The Wastefulness of the Environmental Movement –

An Investigation into Sustainable Activism

Degree of Master of Science (Two Years) in Human Ecology: Culture, Power and Sustainability
30 ECTS

CPS: International Master's Programme in Human Ecology
Human Ecology Division
Department of Human Geography
Faculty of Social Sciences
Lund University

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Term: Spring 2018

Abstract:

This thesis examines how the Climate Justice Movement in Germany is set up today and how activists relate to and feel about their activism. Specifically, factors are investigated that make people feel unhappy about their activism or even leave the movement. Furthermore, potential changes of the movement in order to become a healthier and more sustainable environment for activists are suggested.

Participatory Action Research was conducted and data was collected through unstructured interviews, autobiographic reflection and informal conversations. This study finds that the Climate Justice Movement has indeed inherited violent and destructive dynamics of the surrounding world system. Capitalist pressures of efficiency, competition and productivism just like patriarchal oppression are visible. An exploitative culture of activism that creates an adverse social metabolism and consequent rift of activists within a supposedly anti-capitalist and pro-sustainability movement is a consequence.

Various starting points for a restructuring process have been identified. A first important step is the fundamental recognition of the embeddedness of the movement in the current system and the resulting pressures and traumata that activists experience as a consequence. Furthermore, internal dynamics and working cultures need to be scrutinized. Developing a holistically authentic strategy that can make the CJM a healthier, more sustainable and coherent place for current and future activists will play an essential role in the urgently needed great transformation.

Acknowledgements:

This thesis wouldn't have been possible without all the people that made time to talk to me throughout the research process; thank you for your trust and your honest self-revelations. I also want to give a million thanks to Vasna Ramsar for being such a patient and supportive supervisor throughout this unexpectedly long process. Next to the content-related support, I am tremendously grateful for my beloved commune and all the acroyogis out there for always being the best moodlifter I could have asked for! The same goes to my family; thank you for bearing with me! And finally: Mil gracias a Acción Ecológica por tanto que me permitieron aprender de su lucha. Y a Marga Arboleda Henao, te quiero agradecer por tanto que me apoyaste, por tu buena fe y tus ánimos siempre.

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List of Acronyms

CJA Climate Justice Activism
CJM Climate Justice Movement
CO_2 Carbon Dioxide
NGO Non-Governmental Organization
SA Sustainable Activism

1. Introduction

In many regards, the world seems to be an increasingly cold-hearted, violent and unfair place. Under the name of "development" and "modernization," nature, social relations and the great majority of the world's human inhabitants are being suppressed by the hegemonic system[1]. At the same time, a growing body of movements strive towards changing the status quo by means of giving their time, energy and even their pure bodies for the greater cause of changing the current harmful system. Acknowledging the state of the world and trying to change things can be an overwhelming and demanding endeavour. Feeling personally responsible for the fate of the world and working oneself up in the intent to change the status quo is a fertile ground for rapid overwork and consequent exhaustion. Often enough, the ones that strive towards making the world a more loving and just place end up stressed out, hurt and unhappy. An increasing number of activists end up heavily overworked or even depressed as a consequence of their political work (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Meanwhile, the scientific consensus is quite explicit about that fact that there is not much time left to lose if we want to save the planet and its inhabitants from extinction through rising temperatures and human exploitation (Cook et al., 2016). We are living and acting in times of multiple capitalist crises (Klein, 2014) and this raises the importance for social movements and civil society organizations to constructively engage with our personal, ecological and political crises. If we want to protect ourselves while collectively working towards "the world we want to live in," it will be important to take time to think about *how* we do things, instead of rushing on to plan the next campaign or petition. The high drop-out rate within the climate movement is a powerful indicator for the importance of restructuring our working culture and reflecting on our greater strategy. Many of the activists that have left the movement have not only individually suffered, but deprived their comrades of valuable knowledge, experience and network. At this critical point in history where we will either be able to turn fate around or face chaos and extinction, the climate movement needs to be healthy, strong, enduring and attractive for newcomers to join. In order to ensure sustainable activism that is able to be functional over the long term, it is crucial to identify and nurture those psychological resources that can protect us from withdrawing from the big tasks that lie ahead of us as humanity. Such simple acts of caring for ourselves and for our comrades by going beyond the

[1] The hegemonic system which today constitutes of a vicious combination of capitalism, extractivism, patriarchy, neoliberalism and (neo-)colonialism, amongst others (for references see e.g. Klein (2014), Hornborg et al. (2007) or Nixon (2011)).

narrow-minded focus of utility maximization and efficacy consequently become part of the holistic revolution that we demand; by forestalling anti-capitalist routines in the movement itself. Such elements of prefigurative politics within the CJM would not only make it more authentic and attractive for newcomers but will ensure the long breath that will be needed for a true and profound change to happen.

This thesis will focus on structural changes that can be undertaken within the Climate Justice Movement. Concentrating on psychological insights that have been gained by a science that mainly focuses on the individual is a common way of societies to avoid looking into the mirror and facing the status quo of our current political and economic system. As the CJM challenges the hegemonic world system that humanity has created, it is coherent to also turn our scrutiny inwards and observe ourselves and the way we reproduce destructive and unsustainable customs of the society we have grown up in. Stress, depression and burn-out can be viewed as a medical problem, or they can be viewed as a political one. Unhappiness can become an important foundation for people to challenge the situation they live in and to create a narrative around hopes and utopias for a different world (in this case, a different movement world). Such kind of emancipatory spirit runs danger of being turned against the individual activist as soon as the same phenomena of unhappiness is used as a basis to judge the constitution and mentality of people, rather than the structure of power and our internal organization.

1.1 Research Questions

In order to explore the reasons for activists to leave the CJM and deduce possible approaches for restructuring processes, the following questions guided the investigation:

A) How does activism in the German Climate Justice Movement look like today and how does it this affect the well-being and happiness of the involved activists?

B) What conditions and experiences in the movement lead people to leave the movement in order to protect their health and well-being?

C) What potential changes could support the movement in becoming a healthier and more sustainable environment for climate activists?

2. Background and Context

In the following, the current context of this investigation will be illustrated.

2.1 Climate Movement

The Climate Movement is only recently becoming the subject of increasing scientific attention, and as a consequence there is variation in the different definitions that have been established. As outlined in the *Routledge Handbook of the Climate Change Movement*, the climate movement meets the majority of conventional criteria for a social movement as "an action system, formed for a certain period of time and based on collective identity of mobilized networks of groups and organizations which aim to bring about, prevent, or reverse social change by means of protest – if necessary, violent protest". (Rucht 1994: 76-77, as cited in and translated by Dietz & Garrelts, 2014)

While the overall conceptualization of a social movement seems to fit quite well to the general understanding of the climate movement, it is important to point out that the movement consists of an extraordinarily diverse range of actors. This fact challenges the aspect of a "collective identity" that is usually characteristic for social movements. Especially when it comes to the underlying "ideology" of the actors, there is often a significant distinction made between two groups; on the one hand, there is the so-called "climate justice stream," which makes reference to rather radical members that follow a strategy of direct action. On the other hand, we find what is often called the "climate change stream", where more moderate actors and established NGOs partake (Dietz et al., 2014).

Furthermore we can find a great variety of different actors that can be considered forming part of the climate movement. In a broader sense, this could be NGOs, informal actors, state officials, academics, market-based actors, cities, municipalities or local authorities.

Another distinctive aspect of the climate movement is the varying motivation of its members. While past social movements were mostly made up of people that were personally affected and thus striving to push for change, climate change is a extraordinarily diffuse cause with highly diverse consequences; as a result, it seems almost impossible to list all the individual reasons for people to get involved into the various movements around climate change and climate justice.

Regardless of the questionable homogeneity within the movement, there is after all a significant common ground that builds up on the collective notion that global warming is

posing an existential threat to the earth and that it is inevitable to take extensive and decisive action now. The recurrent demands of the protestors are usually about new energy sources, emission reduction and economic system- and lifestyle change (Dietz et al., 2014).

2.1.1. Climate Movement in Germany

As a reaction to anthropogenic climate change, a new social movement emerged in Germany that focuses, similarly to the broader global climate movement, on climate change and / or climate justice. Generally speaking, it aims at the "creation of a project that stands in antagonistic opposition to the hegemony of neoliberal climate politics" (Bedall, Bricke, & Tzschiesche, 2011: 41). This is especially relevant in the context of German politics, where a comparatively strong but highly controversial Green Party that once originated from the left field has today been caught up in conventional conservative politics. Up until today, this is causing irritation and frustration amongst environmental actors of the German Climate Movement (Raschke, 2001).

Overall, Germany's left is rather emancipatory and critical towards hegemonic solutions to the capitalist crisis. Nevertheless, I will refer to the movement as the Climate Justice Movement (CJM), using the term as an umbrella concept that, for the sake of simplification within this thesis, addresses the climate justice movement just as much as the conventional climate change movement. While this generalization works for the investigation at hand it is still important to remember that the movement is not as homogenous as it might seem when referring to it under one unifying label.

According to Dietz et al. (2014), the central demands of the climate movement (in this study the CJM) in Germany are:

- To stop energy production from fossil fuels;
- To change consumption behaviour;
- To achieve a global redistribution of power and wealth; and
- To implement a rights-based policy approach.

In recent years, Climate Camps have become a central part of the German CJM. As a consequence, they will also play a crucial role in the thesis at hand.

2.2. Climate Camps in Germany

According to Betall et al. (2011: 42), climate camps are

> meetings oriented at the grassroots level of the climate movement. They intend to create a platform for learning about a world respecting the principles of climate justice (theory). Furthermore, they aim at strengthening the climate movement (strategy) and are used for the organization and realization of direct actions against huge polluters (practice).

In 2008, the first German climate camp took place in Hamburg as a response to the construction permission for a power plant in Moorburg under the conservative-green government. Even though in that moment the camp was not as successful as it had been hoped for, it was a crucial first step towards what today has become a key characteristic and leading example for the climate movement worldwide. This makes it an especially interesting case to study. The inspiration of various yearly climate camps in Germany is today spreading throughout Europe, with an increasing amount of climate camps being organized. The spreading popularity of climate camps is becoming part of a wider project that gives them political meaning beyond their localized interventions. 2017 has seen the peak of the number of climate camps in Europe so far. In total, eight climate camps were organized all over the continent (Hubbart, 2017), out of which two took place in Germany. These camps prove to be an excellent way of gathering the diverse scope of actors[2] in the movement (as mentioned above).

Moreover, the strategy of eco-anarchic protest forms and civil disobedience that are gaining popularity at the climate camps prove to be quite successful in creating a collective group spirit and public visibility throughout Germany. This is partly due to the fact that, in a global comparison, Germany allows for more room to engage and oppose to the ruling law than it is possible in other countries[3] (Lartey, 2015).

In this thesis, I want to focus especially on climate camps in the Rhineland, which have become a reliable institution since 2010. The Rhineland region is a key place in Germany, as it is the biggest source of CO2 emissions in Europe. In the course of coal mining activities, many people are still forced to leave their homes. Villages just like the surrounding

[2] Residents, NGOs, hippies, anarchists, and activists from the different spectrums (like e.g. autonomous, radical, militant and ecological activists) are likewise involved.

[3] Without disregarding the heavy repression that activists nevertheless experience in Germany as well.

landscapes are being destroyed in order to give way to the exploitation of the lignite reservoirs underneath. Since 2012, the Hambacher Forest is being occupied in order to protect one of Germany's oldest and most biodiverse forests (klimacamp-im-rheinland.de, 2017).

An important stream within the climate movement, which is tightly connected to the climate camps in Germany, is "Ende Gelände", a broad alliance of people from the anti-nuclear and anti-coal movements, the Rhineland and Lausitz climate camps and the Hambacher Forest anti-coal campaign. Its revolutionary and most defining characteristic is its strategy of mass civil disobedience "as a powerful signal for real action to put our climate before profit" (Ende Gelände, 2017). Since 2015, an increasing amount of people has been coming together in order to put their mere bodies in the way of the coal-mining infrastructure in order to prevent the smooth operation of coal extraction. Until today, four "official" actions were implemented by the Ende Gelände alliance[4].

Ende Gelände is not only special because its form of mass civil disobedience is new and extremely suited to bring to public awareness how illegal actions in today's economic system are not only legitimate but urgently needed. It also unifies a variety of different actors and makes for an extremely popular entry point for newcomers to the movement that often get politicized in the very act of joining a political action for the first time. On another level, it also challenges the dominant belief in today's democratic system and the misleading image that German politicians are trying to promote of the country as being an international role model for the needed energy transition.

2.3. Who is an "Activist"?

As activism is something like an "undisciplined discipline", it seems to be difficult to agree on one fixed definition that does justice to all the diverse actors and forms of action. Activism can be used as an umbrella term for a great variety of 'actions for change' and people can mean very different things when they make use of the concept. On a general baseline, activism can be understood as any kind of action directed at effecting social, political, economic or environmental change (Dalton, Reccia, & Rohrschneider, 2003). Furthermore, a

[4] During the summers of 2015 and 2017, Ende Gelände actions took place during the climate camp in the Rhineland. Additionally, in 2016 the climate camp in the Lausitz mobilized for an action. In Nov 2017, an Ende Gelände Action was executed in the context of the COP23.

purposeful intention to change things "for the better" and effect improvements for society is relevant[5].

Under this definition, many different forms of activism can be identified. The English Wikipedia Entry (n.d.) on methods of activism lists 42 different ways of how one can engage politically. Amongst those stand concepts ranging from atheist activism to lobbying or Franchise activism. Even acts like a vegetarian diet are being considered activism, since they constitute a boycott of animal meat usage. This shows how broad the understanding of activism can potentially be, which can have various advantages. First of all, the art of making daily life a protest should by far not be underestimated; doings like considering the act of spending money as a form of voting, sharing revolutionary ideas on social media, acknowledging privileges and oppressions on a daily basis or using everyday conversations for dismantling hegemonic narratives can be an important contribution to a slow but steady transformation. Furthermore, there is a value in recognizing the smaller acts and a danger in disregarding peoples' efforts just because they do not live up to some idealised expectation of how an activist should be and what she should do.

In opposition to the previously outlined wide spectrum that can be counted as activism, the following investigation uses a rather narrow conceptualization of the term. Only actions that are not led by individuals but done collectively as part of a wider social movement and intentionally anti-systemic will be considered "activism". Furthermore, focus is put on forms of direct action like civil disobedience, protests, occupations, campaigning, boycotts and demonstrations. Conventional activism such as lobbying, writing letters, Internet activism or petitions will be excluded from the analysis. Those are usually less demanding forms of engagement and don't imply the same amount of personal involvement and risks associated with them. Hence, the overall danger of leaving the movement after intense engagement in such activities is smaller.

This work deals specifically with the CJM, and as such the activism in this work is environmental activism that is explicitly anti-hegemonic and strives for a great transition that goes beyond the focus of "stopping climate change".

Before leading over to the next chapter, I find it important to make explicit how exclusive this narrow definition of activism is: not only does it fail to appreciate individual-based daily life

[5] See for example the definition in the Oxford Dictionaries (n.d.) where activism is described as "the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change".

engagement, but it also excludes many people that do not have the possibilities to engage in the exact way described above. In today's world we can see an increasing criminalization of activists and protestors and it is by far not a given that everybody has the opportunity to even attend protests and the like. In a world where law often protects national boundaries and the financial system more than safety and well-being, people can be excluded from active participation because of the absence of a residence permit, police records or because their state of health or age does not allow them to be out on the streets in such kind of actions. This makes activism a privilege of which it is important to be aware of. Furthermore, just as the definition of activism itself is contentious, so is the classification of an "activist". In the following I will refer to people that actively participate in environmental justice activism (as conceptualized above and below) as climate justice activists (CJAs).

2.4. Sustainable Activism

"Sustainability" has become a buzz-word throughout the last decades and is being used in an increasing range of word-combinations. As humanity heavily relies on verbal communication in order to connect and collaborate with other people, words almost intrinsically carry a political dimension. As such, I argue that it is important to fight for words to contribute to their emancipatory understanding in order to question their ever-present hegemonic interpretations. Consequently, the concept of "sustainability" in this thesis does not so much refer to superficial practices for personal well-being or commercial products that carry a green Band-Aid of any eco-certification. Rather, I want to focus on those elements that pay justice to greater values like true health, collective care and profound connection (between human beings just as much as their natural environment). CJAs of today are often seen to bring heart and soul to tremendous sacrifice and in the process neglect their own physical and psychological well-being. Little time is "wasted" to stop and reflect on the fact that this is neither ethical nor integrity based practice and far from being sustainable. If we do not want to do harm, we cannot numb our emotions and exploit our own bodies. Pushing our own boundaries and ignoring our limits does not seem to prove utile in the long run, neither for the individual activist nor for the greater cause.

With the concept of sustainable activism, I want to introduce the idea of a sustained, long-term, healthy and satisfying activism that enriches the activist rather than wears her down. In his recently published book, *Being and Staying politically Active; Handbook of Sustainable*

Activism (own translation), Luthmann (2018) provides a valuable and very thorough contribution to the currently expanding debate on sustainable activism in the German CJM. He identifies three relevant dimensions of the concept of sustainable activism:

1. The first lies in the conscious documentation and reflection of social change and various paths of action. If we want to create a longer lasting social change, we need to be strategic in our organization.
2. The second dimension is about self-care and the fulfilment of one's personal potential. These aspects are very much focused on the individual activist and her own practice of self-care that needs to become an essential part of her activism. This includes a reflection on one's own passions and talents and the courage to stay true to one's own essence within the movement. It is important to engage in activities that fit to one's personality and to prevent popular images of how an activist is and what she should do overshadowing this.
3. Thirdly, it is about collective strategies that support long-term involvement and a kind of movement organizing that aims at becoming true to its own ideals.

These three dimensions are supposed to support the creation of a movement which is not only politically more effective but also more inclusive and supports activists in experiencing their political engagement as meaningful. This plays an essential role in reducing the danger of becoming overworked and thus not leading a sustainable activism (Luthmann, 2018). In line with the research question, special attention will be put on the third dimension that focuses on collective strategies and overarching dynamics within the German climate movement. Nonetheless, all three dimensions are interrelated and will come to the fore in different chapters throughout the thesis.

2.5. Do we need Sustainable Activism?

We cannot build a thriving future out of burn-out and exhaustion.
We cannot build a thriving future out of weary hearts, tired minds and burnt out bodies.
But we're certainly trying to, by the looks of it.
(Haaheim, 2014)

Sustainable activism has become a matter of survival; to be happy with one's own activism is an essential prerequisite for a long-term commitment to work for the sustainable and just transition that is needed. With happiness I do not refer to the superficial happiness of our current consumption society (see e.g. *The Happiness Industry*, Davies (2015)), where the concept is usually directed towards goals other than being happy, such as status, power, employment, and money. I am referring to a profound happiness through the experience of meaning and mindfulness, a rich social life and fulfilling experiences in nature. As such it can be a source of energy and resilience[6], which will be an important precondition for a long-lasting healthy activist life.

