

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

different elites (politicians, consultants, corporate figures as well as representatives of the *Fridays for Future* movement). One was also very suspicious of the media, especially because they were perceived to practice substantially exaggerated discourses of catastrophe in relation to climate change and because they were seen to habitually ascribe responsibility to the guild of farmers.

Responsibility

Even though it was initially stated that responsibility for climate action lay with the whole of society, in the course of the discussion it was however mainly attributed to societal elites (in those instances where it was deemed at all necessary to attribute it).

The group particularly emphasised that politicians had to lead with a good example instead of behaving hypocritically. In relation to this, it was criticised that political agents were still not taxing kerosene as this would certainly lead to less flying. It was then added that part of the problem was that the Bavarian state was an investor of Munich airport, which gave it the incentive to protect its business and jobs. The group was generally very sceptical towards political executives as they were thought to be governed by corporate interests and short-term election cycles. Experts and consultants that worked for the political sphere were also attested partial responsibility.

Consumers were deemed responsible for coming up with the right kind of demand. Overall, they were however thought to be uninformed, self-interested and irresponsible. Therefore, retail was attested responsibility for reconsidering its product range. Here, in the eyes of the participants, regional produce should play a much larger role, whilst organic farming was not deemed particularly important. It was then taken issue with consumers reportedly being oblivious to what grew in the region and in which season, which the group then ridiculed at length. This attested lack of knowledge was however only partially the consumers' fault as the group thought that they were also repeatedly misled by (other) producers.

The following dilemma illustrates the group's struggle in straightforwardly attributing responsibility for climate action: the consumer was perceived to simply be reacting to supply and the producer was exposed to competition. Politics were also seen partially responsible for regulating retail as it was the whole system that was problematic because consumers had become so used to being offered so much of everything at extremely low prices.

Such low prices could however not be offered by the farmers in the region. Therefore, corporate agents (retailers) were deemed responsible for pointing out more clearly what was being produced in the region. Overall corporate agents were ascribed considerable responsibility for climate action, but the group was sceptical of them meeting this, especially when it came to large firms.

The group was also very critical towards the media, as they were thought to firstly endorse fatalistic and apocalyptic messages in relation to climate change and secondly holding farmers responsible for considerably contributing to climate change:

Today people don't get this anymore. They believe every story and take it at face value and say, yes, the world is going to end and every farmer is off their head...

The scientific community was considered responsible for presenting the facts that would allow a clearer definition of the issue of climate change. Besides, researchers should finally come up with some technical solutions.

The group then vehemently complained that climate change was being debated much too emotionally, which to a large extent was thought to be due to the momentary momentum of the *Fridays for Future* movement. Here, it was stressed that going to school was actually compulsory. The protestors were then said to be only voicing demands whilst not presenting any concrete or constructive ideas.

B6: [...] first of all, 'climate change', alone the word... Climate just exists and cannot be changed in that sense, you can only treat the resources that you have in a mindful way. And this I don't do by going somewhere to protest. [...] I then also have to change my own life. And then it doesn't make any difference if I have a vegetarian. Or if I subsist on nothing or something like that. Because humans themselves also emit CO₂. Are we supposed to lock them away as well?

In line with this, the group firmly refuted its own responsibility as the current 'green hype' was thought to firstly be ridiculously overrated and secondly, if at all, elites were the ones responsible.

Everyday efficacy

Initially, it was voiced that the individual could make a difference but since the issue was overall believed to be substantially exaggerated and responsibility was not attributed to the group of farmers themselves, in the course of the interview, it ceased to play a role if the individual could make a difference. Moreover, consumers were described as uninformed and lazy which also pointed to them having been perceived as inefficacious. Instead, people who were seen as role models were deemed influential. The group harboured a particularly negative attitude towards the *Fridays for Future* movement that was at the centre of public attention at the time of the interview, which also came with a profound questioning of its true efficacy as the farmers deeply judged the student protestors on the grounds of alleged hypocrisy.

One was further angry about the negative reputation and lack of regard for farming in general in relation to climate change since its contribution to emissions were

in fact much smaller than generally perceived. Also, much more CO₂ was actually coming from elsewhere (diffusion of responsibility):

B6: [...] this hype that this group is getting right now, I don't get it. They are being invited to see the Pope and I don't know what. For me that's something anyways, how politics is paying court to all these young people...

One was also annoyed that for instance the consequences of flying for the climate were not adequately publicly addressed as that industry could afford pervasive lobbying as opposed to one's own. Once again, politics was advantaging the elite and the group questioned why business managers needed to fly when they could simply be using video calls instead.

Further critique was addressed at the unquestioned growth imperative and increasing inequality within society. A consequent pricing strategy for climate action was believed to have the potential to make a difference:

So I think nowadays it is not a question of transmitting knowledge any more. You can generally only educate people through their wallets [...] because they only buy what is cheapest, thus what is bad has to become more expensive [...] and then you don't have to explain stuff anymore...

Politics could influence educational institutions so that for example more climate-friendly farming was taught as part of professional training. Again, this did not point towards the farmers themselves being able to make a difference. Hence, they were also not considered responsible. At the same time, politicians' integrity was severely doubted (here in relation to the climate cabinet):

B6: These are only people who want to shine a positive light onto themselves. Who want to be re-elected next year.

B7: When I don't know what to do any more, I build a working group (laughing). That's how it is. It is just cosmetics.

