8 Conclusion

If climate action is to be successful in the future, it has to be planned and implemented as inclusive project involving the whole of society. However, mobilisation of large sections of society has thus far remained behind expectations because official responses to climate change are generally blind to the substantial climate-cultural differences that exist between social groups. Calls to action sent out by political decision-makers (e.g., in political talk shows) are received markedly differently by different societal segments. Thus, first and foremost, this study established profound climate-cultural difference existing in Germany. It set out to shed light on the reasons why some people's passion is lit when confronted with climate change, whilst others are substantially paralysed by the threat and still others reject it outright.

The initially observed homogeneity in outlooks amongst elite groups shows that official calls for more climate action in Germany generally use the language of those privileged segments of society that have had the means to attain the roles of decision-makers or knowledge providers (like politicians, scientists or journalists). In these statements, not much objection to or deviation from official climate-related narratives was found. Yet a sharp contrast was then observed between these elite interpretations that take aspects (anthropogenic component, need to act) on the matter of climate change for granted (elite discourse coalition) and the rest of the public that still debates these aspects as if it were living on a completely different planet.

In direct opposition to this elite discourse coalition stand the eclectic and multifaceted statements made by the focus groups and the non-elite climate cultures 'from below' identified in the media analysis. What particularly stood out in this respect was the widespread climate scepticism and even outright climate change denial that exists, somewhat surprisingly, in Germany. However, this has hitherto remained almost completely invisible in (elite) climate debates, including in academic research, proving that vital insights are missed when one does not look beyond elite discourses. Only certain segments of society hold the privilege, in terms of financial means and time, to contribute to climate action as it is officially being conceived of thus far. This results in the danger that only certain elites will take part and that they will then promote their own interests. Acknowledging and investigating these climate-cultural differences, as done by this study, presents a vital prerequisite for im-

plementing more meaningful climate action that finally engages all of society. One key insight from this study is therefore that climate action does not stand a chance to become an inclusive project involving the whole of society if it keeps being presented only in such elite terms.

For considering these climate-cultural differences, it especially pays to do so in relation to responsibility, efficacy and knowing. Here, it makes particular sense to approach responsibility together with efficacy: for instance, a clearly discernible readiness to lead and shape climate action in the more elite climate cultures often comes with a pronounced self-efficacy expectation. Yet, at the same time there is some variety regarding the attribution of responsibility (either to oneself or others). By contrast, the statements regarding responsibility and efficacy that emerge from the rest of the public's different climate cultures indicate experiences of financial and time-related limitations and perceived or actual impotence. With this comes a more or less deeply rooted scepticism towards the willingness of political and social elites to actually practice climate action. Here, the perceived lack of accountability and distance to the everyday experience of 'common people' attributed to such elites are repeatedly stressed. This irrelevance might lead to even less engagement, as not being addressed and included steers up reactions of anger and opposition, potentially even as an act of defiance. In all this, the divergence between responsibility and efficacy plays a central role. This gap widens (and with it the scepticism becomes further entrenched) when responsibility is repeatedly attributed to individual citizens, for example by means of publicly orchestrated and ministerially endorsed medial calls for climate-friendly food consumption. When this over-responsibilisation collides with the actual limited self-efficacy that defines many people's everyday experiences in a highly complex and bureaucratically operated society, this becomes particularly discouraging. Ultimately, responsibility for climate action can no longer be offloaded onto uniformly imagined standard consumers. Such discrepancies between responsibility and efficacy and also between attributed and self-perceived responsibility or efficacy affect different segments of society in different ways. Steps towards the inclusion of larger segments of the public could therefore lie in thinking responsibility together with efficacy and differentiating between official attributions of responsibility and efficacy and the real lived responsibility and efficacy that people experience in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, information provision alone is not sufficient to spark meaningful climate action. Commonly instigated official information campaigns that aim to motivate consumers to act climate-responsibly must therefore remain below expectations and so they have. Such narrow messages can simply not be equally relevant to different social groups with diverging climate cultures. Besides, unidirectional information deficit logics must be deemed insufficient due to the complexity of human behaviour alone. People have numerous motives that must be prioritised and integrated to surmount crushing ambivalences. Again, this becomes particularly ap-

parent with respect to the startling difference in life-realities of elite and non-elite climate cultures. Both research and policy have thus far neglected the importance of social environments and practical demands that substantially play into people's climate-related everyday behaviour.

This study's findings further show that there is widespread denial present in relation to climate action in Germany. In each instance, different manifestations of such denial reflect different combinations of responsibility, efficacy and knowing. Denial surfaces both explicitly (in the form of resistance movements) and implicitly and is more or less pronounced depending on groups' different social and cultural positions. Clearly, to successfully decarbonise society, this differently manifesting denial must be taken into consideration. However, most approaches so far do not do justice to this diversity – in fact they are entirely blind to it, as they are to social disadvantage. They also completely overlook that current forms of communication also often fail to reach even those privileged parts of society that would actually (at least financially) be equipped to contribute. Climate action can be considered important but the concurrent desire to be perceived as cosmopolitan and worldly can still cause one to take a plane to the southern hemisphere each summer, thereby practicing implicit denial.

Therefore, what constitutes different social imaginaries should by no means be conceived of only as consisting of cognitive ideas and conscious convictions. The necessity to link both cognitive and emotional aspects of knowing in the context of climate debates and action thus emerges as a key challenge to those interested in advancing climate action. New forms of multi-directional, dialogic knowledge exchange like those that surface in the societal dialogues investigated could help alert different actors to their respective responsibilities for climate action. Pointing to people's actual capacities to act could also further the goal of effective climate action.

If such insights were integrated into policy, this would finally render it more applicable, feasible and relevant for people's lives. Here, it is the politicians' responsibility to provide the necessary structural framework conditions to enable climate-friendly consumption and, arguably much more importantly (due to corporate efficacy being profound), also production. This should entail symbolic and financial incentives but also politically legitimised regulations and targeted prohibiting of what is particularly significantly contributing to climate change. The discrepancy between responsibility and efficacy shrinks the moment political decision-makers act climate-responsibly, according to the mandate they were given by the voter. Differentiated and targeted addressing of diverse social groups and establishing links to their lived everyday realities present possible first steps.

The meaning of climate change does not simply exist out there waiting to be unveiled by science and subsequently transmitted to the public. Instead, meaning must be made in ways that can be integrated consistently and, in turn, *meaningfully*

with what already matters in people's lives. This type of sense making is thoroughly shaped by the different socialities people are surrounded by on a daily basis. This study's data on climate-related debates that occur across different media formats and occupational fields clearly reiterates this lack of attunement that exists in German society regarding who should take the lead in climate action or who can actually make a true difference. Its results thus underscore the need for a markedly more culture-sensitive and therefore inclusive societal engagement with climate change as a precondition for successfully implementing current and future climate action targets and measures.