The CJM needs to be inspiring for the broader population in order to grow in an organic way and gain strength for the challenges ahead. We need collective energy and commitment to be able to stay in for the long haul. This is underlined in the oftentimes used metaphor in this context which points out that social change is a marathon, not a sprint (see e.g. Funk, 2017).
The fact that activists disappear and leave the movement (the reasons of which will be addressed in the following) does not only imply an unwanted indisposition of the individual activist. It is in itself a powerful symptom of an underlying structural problem of the movement that brings to the surface the urgent need to include in our demand for a greater transition a change from within. When activists unintentionally drop out it can have direct fatal consequences for the movement that stays behind. Amongst those is the loss of accumulated knowledge, experiences and contacts. It also makes the movement less inviting to new people, interferes with the development of the movement and leaves organisational holes. In *The Lifelong Activist*, a book full of experiences after years of working on and with sustainable activism and "activist burn-out", Hillary Rettig (2016: 16) underlines the importance of sustainable activism:

"When an activist burns out, she typically derails her career and damages her self-esteem and relationships. She also deprives her organization and movement of her valuable experience and wisdom. The worst problem, however, may be that when an activist burns out she deprives younger activists of a mentor, thus making them *more likely to burn out. And so it's a vicious circle with burn-out leading to more burn-out."*

[6] Some specifications of the conceptualization of resilience in this thesis can be found at 3.3.

The abandonment of one's activism seems to be a prevalent pattern where the majority of activists engaged in the CJM give a lot of themselves to the movement for some years and then leave the movement again. This is not to say that only the extremely limited definition of CJA used in this work is worth being considered as activism and surely a lot of people keep believing in their values and dreams even when they are not part of the CJM anymore. Those that drop out of the active participation in the movement often keep up efforts on their own terms. At the same time, history has seen an amazing range of social change movements and within them a fascinating amount of people dedicating their energy, time and passion for a good cause that have joined and left the movement again. Where are these people today? Where would we as society be today if they were all still "active" out there somewhere, working for the great transformation? A great amount of them has given up on their activism all together and has made an (often involuntary) decision to leave the movement.

If this is indeed a pattern, then it is important for the movement to acknowledge this drift and take on the responsibility to get on a collective journey of internal transformation in order to become a healthier, more sustainable and liberated movement. Federice, an activist from the radical autonomous feminist Marxist tradition, makes an important point when she describes how "we go to demonstrations, we build events, and this becomes the pea of our struggle. The analysis of how we reproduce these movements, how we reproduce ourselves is not at the centre of movement organizing. It has to be". (Federici, 2008). We need to start working with our internal belief system, and how it is shaped by power, privilege and our own positionality. If we fail to do this, we are bound to recreate structures of injustice in our daily interactions and political campaigns.

In this line, sustainable activism also means rediscovering what is today too often being taken for granted. Valuing Care- and Reproduction work and distributing it in a more just and equal way is an essential step on the path towards more feminist politics and as such an integral part of a liberated and sustainable activism.

As a consequence, the inherent pun of "sustainable activism" within the CJM is not so far fetched: One of the most common definitions of sustainability (in ecological terms) is that it describes the "property of biological systems to remain diverse and productive indefinitely" (Parker 2017: 77). Given that this is an important feature of what the environmental movement strives for, then why is there such a lack of connection to a transformation from within, for a sustainability not only on a global ecological level, but within the environmental movement itself?

The often cited argument that "the ends justify the means" has in this context proven to be misleading. We are trying to get rid of a problem by using the instruments that created it in the first place, namely pressures to perform, compete and excel. To use a famous quote by Audre Lorde (1979):

"The Master's Tools will never dismantle the Master's House."

Today's strategy of the CJM does not seem to be effective for the greater cause. In the best case, it will bring us closer to moving into the Master's house, but it will never truly demolish it.

2.6. Overwork, Burn-out and Despair amongst CJAs

With regard to the various stressors that can lead to an activist leaving the movement, different aspects on the individual, the collective and the systemic level can be identified.
In this work I will take a systemic approach. Focus will be put on the overarching fallacies of a movement that consistently produces overworked and worn-out members that involuntarily leave the movement after a time of intense dedication and passion for the cause. This is not to say that individual and collective processes do not matter in this regard and they will also be addressed throughout the thesis; as real life hardly ever follows academic distinctions, those spheres overlap and so they do in this thesis. Nevertheless, focus will be put on the fact that the movement, which is characterized by striving for systemic change and a "great transformation" towards sustainability and integrity (Dietz et al., 2014), needs to scrutinize its internal coherence with its overarching values of health and sustainability. Doing this will help to create a nurturing and inclusive ground for more people to join the movement and stay with it.
Within the capitalist focus of utility and productivity, literature can be found analysing harmful customs regarding the activist culture of those that try to change things for the better. A destructive culture of selflessness is often bemoaned (Rodgers, 2010), which is characterized by scarce conversations about emotional needs and challenges. The lack of self-care goes hand in hand with a culture of silence in which neither the phenomenon of activist burn-out nor its implications for the movement are talked about (Chen & Gorski, 2015). At the same time high expectations concerning commitment and sacrifice for the cause are dominating. Other stressors that have been identified to affect activist work include tensions

between workers (Hopgood, 2006) and workload and time pressures (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

It is important to highlight that this thesis will focus on the overall notion of a healthy and thus sustainable form of activism and the prevention of overwork in the CJM. Focus will not be put exclusively on the diagnosis of burn-out, as it is the most extreme form of overwork and by far not the only cause of activists feeling unwell and leaving the movement. Burn-out is a highly debated diagnosis that has been usurped by a hegemonic discourse on health and well-being (see e.g. Neckel, Schaffner, & Wagner, 2017). Within the sphere of clinical psychology it is increasingly debated whether the diagnosis of burn-out today replaces what formerly would have been described as depression or overwork. Burn-out seems to be in a way an attractive diagnosis, as only those that have "burnt" can burn-out. As such, even amongst the diseased can burn-out put a distinction mark on the "high-achievers" which have worked so much, they weren't able to handle it in the end. As a consequence, it seems a widespread phenomenon today that people prefer the diagnosis of a burn-out over other, more "traditional" diagnoses. This already is a strong indicator for the demanding working culture and high expectations that are being hold towards activists.

Despite the aforementioned ambivalence towards burn-out, it is useful to establish a common ground about the understanding of the diagnosis in this thesis. The Handbook of Work and Health Psychology provides a general conceptualisation in describing burn-out as "a state or process of mental exhaustion" (Schaufeli & Buunk 2003: 383). With regard to political activism, Pines (1994: 381) has synthesized a variety of conceptions of burn-out as "the end result of a process in which idealistic and highly committed people lose their spirit".

On the individual level, Goodwin and Pfaff (2001) argue that activists are especially susceptible to burn-out. Having one's passions and identity deeply wrapped up in social causes, activists presumably invest extraordinary amounts of what Hochschild (1983) described as "emotional labour" into their activist work. Especially in the face of extreme injustice, destruction and violence it can become hard to manage ones feelings and expressions during the "work" of activists. At the same time, it is part of the activist routine to suppress negative emotions most of the time and only allow room for them in specific short moments.

Overall, it could be argued that CJAs are somewhat by definition more vulnerable to burn-out as they invest a great deal of their time and energy for their personal passions while having to cope with a lot of setbacks and hopelessness. At the same time they are engaging in a

movement that apparently lacks self-care and has adopted violent mechanisms of market productivity.

This thesis aims at investigating into those aspects of activism that are especially difficult to deal with and what it is that activists struggle most with in their work. With this in mind, it aims at identifying strategies that will contribute to a greater transition of making activism more sustainable and life affirming, in order to protect people and the movement overall.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this section I outline some of the broad theoretical frameworks that I use to engage the structural conditions shaping the CJM today. Those are mainly derived from a literature review in combination with personal observations and experiences.

3.1. Social Metabolism

"We are consuming our way through people as if they were coal and oil."
(Haaheim, 2014)

Since the concept of Social Metabolism gained strength in the field of socio-environmental studies since the 1990's, it has been applied and adapted in various contexts. In a rather general conceptualization it is defined as "the manner in which human societies organize their growing exchange of energy and materials with the environment" (Martinez-Alier, Kallis, Veuthey, Walter, & Temper 2010: 153).

Long before the establishment of the concept in the socio-environmental discourse, Marx mentioned the theoretical construct of "rift" in the "metabolic interaction between man and the earth" for the first time. By the example of large-scale agriculture in a capitalist system, he elaborated on a form of "social metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life" (Marx, 1976). One and a half centuries later, in the same line of thought, John Bellamy Foster picked up this idea in his thought-provoking book *The Ecological Rift – Capitalism's War on the Earth* (2010). In his work he, too, addresses the "ecological rift" between humanity and nature. In the last chapter labelled *Ways Out*, he addresses the notion of "socialism as an alternative hegemonic product aimed at sustainable development and substantive equality (…)

[which] has facilitated a dialectical understanding of social-ecological metabolism" (Foster 2010: 416). This can be seen as one popular example of eco-socialist streams, which aims at changing and breaking with productivism and non-dialectical conceptions of progress.

Do climate activists today actually live up to such lofty goals? What about the emotional toll of all too often violent and oppressive actions and a culture of selflessness amongst the members of the movement? Many activists on the left (re-)act out of a sense of urgency and necessity, because they feel that the "irreversible tipping point after which events and their impact can no longer be controlled or limited has almost been reached" (Dietz et al. 2014: 2). This combination of wholehearted dedication and desperation in turn leads in many cases to a culture of self-abandonment for the cause.

This gives food for thought for the CJM, as it is not only loosing its strength through such draining practices, but also falling into the same traps of a consumer society we aimed to abandon in the first place. Reflecting on the inheritance of the capitalist logic even of a post- / anti-capitalist movement will be essential in order to become aware of those aspects and collectively confront them. It is high time to support the outer transition we strive for with an internal transition of our own minds and movements and find alternative strategies that don't rely on exploitation, pressure and competition. Because, as Haaheim (2013) fittingly phrased it:

"Over-consumption cannot drive out over-consumption; only gentleness and care can."

3.2. Decolonizing the Mind & the Revolutionary Imagination

With every step we take, we are always embedded in a political, societal and cultural context that constantly influences our actions. This underlying context doesn't refer to one specific power holder in particular, but to the very foundation of our intellectual and moral upbringing and development. Social control can be exercised in two different ways; one is the obvious and tangible form of external rewards and punishments. The other one is subtler, and refers to "an order in which a common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour" (Femia 1981: 24). Such internal control is the basis of what Gramsci has famously called the "hegemonic culture" (1971). The element of consent, rather than force of one class or group over another, is what makes it an extraordinary challenge for any social movement. Rather than being explicitly oppressed, dissenting voices are subdued and co-opted through subtle

dissemination of the dominant group's perspective as universal and natural, "to the point where the dominant beliefs and practices become an intractable component of common sense" (Litowitz 2000: 519). This lens allows us to re-consider the struggle of the climate movement in a new light. If ideology is becoming an instrument to ensure the consent of the great masses, how can we get civil society on board to collectively request profound system change? Any form of climate activism takes place in this biased context, where our current worldview is defined by internalized oppressive cultural norms, and our minds have been colonized to normalize deeply pathological assumptions. In order to deconstruct our ability to imagine true change, we need to change the hegemonic discourse and redefine reason and rationality.

The Australian philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood developed parallels between androcentrism, eurocentrism and anthropocentrism in the late 20th century. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) she argues that western culture's historical phases of "progress" can be understood as phases of colonisation of the various forms of "nature" by "reason". This line of argumentation builds upon a philosophy that can be traced back to René Descartes, who established the so-called Cartesian Dualism in which he argues that the mind and the body are distinct and separable (Baker & Morris, 1996). In the 21st century we now face a modern, industrial society (also known as "civilization") that has been domesticated through hegemonic institutions like school, military service or labour work. We have learned to supress impulses and emotions, which are a bodily expression of our animalistic heritage and often enough downgraded to be "unreasonable" or "inappropriate". We have gotten used to leading a "disembodied lifestyle" where our direct experience is increasingly superposed by a world of symbols, ideologies, virtual realities, careless materialism and a daily flood of information.

With the theoretical support of theories from feminism, de-/post-colonialism and Marxism, I suggest to confront what Plumwood (2001) calls "the ecological crisis of reason", and reconnect to our own and earthly body. Not only do we need to work towards a revolution of the way we imagine societal change to happen, but also to acknowledge our ecological and social realities. This also becomes clear in *The More Beautiful World our Hearts know is possible*, where the author, Eisenstein, reflects on the modern conceptualization of (in)sanity: "In a way, it is insane – insofar as sanity is a socially constructed category that serves the maintenance of dominant narratives and power structures. If so, it is time to be insane together! It is time to violate consensus reality" (Eisenstein 1967: 29).

3.3. Another Comment on Resilience

"We needed a revolution. We got resilience." – Alf Hornborg

The recent discourse on sustainability features some new concepts that are gaining increasing popularity. "Resilience" is one of them. This passage will likewise address this concept that is receiving a great deal of attention, not in order to promote the concept but to pre-empt associations of sustainable activism aiming at enhancing activists' resilience.

Originally, the concept of resilience was used to describe "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). In the context of today's discourse on climate change it is regularly used when referring to so-called "vulnerable communities or people". The current context of application can be exemplified with a New York Times Article from 2012, with the header "Forget sustainability, it's about resilience" (Zolli, 2012). In the Article, resilience is described as a way "to help vulnerable people, organizations and systems persist, perhaps even thrive, amid unforeseeable disruptions. Where sustainability aims to put the world back into balance, resilience looks for ways to manage in an imbalanced world". From a feminist perspective, it seems obvious how such terminologies feed into the capitalist hegemonic narrative where the responsibility of finding solutions is being passed on to the individual, while taking away the focus from the underlying structural problem. Next to mainstream newspapers that are commenting on and consequently influencing the modern-day conceptualisation of resilience, there is also an increasing number of books being published that actually proclaim to advocate sustainable engagement, like "Sacred Demise: Walking the Spiritual Path of Industrial Civilization's Collapse" (Baker, 2009) or "Navigating the Coming Chaos: A Handbook for Inner Transition" (Baker, 2011). The titles promise support for individuals in accepting the status quo and developing emotional resilience in the face of (system-caused-) destruction and suffering. A lack of the intention to change societal conditions is outstanding. At the same time, it is not only mainstream media that is advocating such terminology; as recently as November 2017, a German sustainability webpage promoted in its weekly newspaper ways how to enhance one's own resilience. In the article, resilience consists of six different features, the first being acceptance as the ability of accepting one's own destiny. The second is optimism as believing that everything will be good in the end. The third feature is self-efficacy as the belief in one's own abilities and competences to solve one's crises and problems. This is followed by individual responsibility, where people take responsibility for any kind of problems, even if they were not the ones who caused those

problems in the first place. With regard to the global system of profit-driven exploitation of nature and communities, a dominant but concealed neo-colonialism and overarching patriarchy, the aforementioned features of resilience seem cynical and absurd. How is one supposed to feel accepting, optimistic, self-efficient and responsible for global climate change and local destructions through big companies and corporate interests? Global witness found that environmental activist murders set record as 2016 became the deadliest year, with at least 200 activists being killed (global witness, 2017). Accounted numbers of environmental activist murders have been rising every year, while the true death toll is estimated to be much higher still, as many killings escape the public records.

On his blog *Catfish for lunch*, Kung Li (2012) fittingly describes how:

"When we celebrate resilience, we focus the spotlight on the people who got screwed over. The institutions that did the screwing over take the opportunity to slink off into the shadows."

And meanwhile, I would add, we recommend those people who got screwed over to try and be more mindful, meditate more and work on themselves to accept their destiny. This is why for me, the concept of resilience needs to be used in a very careful way and will not play a central part for sustainable activism in this thesis. Nevertheless, there are two more features of resilience missing which were not mentioned yet above. I regard those two as the common ground where this work's understanding of sustainable activism can benefit from ideas about resilience. The first is about networking and the way friendships can give strength in times of crisis. The second focuses on a solution-oriented approach when confronting problems. I find these two concepts useful as they can be applied to an overall suggestion for a stronger and happier movement altogether. The values of community and a "fighting-*for*" instead of "fighting-*against*" approach can be meaningful for creating the kind of nurturing and more sustainable movement that seems to be needed. These aspects will consequently be taken into consideration later on.

4. Methods and Methodology

4.1. Methodology

Politically committed research needs to take into account the power relations within the research process and emphasize the needs of those for whom the research is produced

(Farrow, Moss, & Shaw, 1995). The present investigation set out to explore the current state of (sustainable) activism in Germany and develop suggestions for possible improvements. As a result, a qualitative and participatory approach was considered appropriate. Involving the research partners in the knowledge-production process and focusing on the creation of useful insights for the community was made a priority. The choice of participatory action research inherently challenges conventional role assignments where the researcher extracts information from the informant and develops relevant knowledge. Through the combined effort of various viewpoints, I hold that with a critical realist epistemology it is possible to gain insights on the CJM and its status quo today. Due to the subjectivity of human perception (Bhaskar, 2008), those insights will always be incomplete and fallible, and so will be the resulting findings.

4.2. Methods

The fact that I am personally involved in the CJM in Germany generates a challenging but rich ground for this research. Being an authentic part of the context and thereby having the perspective of an insider, I was able to observe processes and dynamics in my surroundings and within myself just by naturally being present and aware in different situations. Also, I gained great insight from informal conversations within project groups and between friends. This is why I decided to concentrate the process of data collection on areas where I could make most use of my own involvement and focus on activist research as the overarching research method (Choudry, 2013). In this spirit I conducted unstructured interviews and reflected on informal conversations and public speeches that I witnessed on different occasions. Furthermore, I reflected on my own experiences and internal processes to include them as auto-ethnographical insights (Denzin, 1997). Keeping a research diary (see appendix 1) throughout the time of the research process (February 2017 – January 2018) helped me to keep track and order the various aspects.

Taking this qualitative approach (as illustrated in figure 1) enabled me to investigate more deeply into specific narrations that to me seemed relevant to the research questions in order to then deduce insights that could be relevant to a greater amount of people.

The fact that I chose to employ data acquired through qualitative participatory methods at the same time enabled me to obtain a deeper variety of insights and thus enhanced research quality.

The disadvantages of being personally entangled with the study subject will be further discussed in the next section, where I will be outlining the limitations of the investigation.

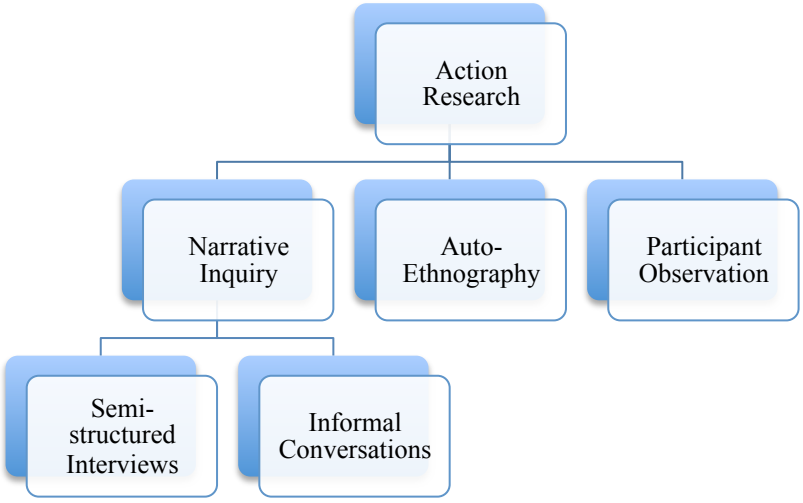

Figure 1: Diagram illustrating the underlying methodological approach of the investigation.

