



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

Lund University

Department of Sociology

BIDS

The Extraordinarily Ordinary:

How The Rebels of Extinction Rebellion Berlin Shape Their Movement By Using
Connective Action Repertoires

Author: Hannah Amm

Bachelor Thesis: UTKV03

15 hp Spring semester 2020

Supervisor: Olle Frödin

*For the rebels of Berlin-Süd,
Love & Rage*



[An Extinction Rebellion sticker showing its prominent hourglass symbol outside
De-Zentrale somewhere in Berlin; 02. 02. 2020]

Abstract

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a global climate justice movement. Founded in 2018 in the UK and arising partly out of the *Rising Up!* network, it has since spread across the globe with various local and working groups in 57 countries. While environmental in focus, XR appears to be more than what first meets the eye. Their decentralized, non-hierarchical and self-expressive cell network works both online and offline. Its structure is shaped by the principle of Self-organizing System (SOS) and decentralization. However, the particularities of coordination within a decentralized network deserve special attention by taking a look at how environmental activism is conducted at a local level. This study has explored the local group of Berlin-Süd by following the rebels in Germany's capital for two months. Participant observation and interviews have been used to account for complexity and to describe the movement's local group in greater nuance, as an in-depth description of Extinction Rebellion's movement seems lacking so far. The study asked the question of how, within their decentralized, self-expressive movement, the members of XR find balance between their personal motivations and their need to collectively coordinate. By working on the intersections between cultural movement theory (Melucci, 1995) and connective action frameworks of digitally-mediated networks (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013), the rebels' ends (goals), means (how) and fields of interpersonal relationships were highlighted, in which they construct their collective identity in motion. Their social practices of doing action rest at the heart of the movement, suggesting that action lies in more than merely blocking streets. Through actively shaping the movement from within, the rebels make use of connective action repertoires to account for the challenge of coordination within a decentralized network. They appear to balance their individual motivations with collective coordination by activating personal relationships, employing personalized action frames and adapted connective communication repertoires. Thereby, their individual ends seem to both play a role in shaping the movement and are being reflected to the extent that the rebels feel heard and keep sustaining their rebellion.

Key words: Extinction Rebellion, collective action, connective action, social movement theory, decentralized networks

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Foreword

1 Introduction.....	1-2
1.1 Research Aim.....	2-3
1.2 Research Question(s).....	3
2 Background.....	3
2.1 Extinction Rebellion in Berlin.....	3-5
2.2 The Rebels of Berlin-Süd.....	5
3 Existing Research.....	6
3.1 Environmental Organisations and Social Movements.....	6
3.2 Decentralized, Digitally-mediated Networks.....	6-8
4 Theoretical Framework.....	8
4.1 Processual Collective Identity.....	8-10
4.2 Connective Action.....	10-11
5 Methodological Framework.....	12
5.1 Data Collection.....	12
5.1.1 Participant Observation.....	12
5.1.1.1 Field Observations.....	13
5.1.2 Interviews.....	13
5.1.2.1 Sampling.....	13-14
5.1.2.2 Interview Design.....	14
5.1.2 Virtual Ethnography.....	14-15
5.2 Limitations.....	15
5.3 Data Analysis.....	15-16
5.4 Ethical Considerations.....	16

5.4.1 In the Offline Field.....	16
5.4.2 In the Online Field.....	16
6 Results.....	17
6.1 Local Arenas of Social Change: The Weekly Plenary Meetings.....	17-19
6.2 Extinction Rebellion’s Movement Culture.....	19
6.2.1 A Cycle of Action and Regeneration: Regenerative Culture.....	19-21
6.2.2 “XR has nothing to do with throwing stones”: The Concept of Nonviolent Communication.....	22-24
6.3 The Rebels of Berlin-Süd Revisited.....	24
6.3.1 The Extraordinarily Ordinary Rebel.....	24-27
6.3.2 Challenging the Homogeneous Unit.....	27-29
6.4 Extinction Rebellion’s Movement Nature.....	29
6.4.1 “Human evolution, basically”: SOS and Decentralization.....	29-33
6.4.2 The Decentralization Contradiction.....	33-36
6.5 Connective Action Repertoires.....	36-40
7 Concluding Discussion.....	40-43
 Afterword	
 Bibliography	
 Appendix	
 Interview Guide	

List of Abbreviations

XR: Extinction Rebellion

OG: local group (“Ortsgruppe”)

AG: working group (“Arbeitsgruppe”)

