

## 7 Discussion

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### 7.1 Introduction

The following discussion of my findings is structured around three core insights that emerged from the in-depth analysis and interpretation of the empirical material introduced in the previous three chapters:

**First**, in German society, 'elite' notions of a public consensus regarding climate change and the need for action are challenged by an in fact profound climate-cultural diversity. My empirical evidence revealed a substantial gap between those climate (sub)cultures within the population whose members receive, acknowledge, and internalise 'official' messages regarding climate change and -action, and those with whom these messages do not (at all) resonate. It shows that mainstream calls for climate action generally reflect the language and mind-set of groups who are endowed with larger shares of capital (cultural capital types here being particularly indicative), thereby eclipsing the everyday realities of large parts of the population. These profound climate-cultural differences are not yet reflected in research or policy. This is deeply problematic as it renders climate action largely irrelevant to less privileged sections of society, perpetuating their sense of marginality and inefficacy.

**Second**, the observed climate-cultural diversity is rooted in distinct constellations of responsibility, efficacy, and ways of knowing. Importantly, it was uncovered that incongruences between responsibility attributions and efficacy expectations often lead to climate inaction. Furthermore, it must be differentiated between official attributions of responsibility and efficacy, and the lived responsibility and efficacy that people experience in their everyday realities. These discrepancies are currently almost entirely unacknowledged in both research and policy. Accordingly, making them visible first and handling them thereafter currently presents a key challenge.

**Third**, specific constellations of responsibility, efficacy, and ways of knowing that characterise particular climate cultures can result in different forms of *denial*. This denial was found to be either explicit or implicit. Explicit denial is performed by those sceptical of climate change even occurring whilst implicit denial refers to people who acknowledge the issue but diffuse their responsibility and deny the

imperative to act accordingly. However, there is no clear link between societal status and engagement in climate action, with members of 'elite' climate cultures being similarly prone to climate inaction than their less well-off counterparts. This is all the more worrying given that these sections of society tend to experience high levels of efficacy that reflect their above-average educational, cultural and financial capital.

## 7.2 Climate action as 'elite project' obscures climate-cultural diversity

Germany's climate-cultural diversity turned out to be much higher than is generally assumed in both, academic literature and public debate. However, this only became apparent when the investigation moved beyond 'elite perceptions' expressed through expert interviews and 'official' media messages. As Beck has poignantly pointed out (refer to section 2.4), climate policy will only ever cease to be an "elite cloud-cuckoo-land" if a majority of very different people agree to vote and act accordingly, and do so, in many ways, against their own personal interest.

Views expressed by members of elite climate cultures were thus surprisingly homogenous, given the apparent diversity of actors involved (ranging from elected politicians to YouTubers). Here, prevalent discourses by and large reflected the climate-cultural orientations of the socio-political establishment that implicitly accept the IPCC-consensus, the necessity for rapid climate action and the need to consider related questions of responsibility and efficacy. This confirms that official calls to (climate) action are mainly noticed and internalised by those in society who speak the same language as the originators of these messages. Elites from political, scientific and some corporate and social spheres form 'discourse coalitions' (Hajer, 1993, 2004) that also dominate the debates around climate action, for instance in conventional media formats (e.g., television, prestige print media). Those who are not part of these particular elite discourse coalitions often accuse the media of being complicit with these narratives, as several social media statements indicated (see chapter 5.3). Similarly, craftsmen and farmers interviewed for this study also believed that the media were generally biased towards the climate movement (see sections 6.2 and 6.5).

Experts interviewed by and large participated in these particular elite discourse coalitions (see chapter 4). For example, they stated (nearly) unequivocally that climate action needed to be undertaken by the whole of society – mirroring political calls that ask everyone to contribute. However, the question remains how this can be achieved when such official political calls for action address only some sections of society (endowed with the relevant types of capital). Predominantly speaking to the public as if it were one uniform entity completely overlooks the everyday reali-