4.3. Participatory Action Research

As action research integrates theory and practice, it provided a useful framework for my research aiming at a structured reflection of environmental activism. As the *Handbook of Action Research* frames it,

"The aim of participatory action research is to change practices, social structures, and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice and unsatisfying forms of existence."
(McTaggart as cited in Reason & Bradbury 2006:1)

With this in mind, the present thesis aimed at the production of knowledge that would be useful to the climate movement and individual activists at the same time. This is why, next to the interviews explicitly conducted for this research, many more voices are being included in this analysis; for the last year I was keeping a research diary where I wrote down relevant insights from informal conversations, group meetings or public speeches that were held in the context of environmental activist work. My own involvement allowed me to be part of safe spaces where people could talk more freely and trustfully. This approach is different to traditional investigations where researchers stay in the background and aim for objectivity and neutrality. I believe that the methods need to fit the field of investigation, and for many climate activists, an outsider or stranger asking questions often elicits suspicion and hesitancy.

The fact that we shared circles of friends, had participated in collective actions together and were, often enough, part of the same working groups allowed for much more in depth insights. I thus decided to take an approach of "reflective subjectivity", being aware that I was gathering information while at the same being an instrument of research myself (Mruck & Breuer, 2003).

4.3.1. Narrative Inquiry

For the qualitative investigation I obtained information from four semi-structured interviews, six informal conversations and various speeches that I witnessed in relevant moments of movement gatherings and during campaigns like Ende Gelände during the whole year of 2017.

4.3.2. Interviews

The interviews conducted were conversational-style and on purpose very loosely structured. Part of the insight from the conversations was going to purely focus on the fact that certain topics would be brought up by the interviewees while others weren't. There was no pilot-study conducted beforehand, but a great variety of conversations about the topic helped me develop a feeling for issues that were relevant to people. Furthermore, questions were framed with an open ending, so that participants had great freedom in guiding their own answers. Even though the intention was to talk to all interview partners in person, practical realities lead to one interview being conducted via Skype. Furthermore, a low response rate turned out to be an unexpected obstacle. Those people that seemed most interesting to talk to (because of extraordinary involvedness, dedication, time in the movement and/or positions of organization and coordination) would often agree to an interview and then drop out again in the last minute. When contacting desired interviewees, I made an effort to ask for a "conversation" about peoples' activism, without mentioning the specific topic of sustainable activism. By this I intended to avoid priming for the matter (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000) prior to the actual interviews. That way it was possible to see whether, when and how people would address their own well-being in the CJM by themselves. That indicated how relevant and present the topic was to them without me taking the point of discussion there. Interviews were recorded with a recording device and subsequently translated and typed down. This enabled me to be

fully present during the interviews without fearing that relevant content might get lost. Finally, interviews were analysed through a coding process.

After having gained a broad overview over different voices and opinions on the topic of sustainable activism through a great number of conversations, I chose to deepen my understanding of specific perspectives and experiences that seemed especially relevant to the research questions. A purposive sampling was used and focus was put on gathering a diverse spectrum of actors from the CJM with varying experiences and viewpoints. This kind of deliberate sampling for heterogeneity implies a disadvantage when aiming at generating accurate estimates of population parameters, but was useful for generating theories and hypotheses in this scarcely investigated field (Blankertz, 1998). In the following section more detailed information about the specifics of the sample is given.

It seems important to me to make transparent my own relation to the interview partners. Out of the four "official" interviews I conducted, I knew three interviewees prior to the investigation. Two of those I have gotten to know through shared project work and by now I would also call them my friends. Even though this fact could be considered a potential weakness for the study because of the bias my own presence has on the interview, I actually felt that it was rather making for an advantage. Through a shared background of political work and the common identity of "environmentalists", a rapport was facilitated and thus produced "a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy and mutual respect and understanding", as predicted by Flowerdew and Martin (2005: 113).
With regards to the third interviewee, I have been aware of him for many years as he is a popular figure in the climate movement, but we had never had a longer conversation. The fourth interviewee I had actually never met before the interview, but got to know about her as she was organizing a youth seminar on sustainable activism.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to cover some essential aspects while allowing space for the interviewee to determine the flow of the conversation to a great extend.
To start off, the interviewee was asked about his*her form of activism in general. This was relevant in order to understand the individual "activist history" and the potential draining aspects that occur with different forms of activism. A question related to personal feelings or emotions towards one's activism was supposed to investigate whether overwork and stress

would naturally come up in an activist's narrative without explicitly being addressed by the interviewer.

Following, interviewees were asked to describe challenges that they saw of being an activist. Here the intention was to find out about relevant factors that are most demanding for activists and which potentially need to be changed in the long run. This was followed by questions about personal responses to stress, in order to find out more about the individuals' strategies to deal with especially demanding times. The last section focused specifically on aspects of support that activists are or would hope to receive from the movement in order to feel supported.

The general guideline used to conduct the semi-structured interviews as described above is featured in appendix 3.

I translated those interviews that were conducted in German into English and subsequently transcribed all of them separately (appendix 2). In the next step I analysed the retrieved data through a coding process. The recurring themes in the interviews were initially recorded in a preliminary table, in order to minimise the loss of data (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). I intended to include all final key codes into the findings, even though emphasis was put on those that were mentioned various times and also were supported by other informal conversations I had.

In the following, I will briefly outline the characteristics of the different interviewees, and the context in which the interviews took place respectively.

4.3.2.1. Sample

In the following the four official interviewees are being described:

a) One respondent has been a climate activist for 10 Years and had a major breakdown in her career as a climate activist after the failed climate conferences in Copenhagen 2009. As a result, she has left the CJM.

b) Another respondent has been a climate activist for 10 years and has been working himself to the limits various times. As he has found personal routines of self-care and coping strategies, he was able to circumvent a major breakdown until now.

c) Another interviewee works on the topic from a movement organizational perspective, giving workshops on sustainable activism for youth groups of a

major environmental NGO. At the same time, she started working on the topic after a personal collapse and hospitalization which had followed an intense time of campaigning and actions.

d) The last respondent has been involved in the movement for over 20 years and has taken various positions within the CJM as an activist, coordinator and organizer of various campaigns. He is a co-founder of the Ende Gelände alliance and reports to suffer roundabout one to two major breakdowns every year.

Throughout this thesis, the four respondents described above will be coded with capital letters *(A, B, C, D)* in order to enable the reader to reproduce a connection between different quotes. For confidentiality reasons, these identity markers will not be linked to the specific interviewee descriptions.

After finishing the writing process of this thesis, I sent it out to all interviewees in order to give them the chance to see and comment on the final document that heavily benefits from and relies on their voices. Through this procedure I intended to make sure everybody felt comfortable with the quotes I used, the context I put those into and didn't feel misunderstood in any way.

4.3.2.2. Interview Process

- For the COP23 I was staying in a squatted building. It turned out that one interviewee had been living there for a few years and invited me to do the interview in his room. Having spent some time together the previous days made for a relaxed atmosphere and I had the impression that he felt free to talk about the issues addressed. We talked for about 90 minutes.
- Another interviewee I had contacted after reading that she was organizing the above-mentioned workshop about sustainable activism for an environmental NGO. Since we didn't know each other at all and were only able to talk via skype, the interview felt a lot more formal and didn't yield as much in-depth insight as the other interviews. As we only talked for about 45 minutes it was also a lot shorter than the other interviews.
- Another interviewee is a good friend and mentor for me. On a long train ride together she first told me about the heavy depression that she fell into after Copenhagen 2009. She was the first one who made me become aware about the issue. We met close to her home in Berlin and talked for about two hours in a quite and save space.

- The last interviewee is extremely involved in climate campaigns and has been part of the movement for over 20 years. I wrote to him various times, ran into him during actions 2017 and called him on different occasions. It took about half a year to make an appointment but then I was able to visit him at his home and spend almost three hours there. The interview felt extremely honest and yielded a great amount of new insights for me.

4.3.3. Responsibilities of a Researcher

The fact that academic research has a responsibility to produce meaningful content seems to be indisputable. This for me is enhanced by the fact that as an action researcher I feel part of the movement that I work for and thus feel the responsibility to use the in-depth insight that I am allowed to try to give something useful back to the community. In various conversations I could perceive how the issue of sustainable activism and overwork in one's engagement are pressing concerns to many people. This became obvious for example in the uncounted requests from CJAs to read the final thesis outcome.
I am not giving in to the illusion that I will be able to produce content that will actually revolutionize the structure of the CJM and thus prevent its members from overworking themselves for the greater cause. But I am aware that this is a research area that stands out for lacking literature and academic attention. I do have the hope that I will not only take insights from my activism into my academic work, but also bring back insights from the academic work to my activism.

4.3.4. Confidentiality and Safety

According to the experiences I have made, overwork and burn-out have become topics that people feel able to talk about. This is why I rather naively addressed the topic with different people in an open fashion with the intention to collect a broad variety of perspectives. Only one encounter with a full-time activist working for a popular international NGO provided me with indication that there still seems to be a strong culture of silence around the topic. This activist gave me his*her private number and offered me to talk on the phone to a later point in time. When I called back, he*she had changed her mind and did not want to talk about the subject anymore.

This incident made me aware of the fact that there seems to still be a part of the movement that is struggling with, but not actually able to talk about self-care and exhaustion in their activism.
As it is not of any specific relevance and in order to respect the privacy of interviewees, all insights and quotes from the interviewees and conversations are anonymised.

4.3.5. Positionality and Power Dynamics

Purposefully having chosen interview partners for whom sustainable activism plays a relevant role in their daily lives (all interviewees are full-time activists with >10 years of partaking in the movement), the "expertise" was clearly on the side of the interviewees from whom I was hoping to learn. Furthermore, as I have been involved in the movement for four years by now and have worked together with two out of the four interviewees, we could talk on rather equal terms. Sharing the same cultural background with all participants and being a female and younger comrade in the shared struggle certainly helped to create an atmosphere in which interviewees could feel trustful and relaxed.
Having said this, it is important to mention that it would be naïve to think that no power dynamics at all were in place. The mere presence of the recording device caused a twist in our rapport. On top of this, I tried to avoid mentioning the topic of the interview beforehand, in order to avoid priming. This strategy yielded the danger of causing a hierarchy of knowledge, even though I honestly answered questions about the topic of the interview if respondents explicitly asked for it.

4.4. Limitations to the Methodological Approach

Various limiting factors influenced the research and probably the most influential ones might have been those that I am not even aware of. Below some of the aspects that became especially relevant are listed.

4.4.1. Limited Literature and Scholars in the Field

One aspect that stood out was the extremely small amount of people working on the subject. Sending out e-mail requests for interviews and searching for people that might be relevant

conversational partners I was regularly referred to one and the same person, namely Timo Luthmann. I had read the draft of the book that he has by now published on sustainable activism (see Luthmann, 2018) and attended some of his workshops and seminars about the topic. I very much appreciated his input and learned a lot but would have liked the input of other perspectives from people that also (academically) work on the issue.

4.4.2. Time Constraints of Full-Time CJAs

Another limiting factor that could have been anticipated was the tight schedule of climate activists that are extraordinarily involved in the CJM. Often I managed to get hold of people during an action or action preparation and got their number. But when I later on called them to ask for a date to do an interview, most people could not or did not want to make extra time for it. This was one reason why I decided to include casual conversations that I had with activists before and after certain events and that enabled me to use the little time I shared with those people directly. On top of this, two already scheduled interviews were cancelled because people turned out to be busier than they had expected.

4.4.3. Beyond the Semi-Structured Interview

After each interview, I would turn off the recording device and chat a little more with the interviewees. As soon as we would say goodbye to each other, I would run back to my research diary and takes notes about aspects that we had talked about in the last minutes. I couldn't say whether it was the presence of a recording device, the flexible but still pre-set structure of the interview or something in the unconscious rapport the interviewee and I shared which changed as soon as the interview was "officially over". I had the impression that some of the most relevant things were said in the gap between the official end of the interview and saying goodbye. This was another factor that made me include information from more informal and unspecified conversations.

4.4.4. Rapport between Interviewee and Interviewer

As has been extensively discussed elsewhere, an interview is a "social encounter and the relation between the responded and the interviewer will always to some extent distort the

data" (e.g. O'Connell Davidson & Layder, 1994: 118). Trying to specify how respondents and I thought or felt about each other would be mere speculation. But it is to be assumed that our rapport was an influencing factor, especially in the unstructured conversations in more private contexts.

4.4.5. Researcher's Traits as Influencing Factors

Next to practical considerations I can imagine that my background in psychology facilitated the decision for conducting interviews. This is a research method very familiar to me and – even though conducting a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions felt like a great adventure – I already had some experience in this field.
Also, the overall topic of activism, how respondents were addressed in their identity as "activists" and the pre-structured encounter between interviewee and interviewer made for limiting influences.

4.4.6. Inherent Limitations of Action Research

Choosing the methodical approach of action research automatically imposed certain limitations that come along with this way of doing research. The researcher's own identity and personality become entangled with the area of research and thus with the result of the research. Furthermore, any criterion of objectivity will hardly if at all be fulfilled. Obtaining reliable and valid data doing action research becomes even more of a challenge, especially with the qualitative data sampling that was used.

5. Defining Factors for (Un-)Sustainable Activism

In the following I want to address themes that stuck out as being especially dominant in the narration of the interviewees. These are aspects that come directly from within the CJM. I consider those to be especially important as they seem to be crucial starting points for an inner transition of the movement which will be indispensable for the greater transition to happen also in the "outside world".

5.1. Overwork amongst CJAs

All activists that were interviewed came to talk about excessive workloads, overwork or depression in activism quite early in the interview. It is important to notice that all addressed these issues before I explicitly mentioned them. The questions I raised were rather directed towards their feelings or emotions towards their activism and the greatest challenges that they see in activism. All except for one *(interviewee C)* recalled specific events where they realized that they needed or wanted to change something in the way they did their activism. The narrations of those moments are depicted in figure 2 below:

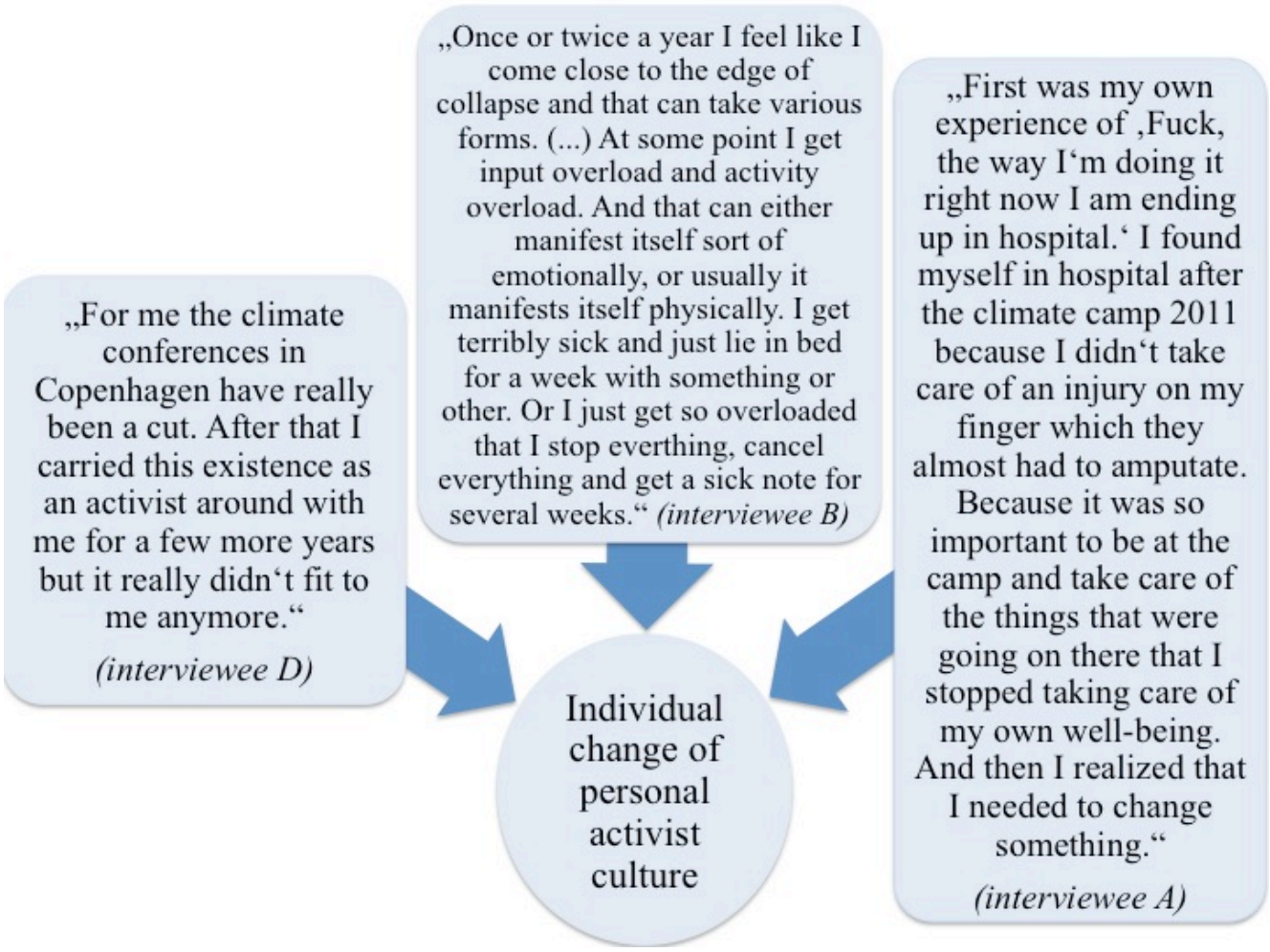

Figure 2: Depiction of specific incidences that made the interviewees change the way they do their activism today.

5.2. Coping Strategies and Lack thereof

"But in a way the short answer to the question 'what are my coping strategies' would be 'well, I sort of struggle with that. Clearly I don't have enough'. Not even after seeing one of my closest friends who suffered two or three really heavy burn-outs in several years and now is potentially lost to the movement forever. And this is a woman that has been around and fighting since the 80's and was one of my role models in that regard." (interviewee B)

*

"I'm not sure whether I had any coping strategies. There was this topic once in a while concerning burn-out of activists, excessive demands and how people that are idealistic have a heavy burden to carry in a way. But I was hoping that it wouldn't hit me as hard. I thought that I would be able to handle it, or that I would need to be able to do so. I don't remember having any explicit coping strategies." (interviewee D)

It stood out to me that all interviewees that reported having had a major breakdown during their activist career talked about not having had – and, in fact up to today lacking – coping strategies. At the same time it seemed to be a topic all CJAs I talked to were very interested in. Many interviewees even explained that the reason they agreed to do the interview was in fact curiosity about the topic (even after the extremely vague description that I gave).

"My current question is: 'How do I manage to hit the pause button before shit like this summer happens?' I mean, the signs were all there; I was on a summer holiday and I didn't want to talk to anybody, didn't want to do anything, I wanted the weather to be bad so I could stay in. Maybe that would have been a warning sign to slow down a bit. But I still didn't manage." (interviewee B)

It might not come as a surprise that the only person able to talk about his coping strategies was in fact the one who did not recall every having had a major break down throughout his activist career.