SOS: Self-Organizing System

RC: Regenerative Culture

Foreword

The French uprising of 1871, known as the Paris Commune, was local and intimate in nature, global in its mindset. The night that opened many doors to my personal journey in understanding Extinction Rebellion a bit better, however hardly its full complexity, happened at Berlin's bar "Cafe Commune". It was there that I met the first rebels in person. In the weeks that passed, I came across many of them again, some became familiar anchors in the busy, never sleeping city of Berlin. Time has no beginning and end, and so does change. Time is as relative as one's perceptions of what constitutes change. In the following pages, many voices will be heard talking about their own definitions of activism. Uniting all of those perceptions is the wish to envision a better, a different future. Only time will tell Extinction Rebellion's success. Until then, a researcher is left to sit in awe of the extraordinarily ordinary rebels that take on the task of revolutionising social life.

1 Introduction

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a global climate justice movement. Founded in 2018 in the UK and arising partly out of *The Rising Up!*¹ network, it has since spread across the globe with various local groups in 57 countries. In Germany, 23 branches are listed on the official website (<https://rebellion.global/branches/de-germany/>). Local groups or branches can differ depending on the number of people involved. Usually, local groups comprise a city or a region.

In the short time since the movement started, it has spread across European capitals. In 2018, London was faced with the biggest mass civil disobedience action to this date, with thousands of activists blocking streets and bridges, sitting on the ground, singing, shouting and uniting under the hourglass symbol that became XR's trademark. Since then, XR's nonviolent mass gatherings, causing the disruption of daily lives, have arrived in Berlin with two big actions, among many other smaller ones, in April and October 2019. For a week, activists blocked traffic from flowing and declared the climate emergency.

By applying mass civil disobedience as the predominant action strategy, XR is explicitly distancing itself from previous, small-scale climate actions as they “had minimal to no meaningful impact on government policy” (Hallam, 2019, p. 30). XR is therefore diving into the unknown waters of causing a supposed dilemma for nations' legislations and executive organs, such as the police, by stating that they can only “agree to give up power or repress us” (ibid, p. 26). While case one would ultimately lead to XR's demands being met, culminating in establishing a Citizens' Assembly on climate policy decisions, case two would confront national governments with supposed rising media and mainstream sympathy for a movement that appears to work against mass species extinction, yet its activists continue to face repression and mass arrest. With XR's strategy of preparing for mass arrest seen as anything but uncontested among its activists and beyond, the movement's strategies, organizational network and logic are not coincidental. Continuous emphasis is being placed on previous social movement and civil

¹ No longer active, its website now directs to Extinction Rebellion's sources. However *Rising Up!* aimed at building a decentralized, civil disobedience climate movement with its tactics and demands mirroring and building the backbone of what Extinction Rebellion came to be (<https://risingup.org.uk/about>).

disobedience research, such as Chenoweth's "Why civil resistance works" (2012), as well as scientific justification regarding the urgency of the climate catastrophe (IPCC, 2018).

While environmental in its focus, XR appears to be more than what first meets the eye. Their 3 demands² and 10 principles³ sketch both a vision for social change and a guideline on how to achieve such societal transformation. XR's demands and principles are meant to describe the movement as a whole and ensure a unified picture to the out-group. Their decentralized and self-organized cell structure network, on the other hand, categorizes the nature of XR, namely being flexible, open to change, highly adaptive and self-expressive. It therefore appears worthwhile to cast a closer look at how environmental activism is conducted at a local level. This study has focused on the local group of Berlin, Germany. Because of the capital's size, 4 local groups are currently emerging within the city. The following pages will focus on the OG Berlin-Süd, exploring how XR's activists shape the movement from within, renegotiate global and local goals, engage in local alliances, seek comfort in coming together virtually or physically through their Regenerative Culture and account for tensions both from within and out-group pressures.

1.1 Research Aim

The research aims at exploring the organizational structure, communication strategies and construction of a collective identity of XR in depth. By choosing to focus on the local group of activists in Berlin, it is hoped to capture the group's structure in all of their complexity and nuance. The study does not set out to generalize its findings due to its research design, purpose and limited scope.

² Those are: 1) Tell the Truth (urging governments to declare the climate emergency), 2) Act Now (urging governments to act according to the climate emergency to protect biodiversity loss and species extinction), 3) Beyond Politics (urging governments to establish a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice) (<https://rebellion.global/about-us/>).

³ Those are: 1) We have a shared vision of change, 2) We set our mission on what is necessary, 3) We need a Regenerative Culture, 4) We openly challenge ourselves and our toxic system, 5) We value reflecting and learning, 6) We welcome everyone and every part of everyone, 7) We actively mitigate for power, 8) We avoid blaming and shaming, 9) We are a non-violent network, 10) We are based on autonomy and decentralisation (<https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/about-us/>).

