such diet switches can cause real opposition, tension and power struggles.

Policymakers are not as limited in their efficacy as they often claim when stating that 'their hands are tied' (as they did in the interviews, see chapter 4). As Lewis Akenji writes, they treat "individual consumption as a sovereign domain, which is beyond the reach of public intervention" (2013, p. 3, cited in Kenner, 2015, p. 10). At the same time, they do not shy away from restricting other harmful practices such as smoking and drinking, citing health reasons. Seemingly unpopular measures having been decisively implemented during the course of the Covid-19 pandemic further proves that politicians can indeed act in a determined manner. Besides, as Akenji confers further, "there is little logic in individual freedom that consumes away the livelihood of an entire planet!" (2013, p. 3, cited in Kenner, 2015, p. 10). Politicians' stance towards efficacy is interesting here as in this study it was found that they still managed to diffuse their own responsibility even though they often perceived their efficacy levels to be high. This occurred either by downplaying of efficacy as decision-makers or by blending out that the public at large has a completely different efficacy at its disposal.

However, not all the politicians' statements analysed indicate such deflection of responsibility. In contrast to the conservative politicians, the politicians who advocated for more collectivist approaches perceived themselves as both responsible and influential regarding climate action. At the same time, they were also more inclined to recognise the real obstacles many members of the population experienced in daily life that reduced individuals' efficacy (cf. Ford and Norgaard, 2020; Kessler and Rau, 2022). Therefore, these political circles tended to only hold the population responsible on a moral basis.

This, in turn, was often strongly rejected by some other (anti-climate action) groups within the population. Generally, in those instances where responsibility and efficacy levels were more congruent (e.g., NGO focus group, chapter 6; pro-action public climate culture, chapter 5), people reported to engage in climate action. This professed correspondence between responsibility and efficacy was then also often mentioned by members of these climate cultures (e.g., in social media postings), studded with arguments based on moral obligation. This reflects moral responsibility attributions from political directions. Again, this presented an ideal target for attacks on the grounds of perceived conformity or naivety from opposing segments of the population. Yet situations were also recounted where there would have been room for personal choice in higher income groups, but efficacy was then frequently hampered by political action, impracticability (see example above, organic shopping), social reasons or inconclusive information (see chapter 5, inaction subculture II).

Overall and in accordance with the conceptual work presented in chapter 2, there was a growing recognition among the majority of the experts interviewed (see chapter 4) that too much responsibility was being put on individuals. Recognising this lessens the gap between responsibility and efficacy, paving the way for future

progress towards climate action. Some experts for instance focused on *strategic* individual action in the sense of *avoiding the worst excesses*, indicating that responsibility was already being considered in concordance with efficacy. This recognition was confirmed by what was said in some elite climate cultures, for instance by the collectively oriented climate cultures identified in the media analysis.

As the actual divergence between responsibility and efficacy is low for the political and pronounced for the private sphere, it makes sense that focus should be placed on the political realm. If the legislative landscape actually only permitted low carbon behaviours, or at least punished the most carbon intensive practices (like flying), it would be much harder to offload so much of the responsibility for climate action onto the consumer. Climate action thus urgently needs to become the path of least resistance.

Saving the world with non-plastic straws?[11]

Yet, conventional ways of communicating appeals to climate action usually provide information on products' climate impacts and the comparative benefits of voluntarily shopping for green alternatives (e.g., labelling of sustainable products, green shopping guides). Calls to actually reduce consumption feature much less, however. Here, some say that if inequality were reduced, environmental impact would also decrease as sustainable consumption would then become more accessible to more of the public (cf. Laurent, 2014; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010, cit. in Kenner, 2015, p. 03). Yet this still neglects that 'green' consumption, besides generally being more expensive, brings significant extra effort as alternatives must be researched and labels must be read while shopping. Being able to expend such efforts would translate into higher efficacy (influence over outcomes) for consumers, which however remains unrealistic given that most of the population is either time- or resource poor. Furthermore, climate-friendly alternatives are not always readily available, for example in sub-, peri-urban or rural areas. Online shopping is no viable alternative either as it means long transport distances (and also problematic working conditions for delivery personnel, among other things).