"Through my practice of yoga and systema[7] *I try to reduce stress through the movement and by being outside, for example in the forest. I try to always return to these things. But in times of extreme stress, like for example during Ende Gelände, this turns out to be very difficult." (interviewee C)*

Again it becomes obvious how much personal well-being and self-care is individualized. Not only did interviewees exclusively reflect on their personal deficiency of coping strategies. But even the one who purposefully did try to protect himself from excessive demands experienced that in times of bigger actions this gets increasingly hard to carry out. More intensive times of activism like bigger actions or campaigns will always be more demanding than a restful time at home. Nevertheless I find it important to ensure that activists do not feel left alone with this burden. I thus consider it our collective responsibility to include care-work into our activist practices and make sure that we can sustain our activism for the long run. Self-care is important, but it shouldn't become a personal struggle to uphold it in times of action. Rather, individual strategies should be supported and enhanced by collective practices and structural changes within the movement.
I asked one interviewee, who states to have played "a key role in creating Ende Gelände" about whether he feels there is room for improvement for the movement to be structured differently in order to support its members.

"Certainly yes. But that's not the kind of stuff that I think about. I'm a manic, hyper-active, attention-seeking, mildly freakazoid person. I'm not going to be the one who gives good ideas about sustainable activism. Somebody needs to tell ME about good ideas about sustainable activism." (interviewee B)

5.3. Relationships within Social Movements

"Meaning, Social Networks, Intensity, friends, lovers are what make me feel good about my activism. Even when I get depressed. Because the chances that we are going to stop the world from sliding into complete fucking chaos are super fucking limited. I mean really you need to engage in magical realist thinking to continue doing activism. And that's what activism in a way is; it's continuous magical realism worked upon the world, and sometimes it works. But

[7] A kind of martial art

usually it doesn't, on average. And particularly not with the eco-crisis. But even then I think 'well, the activism I do now will create intense and resilient social networks, so when things go to shits it will of course be exactly my activist comrades whom I will be working with to somehow make life liveable in whatever situation then arises'. So even when I get depressed, the activism is still a good." (interviewee B)

The term 'social' in social movements refers, in the first place, to the fact that they are part of the human society. Just like a social class or a social problem are not inherently 'social' in the sense of cooperation and interdependent relationships. At the same time, social movements are in fact also an important place of social interaction out of which often enough companionship, emotional bonds and connections result that go further than the social cause that connected people in the first place.
It is indeed highly political how we treat each other. This is of course true not only for the climate movement but on a global level. In this regard, many lessons learned here in the context of sustainable activism are in fact lessons learned for life and not exclusively applicable for the CJM. Nevertheless, in a context where people are predestined to experience repression, violence and various negative emotions, an empathic and solidary way of working together can be especially important in order to provide protection and support our motivation and our capacity to resist.

5.3.1. Positive Aspects of a close Social Network within the Activist Scene

One interviewee *(B)* repeatedly mentioned the fact that one of the reasons why he feels very good about his activism is the fact that for him it is an *enormous source of social networks, of contacts, of friendships, of lovers, of intensity*. Overall, the social relationships that one builds up within the movement, and I know this from personal experience, become extremely valuable for oneself and one's own activism. Nowadays, when I travel to a climate camp, I don't only go there to attend plenaries and workshops, but to reconnect with people and enjoy time together. When one's own identity is so much build around politicized issues like environmental protection, degrowth or feminism (just to name some examples), it can pose challenges to "outside" relationships where people have come to different conclusions about the world system (or not even care to think about it as much). At the same time, within the movement, people gather that somewhat share similar utopias, become active together, meet again on different occasions and places and build up relationships over a long term. They

often share bonding experiences that bring them even closer together and create the aforementioned intensity. One interviewee *(D)* recalls many "*beautiful and exciting experiences. A lot was the experience in the group that really shaped me. Doing really cool things with really cool people"*. Those social bonds often last longer than the original form of activism that brought people together in the first place. On top of this, she also recalls how her social contacts supported her during the time she left her activism after some years of depression and intense struggle with her activism that followed the "failed" climate conferences in Copenhagen.

"Individual people definitely did support me through really good conversations that I had. Most of the time I spoke to people that felt similar to me. So not even with people that were already a step ahead but rather with people where I had the impression that they were 'swimming' just like me. And it was important in that moment to have likeminded people and collectively think about how we could get out of there or what we were going to do with that."

5.3.2. Challenges of intense Social Bonds amongst CJAs

At the same time it is worth noticing that social contacts outside of the "movement bubble" potentially suffer from the intense engagement of a CJA. This can have various reasons like for example a reduced connection through extremely different opinions or lifestyles, people not liking their own self-image next to the "moralist activist" or reducing the person on his*her activism. But also the very stress of activism can lead to activists reducing their outside social contacts and only engage with those people they work or live with. This came out in the various interviews and informal conversations and it matched my personal experiences.

The fact that activists often end up engaging almost exclusively in a like-minded bubble also implies heavy disadvantages for the movement and its power to spread its message. Social psychology has shown that peoples' behaviour is guided to a great extend by their social environment (Fiske, Gilbert & Lindzey, 2010). From a very early age onwards we start copying what we see other people do, and when we grow up, we orient our own actions along those that the people around us do. By isolating ourselves, our opinions and actions, we loose a great part of the potential that the mere fact of walking our talk and talking about our walk could have.

5.4. We need to change our Idea of Change

5.4.1. Culture of Activism

"Yes, there is particularly in environmental activism a kind of sacrifice. I hate this moralizing … I actually created a term for that: not 'Gutmenschen' but 'Bessermenschen'. A 'Gutmensch' is just like 'I am great'. A Bessermensch says: 'I am better than you'. And there is this kind of moral competition amongst activists, about who can be more …" (interviewee B)

When looking closer into today's culture of activism, it is worth repeating how little the movement has actually managed to put into practice its own values or ideals with regards to their working culture. Social movements are by their very nature made up of individuals that all have their own ego and thus strive for recognition and appreciation. In the previous quote the activist differentiates between a "Gutmensch" and a "Bessermensch". The concept of the Gutmensch is a German sarcastic and disparaging term for a "do-gooder" who is very moralising and proselytising in his wish to do good. Furthermore, a do-gooder overeagerly seeks approval for his*her commendable behaviour. The interviewee takes this concept further by proposing a "do-better-than-gooder", who is unique in priding him-*herself not only for doing good, but doing better than everybody else, including the do-gooders. Such concepts are symbolic for a culture where the quality and amount of one's actions are not only attentively observed but also rated by the "comrades" around oneself. For example, from a feminist perspective it could be argued that those activists in an illegal blockade are usually recognized more than those that meanwhile were cleaning the toilets and preparing food (Bartky, 1990). Adding to that, there is little reflection about the recognition we give to those that do active self-care and take a break when they need it. We much rather give reputation and respect to those with outstanding dedication and personal sacrifice for the greater cause. That they suffer from break downs every now and then and heavily rely on their family, friends and partners to support them and coddle them up again is an often ignored side fact.

When addressing the current Activist Culture, it is important to reflect on the idea that a "sacrifice" for the greater cause will maybe always to a certain extend be necessary and acceptable. One could even argue that work within the CJM, especially in the privileged western world, might also be in a way just and appropriate. In her speech *Beyond the Cliff*,

van Dernoot (2015) recalls:

"I was raised in a number of traditions that implicitly and explicitly communicated: if you care enough about what you're doing, if you're down with your cause enough, if it matters enough to you – your going to suck it up."

We need a discussion about the degree to which we consciously accept a certain extent of overwork and stressful times. The reality is that activism which confronts a single-sided domination of economic values requires a certain degree of effort. But how much do we invite demanding experiences and lifestyles and where do we set our (individual and collective) boundaries in order to protect our own well-being and live up to visions of a loving and sustainable treatment of each other?

A few days after the 2017 Ende Gelände Action during the climate conferences, I was waking up with some friends who had been intensely involved in the planning and realization process of the action. I overheard them talking about their huge sleep deficit which they still needed to make up for. At one point, their debate was rotating around the question who had slept the fewest hours during the last week. It felt like a competition about "who has given the greatest sacrifice" being measured by hours not slept and awful energy drinks drunken. For me this was a powerful moment, which directly fed into my already existing doubts about the usefulness of our current Activist Culture.

Within the movement there is strong agreement that things need to change urgently and rapidly. Many people do all they can to support this change, and this work is urgently needed and important. But we should be careful not to give into the misconception that it is us that will ultimately make the difference, and that we need to give everything of us to the greater cause. Because carrying the weight of the world on one's own shoulders and not letting oneself rest until the problems of the world are solved will be a pretty sure way to sooner or later get overworked.

5.4.2. The Image of an 'Activist'

"I believe that, if we want to build up a lasting movement in the long run, then we need to change our idea of change. I don't believe that change only happens through activism in the

sense of oppositional activism. But I think that for change there are three important factors. There is this model of three factors, which includes resistance, renewables or alternatives, and shift of consciousness. And I think we need all three parts. And right now these parts are very separated from each other, and I share these parts only with a certain group of people, but we don't have that as a commonality. And when you transition from the part of resistance to the part of renewables, you kind of leave the movement. There is no connection being made." (interviewee C)

The popular image that people have about an activist is quite narrow and in its rigidity it has far-reaching consequences. The interesting fact here is that it is not just other people's expectations that seem to be putting so much pressure on activists, but in fact it often is their own ideas about how they should behave or what lifestyle is appropriate that gnaws on them / us. Many people have their own (implicit or explicit) "theory of change", a personal belief system of how change comes about in this world. Oftentimes, CJAs have come to the conclusion that oppositional activism is an essential part in this process. So the more extreme peoples' activism gets, the less space is often left for recognition of other people that form part of the same struggle on their own terms. There is a great need for more radical actions, for more engagement and will to change. But if we want radical actions to become the new normal, we cannot hope for everybody to feel comfortable in a rather rigid activist-mould that actually only fits a few. I was surprised to hear one interviewee *(B)* who himself is a dedicated full-time activist for more than 20 years by now describe how he felt this pressure of other activists to do what they are doing.

"There are some kinds of activists whom I've always found really annoying because I hate the way they communicate, their moral absolutism translates into a sense that they are the MOST important part of the movement and everybody has to do what they do because they constantly put themselves on the line. I even understand how this feeling arises because their daily existence is struggle and they will think 'well, the others only struggle five days a year'."

So even though the interviewee himself dedicates a huge amount of time and energy every day into climate activism (in fact, works full-time in the CJM), he felt judged by other activists, namely those that live in tree-houses in a forest near one of the biggest open-pit coal mines of Germany in order to occupy and thus protect it. Within the CJM, there is basically

always potential to be more radical in the actions one does. This ties into the hegemonic capitalist logic of "bigger, better, stronger" where people feel a constant pressure because there will always be somebody out there who does something better or more intensely than oneself. Just as anywhere else in life, our own ego can yield power over us up to the extent where we do things mainly out of a pursuit of recognition, while maybe lacking the inner desire to do so. Such a pre-set image of what constitutes worthy and real activism brings the potential danger of distinguishing a "good" activist from a "bad" activist. One interviewee *(C)* described this dynamic:

"We are all children of our society and we all want recognition. A lot of issues around one's ego play part in this. And I think it is important to become aware of that. And that it is OK at points. We need to find a way to manage that as well. But I think it is important to have that clear. Because otherwise, if we don't find ways how to deal with this thing about recognition, it leads to all of us trying to match this image of how an activist has to be. Without considering whether what we are doing makes sense for the cause. But people only want to match that image in order to get recognition."

People can get into a spiral up to the point where their existence can revolve exclusively around their activist identity where they want to do well, receive recognition and distinguish themselves from other activists.

Furthermore, psychological research has shown that a politicized identity goes hand in hand with a stronger internal obligation to participate in social movement activities (Stürmer & Simon, 2004). At the same time, when the personal self-concept revolves around politicized issues and consequent actions, there is a danger to loose oneself on the way and neglect the life beyond one's political work. As a consequence, personal passions and interests that once characterised a person are becoming overshadowed by more "important" or "urgent" topics around one's activism. One interviewee *(D)* describes this phenomenon:

"After Copenhagen I went through various processes, but one was this realization that it actually is possible to lead a life without going to meetings and preparing actions all the time. And it is possible to have 'normal' hobbies like being a beekeeper or catching up with friends to play games."

Another consequence of the current image of what constitutes an activist, what she should do and how she should do it are the resulting expectations. For example, those expectations that one has towards one's own behaviour, where the big and the small points[8] of environmentally friendly behaviours get mingled up. As a result, individuals work themselves in the pursuit to make their personal lifestyle as environmentally friendly as possible. This often becomes energy demanding up to a disproportionate extend. On top of this come expectations from our social contacts, be it friends, families or activist comrades. This can lead to an amalgamation of expectations that subliminally exert pressure on activists. One interviewee *(C)* recalled:

"It's also the expectations that we have. Those that we actually have. And those that we think that other people have towards oneself. So sometimes I think I should do this and that, because otherwise this other person will be disappointed of me."

Manoeuvring between one's personal expectations towards oneself, those that other people put on us, and those we ascribe other people to have about us can become a highly energy- and time-consuming endeavour that can become a draining in the long run. This is especially true for activists with a diversified network of comrades and projects they engage in. Trying to keep everyone including oneself happy by fulfilling all expectations is always a challenge, and the CJM does not constitute an exception in this.

5.5. Hope and Utopias

One evening towards the end of last year I was sitting around the dinner table with a group of friends that all fulfil the restrictive definition of this thesis about what an activist is. Both their private life, their voluntary work and their paid jobs are strongly connected to the idea of creating a different future, pushing for a change in politics and collectively organizing for a transformation. I asked them to give me a show of hands about how likely they think it is that we will manage to avoid climate catastrophe and global chaos. I marked two poles for responses, with hands waving high meaning "Yes, I am sure we will make it" and hands waving low meaning "I don't think we will make it". I was slightly shocked to see that all

[8] Big vs. Small points here refer to the environment impact of certain behaviour. They make reference to e.g. lifestyles that might be perfectly structured in order to be as sustainable as possible when it comes to light bulbs, food waste or plastic reduction, but where the plane is taken to travel to exotic places for every holiday.

hands waved either low or at least underneath the middle line. Out of this group of activists that dedicate so much time and energy into working for change, actually none of us believed that we actually still have a chance to effect the necessary changes[9] in time.

Amongst the usual warning signals that psychologists identified for trauma reactions, feelings of helplessness and despair are always quite popular (Herman, 2015). I argue that capitalism, patriarchy and modern industrial civilization can in a way be traumatizing themselves. And as a consequence they can systematically reduce our ability to feel hopeful. This can have far-reaching consequences, especially since the social aspect of hope plays an important role for a societal transformation. If a significant number of people feel hopeful, they can inspire a great amount of other people. But the same is true for the opposite, which is why widespread despair can become dangerous for a society. This might be another reason why utopias are so much in the coming[10]. Utopias can help us to stay on course, to delegitimise the status-quo, broaden our imaginary and sustain a long breath (Tester, 2012). They can function like a generator of meaning by giving context to our actions of the here and now and as such inspire actions again and again. In contrast, hopes are rather concrete and will at some point either be fulfilled or disappointed.

This difference between hopes and utopias came to the fore in 2009 during the climate summit in Copenhagen. A variety of different but concrete hopes and expectations were created throughout the years of previous climate politics and in the concrete mobilization for the COP15. As a result of the lack of necessary agreements during the conference, those hopes amongst the CJAs were heavily disappointed. Later, the disastrous 2009 climate conference in Copenhagen would be referred to as "Hopenhagen". Two interviewees specifically addressed personal experiences during that time. One *(B)* recalled:

"Copenhagen was a debacle for the mainstream climate politics. But also for the movement which, partly as a result of a mobilization that I was very involved in, created a lot of magical and unrealistic hope around Copenhagen. Just that we had a movement hope and they had a policy hope. Both failed."

[9] Afterwards a big discussion broke loose about what kind of exact change we strive for, how the world might look like in a future with climate chaos but human extinction etc. The reported show of hands was about an extremely vague scenario, as the question I posed was obviously extremely unspecific.

[10] An increasing amount of congresses, festivals or organizations that are about utopias have been emerging throughout the last decade (see e.g. living utopia, utopival, move utopia etc.).

The so-called Post-Copenhagen depression that followed 2009 is a manifestation of the importance of being careful about putting concrete hopes into specific events. This aspect will be further addressed in a later section specifically about failure and success of actions. In a way, history has taught us to be careful with creating concrete hopes that can be disappointed, while it is essential to have shared utopias that function as a compass for the movement and can give us the strength and patience that is needed for the perseverance that we need.

5.6. Why do CJAs struggle?

There are different challenges that activists face and that make their work more demanding and thus more difficult to sustain. On top of this, how much one suffers also depends on the personal constitutions and the life-phase one is in. Trying to separate one's activism from one's labour work and private life is an almost impossible endeavour. This was underlined in a couple of interviews where I realized how much things that were happening in the private lives of activists had implications on their activism and vice versa. Two interviewees reported of having had a major breakdown after the COP 2009 in Copenhagen. In this context it is worth mentioning though that their political depression was compounded by events that happened in their private lives; for one this was hearing about his HIV-infection and for the other this was her bride-to-be getting extremely ill. Similarly, one interviewee *(B)* mentions as one of his "coping-strategies" for dealing with work overload in his activism that being in a relationship with a partner that provides him with calm and care-energy or smoking weed helps him to tolerate the demands that CJA poses upon him. I understood that his private life is so closely interwoven with CJA that those spheres actually feed into each other; a well-functioning relationship can thus bring forth a more engaged climate activist;

"I really feel that with this sort of new life that I have with this wonderful relationship which we expect to continue being wonderful for quite a while and with a stable job and a stable flat, I feel better set up for escalating the struggle than I have for a long time."

5.6.1. Repression

Having to deal with oppression, despotism, violence and abuse of power is a common feature of political activism. Neither judiciary nor legislative or executive, amongst which power is

distributed in Germany, approve of people disagreeing with the hegemonic system. Throughout the last years of climate activism in Germany, it has become common practice for the police to pepper spray and beat into the non-violent crowds of activists (e.g. see *Thousands of Climate Activists face Police Brutality in Germany* by Flening, 2017). I have witnessed close friends being manipulated and blackmailed during their time in custody in order to intimidate them and force a guilt plea out of them. Female bodies are often inappropriately touched, basic provision with a telephone, food and water is kept back and lies are told about the status of the fellow activists. Next to personal pain, I remember that especially having to witness close friends experience heavy pain through police voilence like having thumbs pressed into their eyes, their arms broken or being kicked and thrown onto the ground are memories that have followed me into my dreams. Experiences of repression and disempowerment are an integral part of how depression, stress and anxiety arise (Davies, 2015). Taking time and providing structures for emotional work after experiencing police repression, violence, physical attacks of political opponents or any other disturbing incidents of which there can be many is important. This is not only true for activists themselves but also for the support structure, since secondary traumatisation[11] can occur also amongst those that did not make repressive experiences themselves.

When climate activism becomes the medium through which people get into conflict with the ruling institutions, it becomes strikingly visible that the main problem is not purely climate change itself, but the system that brought it about. One activist *(D)* that experienced heavy police repression during the COP15 in Copenhagen recalled:

"We had the impression that in the first place we would have to do human rights actions and not climate actions. There was so much police violence that depressed, concerned and frightened us."