This study, furthermore, needs to be read in its specific time frame, following the rebels from January until mid-March 2020, two years since XR Berlin came into being and three years after the initial creation of Extinction Rebellion in the UK.

1.2 Research Question(s)

The following research question is explored:

How, if so, do XR Berlin-Süd's rebels balance their individual motivations with collective coordination in a decentralized network?

Furthermore, a set of sub-questions help to guide the research:

1. What, if so, sustains the rebels' activism within the movement?
2. How is XR Berlin-Süd internally organized?
3. How does XR Berlin use digital media as agents for connective action?

2 Background

2.1 Extinction Rebellion in Berlin

XR should not be seen as just a global environmental movement on a large scale. It is rather shaped by its people at a local sphere. XR does not, technically, count members that sign-up, but entails self-proclaimed *rebels*. Anyone (who respects and agrees with XR's 10 principles and 3 demands) is free to join.

XR took its local shape in Berlin in early 2019. Due to its decentralized nature, virtually any local group can be founded at any time and any place if there appears to be a need and enough people willing to undertake the task of engaging in climate activism. In the early days of XR in Berlin, not many structures were established. Regenerative Culture was at the movement's core.

Both the Self-Organizing System (SOS) and XR's decentralization deriving from the SOS are important concepts giving XR its shape and enabling the rebels to work for achieving their 3 demands. SOS functions as the overarching structure in which XR's rebels organize themselves. Autonomy, non-hierarchy, the shifting of positions and simultaneous anchoring of roles (i.e.

being responsible for Regenerative Culture within a local group's meeting) in positions are agreed upon in the SOS structure. Additionally, SOS enables the creation of autonomous - yet coordinated - local or working groups at any given time. Thereby, a cell network is created, with anchor circles or cells (the respective local groups) around which working and sub-working groups are spinning. Transparency, information dissemination and coordination need to be ensured continuously. While multiple working groups have been created through XR's SOS over time in Berlin (i.e. AG Finances, AG Action, AG Outreach), the *Deli Plenum*⁴ functions as an entity for connecting and informing rebels between working groups, and as time proceeded, local groups within Berlin. With increasing "success" in terms of ensuring media presence, publicity and outreach, OG Berlin grew in numbers, attracting more rebels to join the rebellion. As efficient working could no longer be ensured, XR's SOS helped to create four local groups within the city: OG Berlin-Nord, OG Berlin-West, OG Berlin-Ost and as of December 2019 OG Berlin-Süd. Despite XR's decentralization, the local groups need not be seen as completely separate due to coordination through the Deli Plenum remaining.

Extinction Rebellion is globally connected through the online platform Mattermost⁵. Interesting hereby are the ways in which Mattermost reflects XR's decentralized nature (see: 6. 4 Extinction Rebellion's Movement Nature). Furthermore, chat apps such as Signal and Telegram are used to substitute ingroup communication. Nonetheless, Mattermost appears to be the only way of tracking the number of rebels currently involved in the movement. As of May 2020, XR Berlin's channel counts around 1700 users, however, not everyone who joined a certain channel is automatically active. Additionally, open Facebook events attract potential new rebels interested

⁴ A regular meeting where a chosen delegate of each working and local group comes together to discuss, share and plan further proceedings within the group. Each delegate is to report to the Deli Plenum and back to their respective working or local group. Ideally, the role of the delegating rebel is assumed to circle to ensure non-hierarchy.

⁵ Mattermost is an invite-only chat forum, hosted on a green energy server in Switzerland (<https://organise.earth/login>). XR uses Mattermost for international, national, cross-regional and local connection and coordination, as well as working-group-internal coordination. Channels for every local and working group (including sub-groups focusing on specific projects in planning) can be created. While most channels are public, that is, one can join without invite once invited to Mattermost over all, some channels are set to private, usually discussing internal working group procedures. Using Mattermost is both facilitating information spread and creating a, at times, hard to navigate cyber landscape, as many entries are posted daily by many users, and therefore sometimes contradicting its very nature of helping coordination. Mattermost, furthermore, needs to be seen as an addition to XR's offline structure, rather than a fully effective substitution. Not all, but most, of the rebels actively engaged in XR are on Mattermost.

in joining the movement through various, so-called “Outreach-Events”, such as Onboardings, XR Cafés and XR Talks across the city.

