

6 The seven focus group discussions

6.1 Introduction

As the last section has demonstrated, the increasingly pressing imperative for climate action resonates in different ways with differing segments of society. These variations reflect and at times shape various climate cultures. Here, the occupational context is one of the factors that play a decisive role in people's engagement with climate change. Thus, this chapter turns to the professional context, where profound climate-cultural diversity was again observed. Practitioners from various professional fields were group-interviewed regarding their opinions on climate action between July 2019 and March 2020. The content analytical exploration of the interview material yielded both similarities and differences between the groups regarding climate-related discourses and practices and connected climate-cultural orientations. Once more, particular focus was placed on the attribution of responsibility to different societal actors, related efficacy expectations as well as the role of different forms of (not) knowing/refusing to know.

6.2 I really don't care what comes out of the plane in terms of CO₂ - Craftsmen

The men in this group were of different ages. The group agreed in saying that climate action did hardly play a role in their lives (even though they thought that the environment should be protected). The reasons for this were quite varied, however: one person (that was comparatively dominant) had extensively prepared for the discussion in order to convincingly present his conviction that climate change was not caused by human influence. Another person did not perceive climate change as an issue, whilst the rest of the group was generally aware of the issue, but had not internalised it to the point where it would have been deemed necessary to adapt one's everyday practices because of it. There was no objection towards the lengthy statements of the climate sceptic. The group concurred that wasting of resources definitely needed to be avoided. The participants were generally very connected to nature and the coun-

tryside, whilst it was spoken dismissively about urbanites. This was also reflected in regionality being the only climate-related factor that played a role when making purchasing decisions. Overall, one was wary of rich people and mistrustful towards any kind of elite.

Table 5: Overview: The focus group of craftsmen

Group: Dimension	Craftsmen
Responsibility	Diffusion of responsibility + pronounced externalisation of responsibility for climate action (to politics, corporate agents, the media and science)
Efficacy	Low individual efficacy expectation, little trust in decision makers, overall, very sceptical towards 'the elite' and 'official discourses'
Knowing	Patchy knowledge of climate change (exception: where there was work-related overlap; yet IPCC-consensus not accepted by majority of the group), low problem awareness, clear preference for factual information (= information deficit thinking; aversion towards manipulation/'framing'), well-informed in own perception
Denial tendencies	Pronounced outright denial (e.g., conspiracy theories), imperative to protect the climate not internalised, if at all treated like a trivial offence

Lived responsibility

As members of a small firm, the respondents did not perceive themselves as responsible for climate action. Instead, they thought it was larger companies that needed to act, but deemed this improbable as they were generally profit-driven and corrupt. Here, the *Dieseltgate* scandal was again mentioned. Large firms were perceived to get away with a lot that would immediately have consequences for smaller firms, especially due to lobbying. Although it was stated that the individual was responsible for climate action, in sum the responses did not indicate that the participants applied this to themselves (ergo it may have been said due the interview situation, social desirability). For example, one group member said:

I like flying! [...] I really don't care what comes out of the plane in terms of CO₂.

This statement shows that in this group, behaviour that is harmful to the climate is generally not socially sanctioned. Besides, it was not deemed realistic that enough members of the population would contribute to climate action, as people were 'too lazy'. Moreover, politics was attested responsibility to protect the climate, the group

however believed that this was currently not being practiced. The global nature and temporal complexity of the climate crisis were cited as reasons for political inaction:

Why is Germany supposed to invest 15 billion in climate projects when this has no benefit for it whatsoever in the present?

Such diffusion of responsibility was quite pronounced in this group.

Everyday efficacy

The members of the group voiced that the individual could hardly make a difference and that this inefficacy was being exacerbated by the inconclusive knowledge and information the population was being supplied with.

The following exchange illustrates how one group member (**B3**) objects to the previous participant by employing the strategy of pointing to his own everyday practice instead of disagreeing outright (to avoid the discomfort of direct confrontation):

B4: But there, the cucumber wrapped in foil is just as good as the cucumber without any plastic. If you eat that cucumber, then there is not really any difference between the two. They taste the same.

B1: Let me put it like this: why would anyone as a single human being try anything to make things better, when at the end of the day it turns out, like for example with the cucumber, that it does not make any difference anyways? In fact, the cucumber that causes less CO₂ until it ends up in the supermarket is the one that is wrapped in plastic. And then there is one without plastic, but that one causes more CO₂ due to its transportation. That's where the mistake is.