As stated in this quote, police repression can get heavily violent and extreme, and often distort the original intention of an action. But repression can also be more subtle and focus on individuals in their private lives. In that case, it can prey on people's mind and leave them restless and fearful on a daily basis. Like it happened to this interviewee *(B)*:

[11] Secondary trauma is defined as indirect exposure to trauma through a first-hand account or narrative of a traumatic event. The vivid recounting of trauma by the survivor and the clinician's subsequent cognitive or emotional representation of that event may result in a set of symptoms and reactions that parallel PTSD (e.g. re-experiencing, avoidance and hyperarousal). Secondary traumatization is also referred to as compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995) and vicarious traumatization (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995).

"For weeks I couldn't sleep properly. Which I normally can because I'm also quite a dope-head so I normally sleep – no problem. But I woke up every morning just before six because I know that in Berlin at six is when flats get raided. The early hours are when most people are at home. I was really scared and working at feverish intensity."

Those kinds of repressions pose a challenge to any kind of activist work and make life as a CJA harder. On top of this, doing actions becomes an even greater defiance when one has already made extreme experiences that come back into memory for every new action. The same interviewee talked about his trauma after having been tortured in a Czech jail and how he gets re-traumatized[12] in actions where he gets into conflict with the police, gets kettled or even ends up in jail again;

"I have a police trauma. The first 24 hours when I was in jail in Copenhagen I mostly cried because I'm terrified of jails and terrified of being alone in jail. Because once I was alone in jail and I was beaten very badly."

Finding an emancipatory and collective approach towards repression could give strength to activists and is a structure that is urgently needed[13].

5.6.2. Clash of teleologies

"Coming from the Marxist tradition, the historical timeline is towards emancipation and revolution. Never mind all the setbacks. You could also cite Marxist Hegelian teleology with revolution via the end; in general the enlightenments-idea that the historical path goes towards more freedom. (...) Now add to that then the teleology of the timeline of

[12] Retraumatization is a conscious or unconscious reminder of a past trauma that results in a re-experiencing of the initial trauma event. It can be triggered by a situation, an attitude or expression, or by certain environments that replicate the dynamics (loss of power/control/safety) of the original trauma (Zgoda, Shelly & Hitzel, 2015).

[13] There are indeed today already mentionable efforts where people e.g. send support-letters to activists in jail or organize solidary demonstrations in remembrance of the inmate. It seems important though to mention that first of all those structures could be expanded. Secondly, repression takes place on many more levels than the immediate oppression by police force and needs to be considered more thoroughly.

environmental activism where the arch of history bends towards holy fucking shit and crisis and chaos and destabilization." (interviewee B)

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"In the first kind of issue, it's good and important to win. But if you don't win, you know that you will keep fighting and keep fighting. And at some point you have the sense that you will win. Suddenly you then transition to working on an issue where you have to win really quickly and a lot. Because if you don't win now, the conditions for all your struggle will continue to get worse and worse and worse. Until a time where you can't even imagine the world around you now because it will be so crazy shitty. In a way, it's the problem of the future; the communist imaginary and the left imaginary in general always provide you with a future." (interviewee B)

In the classic teleology of social struggles, defeat is part of the struggle and turned into productive failure until ultimately revolution and consequent emancipation follow (Avineri, 1968). Adding to this an environmental teleology where a great transition is needed to happen not only extremely drastically but also urgently poses new challenges (Ripple, 2017). We are faced with a situation where we have an extremely small window of opportunity to turn things around. If we do not succeed in this, conditions for the struggle will only get worse until complete collapse and chaos are predicted to set in.

"Add to the general sense of failure that activism - anti-capitalist activism particularly - experiences, the sense of a dreadful time-pressure and a continuously escalating injustice. So all the problems of dealing with failure, trauma, overload and the work never stopping get worse. And to summarize, on a psycho-medical level; activist burn-out is a key term precisely because of that: the work never stops." (interviewee B)

Ending climate change or capitalism seems an impossible task to face for any movement today. The sense of an impending deadline feeds into the "usual stress-factors" of political activism and make every new experience of "failure" especially hard to accept. The debate around temperature rise and tipping points has been causing the impression that each upcoming year full of actions, campaigns, conferences and meetings might be the crucial moment to turn things around for the CJM. In conversations with activists, I got the impression that they oftentimes not only perceived it as a matter of "winning or loosing the battle" but also profoundly personalized the success of any action (see also activist

perfectionism). When one has been putting a lot of hope into specific events, disappointment can hit hard. One interviewee *(D)* who left activism after a very heavy depression following the COP 2009 in Copenhagen explained to me that she never emotionally prepared for the case that the climate conferences might fail. The idea of preparing for a plan B or at least for a support network had not crossed her mind. Thereupon, I asked her whether she now has any ideas about what could have been different in order to prevent her from having such a major breakdown. It turned out that in fact, she even had been asked the question concerning the possibility of failure before the COP15, but recalls not actually being able to envision this scenario.

"I remember in the movie being asked: 'What do you do when the COP fails?' And I remember already back then being very confused by the question. Like, 'hej, that's something unthinkable'. And then I answered; 'I will go onto the boat to cry, and afterwards I will keep going'. In fact I did go onto the boat to cry, but I did not keep going afterwards. At least not in the long-term. But I think I could not have thought about that previously, that's not possible."

The question thus remains; how can we stay hopeful and engaged in a world where collapse and increasing injustice inexorably come close and at the same time prepare for to-be expected failures and not allow them to drag us down to the extend where this inhibits us from engaging in the first place?

Against this background it is worth mentioning that successful actions played a key role in the narrative of some activists. Despite the huge amount of setbacks, the few major successes did indeed bring back people's energy. One interviewee *(B)* recalled an explicit moment where his future activism hung in the balance. It was specifically the blunt occurrence of either failure or success that was going to decide whether he was going to stay in the CJM or leave it for good:

"I was on a train to Ende Gelände, I had been doing so much work and I was really exhausted. I hadn't been part of or hadn't organized a big action that had been a real success for so many years. And in retrospect I now know that I need those successful actions; they are like a battery of pure life that you sort of touch and you just go 'brrmmm' (makes movement of touching something and gaining a lot of energy out of it). *I really remember this thought and I think I told that to one or two people when I arrived at the camp: 'If this action doesn't*

work, I'm done with organizing these actions. I can't just put so much heart and soul into stuff that just continuously keeps disappointing'."

5.6.3. Motivation

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs, ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."
Howard Thurman (as quoted in Bailie, 1996)

The underlying motivation of why one does activism has shown to be an extremely relevant factor for all interviewees that I talked to. In the interviews it became clear that it was the examination of one's personal motivation to engage in the CJM that has ultimately changed the way interviewees did and felt about their activism. The majority of interviewees recalled specific situations that made them go on a salutary journey of learning to redefine their underlying intentions that drive what they do today.

"After Copenhagen I also became aware of the fact that I, up to that point, in my personal projects just as much as for my work, I always only asked myself how I could operate in a way that would be beneficial for the world. What does the world need from me? So during that time I became aware of the fact that this is one aspect that I would like to consider, but when I think about what I want to do in my life, there is also other questions that should be considered like 'What do I actually like to do? What am I good at? What does the world pay money for?' Many parameters changed during that time." (interviewee D)

This citation feeds into the aforementioned narrative of activist sacrifices that are being done for the greater cause. It underlines the importance of also staying true to one's nature, one's personal passion and talents and to try to do things that do not clash but rather match with the individual personality structure and interests. One interviewee *(A)* explores what she finds to be the biggest challenge when doing activism:

"(...)To bring, in the long run, into harmony that what is good for myself, what I wish for myself and my own life, with what I wish for the greater context and what is good for that. (...) So that I am not active in order to achieve this or that in the outside and that it was only worth it when I reach that goal. And when I don't reach it I'm frustrated. But that I do my

activism because in the very moment that I do my activism I feel; this is exactly what I want to do and that's why I'm free to give that and not depend on the fact that my goals are also reached."

Not relying on the final outcome of an action but being satisfied with the notion that one tried and did what was within one's limits seems to be a recurring and important insight for activists. Again, there seems to be a fine line in between doing radical and important self-care, and working hard for the desperately needed transition that is part of today's reality. Considering the status-quo of the world, it might also be simply asking too much to expect that one can do activism and always feel good about it. In the context of political time spans, specific periods will, up to a certain extent, always be especially demanding. Moments were big campaigns or political events (like e.g. climate conferences, climate camps, G20, local infrastructure projects, forest clearance, elections) are coming up, activists are pushed to work more and harder. I believe that, within the limits, this is also needed in order to respond to political realities and necessities. Where those limits lie and what one can do and still feel good with it needs to be evaluated by every person individually according to one's needs, life situations and capabilities. Regardless of the individual response though, it is important to establish structures that support activists in perceiving and respecting their limits even in times that are extraordinarily demanding.

5.6.3.1. Love

Out of the four semi-structured interviews that I conducted, three respondents mentioned love to be their primary and foremost motivation for their activism.
One interviewee *(D)* coined the term "passionism" as a new personal form of hers of being active while focusing on the passion for the things she loves as the primary source of motivation. For the interviewee it was especially important to distinguish those actions that today follow her feelings of love from actions she had previously done out of fear;

"From a biological perspective, when fear is what drives your actions - so in my case fear about climate change - then your body cramps or becomes stiff, because that's what your body has learned to do; when a lion is in front of you and you're scared, you become really stiff. And then you focus very much on the problem and you can't really think about anything else then flight and shock. But when you try to look beyond fear and see what it is that you

love so much that you're afraid of loosing it, e.g. when I'm in front of the lion I'm afraid to loose my life and I try to focus on the love for my life. Or in my case if I don't act out of a sense of fear about climate change but out of love for this planet or love for nature, then the body relaxes and I can think much more freely and creatively. And I'm not so much focused on the problem anymore but rather solution-oriented."

Indeed psychology has shown that this is one of the great problems of climate change communications and action campaigns; way too often we are presented with shocking and disastrous images, that rather elicit negative emotions like fear, helplessness or anger (Harré, 2011). Such negative feelings are predestined to make people draw away from an issue because they feel uncomfortable. It has long been shown that messages and images that elicit positive emotions, like happy and healthy communities in a sound environment, are much more inspiring for people to become active and join a movement or think about other possibilities how they could get active (Harré, 2011). Another interviewee *(C)* drew a connection to the aforementioned harmful activist image where people feel they need to self-sacrifice and make things perfect and end up feeling unhappy with their activism. From his point of view, this can also be circumvented when concentrating on one's love that drives our actions:

"I had the impression that I wanted to change the underlying motivation. Because I believe you can fight out of anger and stubbornness and do your activism. And part of this is that you are always annoyed of other people because they don't do enough, or don't do their things well. Or you can do your activism on the basis of gratefulness. I mean, we all have a reason why we do this. And I believe that, in the majority of cases, this is – very hippy-like – love. This is at least my reason. I'm just really amazed by this world. So when I look at a robin redbreast, and its breast lifts up, well then I'm just in love."

The interviewee goes on to talk about how he tries to every day make himself aware of his love and gratitude in different rituals or habits that frame his day. What is interesting is that, in the same breath, he mentions how it is exactly those rituals that break away when he gets stressed, and then lack as coping strategies. If some activists have established such kind of personal rituals and self-sustaining habits, it is important to create a movement structure that supports those rather than making them break away.

On a final note I recall one conversation that I had with an interviewee *(A)* just when I turned off the recording device. We talked about her strong dedication to always first feel love and then become active. I was a little doubtful whether it could always feasible to feel love and use that as the main motivational driver. She tried to explain it to me like this (wording from memory):

"Only when I really don't want to change anything anymore can I start to actually change something; out of a radically loving acceptance of things. Only then I can start to act out of a constructive approach rather then out of resistance."

5.7. Emotions towards Activism

In all interviews I asked the activists about their emotions towards the activism they do. Activism is a heavily politicized and often very intellectual field, where people get drawn into projects and actions because of a great range of motivations (see above, e.g. social influences, political conviction, or being personally affected). In the last years I was able to observe how political work often enough becomes a routine that feeds into a spiral where people get increasingly active but question their activism less and less. Pausing in order to reflect on one's well-being and personal hygiene in the midst of important and urgent political work is essential in order to foresee and prevent a heavy breakdown with fatal consequences.
All activists reported both having very positive and very negative emotions connected to their activism. The sources that elicited those emotions often overlapped amongst the respondents.

5.7.1. Positive Emotions

Some of the reasons why respondents felt good about their activism have been shortly addressed above, and this is not intended to be an all-encompassing account of potential sources why someone might feel good about being active. It is rather a rough insight into aspects why activism might also be a source of pleasure rather than focusing only on the demanding aspects of it.

5.7.1.1. Gratefulness

Having grown up in and being part of the western world that in so many ways carries a big burden of responsibility for the status quo of the world today, it can feel highly empowering and liberating to be(come) active and stand up against injustice and exploitation. On top of this, the pure possibility of doing political activism gives reason to be grateful; since the conditions for standing up against the ruling institutions are almost anywhere worse then in Germany. As a consequence, many activists that I talked to reported to feel highly privileged and grateful for the pure possibility of doing CJA.

"I think when I'm in an action I'm super happy and I enjoy it. I'm really grateful that I can do this. I see it as a privilege that I can put myself in a protecting way in front of those that I love or what I love." (interviewee C)

5.7.1.2. Meaning

Various activists I both interviewed and talked to on other occasions referred to activism as being an enormous source of meaning in their lives. Feeling a reason for one's own existence and a sense in one's own actions is something that, especially in the modern industrial world, becomes increasingly rare and valuable.

5.7.1.3. Agency

"Ultimately and most importantly, it is about agency; The capacity to affect and be affected by the world. That's the main thing that activism makes me feel like." (interviewee B)

One interviewee was especially fond of the feeling of agency that his activism transmits him. Organizing campaigns and doing actions can give us this powerful sense, which can unfortunately be turned against us the moment e.g. police repression forces us down and we loose our agency. The political has become a personal identity project through the politicization of social identity (Klein, Spears & Reicher, 2007). As a consequence, an individual's identity is transformed from one that is defined by social circumstance into a more agented one (Drury & Reicher, 1999).

I identify this to be one of the key aspects for CJA, as the feeling of agency can vary drastically in-between activists and projects. Climate Change is a phenomenon of global and intangible scale, which often leads to a destructively low self-efficacy of activists. At the same time, collaborating in groups and conducting action-campaigns can reward activists with the mentioned feeling of agency that we are so often deprived in the modern-day capitalist system.

5.7.2. Negative emotions

The negative emotions that activists recalled towards their activism arose mainly out of already mentioned aspects like police repression, constant experiences of failure, despair and work overload. As this thesis focuses on the demanding and weariness provoking aspects of CJA, those aspects are being sufficiently addressed elsewhere.
One noteworthy insight throughout the investigation was the fact that interviewees seemed to take the aforementioned aspects extremely personal; an aggressive police encounter was often narrated like a fight between two people rather than a struggle of opposing ideologies. A failure became the manifestation of personal incompetence rather than of unequal distribution of power and injustice. Overwork was conceived of as a lack of appropriate personal organization and despair was met with stubborn-like brushing away.
This to me felt important to reflect upon, as it underlines the degree to which negative experiences and emotions can affect CJAs on an extraordinarily personal and self-esteem threatening way.

5.8. We are on our Way; Already existing Internal Structures

"I believe that everything good, true and beautiful came originally from a social movement." (interviewee B)

A lot has been said about those aspects where the CJM has room for improvement and could more strongly "walk its talk". Shortly I also want to address some structures that already exist. It seems important to not only criticise what needs to change, but also recognize those structures that are already today helping to make the CJM more sustainable. From the interviews I gathered that these existing structures have not always been there and I got the

impression that there is actually already a lot of thought (at least by some individuals) being put into coming up with strategies about how to lift our activism onto more sustainable pillars.

5.8.1. Hierarchies

In a lot of aspects the movement already tries to "be the change" and act out what we would like to see in the world. One key element in this is hierarchy and the intention to work on a horizontal level.

For example the yearly climate camps aim at providing platforms where everybody can participate in decision-making processes and reduce hierarchy. So-called "neighbourhoods" and daily plenaries are by now reliable institutions that have proven to be very useful for breaking up hierarchies and reaching collective decisions. Even so, as the feminist, political scientist, writer and attorney Jo Freeman puts it: "There is no such thing as a structureless group" (1970). Trying to avoid hierarchy and leadership, many activists disarm each other when it comes to identification and removal of obstacles for effective collective action.

Especially in bigger groups the intention of distributing responsibility and allowing autonomy can imply an excessive demand on the individual. This can be seen with every year that climate camps get bigger and attract more people, and the neighbourhood plenaries get increasingly complex to coordinate. It becomes very visible that we have not grown up with learning how participatory democracy looks and works like. Not everybody is prepared to get involved in decision-making processes and sit through, sometimes quite lengthy, plenaries. As a consequence, the oftentimes slow process of collective decision making gets disregarded as tiring and time-consuming. On the one hand, this can be seen as a valuable process, in which we experience and practice how participatory democracy can feel like and what it also requires in terms of personal efforts and contributions. At the same time, it might be useful to start a more general debate around the question of whether and where it might in fact make sense to avoid involving the big collective but rely on the expertise of some. Especially when it comes to organizing the various "to-dos", clear division of work and transparent workloads are essential in order to avoid overwork of some.

Even so, it seems to be worth the effort of practicing and establishing alternative forms of internal organization; decentralised decision-making processes and horizontal structures are less prone to corruption, and the more people are included in the process and feel empowered, the greater the chance that long-term and profound change will happen. This will then in turn also fall back on our everyday behaviour.

5.8.2. Emotional Rounds

Doing emotional rounds[14] is still an integral part of plenaries or group processes or sometimes simply a way to collectively start into the day. From my point of view this is already an important feminist step towards valuing the emotions of the individual, improving our communication culture and practicing collective mindfulness.

5.8.3. Yoga at the Climate Camps

It is a common institution that at every climate camp there are some yoga sessions being offered for everybody to participate. This is a unique moment where activists come together to do something for their physiological and psychological health. I hadn't been reflecting so much on the importance of the yoga classes on the camp up to the moment where I told the yoga teacher about the topic of my thesis. She told me that she still remembers one moment where we bumped into each other on the camp. I had thanked her for her yoga classes and told her that these 1,5 hours are in fact the only time during the week-long camp that I was explicitly taking for myself and was making sure that I made no other commitments for that time. Apparently it stroke her how grateful I was for this time and the incentive to make space for "a date with myself" to look after my own well-being. I'm sure I wouldn't have taken that time had the yoga class not pushed me to do it. One aspect that is special about yoga is that it falls into the category of "preventive" measures that people can practice both collectively and individually.

5.8.4. Out of Action

Out of Action is a structure that provides support from activists for activists and accompanies stressful experiences before, during and after an action. The emotional first aid group is usually present at big climate mobilizations. My experience is that it is a structure that people make use of when there is already a need. It seems to focus less on large-scale structural changes to support people avoid or prepare for negative experiences[15]. Out Of Action seems

[14] An emotional round is a collective practice where everybody shares his*her current state of mind. Those rounds can take various forms, from being extremely long and intimate to simply functioning as a quick check-in.
[15] E.g. avoid overwork, prepare for police repression or stressful times.

to be an important step towards a movement that engages in more sustainable activism overall, but in my opinion the structure will need to be expanded and become more visible and involved in the overall set-up of a climate camp or action campaign.

6. Situating CJMs within the current world system

In the previous section, resulting themes from the coded interviews have been analysed. These aspects are only generalizable to a certain extend, as the sample of the study was limited in size and purposefully selected. In the following, I will thus address aspects of the overall context in which activists engage and which has - direct and indirect - consequences on their well-being.

