who live in Aschaffenburg or back somewhere else, who have nothing to get by, do care in fact.

Lastly, it was collectively deflected away from the climate crisis due to its globality, the temporally distant effect of its consequences as well as the higher priority of other societal challenges.

## 6.3 We only worry about climate change because we are well off – Green startup

This group was particularly homogenous. All respondents had extensively thought about climate change, including its moral aspects. The fact that they worked for a carbon conscious company alone showed that climate action played an important role in their lives. The imperative to protect the climate had been internalised as a task for the whole of society. The members of this group were well informed and aware of the complexity of the debate. Disagreement featured only rarely and if so, in relation to details. Regarding the responsibility of the individual, the members of this group expressed to be in a kind of elite dilemma when climate action came into conflict with other (identity providing) motives. Accordingly, flying was ultimately deemed an (almost untouchable) personal decision by nearly all group members, in connection to which a series of justification strategies were employed ($CO_2$-compensation, short trips even worse etc.).

*Table 6: Overview: The green startup focus group*

| Group: Dimension | Green startup |
|---|---|
| **Responsibility** | Strong emphasis of own individual responsibility, little externalisation |
| **Efficacy** | Focus on consumption; recognition of relational efficacy, individual efficacy unresolved<br>High efficacy ascribed to corporations, yet overall little trust in conventional companies<br>High efficacy ascribed to politics, yet attested inadequate implementation |
| **Knowledge** | Very well informed (due to occupational centrality of the topic), quite broad knowledge concept, climate change perceived as ›elite project‹;<br>Ubiquitous justification of the knowledge-action gap, pronounced ›bubble thinking‹ (but this reflected by the group) |
| **Denial tendencies** | Partial denial as own climate impact quite large, e.g., due to continuation of flying |

## Lived Responsibility

The members of this group did see themselves responsible as employees of a green startup. Besides, this group believed that as an individual one was responsible for informing oneself sufficiently about the climate impact of one's own behaviour, since *ignorance did not protect one from stupidity*. There was however recognition of the differences in access to alternative behaviour, which was ultimately cited as a reason not to ascribe too much responsibility to the individual end consumer.

Politics was attested the responsibility to regulate the corporate sector, since corporations were exposed to profit pressures and global competition, which caused them to simply load off responsibility onto the consumer. Still, the group members believed that at the end of the day, companies were also responsible for climate action as it was them who determined the supply of (climate-friendly) options. Consequently, the behaviour of conventional companies was deeply condemned by the group:

> I find it completely perverse that H&M spits out a new collection on a weekly basis!

One further aspect that added complexity was seen in the diffusion of responsibility: the group stated that the threat posed by climate change was denied in ways that were reminiscent of denying the dangers of smoking. However, with smoking, the consequences only hit the originator themself, whilst the damage done by climate change accrued to responsible and irresponsible people alike:

> It is a bit like in a shared apartment (WG), you have to still feel responsible somehow for what is happening…

Accusations of hypocrisy caused intense annoyance. One person said that when speaking of her climate-friendly diet, she had repeatedly been confronted with the question of whether she still flew, which made her angry. Thus, she argued that it was not really reasonable to ascribe so much responsibility to the individual, especially since she and the other members of this group were already trying to adapt their behaviour because of climate change. From this emerged that for this group the question of individual responsibility in relation to air travel embodied a particularly emotionally charged aspect. For them it was exceptionally difficult to arrive at answers for themselves on how to handle the topic of flying in the future as they deeply disliked these feelings of cognitive dissonance. There was much talk of feeling guilty or bad when flying and the group members were definitely aware of the negative consequences for the climate. Still, the group managed to suppress these feelings and continue to fly (most group members admitted that they had already flown in the running year). It was also stated that in certain circles one did

not dare to admit any more that one had taken a plane. Here it was stressed that rationally, one understood that it was bad for the climate, but one was still surprised that there was so much social sanctioning nowadays. Therefore, the group concluded that ultimately flying was everyone's own and very personal decision. Here, the members of the group went to great lengths to justify the continuation of flying:

> Of course, we can talk about climate change in relation to flying, but we can also talk about how it has brought us all closer together (collective agreement). And as you said, we know so much more about the world since we have had this level of connection. And it used to be a major hassle to be able to travel to the US and now you can easily go there for vacation and then you come back with amazing experiences.

A lot of responsibility was also ascribed to the media and the scientific community in terms of knowledge transmission. Here, there was explicit mentioning of the responsibility of science communication.

## Everyday efficacy

In terms of individual efficacy, there were different opinions: one group member said that as an individual, you cannot save the world but in the collective, there was much that could be achieved.