In order to actualize their 3 demands, XR applies various action strategies globally as well as locally. In 2019, the city of Berlin was twice faced with week-long mass civil disobedience actions at various sites all over the city, culminating in XR’s prominent Rebellion Wave that attracted and connected rebels from within Germany, as well as internationally. The Rebellion Wave’s function thereby is two-fold; firstly reflecting XR’s understanding of mass civil disobedience as the most efficient way to cause governments to listen to their demands, secondly increasing their media attention and attracting new rebels, as mass disruption of traffic did not go unnoticed by both sympathizing civilians and the national government. After both Rebellion Waves, XR’s Mattermost channels counted an increase of people, partly leading to the creation of, among others, OG Berlin-Süd.

2.2 The Rebels of Berlin-Süd

Both an essential and a geographically convenient decision, OG Berlin-Süd was created in late 2019. Still a generally small and young local group, its internal dynamics, roles and working procedures appear especially interesting when looking at how XR’s rebels shape the movement from within, negotiate their personal desires, bring in their wishes and hopes; ultimately asking the question of what sustains their rebellion.

Four working groups within OG Berlin-Süd are currently active, namely AG Outreach (for outgroup communication and attracting new rebels to the movement), AG Action (planning a variety of actions within the different action levels), AG Media (creating and maintaining OG Berlin-Süd’s online presence), and AG Regenerative Culture (essential in ensuring the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the rebels). For a wide variety of different working group procedures, coordination between the local groups as well as the overarching OG Berlin structure remain present. Many of Berlin-Süd’s rebels have previously been active in the OG Berlin structure, however chose to engage in Berlin-Süd due to the feeling of emotional or geographical connection to the south of Berlin.

3 Existing Research

3.1 Environmental Organizations and Social Movements

Previous research on Extinction Rebellion as a social movement is sparse, due to its new and emergent nature. This highlights the relevance of this study by delivering a detailed description of the local group Berlin-Süd. Studies so far have used Extinction Rebellion by stressing the issue of climate governance (Gunningham, 2019). A variety of case studies have been conducted throughout the years, mapping environmental activist groups, grass-roots organisations and movements in the US and Europe (Andrews, Edwards, 2005; Abbruzzese, Wekerle, 2011; Beineke, 2015; McAdam, 2017), however Extinction Rebellion's movement needs further academical attention to understand the complexities within a decentralized network.

3.2 Decentralized, Digitally-mediated Networks

To understand where to conceptually place Extinction Rebellion, a look at the literature on decentralized, digitally-mediated networks is useful. Set against a long tradition of social movement research that treated coordination as a largely implicit feature of organizations (McAdam, 1982; McCarthy, Zald, 1977; Gamson, 1975), the question of coordination within decentralized movement types deserves special attention.

One ethnographic case study, looking at the *Occupy Wall Street* (OWS) movement in New York City, focused on the amount of coordination occurring in the absence of formal organizational structures (Savio, 2015). Thereby, a broader understanding of social cohesion is envisioned, moving beyond rational assumptions of social action. While the concept of autonomy was both highlighted and linked to the freedom of decentralized working for the participants, coordination remained a challenge (ibid). To safeguard against what Michel (1915) described as “the iron law of oligarchy” whereby large social movements require the development of an oligarchic structure, leading to “goal displacement” by their leaders (Michel, 1915), also appears challenging within a decentralized network. However, Savio (2015) exemplified how OWS coordinated their internal matters outside the boundaries of formal organization, highlighted the

incidental nature of certain events leading to informal coordination (see: Savio's discussion on the NYC General Assembly and the occupation of the Zuccotti Park) and described how diverse groups can cohere and act collectively (Savio, 2015, p. 44). Savio (2015) concludes by stating that coordination within the decentralized network of OWS appeared possible, took on an autonomous and self-expressive character, but seemed at times constrained and fragile. As horizontal, non-hierarchical networks, like OWS and XR, are best understood as "continual work in progress" (Savio, 2015, p. 44), this study of Extinction Rebellion hopes to highlight the movement's changing character. Savio (2015) describing OWS' coordination, a certain set of similarities with Extinction Rebellion's decentralized network can be observed. The study will return to those at the section 6.4 Extinction Rebellion's Movement Nature.