Understandings of responsibility and efficacy transported into society therefore also primarily reflect privileged people's views and experiences. Here it is necessary and helpful to distinguish between 'lived' responsibility and 'everyday' efficacy versus *official* responsibility attributions and efficacy expectations: those rich in (cultural) capital responsibilising other segments of the public by pointing out how 'dirty' their diesels are, together with all the other climate harmful practices they perform on a daily basis, is not a particularly motivating discourse, especially when it is so hard to forego them. This is therefore often not received well by those groups

11 Joke made by one of the craftsmen.

within the public. These political calls to action being repeatedly mocked by some parts of the population indicates how ill-fated this strategy truly is (refer to e.g., chapter 5, and chapter 6). Here, the lack of consideration of the population's everyday realities within elite messages becomes particularly apparent. Perceived limitations in self-efficacy due to financial problems, time pressure (cf. Rau and Edmondson, 2013), or a(n apparent) lack of competencies in dealing with the complexity of climate change present real obstacles. This is further exacerbated through elite's privileged demeanour (cf. Fox and Rau, 2017; Ford and Norgaard, 2020).

Climate-cultural variations also surfaced with regard to different ways of knowing: trust in different ways of knowing varied among members of the public. many of them fiercely rejected the role of emotional messages. For instance, some respondents emphasised that they did not want to be 'framed' (craftsman) by the originators of official messages, and that the subject of climate change was being discussed 'way too emotionally' (farmer). Yet again, the farmers but also the NGO employees underlined the need for practical information that would match people's needs and daily lives more closely. Beyond this, it was important to some participants less rich in cultural capital to prove that they were sufficiently scientifically literate to participate in the debate. At the same time, these less privileged groups were more likely to embrace conspiracy theories, which shows, first, that emotions do play a decisive role in these discourses, and second, that one was not actually endorsing the current scientific consensus. Therefore, in this case the conveying of knowledge operates not only through the transmission of information but crucially also through affective, emotional and embodied messages.

Elite knowledge concepts also varied in their degree of reflection: some experts mentioned information deficits and deemed them problematic for advancing climate action. Yet other statements indicated that participants were moving beyond counting on factual information only. Still, the value of evidence-based scientific knowledge and rationality remain central among more privileged groups. In fact, a deep faith in science and information provision as 'silver bullet' was discernible.

Yet, the question remains why effective climate action stays so elusive given the comparative affluence of German society and the existence of sufficient information about climate change, at least since the Brundtland Report of 1987. Some (social media) statements from non-elite climate cultures confirm that trust in precisely these scientific types of information is not necessarily present in parts of the population. This fact alone points to the inadequacy of relying (more or less) exclusively on closing the public's information deficits. Besides, sustainable alternatives are almost always more expensive because of the structural conditions decision-makers who frequent exclusive elite circles have set in place. That climate-harmful practices are 'mostly those that are the most fun', as one green startup employee poignantly stated, further makes it unlikely that people will be rationally convinced to voluntarily forego them. Yet, the conservative politicians interviewed still attributed respon-

sibility to consumers and expected them, due to their alleged power over market demand, to actually be able to make a difference. Some members of elite climate cultures tended to use a more encompassing notion of knowledge that included emotional messages. Such recognition of other types of knowledge was however mainly displayed by more progressively oriented speakers.

'Knowing' is more than just 'knowing'

From this emerges that what ultimately counts most is actually the acceptance of different types of knowing and facts (see chapter 2) within each climate culture. Here, a traditional focus on the cognitive dimensions of knowledge contrasts with public climate debates that are interspersed with references to embodied knowledge, everyday practices and emotions. This lends support to the use of emotional appeals in climate action initiatives.

Some experts interviewed (see chapter 4) also noticed widespread resignation among members of the public in an attempt to avoid experiences of fear and hopelessness. This points to the paradoxical situation where increasing levels of (threatening) information may prove counterproductive because they actually defer or prevent effective action. Numerous studies have shown that particularly alarming messages in catastrophic or apocalyptic discourses have not helped advance climate action (cf. Norgaard, 2011 and 2018; Ford and Norgaard, 2019; Kundzewicz et al., 2020). According to Norgaard (2011), these often result in resignation and denial for self-protection as this saves actors from experiencing negative emotions. "Cognitions related to climate change are avoided because they create [cognitive] dissonance and are thus troubling" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 217). The statement about cooking workshops with children in one of the focus group discussions (NGO, see section 6.4) confirms this. This suggests that less alarmist and catastrophic messages might help to remove emotional barriers to climate action.

What does, however, cause people to behave in certain ways is the principal and primal human desire to belong. Belonging to a certain group of people, a family unit, a group of friends, a work team, a particular culture, represents a true necessity for humans as social beings. Human action is to a large extent driven by this need to belong and express one's affiliation to particular social circles. Taking this into account is vital for attaining successful climate action in the future. Being presented with factual information on why meat consumption is particularly harmful to the climate will not make people sell their barbecue, especially if their circle of friends consists of steak connoisseurs. In this case, emotion trumps information, as feelings of belonging are often much more powerful than any information campaign can ever be. Social circles offer emotional ties, a fact that climate communication approaches have fatefully neglected thus far.