Throughout the process of this research I repeatedly came to an admittedly obvious but crucial conclusion: We all are children of our society and have inherited an awful amount of its vicious dynamics which make us stumble even in the intent to break out of them. On top of this there is the simple fact that we engage within the system that we strive to change and which constantly imposes certain obstacles and demands on us. Here two consequences of today's hegemonic system form a duo that creates a tough ground for a revolution; the physical environment of a capitalist, patriarchal and neo-colonialist society in combination with one's own conditioning in this very context, the traumata that every child takes away from growing up in such a surrounding and the belief systems that we have inherited from a very early age (Mignolo, 2007).
In the following, I will address a selection of some of the most relevant characteristics that yield powerful influences on the CJM overall and CJAs individually.

6.1. Capitalist Setting

First of all, it is important to acknowledge the context of capitalism and a class-society in which CJAs engage. Constant expectations to be productive, effective and energetic have infiltrated every corner of our private and working life, and did not make a halt before political activism. Even if they may pretend to be striving towards a healthier and less violent future, activists have not been untroubled by the subtle manipulation of capitalist organizing.

This becomes strikingly visible in the way activism is done today. In many regards, CJAs reproduce capitalist patterns of exploitation, pressure and a working culture where people push themselves up to the point of exhaustion. Especially within the climate movement, a strong sense of urgency and necessity is present which leads to activists having oftentimes unrealistically high expectations of their own performance and working themselves up on the topics. In a second step, the responsibility and burden of indisposition and being worn down is passed on to the individual instead of confronting the issue and finding solutions in a collective and solidary manner.

In the following paragraph I will discuss the ever-present and unavoidable embeddedness of the CJM in the financial system, which is a key characteristic of capitalism. As jobs within the climate movement are rare and – if existent – not well paid, the majority of activists need to do labour work additionally to their political work in order to earn the necessary money to be able to sustain themselves. How extensive monetary pressures can become for the individual activist was underlined by the following statement of one interviewee *(interviewee B)* that has been in the movement for over 20 years:

"I think the majority of people I have seen drop out are people who get other jobs or who have kids. I actually think that is the main reason. I mean, yes, some cadre drop out, but …"

Next to the difficulty of having enough time and energy for labour work next to the political work, it can be especially hard to find a decent employment when one strives for a job that is compatible with values that clash with a profit oriented system; for emotional and ethical reasons many well-paid jobs are often out of question. In addition, activist schedules often tend to be already quite packed as they are and leave little time for extra activities. When I asked one interviewee *(C)* whether he would consider himself a "full-time activist", his answer made clear how central the activism can become in activists' lives and how activism itself becomes a sort of "unpaid job":

"Yes. Well, by now I also have a different job, so I don't earn money with my activism but the majority of time goes into this. So everything else, job, vacation, I try to build around this."

On another note it is important to consider the consequences that a live with little financial resources can have on the well-being and health of activists. Living in precarious conditions

and engaging in an unsalaried work that often takes a high emotional toll creates a ground on which it can be hard to undertake the kind of self-care that is needed in order for activists to stay healthy and enduring. It is still a reality today that the majority of mental illnesses are most prevalent in the lowest economic classes where there is the most difficult access to security, resources, appropriate nutrition, shelter and medical care. However, these unjust circumstances are being stabilized through the dominant conception of mental illnesses in the medical sector and in society overall as being a personal problem, rather than a structural one. The need for activists to have their basic needs secured and their political work towards a liberated life on earth financially valued is thus an essential part of sustainable activism.

The fact that activists' work is not usually honoured as "real" work does not only come to the fore when focusing on the necessary income that people need in order to pay for food and rent. It also becomes visible in daily confrontations with friends and family members. One friend and project partner of mine told me how she is currently looking for whatever kind of job; not because she was in need of a higher income, but because she had become too tired of justifying why she did not have a "real" job to people to whom climate activism was not a serious pastime.

Two interviewees *(A & B)* did actually have a paid full-time job in an environmental leftist NGO and addressed the difficulties they were facing with the resulting commingling of personal passion and economic security. Both talked about the peculiar problem of full-time political jobs, where the breaking down of boundaries between work and activism in everyday-life become exacerbated; in this context they explicitly mentioned the difficulty of drawing a line between full-time and voluntary work and ending up with an exclusive network of social contacts that only come from the political sphere. On top of this, when one works for one's own ideals, regardless of whether this work is paid or not, it is never so easy to let unfinished tasks rest and allow oneself some purely self-focused after-work hours.

Another aspect that was mentioned and that rather refers to the organizational level is the need for funding not only for individuals, but also or especially for bigger NGOs.
One respondent *(B)* described:

"The more radical movements tend to have strong criticisms of the big green NGOs and their inability to pull their head out of their asses and match practice to rhetoric. Sometimes I feel

like with the big environmental NGOs you're talking about everything going to shits in the world, but you can't get yourself to do a little bit of disobedience. And they are like: 'well, then we don't get the money and resources and blablabla'.
More institutionalization would create more stability and probably therefore fewer burn-outs and a greater ability to combine activism with other engagement or your work, but at the same time an excessive degree of institutionalization does tend to drain movement of dynamism. Again, because of stuff around funding and recognition. I mean we need a radical movement right now. And when you create big structures, you need funds. And funds don't always come without strings attached."

This tension that results from being torn in-between an unpaid job one is passionate about, a paid job where one is often in danger of betraying personal values and pressure from outside social networks that either expect decent conventional labour work or full dedication to the greater cause creates for a constant underlying pressure on CJAs.

6.2. A Society of Supremacy

Next to the context of capitalism, there is a long list of other supremacy that children of our society today experience and learn right from the cradle. Imagining that we were today in a society where there was no oppression – no racism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexism, ageism, abelism, classism, xenophobia just to name a few – so much of the suffering that we are tending to wouldn't exist and our own minds would have been programmed very differently. I argue that our struggle would be a different one altogether. As outlined above, we today live in a modern society that downgrades impulses and emotions and embraces the defeat of reason over nature. This results in a lack of space to talk about personal emotions and a tendency to ignore one's own feelings. As a consequence, many people fall into the trap of a vicious spiral where the fact that people don't openly address their emotions leads to an overall culture where there is little space to turn one's internal struggles and heartfelt emotions outside.

"I think the crucial point is that we need to show our weaknesses. And I think that this made for me, as a person with a male socialisation and a socialisation of 'I want to be the hero' and 'Robin Hood', that I sometimes hid my weaknesses. And people think 'He is super strong' and don't see the times when I am really down and exhausted and can't keep going and when

other people need to coddle me up again. Showing this is one thing that we need to do. And by saying 'hej, I'm not always strong and I have my limits' we open up the space for other people to also say 'hej, I'm also not always strong, and that is OK like that'." (interviewee C)

Patriarchal degradation of nature and therewith of human emotions has invaded even far leftist structures. Up to a certain extent awareness about this seems to be spreading, and it is increasingly becoming common conduct to start the day, projects or work sessions with a collective emotional round, where recognition is given to the individual emotions present (see above). But this doesn't seem to be radical enough, since we exist in a context which has, as a baseline, a fairly high degree of ignored or suppressed anxiety, fear and grief. From our environment and our different cultures we have learned what we are supposed to fear and how we deal with that fear. Everyday bombardment with news about extinction, war and economic crises has lead to a widespread avoidance of negative emotions associated with them. Yet from an activist viewpoint allowing us to feel those negative emotions gives us existential feedback about the hegemonic circumstances and can motivate collective actions. In the psychological *Social Identity Model for Collective Action*, van Zomeren, Postmes and Spears (2008) find that anger can motivate people to become politically active and turn perceived injustice into "constructive" action. Recognizing and acknowledging one's own emotions is essential in order to be able to process them. Meanwhile, the mainstream tendency today is rather to suppress and downgrade our emotions and impulses. According to large population-based surveys, up to 33.7% of the population are affected by an anxiety disorder during their lifetime (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015). Numbers like this make me wonder whether we have replaced a potential wake-up call of fear about the status-quo of the world with a broad range of anxiety disorders whose prevalence is rising with alarming velocity. The problem about fear is not that we feel it, but that we don't, or that we are being afraid of feeling the fear. What we don't consciously feel we cannot heal and we cannot learn from it. As Hannah Arendt once put it: *"Fear is an emotion indispensable for survival"*.

Maybe at no other point in history has fear been a more appropriate reaction. At the same time, instead of acknowledging our feelings and allowing them to motivate us to act for change, we suppress them just like many other essential characteristics that are devaluated as feminine or out-dated (Held, 2006). They are pushed aside by a patriarchal and resources consuming economy that feeds into widespread egoism and competition; surveys in almost the entire western world show that narcissism amongst the population is growing (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Additionally, a hypocritical happiness industry sells us mental trainings for

practicing mindfulness, gratefulness and empathy. While this might work on an individual level, studies have shown that the stress hormone Cortisol is not as easy to be diminished in isolation from other people. Reducing inner agitation seems to only be possible by being in contact with other people (Heuser, 2017). Leftist circles lack those places and rituals where we can collectively deal with our negative emotions. This again could be true for society overall, but seems especially drastic in a movement that takes the step to face and confront those violent and harmful dynamics of today's world.

6.3. Engaging in an Accelerated Society

The hegemonic myth of development manipulates people to believe that electronic devices are desirable commodities, that time online is time spent in a useful way and that increasing bandwidth increases our life satisfaction. In the western world (and in a soaring amount of parts in the global south) we can see more and more W-Lan Hotspots or mobile Internet that can be accessed through Laptops, Smartphone, Tablets, watches and whatever other kind of new invention of the digital capitalist market (Prescott, 2017). The more we are connected, the greater our perceived dependency on such devices and the possibility to constantly "stay in touch" with the worldwide web that they enable. Activism is not exempt from this. One interviewee *(C)* explains how:

"For me all the e-mail work is really tough, sitting so much time in front of the computer is really energy-consuming. So in my yoga-practice or in my workout I try to loosen the tension in my shoulders, and then I sit one hour in front of the computer and feel really tense again. This is really crazy, to spend so much time in front of the computer and to have so little time outside. I'm an outside-person and its weird to spend so much time with the computer. This sucks the most energy out of me. I am looking for ways to change this on an individual level, but I also hope that we as a movement can change this. That we don't do so much activism based on e-mails and more face-to-face-organization. Because I believe that this is one of the really big points responsible for burn-out in the movement."

This seems to be a main issue that runs like a thread through this thesis; the personal utopia of activists and the means that they choose to get closer to it on a societal level. The cited interviewee does not want to spend so much time in front of a computer screen, he doesn't enjoy it and it even makes him suffer. But he does it because it is part of the larger, implicit

strategy of the climate movement that in fact strives for a world where less technological devices and worldwide connection will be feasible. A great amount of psychological studies have shown that time on our own and time in nature are incredibly valuable for our well-being, stress relief, our capacity for empathy and profound reflection (e.g. Berto (2005), Li (2010) and Berman et al. (2012)). It thus is not surprising that a society that is deprived of exactly those times and "forced" (on an explicit level at work-places, and on an implicit level with regards to our cultural upbringing) into spending an increasing amount of time with electronic devices becomes less solidary, cares less and is increasingly confused about the sources that will bring happiness and satisfaction into peoples' lives. This is fuelled by the fact that time spent with electronic devices usually implies time spent inside or at least in modern artificial environments. Nature connection gets lost on the way and thus adds up to the list of things that are strived for in many "ecotopias" but in fact is heavily reduced in the intent to get there.

Another consequence of increasing interconnection and widespread organization is that activists often engage in places far off from their own hometown. This implies not only lengthy group calls online but also a lot of traveling in order to get to different projects and places where actions take place. One activist recalled how he is hardly a weekend at home and that this also takes a lot of his energy. The extreme increase in time-space compression (Harvey, 1990) that has taken place during the last century comes here to the fore through extreme advancement in communication and travel technologies. Even though the ability to speed up and spread out is a privilege on its own, throughout the interviews it was evident that it is also taking a high toll.

6.4. Perfectionism

From an early age onwards we learn how our value is being measured by our performance; be it through grades in school, trophies after sports competitions or the clapping of hands after a music performance. As a consequence, we deeply inherit a rather superficial[16] aspiration to improve and try to be better, faster and more efficient in anything we do. This trickles down

[16] With "superficial" I refer to the fact that our performance is usually measured on the basis of very simple and restricted indicators like achieved velocity or amount of goals scored. How good our running technique was or how well we cooperated within our team is usually disregarded in the performance measurement.

even into our intimate relationships, our private daily life and also the way we do activism. The following excerpt from an interview *(C)* illustrates this point:

"(...) And this might also be an important aspect when talking about stress; a really big problem that we have is simply our own perfectionism. That we have an idea, make plans and then, come what may we pull it through. Instead of maybe saying 'no, OK, it has been enough already and we don't need to do this now'. And it is really hard to get rid of this perfectionism."

Now it can be debated how much we assume that human beings have a native perfectionism that would come out in any kind of economic and social system. I argue that it is the very nature of capitalism and modern-day western education that clearly established polarized thinking of "correct" and "incorrect" that condition us to feel a constant pressure to improve. When I was 15 years old I went to live in a boarding school. And on the first page of the school's diary that we were all given it read, "Good, better, best, never let it rest. Till your good is better, and your better best". Ten years have passed, but I have memorized those words and remember them until today. Those kinds of influences are not to be underestimated in their unconscious power that they are still exercising on us even today. This goes up to the point where we follow those very patterns even in the intent to change the hegemonic system. Such kind of personal perfectionism feeds into an overall impression of CJAs that they are the ones personally responsible for things being done and successes being achieved. One interviewee *(D)*, looking back on the activism she has been doing for around ten years, recalls:

"There was always an underlying pressure of 'I am responsible to do something'. If my own values matter to me, like environmental protection or a living planet, then I also have a responsibility to speak up for that, nobody else should do that for me. This also has a weight, that responsibility."

The impression of personal responsibility is even more enhanced when activists take upon them tasks that have implications for the success of an action or a campaign. They can experience heavy pressure by personal and outside expectations about desired results and thus start omitting their personal well-being. During the summer of 2017, I participated in an action of Ende Gelände in which we aimed at disrupting the transportation between the mine

and the power plant. A group of very close friends decided to take upon the role of the "finger tip", the part of the structure that is responsible for leading the masses of people to the final destination, including tasks like breaking through police chains and coordinating the possible routes to manoeuvre the fingers towards the final destination. After weeks of preparation and hours of marching on this very day, we ended up being kettled by the police just in front of the rails. We were brought into custody, photos were being taken and late at night we were again released. When I got out, I saw a close friend of mine lying on the ground and I went over to give her a big hug. The moment I kneeled down and embraced her, she burst out into tears and did not stop crying for a good amount of time. First I thought she was upset because she had been beaten, had seen friends suffer police repression and pain or because she had had a tough time in custody. But when she regained her breath to talk, I realized that what was upsetting her so much was much rather her impression of personal failure. She had previously done a weeklong activist training by a bigger environmental NGO and seemed to be under the impression that she herself should have done a better job in leading the activist finger successfully onto the rails. This sort of feeling of personal responsibility for such big actions and afterwards calling oneself to account for either success and failure is a tendency I have been able to observe in many spheres of the CJM. Feeling constant pressure to give one's best and being accountable for the outcome of big political campaigns can be heavily demanding, especially when experienced over a longer term (Mustakova-Possardt, Lyubansky, Basseches, & Oxenberg, 2014). Psychologists have shown that individuals tend to be happiest if they credit themselves for their successes, but not for their failures (Davies, 2015). This might give the impression of a delusional strategy, but in the context of a competitive, individualized culture where failures, rather than successes, are by default attributed to individual ability and effort, it opens up new spheres for discussion, to say the least.

Another aspect that came out during the interviews was the impression that many activists felt that a lot of tasks were getting stuck with them, because nobody else would do it or wouldn't do it as "well". This has a certain connection to the before mentioned feeling of responsibility for things and the tendency of perfectionism. As one activist *(B)* put it:

"I'm not a perfectionist, but things have to be good. And there are a whole bunch of things that I do well. And that is a classic source for activist burn-out, it's like 'hrr, if they do it, it won't be as good as if I do it – so I do it'."

During the investigation about sustainable activism, I often got the impression that many lessons that I learned are by no means exclusively relevant for Sustainable Activism, but actually for any kind of sustainable group structure. In this case, I for example saw difficulties in finding a healthy balance between more experienced activists doing tasks that they feel are important and thus want to do them, in their understanding, "well", and trying to get on board newcomers, give them the possibility to take responsibility, make their own experiences and learn. Activists that are already profoundly involved in projects and campaigns often seem to have a tendency to take more and more tasks because they feel they know best how to do it or have a certain idea how they want things to be done. This puts a constant pressure on them. One interviewee *(B)* felt especially strongly about this and suggested the following:

"That's about what the movement could do: develop more excellent cadre. So that even vain, narcissistic me doesn't feel the need to be there. I want to have a situation where there can be a big climate mobilization and where I can just sit it out without having the sense of 'argh, I should have really been there'."

6.5. Individualization of the Responsibility of Overwork

The previous quote, just like other interview parts, show that it is indeed difficult to talk about the structural set-up of the movement without taking into account the diverse individuals that amount to it. Capitalist logic tells us that "every man is the architect of his own fortune". This conditions us to first of all focus on ourselves and make our own success and well-being a personal priority.

At the same time, it makes us believe that it is our personal deficiency if we don't manage to cope within the given structures. One interviewee *(B)* reported how it has become a pattern for him to repeatedly break down once or twice a year as a consequence of his demanding activism. When asked how the movement could structurally change in order to prevent this from happening in the future, the response was slightly disillusioning for the aim of this thesis:

"Getting into that situation is part of my personality structure. (...) Burn-out usually catches people who can't really delegate, who can't let go of stuff, some people are control-freaks."

This statement makes reference to our ideas about what is normal today and how a healthy rational being should behave. It seems neither logical nor reasonable to consider it a personal issue if people for example "can't let go of stuff" in a world where dozens of species go extinct every day (Chivian & Bernstein, 2008), where people die from pollution or lose their homes due to the consequences of climate change. I argue that labelling those people that get engaged and heavily work to try and build a different future "control-freaks" does not pay justice to the dimensions of the problems we are facing today.

6.6. Body-Mind-Duality and Domination of Nature

Another characteristic feature of the western, capitalist and patriarchal society in which the German CJM is embedded is an extreme form of alienation of our own corporality and constant strive to dominate over nature (Foster, 2000). The idea that the mind and the body are distinct and separable can have far-reaching consequences. At the same time as we purposefully degraded nature in order to convert life into profit, we started to suppress animalistic heritages like impulses, intuition and emotions. As domesticated human beings in a modern, industrial society called "civilisation" it becomes increasingly important to regain our ability to perceive emotions and find access to our emotional intelligence (our intuition and our instinct) and overcome the alienation of our own bodies. Achieving this while leading a "disembodied lifestyle" where our direct experience is increasingly superposed by a world of symbols, ideologies, virtual realities, blind materialism and a flood of information becomes an increasing challenge in the 21st century. Instead of degrading emotions just like the hegemonic system treats nature, it is essential to find a collective approach to rediscover the connection to our inner processes. Emotions are social phenomena that develop in the context of relationships (Parkinson, 1996). As such, feelings just like healing are transpersonal processes that we need to attend to in community. All interviewees were asked how they felt the activist community could be more supportive in order to cultivate a culture of sustainable activism. One often mentioned aspect was the establishment of spaces to become aware, discuss and work on issues around sustainable activism. The following quote from one interviewee *(A)* underlines the importance of room for exchange and collective attention towards emotions and feelings towards activism:

"By opening up a space to pay attention to my emotions and learn about how other people feel and deal with those feelings. So that there is space where we can collectively look at this

and ask ourselves: how do we feel about our activism right now? To integrate more emotional work with ourselves in the activism, and not working so solution-oriented. In the sense that it is not only about what thing we want to blockade next or how much CO2-emissions we want prevent. This is about how we measure success of an action. And including us as activists and our personal well-being as an essential part of our success. That would have helped me back then, if that would have been more in the focus."