Furthermore, Manilov (2013) described *Occupy's* network innovations, organizing tools and strategies as a "highly flexible and adaptive structure" (Manilov, 2013, p. 207) moving between online and offline activities. Thereby, its decentralized character was highlighted as a strength, enabling global connections and posing as a "trial base" within the social movement landscape. Manilov's (2013) metaphor of *Occupy* "like the root systems of a tree, [whereby] these intertwined strands are significant" (ibid, p. 208) concurs with XR's decentralized cell structure network. *Occupy's* digital tool to organize coordination, InterOcc, appears to furthermore show similarities with the idea of Mattermost for Extinction Rebellion, connecting individuals and small groups by function. Another point stressed by Manilov (2013) is the community of care that *Occupy* offered to its participants, moving away from strongly rational assumptions of collective coherence and action (ibid, p. 212). Links to Extinction Rebellion's Regenerative Culture will be shown in the section 6.2.1 A Cycle of Action and Regeneration..

Halupka (2017) focused on the digital movement *Anonymous*, describing it as a fluid community that also showed challenges in internal coordination due to its decentralization (Halupka, 2017, p. 180). *Anonymous* was further categorized as a crowd-enabled network, following Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) typology of digitally-mediated networks that will be used for this case study, too. Thereby, the need for academic research to capture how individuals employ digital technologies for their aspirations of political and activist participation gets highlighted again.

While decentralized, digitally-mediated networks (i.e. *Occupy*, *Black Lives Matter*, *Anonymous*) have grown in recent years, a look at their internal coordination and personalized use of media agents enabling their collective action still remains widely unclear. It is not the aim of this study to compare the aforementioned movements with Extinction Rebellion in a detailed manner, but rather to contribute to the question of coordination within a decentralized, non-formal movement by describing Extinction Rebellion's rebels of OG Berlin-Süd in a nuanced way, showing challenges inherent in its decentralized network and how they might be overcome.

4 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Processual Collective Identity

To shine light on another understudied topic within social movement theory, this study applies a cultural understanding of social movement research. In the following pages, XR's movement culture will be described in detail, out of which its respective action strategies, communication and coordination repertoires arise. As the cultural analysis of movement is a wide field within social movement research, a further narrowing appears necessary. For the purpose of this study, Melucci's collective identity as a process will be looked upon (Melucci, 1995; 1996). Melucci highlights the production of meaning for participants within a movement. The question of how participants make sense of their world is important for delineating their movement culture to the outgroup (i.e. civilians, the police, co-workers), as well as for their ingroup cohesiveness. Thereby, Melucci encourages casting a look on all dimensions of social life, such as time, space, interpersonal relationships shaping the movement, and both group and individual identity (Johnston, Klandermans, 1995, p. 42). By applying this theoretical lens, it is further hoped to move beyond the sociological tension between structural analyses (that, in this case, focus on the preconditions for collective action) and individual motivation, mirroring old traditions of resource mobilization theory (McCarty, Zald, 1973; 1977). Rather, a rethinking of the concept of collective identity and action is envisioned.

By understanding collective identity as a process that is shaped by participants, can transform and adapt with sustained time of involvement, one looks at the process through which “a

collective becomes a collective” (ibid, p. 43). An assumed unity (whether portrayed to the outgroup or reflected in the participants’ collective identity) is hereby taken as the analytical starting point, rather than the outcome. To question whether an ingroup unity is both imperative and necessarily given for internal coordination and the construction of a cohesive collective identity, is of importance. Especially so, as Extinction Rebellion reflects a decentralized, personalized and self-expressive network whereby personal goals and drivers might be stratified and diverse.

Melucci (1995) goes on to define collective identity, out of which collective action arises, as the “result of purposes, resources and limits” of a movement. Furthermore, it is a process within a field of opportunities and constraints (Johnston, Klandermans, 1995, p. 43). The study will highlight XR’s fields of opportunities and constraints inherent in its web of interpersonal relationships. Those relationships play a role both when looking at how XR’s rebels make sense of their “togetherness” and in terms of their communication strategies. Again, the process of constructing participants’ collective identity, in motion, tension and adaptation, will need further explanation, ultimately leading to answer why the rebels of Extinction Rebellion engage in sustained joint work on the cause of climate change. This then leads to answering the question of how, if so, they do this. Hereby, Melucci’s (1995) three axes of collective action will be employed throughout the study.

First, the study will show how the rebels construct their ends (or sense) of action. Second, by looking at how they construct their means, one describes their field of opportunities and constraints as well as how – and to what extent - they interact and coordinate internally. Lastly, the study will focus on how their collective identity is constructed through their fostering of interactive relationships (or fields) within the movement (Johnston, Klandermans, 1995, p. 44). Those axes, or the *action system*, appear to be defined within a shared language and social practices, as well as shared values. While Melucci (1995) poses that specific forms of organization and communication arise out of these networks of active relationships between actors in a movement, the study attempts to analytically assess the specific nature of such

interactions and how they are possibly mediated by connective action repertoires (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013).