B3: I buy organic cucumbers from Bavaria.

The group was further annoyed that politics did not direct its focus where it would really make a difference as measures were often employed on secondary battlefields. The group also talked very critically (almost spitefully) about the actions of corporate agents:

The problem is, there is a jour fixe for everything, congresses, conferences...

Hence, political- and corporate decision-makers were deemed inefficacious and there was hardly any trust in politics. It was taken particular issue with people who were seen as role models (footballers, politicians) oftentimes not meeting this expectation. Interestingly, at the same time, one could also sense a certain amount of respect for business people (take planes, because they have such little time, a frequent flyer status is justified and aspirational).

Embodied information practices

Overall, climate knowledge in this group was patchy and the scientific consensus on climate change had not been internalised. Where there was thematic overlap due to the nature of the respondents' work, one was more confident:

We have to know about emissions, we are energy consultants.

The members of this group generally thought that they were well informed about climate issues, which was based on their closeness to nature (as opposed to people living in the city) and one's work. The educational system was not credited here.

One was also suspicious towards the media and science. One member called the reporting of public media channels *one giant infomercial for the Green Party*. Being asked where society's knowledge about climate change originated from, one group member said:

Yes, because the 'Mr. scientists' simply discover this at some point and then bring it to the public. Someone claims it, somebody else doesn't believe it.

How climate change was dealt with was also strongly determined by experiences of the weather. On the one hand, a shift was recognised:

We now have a situation like in South Tyrol.
We don't have a real winter anymore.

On the other hand, this was not taken as a reason to change one's behaviour. The concept of thresholds and tipping points was simply rejected:

I: But I wanted an answer to what was just said, that it is cumulative and irreversible?

B3: I can't say, I have no idea. There was an ice age, and then again no ice age.

The knowledge concept this group employed was quite narrow. Although one group member recognised the role of emotional messages, this was perceived exclusively negatively (one did not want to be manipulated through framing). Beyond this, the group followed information deficit thinking. The wording *Mr. scientists* insinuates the resentment that exists towards the influence of the knowledge elite.

Disagreement featured in questions about consumption, which was dependent on problem recognition. One group member (who had referred to his family as 'connected to the countryside') reported that quality of produce and regionality played

a role when shopping groceries whilst a (price sensitive) young father, who did not perceive climate change to be a problem, said:

B4: Ok, but nowadays you can actually buy anything. Because today, you have such strict rules. Like at Lidl, Rewe, they have to...

B3: Yeah, but when half a kilo (of meat) costs two Euros, then?

B4: Yeah, you might as well buy packaged meat at Rewe, Lidl, Penny, that is just as good.

Extent of denial

This group exhibited marked denial of climate change. The issue did hardly play any role in its members' lives and therefore it was not deemed necessary to attribute responsibility to oneself or think about one's own efficacy. Instead, the responsibility was seen to lie with decision-makers in politics, corporations, media or science who were however not seen as trustworthy or competent. Since knowledge about climate change was so fragmented and serious recognition of the problem more or less non-existent, these assumptions on the low efficacy of those societal agents did not particularly bother the members of this group. There was a whole series of strategies employed for practicing this denial:

Denial strategies

One member of the group extensively endorsed conspiracy theories in relation to climate change, which the other group members did not object to. The rest of the group treated climate action as if it were a rather trivial offence. Humour and sarcasm were used to deflect from not-knowing and to save face:

Ok, so if we save the world only with a non-plastic straw, then I like it, then I won't use plastic straws anymore (laughs).

Climate activists were smirked at. Accusing decision-makers and influential figures of hypocrisy and the spread of conflicting knowledge also served to reinforce denial. Overall, the members of the group were very sceptical towards elites and 'official' discourses. Calls to climate action were also questioned on the grounds of social fairness:

Save the bees? Yeah, but who signed this petition? Those who can afford it. Look at Grünwald [affluent Munich borough], how did they vote? (Laughs). We vote green, because we can afford it. That should make us think... Because somebody from Grünwald does not care whether the honey costs three or twenty euros. But those

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 global-ity, 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 (CO₂-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 High efficacy ascribed to corporations, yet overall little trust in conventional companies 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‹ 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