Accordingly, the group mentioned a certain relational efficacy of the individual: through behaving responsibly, one could inspire others and be a role model. Then they wondered how other groups in society could be made aware of their climate impact. This was however deemed a tricky question since raising awareness was seen as important but at the same time, one did not want to talk down from a moral high ground. Navigating this was seen as deeply difficult.

One other group member disagreed with the statements made so far and stressed that flying as a practice had by far the largest impact on the climate and as an individual one should be aware of that (high individual responsibility). He however also pointed towards politics having to regulate through pricing.

Accordingly, at first, politicians were deemed efficacious as they had a lot of influence and room for manoeuvre, which in the eyes of the group was however not done justice to. This led to disillusion and anger.

The group disagreed on the role of corporations when it came to climate action. Although they were deemed efficacious (*companies' carbon footprints are much larger than those of individuals*), there was much mistrust regarding the authenticity of climate efforts of (other, conventional) companies, which were for example deemed to be no more than *greenwashing* as one group member voiced. Someone else

said, however, that the messages of large companies did have a considerable impact. Then other factors were mentioned that further complicated the challenge of climate change, such as its global nature that caused climate harmful consequences to often simply be relocated to other countries.

The media and the scientific community were both deemed largely inefficacious by this group. Even though the role of the media was seen as important, there was not much trust in it (lack of independence), which resulted in the educational system being responsible for teaching media competency. This was exacerbated by the fact that media was consumed selectively according to one's own convictions, which further reduced true efficacy. The fact that scientific insights hardly ever reached the population was also deemed problematic. For example, the IPCC-consensus had not really been internalised by the population before it had reached public awareness through *Fridays for Future*:

> I think that there has been a lot of misinformation. In the sense of: well, it's not actually that bad. Whenever someone fears that the truth is becoming more established, then they simply send out an 'alternative truth'. Or a perceived truth. And if that is powerful enough, then it already suffices that the issue seems 'unclear' and 'not entirely certain' and then I can lean back on the basis that it is not totally certain.

Further, this group believed that prominent people could make a considerable difference for climate action. *Fridays for Future* and Greta Thunberg were also accredited with considerable influence, especially because they reached people on an emotional level and were *not as anonymous as politicians in suits*.

## Embodied information practices

Initially, it was criticised that the current climate-related information landscape was too incomprehensible – there were, for example, too many different labels for organic food. The group believed that knowledge about climate change existed in society, in everyday life this was however often not put into practice. For example, people were aware of the climate impact of mass meat production, yet daily decisions were not being failed accordingly. It was further pointed to the role one's cultural surroundings played:

> In terms of flying, I find it really telling, because until I started my internship here, I was not very aware of the consequences. At university, I studied International Business, and in my course it was all about who travels the most. That was a completely different mind-set and here, it is entirely different, again.

The media was seen as *the number one source of information*. Although *Fridays for Future* was credited with being very efficacious, the group still questioned whether the students were actually informed sufficiently and whether they put this knowledge into practice consistently. Here, it was speculated that there actually were a lot of followers present in the movement. One group member concluded that then, at least, these would be *followers into the right direction*. At times, there surfaced a quite simplistic, linear, and somewhat naïve understanding of knowledge. The group for example took issue with there not being a climate scientist present in the newly established climate cabinet of the government, as then, *politics would just have to put such insights into practice*:

> Of course, we also need people who screen the whole issue in such a way that it becomes measurable, because at the end of the day, numbers are the only truth that we have.

The group repeatedly employed such information deficit logics, yet they were refuted by other group members in most instances. The respondents also voiced that scientific insights did not really reach their daily lives as scientists mainly communicated with their colleagues within their own discipline:

> Now everyone in the ivory tower please read this pamphlet!

The public was not being included in this communication. Here, emotional messages were deemed much more efficacious. Overall, this group had a quite broad knowledge concept that went far beyond the provision of only factual and cognitive knowing. Emotional messages were unequivocally deemed more relevant to people's everyday lives and thus certainly more efficacious:

> Human beings are emotional beings. People don't think about facts and it is facts that science brings, one degree, two degrees, but what does that mean?

Lastly, the group stressed the role of like-minded and relatable others in instigating climate action.

## Extent of denial

For this group it was very important to take climate action seriously and take responsibility for it, be it in the professional or private sphere. There was much reflection and conversation about it. In many ways, behaviour was aligned with the motive of climate action. However, and maybe surprisingly, there was still considerable denial in this group. Although one was well aware of the consequences of different

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