Furthermore, accounting for the semantic contradiction inherent in the notion of identity, Melucci states that identity traditionally implies stability and unity. However, Melucci's (1995) processual collective identity might point towards understanding the rebels' identity as a constant process of (re-) negotiating, construction against tensions (internally and externally) and possible contradictions. Collective identity, then, appears as a "self-reflective ability" by social actors that is in constant motion (Johnston, Klandermans, 1995, p. 46).

Using this approach appears helpful for the analysis of XR as a decentralized, non-hierarchical movement, as Melucci (1995) maps out an approach that casts attention away from the "top" (i.e. leadership figures) to the bottom of collective action.

4.2 Connective Action

In line with the continuous changing of social movement research, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have coined the term "connective action" as opposed to collective action frameworks of the past. Forms of collective action that take on a more personalized and at the same time digitally-mediated nature deserve attention due to some main features, such as ensuring up-scaling of the movement more quickly. Furthermore, they use adaptive protest repertoires by sharing open-source software. Through the usage of their own media platforms, those organizations can also directly address the public without having to involve conventional mass media, i.e. newspapers, TV broadcast channels (ibid, p. 25).

While Bennett and Segerberg (2013) focus their study on the coalition *Put People First, 15M* and *Occupy*, this study will attempt at applying their theoretical lens to Extinction Rebellion. The underlying assumption of the connective action approach is a response to the "collective action dilemma" of how to motivate individuals to cooperate voluntarily (Olson, 1965). Typically, a strong sense of collective identity is needed, whereby the use of social media nowadays can help reduce the cost of participation (Bennett, Segerberg, p. 29). Digital media does, however, at its

core, create new dynamics that do not necessarily require strong organizational control or a symbolic construction of a shared identity (ibid).

By applying this theory, it is hoped to account for complexity of XR as a movement, by not pressing XR into the corset of already established traditions of collective action frames. As Extinction Rebellion mirrors a leaderless, non-hierarchical, decentralized and transnational movement type, a mixture of analytical approaches is helpful to apply. Thereby, the study attempts to bridge Melucci's (1995) processual collective action approach with the connective action framework employed by Bennett and Segerberg (2013).

Connective action networks are typically more individualized. Public action takes the shape of personalized expression, co-production and -distribution, fostering a non-hierarchical relationship of sharing ideas in a trusted (cyber) environment (ibid, p. 35). Formal organizations do not necessarily, and to varying degrees, play a role in these interactions online and offline. Analytical questions that need to be asked hereby are how technologies serve as tools in helping actors with what they are already doing (i.e. action planning, action framing), seeing digital media as the organizing agents within this process. This approach also helps in moving beyond the online-offline dichotomy in highlighting social media as taking on different roles when merely used by movements to lower costs of mobilizing individuals. The same media can operate differently in networks of connective and collective action - and indeed even within connective action types.

Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have outlined three types of connective networks (crowd-enabled network, organisationally-enabled network and organisationally-brokered network) that will be returned to in the section 6.5 Connective Action Repertoires, assessing to what degree Extinction Rebellion can be categorized as one - or multiple - of those, or to what extent Extinction Rebellion might work outside those theoretical parameters.

5 Methodological Framework

5.1 Data Collection

5.1.1 Participant Observation

Due to the study's explorative, ethnographic nature, participant observation was applied throughout the fieldwork. Whereas a participant can be defined as an active member of a group or organization who joins activities, shares emotions and contributes to debates, an observer usually remains watching and listening while not always fully taking part as not a complete member of the community. Being a participant observer, however, enables navigation between those roles and to participate in order to observe events that might prove crucial for theoretical findings later (O'Reilly, 2009, pp. 151-152). As the goal of the research was to find out about XR's organization from within, the researcher has taken an active part as a participant or rebel.

Due to the open nature of XR where everyone is welcomed to join, it has been easier than anticipated to get access and fully immersed as a rebel. A wide variety of events have been visited in the first week, to establish contacts that might prove instrumental or to simply get an overview of the, at times, busy landscape of working group meetings, events to publicize the movement and actions that I was not directly involved in planning. While whenever engaging in conversations, the role of the researcher has been voiced, some actions have been visited in which more covert roles have been taken. The negotiation of informed consent remained ongoing. Additionally, navigating the role as both a researcher and a rebel was in constant motion and while the strive for objectivity needs to be seen as academically necessary, it also became increasingly difficult to distance myself emotionally. As time proceeded, regular contacts have been established. Especially the weekly plenary meeting of XR Berlin-Süd became a sphere for both analysis and getting an increasingly explorative, deepening understanding. Familiar faces were seen, casual talks before and after the meeting held and a sense of community has been felt by myself as well. The issue of trust also appears noteworthy, as I have been trusted with observing XR-internal meetings at a deeper level; rebels have trusted me with their worries beyond but nonetheless connected to their activism.