Overall, politicians were deeply disliked since they were perceived as inconsistent and short-sighted. Besides, the behaviour of corporate agents was received as particularly harmful to the climate. Larger corporations were seen as behaving particularly irresponsibly, which was partially ascribed to the shareholder system. Above all, the group was dismissive of large firms that came to its region as this was argued to also have negative impacts on the climate (reference to area sealing). Thus, this should be politically prevented but instead politicians were vying for big companies to come to the area. One also questioned the efficacy of the media as they were

only interested in gaining clicks and attention and also their reporting was deeply one-sided, sensational and apocalyptic:

B3: ... We just have this one-sided reporting of the media. That's simply only one-sided. [...]

I: Ok, so one-sided on which side? Which kind of knowledge do we have too much of and which-, we don't have enough everyday competency (you said)? And we have too much of what? We are inundated by-?

B?: Advertising!

B3: Catastrophes!

B?: Advertising.

B3: Catastrophes. Advertising.

Ultimately, this group doubted that much could be done about climate change at all since firstly, the challenge would have to be approached globally which was seen as outstandingly complicated. Secondly, it was thought to already be too late to mitigate climate change.

Embodied information practices

The concept of knowing was complex in this group. At one point the multidimensionality of the climate debate was recognised with it being a global challenge that several actors were responsible for. It was also acknowledged that the issue already lay in the definition of the problem. On the other hand, climate change was being outright denied in this group:

So, climate action for me is a word, a word that doesn't actually really exist, because climate is actually everything around us, the atmosphere that comes in from outside, which cannot, I think, be protected.

The rest of the group thought that the imperative to act on climate change was at least severely overrated and there was already enough effort made for climate action. The climate movement was ridiculed and emotions were thought to be stirred by politics and the media who were over-reporting on the issue 'twenty-four-seven' although in Germany there were enough other issues that should gain political attention. Politics was instead practicing mere actionism with the only objective of gaining more votes.

B?: So again we cause fear-. So through fear, we fuel something. Maybe it isn't as bad at all as it is being presented. I'm sure, when the studies-, it is not as bad as it is being pushed.

Such evoking of negative emotions, it was believed, also led to the occupational group of farmers being presented in a bad light.

I generally always find it difficult to talk about climate action when you don't even have the criteria that you want to look at. What is the climate? What plays into that? What do I even have to protect? That, as I think, is still a very unanswered question in the whole discussion. And it is being discussed very emotionally, at the moment [...] only a certain section is being looked at in each instance. And this is being encapsulated from any, let's say, intercorrelations with other things. And I am finding it very concerning, when you are only looking at it like through a crystal ball, like right now with farming. As producer. As one point that plays into the whole debate.

Overall, one identified particularly strongly with one's own occupation and thus felt treated unfairly by decision makers in this respect. The group was very tightly knit, fixated on its own situation and perceived itself as rather separate from the rest of society. A picture was painted of us (the farmers) against those at the top (the elite) that were transporting inconclusive information about the issue (misinformation, conflicting information or e.g., lack of information about e-mobility and batteries). For this, discourses based on accusations of hypocrisy, distance to nature and a lack of everyday competency were employed, which rendered the climate debate *not an honest and truthful discussion*. In line with this, elite groups were made fun of due to their perceived distance to nature and it was agreed that their theoretical knowledge was often far removed from people's lives, useless and quixotic whilst the farmers themselves acted responsibly and actually preserved resources.

Consequently, the group unequivocally and vehemently demanded the transmission of 'everyday competency', that young people today were allegedly neither taught by their parents nor by educational institutions. By contrast, the group perceived itself as well informed and very practically competent due the focus of one's occupation and one's closeness to nature.

Due to its members disliking the emotional intensity with which the topic of climate change was being debated, the group believed more factual information was needed:

(?B4): Because if you look, these talks of CO₂, that is thought to harm the climate. (then follows a discussion about air composition)

B7: And only this aspect is being looked at. This cause.

(?B4): Yes, indeed.

B7: The CO₂ emissions

B2: And the information is being debated very controversially. There is this camp and that camp. How am I as layperson supposed to trust that this really is the prob-

lem now. So I am convinced, even if we practice 100 percent climate action, this will also not change the climate.

Extent of denial

In this group there existed several strands of collective denial with the most obvious being the unequivocal relativisation of climate change that generally culminated in climate scepticism and at times even outright climate change denial, most notably through the endorsement of a climate-related conspiracy theory that was either accepted and then built upon or ignored by the rest of the group. Even the participant who had reported that he himself practiced organic farming did not elucidate to climate action playing an important role in his professional everyday life.

Denial strategies

Particularly telling was also that the issue of climate change was collectively taken very personally by the group, one almost saw it as direct affront towards one's own occupation. At this point, generational and class conflicts played into what was being said (resentment towards elites) which resulted in further hardening of the fronts.

B6: Recently there was this study, how many farmers travel by plane in comparison to, let's say, some office worker or something. There was this comparison, ...

B?: They have better lobbying. You never hear anything against air traffic.

6.6 I don't think flying per se is as bad as it is always made out to be – Mobility provider

This group was quite heterogeneous in terms of age (mid-twenties – late forties) and sex but its members had a similar educational level. Like the farmers, here the group members also collectively identified very strongly with their occupation. Climate change again (like with green startup and NGO) played a central role in their everyday working life, but in direct contrast to for example the group of the NGO, the moral aspect of the issue had not been internalised. Instead, personal freedom and the right to decide for oneself were underlined, which was reminiscent of statements made by those working for the green startup. Overall, one grappled intensely with the externally perceived contradiction between the particularly high emissions of the mobility sector on the one hand and the nature of the work of the sustainability department this group belonged to on the other. There was a lot of annoyance