3 Methods

3.1 Introduction

> We seldom realize, for example that our most private thoughts and emotions are not actually our own. For we think in terms of languages and images which we did not invent, but which were given to us by our society.

<div align="right">Alan W. Watts, cited in Marr, 2008, p. 97</div>

In accordance with this pertinent realisation, the present analysis' research design has at its heart *relational* methodological elements (comment threads on social media, focus group interviews) in order to investigate socio-cultural phenomena that lie beyond the purely conscious and cognitivist attitudes and opinions the individual has access to. This rests on the conviction that explanations for the lack of (individual) assumption of responsibility paint at best an incomplete picture. These include for example information deficit hypotheses, theories of the diffusion of responsibility and de-politicisation, the power of materialism or the thesis of "disintegration of collective orientations and obligations" (Beck, 1986, cited in. Bremer, 2004, p. 13) that allegedly comes with liberalisation and increasing individualisation. Therefore, the research design consisted of a mixed-methods approach that fused the following three qualitative empirical steps together:

- Semi-structured expert interviews
  individual
- Innovative media analysis (flow model)
  relational
- Focus group discussions with already existing professional groups/work teams
  relational

Climate cultures reveal themselves through variations in discursive practices in the public realm concerning climate change and -action. This study is thus concerned with publicly expressed views about climate change and climate action across,

firstly, a range of media and secondly, across different occupational fields. It conceptualises the latter as providers of culture: one's professional field brings with it a certain culture with respect to climate change and –action and thus impinges upon the worker. At the same time the employee brings his or her idiosyncratic cultural composition to the workplace and in turn shapes and restructures the occupational cultural environment.

This study's methodological triad was uniquely suited to examine its central questions, as the main interest lay not in what individual people thought and said, but instead in how the topic of climate action was dealt with collectively. Collective handling of climate matters is precisely what climate cultures are about. Therefore, what was being said in conversation between people and, importantly, also what was not necessarily being consciously communicated presented the focus of this investigation. The question was therefore how such deeply relational, multidimensional concepts like responsibility- and power attributions can empirically be captured and analysed in their social context.

Such relational knowledge, and above all what unconsciously and tacitly swings along with messages, is extremely difficult to investigate, especially because the participants were not actually being observed in how they actually behaved in their everyday lives (with the exception of the statements made on social media). The nature of interviews remains that questions are being verbally answered and thus tracing back how people actually live their lives is a difficult endeavour. Yet some insight into practices and ways of thinking the participants habitually engaged in could still be gained through the application of the two relational empirical steps. For instance, when focus group members of the craftsmen and the industrial enterprise each stated outright that they did not care about the carbon emissions of their respective vacation flights, this indicates that in these two groups, at least, such behaviour was not commonly being socially sanctioned (as then they would not have dared to state this so boldly). The presence of the rest of the group rendered it likely that participants did not deviate too far from how they would normally talk. These insights would have been lost if only single interviews were undertaken: here, a little white lie for fear of being judged by the interviewer would not have been noticed. Similarly, the conversations on social media that were analysed unfolded 'in real life' so to speak – there was no interview situation in this case. Since such unobtrusive data on social media is readily accessible, it provides particularly rich access to how people actually handle certain topics and express their feelings and opinions about them. These two elements (and in particular in combination with the expert interviews where the narrative was in fact quite different) allowed new (and often enough quite surprising) insights into societal perceptions of climate change.

Accordingly, Corner and Randall stress that studies (Haythornthwaite, 1996; Valente and Pumpuang, 2007; Fell et al., 2009) show that "pro-environmental behaviour change will be enhanced by targeting social networks rather than indi-

viduals" (2011, p. 1011). According to Bremer, research also shows that social spaces with common life patterns do still exist, the principal difference to former times lies however in the fact that the categories cannot readily be classified according to past existing social classes (2004, p. 14). Instead, today, social spaces include all group constellations of everyday life such as family contexts, friendship groups, communities that form for leisure activities like music groups and sports teams, groups that form because of life events (birthing classes, bachelorette parties, house building cooperatives) and work teams in the professional occupational sphere. In this study, two social spaces were chosen for analysis, namely particular camps appearing and interacting on (social) media platforms (media analysis) and professional work teams (focus group analysis).

3.2 Background

The wider context within which much of this study's empirical material was collected is also highly relevant: at the time of the 2019 European elections the *Fridays for Future* movement in Germany was growing significantly and gaining influence. There was a public call for stronger action on climate change and a push from numerous directions that politics should prioritise the issue. It was ceasing to be the exclusive topic of the Green Party and making its way more towards the political mainstream. A so-called climate cabinet was established two months prior to the election, with the aim of synthesising legislation for mitigating climate change. Therefore, the question of how climate change should be approached politically featured prominently in public discourse. This general call for political action may thus also reflect the wider social and political context at the time of gathering the empirical materials. It was however also repeatedly mentioned in the interviews that politicians were publicly perceived as acting solely according to the rationale of upcoming elections to please voters rather than with authenticity.

3.3 Research design

The data for the present analysis was collected over a time period of twelve months (March 2019 – February 2020) in and around Munich. The multi-method approach was chosen to enable a more detailed, multi-layered capture of the research topic. The insights gained in each research step informed subsequent analytical components, which aided the synthesis of a more nuanced picture as in this way the different steps informed and legitimised each other.