5.1.1.1 Field Observations

The observations gathered in the field, that is, during Berlin-Süd plenary meetings, at working group meetings and direct actions, were noted down in the field diary. The themes were then re-read and coded. The period of field observations was from end of January to mid-March 2020. While in the first weeks of fieldwork a wide variety of themes of interest were taken in, the intermediate stages allowed for more reduction and a narrowing lens, taking into account the issue of becoming too focused on one or two themes only. Especially in the beginning the field observations have proven crucial for gaining a gradual understanding and deepening knowledge about how XR Berlin overall and Berlin-Süd is organized. Furthermore, the themes explored in the interviews have originated in the field.

5.1.2 Interviews

In spending about one month in the field before conducting interviews, initial connections and friendly relations with rebels could be established. While far from exhausted, rebels from different working groups were met; those that have been active since the formation of XR Berlin in early 2019; those who joined after the previous Rebellion Wave and those who have joined recently. Especially regularly joining OG Berlin-Süd's plenary meetings has enabled the establishment of good relations, trust and some sort of familiarity with some of the participants during the field observation in the weeks prior to conducting interviews which was essential in ensuring a non-hierarchical and trust-based relationship during the interviews and overall.

5.1.2.1 Sampling

The research's sampling for interview respondents was ongoing, iterative and practically constraint. The population consisted of self-identifying members/ rebels of Berlin-Süd and Berlin. Depending on whom closer contact was established to, who seemed open to the idea of being interviewed (or having a longer conversation), some choices were made. This form of convenient sampling was accompanied by maximum variation sampling within the OG Berlin-Süd (in terms of the rebels' internal positions and roles) to account for complexity.

A number of 3 informants and participants were interviewed, however interlinked with the continuous grounded analysis approach to move back and forth between data collection and analysis.

5.1.2.2 Interview Design

The interviews conducted were semi-structured (see: Interview Guide). Anonymity and confidentiality were assured and informed consent sought out both when approaching participants for interviews and before the start of the interview. In line with the ethnographic design of the study, the interviews were meant to be relatively open to give the rebels space for voicing their perceptions, feelings, motivations etc. for being active within XR. Depending on the rebels' own level of comfort and insight, the interviews took the shape of long conversations rather than more structured questioning. Special attention not just to what rebels say, but also on how they say it, what they don't say, who they are willing to talk to in the group and beyond and to whom not, was being paid not only during the interview but also during field observations. Additionally, interview questions were tailored to the rebels' special area of expertise/ position and experiences within XR.

5.1.2 Virtual Ethnography

As XR's coordination appears to take place in more than merely the offline, face-to-face interactions, taking a look at its internal chat forum Mattermost proved a vital sphere for data collection in accordance with offline field observations. The emerging field of virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) is underpinned by a need to find new ways of doing research to study "non-traditional social formations" (ibid, p. 4), which indeed applies to XR's form of organization. In looking at Mattermost, attention was given to the rebels' online interactions with each other, how offline working procedures are discussed, and how the rebels use Mattermost as a tool for internal organization strategies and connective action repertoires (see: 6.5 Connective Action Repertoires). The findings of the online sphere were used to be triangulated and back-checked with emerging themes of the offline field. However, as time has passed and more sustained face-to-face connections have been established with the rebels, Mattermost has not

been used quite as intensely as in the initial research stages where it worked as a valuable tool for knowledge and information gathering.

5.2 Limitations

This ethnographic case study of Extinction Rebellion in Berlin was faced with a variety of limitations. First, the scope of the study appears naturally limited, due to time and space. With a prolonged time in the field, exceeding the research's two months, a more in-depth picture could have been painted, allowing for more themes to take into account. XR globally and locally proves as a sphere for looking at many different concepts from varying theoretical angles, however the study chose to focus on the intersections between social movement theory and connective action. Constantly navigating the need to set its findings into perspective, draw specific conclusions and at the same time remaining open to the overall context in which XR needs to be understood, was both a challenge and a limitation.

Furthermore, the study's interview sampling process was influenced by the outbreak of COVID-19 and my immediate departure some weeks prior to the originally envisioned end of fieldwork. Possibly, those less vocal during, i.e. the plenary meetings, could have proven instrumental for interviewing, too. The number of interviews conducted got reduced with the original plan being to interview more rebels of Berlin-Süd. Instead, in-depth field notes during the participant observation stages of the research have been used to account for this limitation.