As activists we are not simply a mechanistic part of a production-oriented system, but need to stay in contact with ourselves, our comrades and "nature". As understood from the previous quote, we can't allow ourselves to become "estranged"[17] to our hearts, our minds, our hands, and our bodies by becoming the device of execution of to-dos without listening to our personal needs.

7. Embracing Sustainable Activism – Suggestions to move Forward

Throughout the investigation, two major characteristics of the CJM today emerged as being especially noteworthy factors with heavy implications on the (un-)sustainability of climate activism today. One of them was the inevitable embeddedness of the CJM in the modern-world hegemonic system. The other one was a conglomeration of various aspects concerning the current structure of the CJM. The two diagrams presented as Figures 3 and 4 illustrate those two aspects and how interviewees suggested to confront those. Bold letters are proposals for restructuring processes in order to make the CJM become more sustainable and healthy.

[17] The term makes reference to Marx's theory of alienation, where he describes how "the alienation from the self is a consequence of being a mechanistic part of a social class, the condition of which estranges a person from humanity" (1867).

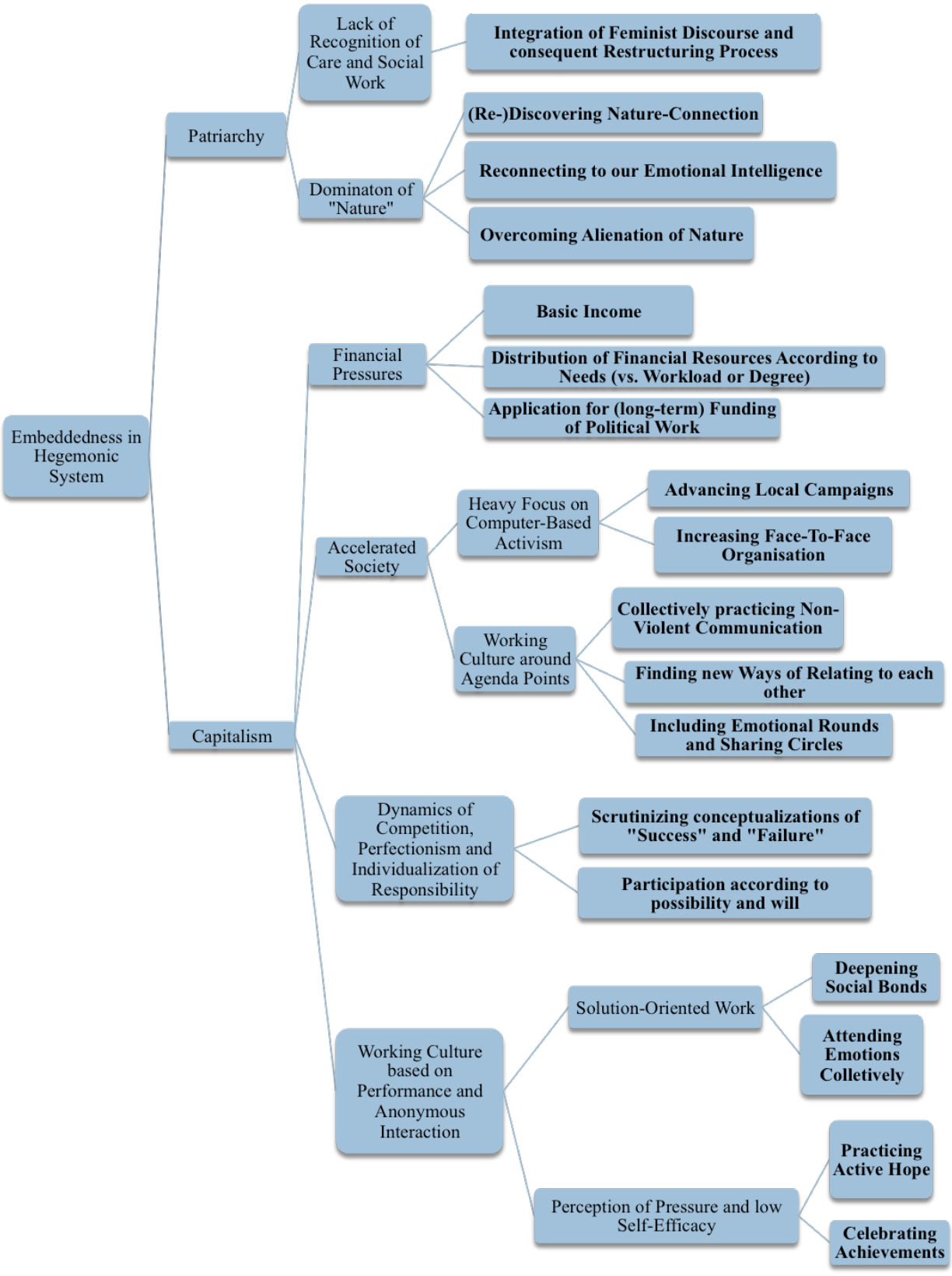

Figure 3: One aspect that turned out to be a major factor concerning the unsustainability of the CJM was the ever-present embeddedness in the hegemonic system. Various consequences and potential ways to confront these are depicted (bold).

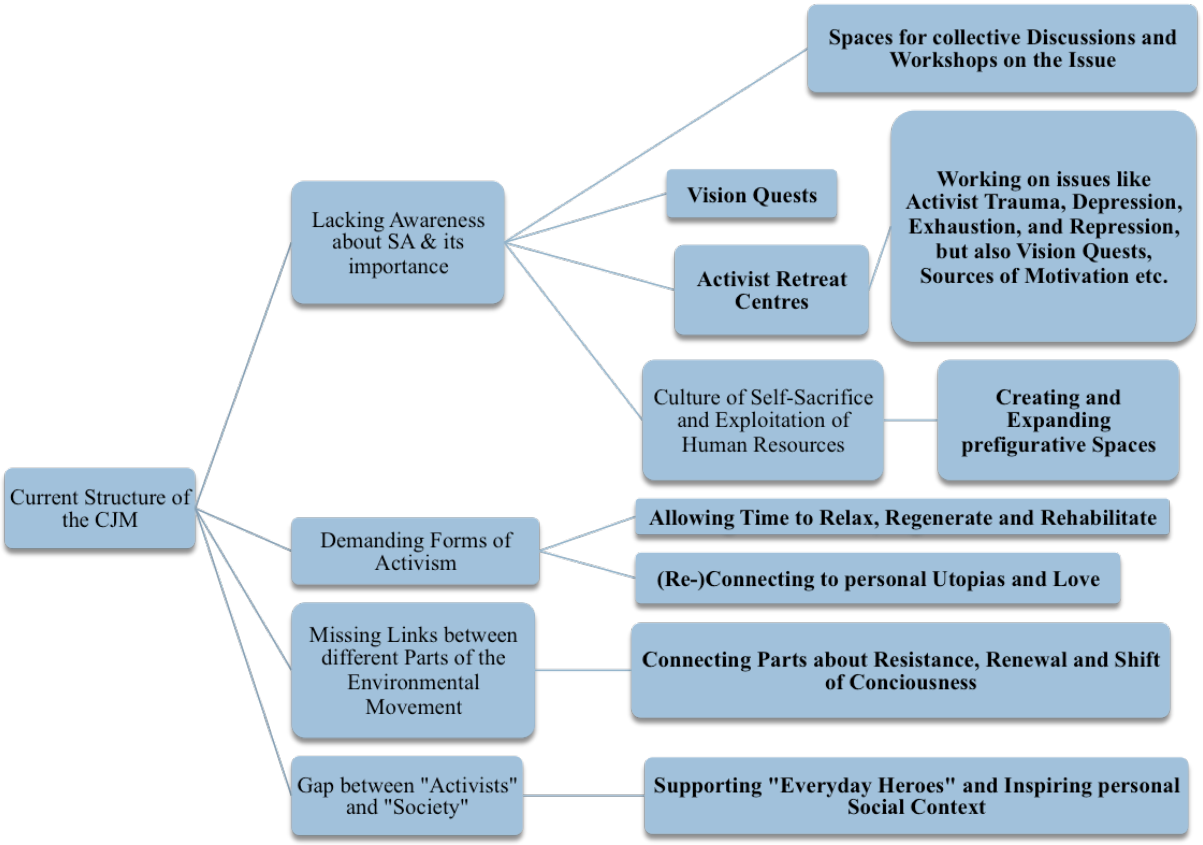

Figure 4: Next to the inevitable embeddedness of the CJM in the hegemonic system, the internal structure of the movement today can be scrutinized when reflecting on factors that make the movement an unsustainable environment for activists. Various aspects have been identified that hinder or prohibit sustainable activism. Similar to figure three, suggestions for restructuring processes are written with bold letters.

In the following I will address some of the aspects mentioned in the figures that were identified as playing key roles for activist overwork and depression. As this thesis aimed at identifying potential changes that could be undertaken in order to support the movement in becoming a healthier and more sustaining environment for climate activists, this aspect was included in the unstructured interviews. Interviewees were asked how they felt the movement could have supported them in a better way, and what changes they would wish for. As a result, the following section is neither exhaustive nor holistically applicable, but a subjective and momentary picture of aspects that came to CJAs minds when they were asked to imagine a restructuring process of the German CJM.

7.1. Overarching System

One highly important aspect seemed to be the inevitable embeddedness of the movement in the capitalist and patriarchal system and the financial realities of activists. Very little does the hegemonic system value and support those that work to improve the lives of individuals and communities. *The Revolution will not be Funded* brings this to the point by stating that "our society seems to ignore the vital importance of those of its members who teach, heal and empower" (INCITE, 2017). Ideas like the basic income might provide a basis on which all people could have an equal baseline of available money that is not tied to conventional ascriptions of what constitutes valuable work. Another important possibility is to create jobs by writing applications for longer-term funding[18] of specific projects or campaigns. Taking away financial pressures from activists would not only pay justice to the valuable work they are doing but also free their capacities to include time for leisure and recovering in their lives.

7.2. A Decent Living

Today, many activists have chosen to live with the least constraints from the financial system possible, often with lifestyles deviating from the conventional system. They might for example live in squatted buildings, eat dumpster-dived or home-grown food, wear second hand clothing or reuse and repair other things that society would consider "waste". While such customs can be empowering and enjoyable for some, they can also divide activist groups. Every activist has individual needs and desires concerning their personal lifestyle, and it can become very tiresome for people to feel they need to justify for their "extravagant" habits. Furthermore, such simple and minimalist ways of living can create a hierarchy where it is much more feasible for younger generations without kids to do this sort of oppositional activism. Reflecting on this and creating environments where individual needs and lifestyles are able to exist without being judged by activist comrades could be a valuable endeavour.

[18] As mentioned above, this kind of money needs to be considered with care as the different sponsors might exert influence through their position of power as the sponsoring body.

7.3. Inter-Personal Communication without the Barriers of Telecommunication

Another important aspect seemed to be the heavy focus on activism that is based on technological devices and especially work on the computer. Here it might be worth checking whether more face-to-face organization or engagement in local campaigns are possible. Another crucial aspect that again could be applied to various spheres of live is the constant potential to collectively work to improve our communication culture. Together with one group I have been working with since 2011 we collectively practiced non-violent communication by Marshall B. Rosenberg (Rosenberg, 2009) with the help of a guide full of exercises. I would say that this collective practice is one of the main reasons why we today still work together in a harmonic and constructive way.

On top of improving the way we communicate, one interviewee *(C)* doubted that the content of what we discuss always makes sense. From his perspective, the traditional practice of working in stressful meetings where the agenda is worked down one item after the other doesn't always make sense; *"sometimes we would get much further by just sitting together in silence at some points"*.

7.4. Redefining Success and Failure

Another issue seemed to be the constant impression that one could do better and feeling personally responsible after ending up overworked. Before a bigger mobilization and on the climate camps it is common practice to do action trainings, where the process of the action is talked through, legal questions are addressed and expected key moments are rehearsed. In such trainings, where especially newcomers participate, it might be important to put emphasis on the fact that nobody is personally responsible for the success of an action, that one's best will be enough, and that there is always the potential of the action not working out the way it was intended to (and that this will also be OK).

7.5. Social Support

One aspect that was repeatedly addressed as being already a great source of support and positive emotions are social connections and relationships amongst activists. The climate

movement today is deeply based on friendships. Having a strong community where people mutually support each other can be one of the keys for long-lasting resistance. As such, this can be recognized as a "best practice" example from the CJM today and can potentially be expanded.

7.6. Overcoming the Rift

Another topic that stood out in the interviews was the hegemonic culture of creating a duality between the mind and the body and considering nature as a subordinate servant. Reflecting on our relationship to nature and nurturing one's own connection to nature can be a potential step to change course.

"This needs to be the basis, those are the roots in a way; nature-connection and community. And on top of this, all the activism grows. In order to protect that. There is a difference whether you do activism and then start, like a manager, to do yoga and meditation in order to work more effectively. This is exactly the other way." (interviewee C)

Overcoming our alienation to nature and reconnecting to our ability to perceive emotions and find access to our emotional intelligence (i.e. intuition and instinct) will play an important part in this process.

Another large part in the analysis of starting points for a restructuring process was made up by the suggestion that we need to change our idea of transformation. Being asked for suggestions they would give to a newcomer to the movement, three interviewees answered they would scrutinise the underlying motivation of the person. Becoming aware about the personal reasons for activism and what sources will be sustainable for doing CJA in the long run turned out to be a major aspect. Many interviewees *(A, C & D)* found sources like love and gratitude to be more sustainable than drawing one's energy out of for example anger, frustration or desire for recognition. This goes hand in hand with opening up an even broader discourse in the movement about questions like:

- How does our form of activism look like today?
- Do we want to change certain routines in order to become a healthier and more sustainable movement?
- How do we measure the success of an action?

- E.g.: What do we consider to be more important in the long run; the total amount of CO2-emissions prevented or the number of worn-out activists lost on the way?

By opening up space to talk and reflect about individual emotions we can learn how to collectively take care of negative experiences and integrate more emotional work into the currently mainly solution-oriented work. If activists became more aware of their emotions and the well-being of their fellow comrades, maybe we could collectively destruct our idea of what constitutes success and failure and look beyond single-issue activism. The next step after becoming aware of one's own emotions and those of other activists around oneself would be to collectively attend those emotions and to rediscover our emotional intelligence. Since hurt feelings cannot be healed in isolation, the support of an understanding, like-minded community is essential in this regard. On top of this, groups could practice active hope[19] together. As mentioned above, many activists seemed to feel rather pessimistic, but practicing active hope even makes sense in areas where we feel hopeless, as it doesn't require optimism. The idea is to focus on the worthy intention and let this be the guide for actions, rather than the probability of the desired outcome occurring.

7.7. Sharing and celebrating positive Moments or Achievements

Next to dealing with negative emotions it is important to share the positive feelings and collectively celebrate achievements. Personally, I can say that this for me has not been as straight-forward as it sounds. How and what we celebrate will be another issue to be discussed collectively. Especially with the new rise of climate camps and increasing participation in Ende Gelände Actions, a new kind of fusionist holiday-communism can be seen with groups of young people arriving with beer and ghetto blasters to the climate camps. This ties back into the question of underlying motivation of CJAs. Even though drinking parties and activist selfies feed into the mainstream culture of a consumer society, one could argue that it does not really matter why somebody decided to join the walk into the pit, as long as the total number of people blockading the digger increases with every year. At the same time there are debates every year about the amount of excessive celebration that a

[19] According to Joanna Macy, the environmental activist, deep ecologist and author of *Active Hope - How to Face the Mess We're in without going Crazy* (2012), active hope involves three steps: First, to take a clear view of reality, second, to identify what one had hoped for in terms of the direction one would like things to move in or the values one would like to see expressed; and third, to take steps to move oneself or the situation in that direction.

climate camp can sustain. The sometimes quite diverse "neighbourhoods" in the climate camp already yield a certain potential of conflict. And with demanding actions and diverging needs before and after an action, conflicts can occur. Amongst others, there is also the recurring debate around how much celebration there is supposed to be after an action, even if it was "successful" in the traditional sense. There will always be people hurt, confused, disillusioned or still in custody after an action of mass civil disobedience. The idea of sharing joy and collectively celebrating to me seems thus as important as dodgy to put into execution in reality.

7.8. Creating Bonds with other Environmental Movements

One more issue that stood out with potential for improvement was the overall structure of the movement. This is a very broad and vague cluster of aspects that interviewees suggested could be changed in order to support and sustain their political work in the long term.
Various comments revolved around the idea that the part of the CJM that is rather about renewal and community is currently strikingly separated from the part dealing with resistance. Bringing those together in order to create a more holistic community and making space for people to transition from one area to the other seemed to be a desire of many CJAs I talked to. This could for example be done by places where both parts of the movement live together. An accompanying shift of consciousness for all parts was another concern, which could include collective spiritual practices but also prefigurative elements like for example internally addressing feminist issues. On top of this, there was the idea of specific "refill-seminars" with the intention to charge CJAs' "batteries" and create awareness for their personal motivation for doing activism. Particular workshops could be incorporated into climate camps where activists could do a guided vision-quest. Such institutions could also help to include topics like overwork, trauma and exhaustion into the overall discourse of the movement and might support people in feeling confident to address the topic when they witness other comrades struggling.

7.9. Prefigurative Politics

According to Carl Boggs (1977), who coined the term, the desire of prefigurative politics is to embody "within the on-going political practice of a movement […] those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal".
Within the CJM, the ways that people choose to effect change are often quite taxing and all-consuming. Especially when focusing on the more demanding forms of activism it is important to allow for time of relaxation, regeneration and rehabilitation. This could help activists in reconnecting with their utopias and reflecting about the way they want to bring those into the world.
Furthermore, certain customs that come along with a movement that today is rather rigidly organized around campaigns and endless to-do lists could be improved. One interviewee *(C)* suggested beginning meetings with a round of gratitude where people can share what they feel thankful about.

"Especially as leftists, we have a tendency to always criticize everything. And the gratefulness gets lost on the way. I have the vision that if we implemented this and started our meetings like that, then we would also be able to remind ourselves in situations of stress why we do this. Which could bring some calmness."

All aspects revolving around "embodying the change" and acting out of love and gratefulness to me sounded very attractive and I wish that increasing prefigurative spaces could become a bigger focus in the constitution of the CJM. In any case, it will always be a fine line between getting lost in cut-off, ineffective, exclusive and far-from-reality ecotopias and betraying the ultimate values and goals in the process of struggling for the change. Out of the experience of one interviewee *(B)* who reported to have had many experiences with prefigurative spaces, those are also neither "paradises" nor the ultimate solution:

"I believe that there can be a tendency to under-emphasize strategic considerations. YES, creating another world in the now is important. But you also have to switch off the shit that is happening in the mainstream world. And that's a pendulum between strategic activism and more expressive prefigurative activism."

On a final note, I want to mention that the debate around overworked activists will stay relevant as long as the hegemonic system doesn't start to undergo real change and more people decide to support the struggle for a great transition. Concluding with the words of Franca Magnani:

"The more citizens with civil courage a country has, the fewer heroes it will once need."
(in Frohloff 2001: 230)

8. Discussion

The starting point of this thesis is the analysis of a supposedly anti-capitalist sustainability movement that has inherited hegemonic features of exploitation, productivism and non-dialectical conceptions of progress.
It is important to reflect on the way our working culture changes if we are driven by ideology and hope. If we "work" because it is our inner desire to do so, and we gain energy and satisfaction out of it regardless of other people's participation or external rewards, then we establish a radically new form of relation towards labour. In such a scenario, it is especially important to do self-care and prevent oneself from sliding into self-exploitation. At the same time, it is a powerful counter piece to the capitalist logic of labour value and can take apart the hegemonic conceptualization of work altogether.
Against this background, taking away the pride in sacrifice for the good cause and the stigma of self-care could be a potential starting point for a profound change of the current culture of activism. This in turn might help to make the movement more coherent with its own values. Furthermore, such adaptations could become key elements in a holistic strategy towards a long lasting change. History has shown that the incidence of activists leaving the movement has disastrous effects on social movements; Not only is the unwanted indisposition of an activist in itself a negative consequence of today's activist culture. But it also implies the loss of knowledge, network and the role of a potential mentor that activists with experience can have. It furthermore makes the network less attractive for newcomers.
Activism in today's world needs to challenge not only the dominant features of a capitalist, patriarchal and neo-colonial consumer society, but to profoundly question modern concepts of reason and rationality altogether. The hegemonic discourse exerts social control through the dominant conceptualizations of progress, happiness and reality and through this manipulates

all modes of thought and behaviour. This is an especially relevant force to be taken into account, as it operates through widespread "consent" rather than force and is consequently harder to combat against.

How profoundly even those movements that aim to be revolutionary have inherited hegemonic practices became visible in various parts of the conducted interviews. Being embedded in a capitalist economic system and having inherited features of an accelerated society that strives for perfectionism and individualizes responsibility for getting overworked pose significant challenges to activists. Working to abolish oppression and exploitation through means like technology or draining practices make us loose connection to nature and our emotional intelligence. Overcoming the resulting alienation towards our own bodies and regaining our ability to perceive our emotions and our access to our emotional intelligence (intuition and instinct) becomes an immense but increasingly important challenge not only for climate justice activists but modern-day population overall.

In the end, it doesn't seem to matter so much whether we build upon Plumwood who focuses on hegemonic rationality, Eisenstein who uses the term of modern Insanity, or Gramsci and his conceptualisation of a hegemonic culture; if we are prepared to open our eyes, we will be able to see that pathological values have shaped the global system and at the same time distorted our ability to imagine true change. It's time for the climate movement to become irrational, unreasonable, insane and counter-hegemonic today, in a collective aspiration towards a revolutionarily sustainable, just and healthy tomorrow.

On another note, activism needs to be scrutinized in combination with the overall life that an activist leads and cannot be considered in isolation. Leading fulfilling relationships, having money troubles or general physical and psychological health conditions mutually affect the activism one does and vice versa.

Another important aspect turned out to be the search for collective ways to respond to repression through police or other authorities. Feeling the solidarity of their comrades turned out to be an essential aspect of activists' well-being. Furthermore, the social relationships that were established in the course of collective actions and project work were repeatedly mentioned to be a big factor for people to enjoy their activism and stay in the CJM. Nevertheless, this does not disregard the importance of staying in contact with the "outside world" in order to avoid getting lost in one's famous environmental "bubble" and make use of the full potential one can have as a source of inspiration for other people to reflect on their lifestyles or even become active themselves.

What furthermore turned out to be a relevant next step for the movement was the revision of the dominant idea of change. This feeds into considerations about the overall strategy of the movement. Not only does the current culture of activism seem to be over-demanding and exploitative. Also, the image of a "typical activist" that is often portrayed is almost impossible to fulfil and creates unrealistic ideas of how we will bring about change. Too many activists today seem to be driven by (self-)perceptions about how a good activist has to be and an ego that desperately tries to fulfil it all.

Reflecting on the downsides of a culture of activism that promotes (self-)exploitation and perfectionism turned out to be crucial. The amount of activists lost to the movement because of overwork is not only in itself alarming, but it also drastically reduces the attractiveness of the movement for new members to join. If we want to "be the change we want to see in the world", then we need to accept that it is neither sustainable nor desirable to pressure and exploit ourselves. If this change is going to be the aforementioned marathon and not a sprint, we better distribute our energies well to stay in for quite some time to come.

Scrutinizing one's own motivation for doing activism and reorienting one's actions along the love and gratefulness that one feels for nature and life seem to be important in this regard. On top of this, interviewees reported that their activism for them is an immense source of meaning and agency, which supports them even in times when they do not feel good with the activism they do. Sharing Utopias and collectively practicing active hope was another aspect that was suggested for a restructured and more sustainable movement. Historically, the left has been known for usually experiencing repeated failure but turning it into productive defeat until eventually, the ultimate goal is reached. This dynamic now clashes with the phenomenon of climate change, which requires profound change extremely quickly (in fact, I argue that this change was needed to happen some time ago already) and if this is not reached, the conditions for the struggle will continue to exponentially get worse.

Another aspect that seemed to be a relevant starting point for supporting a change towards a more sustainable and healthy movement was the connection and collaboration with other parts of the movement. This thesis aimed at the climate justice movement that focuses on resistance, but interviewees reported that they were missing connections to those parts that are about renewal, community and a shift of consciousness. Making connections and allowing for activists to change their participation in-between those fields according to their life circumstances, needs and interests will help to make the movement more integrated and resilient.

On a final note, it is worth mentioning that there already seems to be subtle changes towards the construction of a healthier and move sustainable movement. Having Out Of Action tents at every bigger action, collectively practicing yoga at the climate camps, starting project meetings with emotional rounds and making efforts to cut down hierarchies in organizing processes are some examples of steps that have already been taken. They are today providing important prefigurative spaces inside the CJM.

This work is only a tiny contribution to a greater discourse that will hopefully create a turning point for activism and the way it is done today. The combination of time running out, escalating injustice and intensifying activist practices within the CJM creates for enormous new challenges. Hand in hand with the societal revolution we strive for, we need an internal revolution. In order to give the great transformation a direction, because the proposed deconstruction needs to be accompanied by a guided reconstruction, otherwise we can not be sure that we will change things truly for the better. It seems important to reflect, on a regular basis, on ways how we can become true to our values and sustain our breath for the marathon ahead.

In many regards, the CJM today has set up structures to provide "first aid" for activists. This might come in the form of medics or legal aid (for example at climate camps or protest campaigns) or organized actions to show solidarity with people in jail. It is high time to also put emphasis on our emotional support networks and create structures and dynamics that aim to assist activists in avoiding depression or trauma that can result from repression, despair, or witnessing the blatant violence and injustice of today's world.

The degree to which interviewees had been reflecting on sustainable activism, had developed personal coping strategies or even attempted to change the current activist culture towards a more sustainable and loving one varied greatly. This underlines the need to create spaces for discussion around the topic, in order to give people space to feel and reflect and to raise awareness amongst activists. Scrutinizing one's own motivation for doing activism, the culture of activism that is often promoted today and our overall strategy[20] are important first steps to take. By doing so, a broader shift of consciousness and alternative practices within the movement will hopefully be triggered. In this thesis I attempted to outline some concrete steps how the CJM could structurally be set up differently in order to become a more prefigurative and healthy context for activists to engage in. Another important aspect seems to

[20] With strategy, I want to refer to underlying intentions concerning questions like; what is the goal of our action? What constitutes an (un-)successful action?

be the (re-)connection with other parts of the environmental movement, namely those parts that are about renewal and building alternatives and those about a shift of consciousness. Investigating further into possible connections that can be established and reinforced in order to enable activists to feel welcome and transition between all three of them will be an important area of future research.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

Hand in hand with a destructive, exploitative and unjust world system, climate change and environmental degradation are advancing at an incremental rate. Climate Justice Activists all around the world are joining forces in order to fight for a more sustainable and healthy future. Often enough, their political work is over-demanding and all-consuming and they end up worn out and despaired.

This thesis set out to investigate how the German Climate Justice Movement is set up today and how the involved activists feel with their activism. Through a combination of literature review, auto-ethnographic reflections and narrative inquiry, this investigation found a noteworthy dissemination of suffering and indisposition of activists resulting from their political work. As overwork and drop-out from the movement is a harmful consequence not only for the Climate Justice Activists themselves but for the Movement that stays behind, the exact conditions and experiences that lead people to leave the movement were examined. One important aspect turned out to be the overall activist culture, which has inherited detrimental dynamics of competition, acceleration and a narrow conceptualization of efficaciousness. In the same spirit, the importance of scrutinizing one's personal motivation for doing Climate Justice Activism in the first place was highlighted. Another practical reality that was found to play an important role was the unavoidable embeddedness of CJAs in the capitalist system. Additional aspects like a clash of teleologies between the operating mode of the left movement and climate change were discussed. The fact that the left is (historically) know for (re-)acting out of a sense of necessity and from a position of oppression leads to activists often abandoning themselves for the "greater" cause. This creates for a high turn-over of activists within the CJM, which is analysed through the concept of social metabolism.

As an enabling and protecting aspect, social networks and intimate bonds within the movement were underlined.

To conclude, potential changes that could support the CJM in becoming a healthier and more sustainable environment for CJAs were investigated. Scrutinizing and redefining current conceptualizations of success and failure of actions or campaigns was suggested in order to draw the focus towards the internal soundness of the movement. Along with this, an overall restructuring process that aims at the creation of prefigurative spaces in the movement, where harmful dynamics of surrounding systems like capitalism, patriarchy and neo-colonialism are tried to be overcome, was suggested. Such elements would also be useful in the necessary but challenging endeavour of decolonizing our minds and making new forms of living and relating to each other imaginable.

On a last note, the potential mutual benefit of a more integrated environmental movement, where the different parts that work on resistance, renewal and a shift of consciousness collaborate more closely was highlighted. How this can be put into practice will be an important field of future investigation.

If this world is to become a healthier, more loving and supporting environment, a great and profound transition is needed. For this, it is important that CJAs look after themselves and reflect on their own customs in order to stay in for the long haul that lies ahead.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Diary

During the time of the investigation (February 2017 – January 2018), I kept a research diary. This was intended to help me remember relevant incidences, structure and reflect on them. I took notes every time I made experiences, had encounters or conversations that were connected to the topic of this thesis, so that I could come back to them at a later stage. The personal experiences fed into my autoethnographic reflections and the informal conversations functioned as an addition to the unstructured interviews.

1.1. Autoethnographic Reflections

- sustainable activism as a trip to myself; I learned to communicate, to feel, to become aware of my feelings, of my needs, to feel empathy and be solidary
- e.g. during internship: shame
- need to start the debate: sustainable activism as a topic within the movement, e.g. emotional rounds at the beginning of every meeting
- my mum; but aren't you as activists some form of renewable energy?
- NABU
    - Working until late at night; and every day compare with the others; how many people did we talk to
- Wandelwerk:
    - Karen doing an immense amount of work intellectually like writing the book, writing application for financial support of projects
    - Alex H. who takes time for herself, who takes a break, does self-care
        - Working with sb. who always seemed well-balanced, taking her time for self-care and only taking upon the amount of tasks she felt comfortable with made many of us – especially in times of high work load – subliminally frustrated and there were a lot of unspoken expectations. One morning, she took over moderation and time-keeping and – since we were at a quite chaotic / messy point in the process – little by little got stressed and visibly overstrained. In a reflection afterwards we realized that this was the moment where for many of us, she got more "accepted" because we could feel actual commitment to the cause and input from her side. -→ small balance between "self-care" and egoism, between looking one's personal well-being and the well-being of the group and its members. -> It might also be a high expectation to assume that we will be able to be part of a revolution and profoundly change the status quo and always feel good while doing it.
- Ende Gelände speeches; the time to act is NOW…
- Also interviews with those that have found a way / do not have a problem with this
- How to finance your work, given that there either is very little recognition of your engagement or very little funds to finance what you do: write applications for funds (which always is going to be self-exploitation, because you invest work – which often also is not directly part of your passion, without guaranty of an outcome and no "advanced money" for the work you are already investing)

- Emotional round in klima*kollektiv (project group); I am the first to talk, I focus on what I am currently happy about in my life, afterwards every single person in the round mentions how he / she is very sick ("well, this was to be expected after the climate conferences" – "yes, totally" …) and I feel weird of not having mentioned that I too was sick (even though I was) – are they going to think now that I wasn't? That I didn't dedicate myself as much as they did?

Reflection COY13 in Bonn:

- Well-Being space: very presently announced, used by little people, nobody there to talk to, individualised, rather dark atmosphere, people alone in there, no talking, silence
- Participants – COY13 – 13. Conference of Youth:
    - "Frustrations don't reduce emissions. Youth need support COP23"

08.12.17; congress of environmental psychology about mindfulness, workshop about mindfulness-based activism

- mindfulness came out of Buddhism; today also a rather secular praxis, not necessary to sit on an 'enlightened pillow'; mindfulness and meditation without ethic as sth. From the past
- comment Maxie: when I start to do self-care my own activism slips into the background, in between the two poles of self-exploitation, trying to live up to one's personal values and self-care
- opposition of spiritual, mindful world and activist world?
- In zen-buddhism mindfulness as an ability to be aware, present in the moment
    - So maybe mindfulness and stress can be compatible?
    - Mindfulness as a capacity of discernment based on experience
- Understanding of body and mind, of myself which then has implications on my social environment
- To act from a sense of empathy
- We intend not to loose our mental quality and the sanatory ('das Heilsame') in the confrontation with our "opposition"
- Practicing mindfulness in order to learn how to open up for the community and find energy and connection there
    - This argumentation builds up on the assumption that we have such a strong lack of mindfulness in our society, that it would benefit anybody
- From Buddshims; 'nibana; cold'

1.2 Informal Conversations with other Activists

Overall, I took notes after six informal conversations I had that inspired certain thoughts and conclusions that became relevant for this work. All conversation partners are involved in CJA and age ranges between 27 to 54.

- Germany Divestment Campaigner from 350.org – wanted to be ANONYMISED:
    - *Activist since 2009, works since 2013 for 350.org; part of the fossil free movement Germany*
    - *Thirty-something years old*

- Interesting to note how she does not want to talk about the issue; especially not representing the organization; her explication: I have thought about the topic a lot and I'm really frustrated right now, so I wouldn't be able to really say something positive. Also burn-out is still heavily stigmatized in the area.
- Dringlichkeit des Themas; urgency of the issue
- Verinnerlichter Wachstumsdrang auch der Bewegung (schneller, mehr, weiter, besser...) -> inheritance of pressure to grow of the movement
- Versch. Motivationen als treibend; Angst, Freude, Schuld, Stolz -> different motivations that are pushing forward; fear, happiness, guilt, pride
- Viele am Rande der Gesundheit; many people on the edge of their health
- "wir leben auf pump"; we are living on the nod
- email-aktivismus; email-activism very strong
- Privileg; uns geht es gut, Gesundheitsversorgung, wir werden immer älter; wir können uns rausnehmen uns zurück zu ziehen weil unsere Gesellschaft / unser Kontext noch nicht zusammen bricht.; privilege; we have medicare, we live longer, we can step out or reduce our workload because our society /context is not yet falling apart
- Selbstfürsorge als Widerstand; self-care as resistance
- Einzelpersonen bringen das Thema in die Organization, Pläne werden erstellt in denen dies berücksichtigt wird; das dann auch immer zu berücksichtigen oft schwierig; individuals that bring in the issue into the organization, then plans are made with consideration of those but in practice it is often hard to actually implement them.
- Beschleunigung; acceleration
- Working as "freelancer"; self-employed; little days to be ill, no receiving support when its needed

- Johannes:
  - *25 years old, academic background, finished his bachelor, german, male,*
  - Atmosphere amongst climate activists, how we relate towards each other
  - Who slept how many / little hours throughout the last days?
  - Who does what?
  - Holidays without a political cause? He seems to feels guilty or at least doubtful about the idea.
  - Who dedicates him-/herself the most to the cause?

- George Marshall:
  - *Male, from England, fifty-something, author of "Don't even think about it: Why our Brains are Wired to ignore Climate Change", met him during a workshop on storytelling and climate change, has been engaged with the movement since 1988 (for almost 30 years)*
  - Not working on the whole spectrum but focus on one thing where you can see progress
  - Find sth. That you are interested in and build that up
  - Changing your fields of activism
  - I'm actually not really interested in climate change (talking about "I don't care too much"); I started off being called a compromiser, the friends who I know are doing this is friends that have other interests beside climate activism : I'm interested in food & music, at night when I go to bed I don't read a book about climate change

    - Sometimes we have this idea that you can't be an activist if you're not going all the way (e.g. eating a hamburger, flying …)
    - Coping strategy:
        - changing fields, metaphor of body builder -> don't keep working always on the same muscle
        - don't hate; hate eats you up
    - George Marshall has been engaged with the movement for almost 30 years (since 1988)
    - Protect yourself from reality in a way -> not accepting climate change is very healthy
        - The people that I know that are very informed about the whole picture just feel overwhelmed
        - I try not to think about whether I'm hopeful – what is relevant is that what I'm doing now is useful
    - This conversation right now is making me think that maybe I need more opportunities to talk about how I feel because I do that very little and I've not been connecting to that – people hardly ever ask me about that, I've been ignoring it.

- Jus Hambi:
    - leave and look forward to coming home; "you start to miss the forest, the community and the resistance"
    - go into intact, healthy nature
    - recharging batteries is externalized
    - culture, also about environment, sustainability
    - collectively going for a hike after an action

- Maxie :
    - 27.08.17: after Ende Gelände action;
        - police letting you fall down on purpose
        - feeling of responsibility for success of the action; being the "tip of the finger" holding the flag, being part of the structure of the finger; stress, sadness, self-accusation
    - 05.11.17:
        - humiliation of policemen; kick them inbetween her legs

- Jacomo:
    - 09.12.17:
        - about mindfulness-based activism:
            - in the first place it's just me on an individual basis which becomes an activist. -> and in this moment there is the need to distinguish myself from the others, do "good" in what I'm doing; focus and responsibility is on myself alone, we don't become active on a collective basis.

Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts

For confidentiality purposes excluded from this version.

Appendix 3: Semi-structured Interview guide

General	- How does your form of activism look like? - How did you start with your activism? (when, for what reason) - How did / do you feel about your activism?
Challenges	- What are the biggest challenges of being an activist for you? - Was there a significant event or events that shaped how you felt about your activism? Describe the event. Looking back, how did it make you feel at the time? - Why did you leave the movement / stopped or paused your activism?
Personal Coping Strategies	- How do you deal with stress? - How did you respond to the stressful times in activism?
Responses to Stress	- What could have changed your situation / what could have helped you / how could the movement have supported you better / what would you have hoped for? - Are you planning to go back to activism? What would you like to be different this time? - What kind of support do you receive within the community to deal with the emotional demands of activist work? - What can be done differently? - What advice would you give to a new activist? - Do you remember a specific event that shaped how you felt about your activism?

Table 1: Summary of areas of investigation and possible guiding questions for the unstructured interview.