5.3 Data Analysis

The process of data analysis needs not be seen as linear for the purpose of the study. Rather, the analysis proceeded in spiral, moving back and forth between idea and theory, data collection and data analysis. Consequently, the first steps of data analysis were inductive (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 15) with a gradual moving from broader to more general ideas and a more defined analysis at the later steps. In line with the Grounded Theory approach, first developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, codes, concepts and categories were derived from the data rather than from hypotheses. Therefore, the sampling of the case, while aiming at generalizing, is a tool for theory construction rather than a means for representativeness (ibid, p. 93). As the research focused

around participant observation to collect data, during the analysis stage one was also encouraged to draw upon own experiences with concepts and theories perceived as open to change and modification, nonetheless grounded in data.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

5.4.1 In the Offline Field

The issue of informed consent within a setting that is hard to control for, such as plenary meetings where new people are joining or working group meetings, was taken into account. By approaching participants up-front and continuously stating/ repeating the research intentions, it was hoped to ensure transparency. Informing participants about the possibility to reject/ disagree with the research intentions also appeared crucial. In line with XR-internal procedures of checking who (dis-)agrees with anything voiced during meetings, the use of hand signs to signal consent was applied. Active opposition was not encountered. On the contrary, rebels have voiced excitement about my presence. With time passing, my role has been both naturalized (due to my participation) and deepened. However, negotiating informed consent remained on-going. Especially so as I was more seen as a rebel than a researcher by participants that knew me the longest and were most used to my presence. Back-checking and talking about my research was one strategy to account for this. Due to many rebels voicing interest in reading the final result of the thesis, I have been open to sharing the results afterwards, in order to “give back” for my kind welcoming.

5.4.2 In the Online Field

Upon arrival in Berlin, a description of myself, my role as a researcher and intentions, as well as questions regarding which events to visit has been posted on multiple channels on Mattermost. No direct opposition was received, but rather many messages guiding me to certain channels, inviting me to the initial Berlin-Süd plenary meeting and describing certain working procedures of working groups. Generally, the Association of Internet Researcher’s (AoIR) guidelines (AoIR, 2020) have served as a set of orientation to navigate the, in many ways, more flexible and morally grey area of virtual ethnography.

6 Results

6.1 Local Arenas of Social Change: The Weekly Plenary Meetings

Despite Extinction Rebellion's global movement character, its activism gets conducted at a local level, through various local groups and their rebels feeling connected to those. One of those local arenas of social change and envisioning a different future, is Berlin-Süd's weekly plenary meeting. Following roughly the same structure each meeting seemed important to maintain efficient working and to guide the rebels through the many updates and agenda items discussed every week. During the time of participant observations, changes could be observed. Especially since OG Berlin-Süd appears relatively young and new, its structure - following the overall SOS principle - allowed for more openness expressed by the rebels.

The plenary was both a physical space of coming together to plan actions and proceedings, and a conceptual space to discuss OG Berlin-Süds identity. Questions such as "Who are we?" and "Who do we want to be?" - as opposed to but interlinked with the overall OG Berlin structure - were asked and individual answers re-negotiated throughout the entirety of the research's observations. The plenary's function to the rebels is manifold. Despite decentralization as an enabling element for XR's rebels to work autonomously, at any place and any time, gathering rebels in the offline sphere to discuss when, where and what has happened appears crucial in maintaining a sense of togetherness.

Furthermore, the plenary meeting can be seen as a next step for potential new rebels, after having joined an Onboarding, XR Talk or XR Café. While new people were welcomed, the plenary meeting should not necessarily be seen as merely information exchange for new, potential rebels, although remaining a possibility to get an overview. Sometimes difficult to follow XR-internal words (such as "Regen"-person, "Deli-Plenum" etc.) - that are exemplifying XR's movement culture - and XR-internal updates even for experienced rebels, this appeared to be a confusing challenge for people on the brink of the outgroup, that is, not fully immersed rebels. Hereby, their shared language becomes apparent, in which Melucci (1995) sees the process of constructing a collective identity embedded.

The plenary meetings do, furthermore, act as information exchange and planning arenas. Accountability and the ability to both be addressed (by other local groups and initiatives beyond XR) and to address alliances as a group was highlighted throughout the plenary meetings. Those are symbolic of XR's internal working procedures. The plenaries took on the shape of meeting places for rebels to come together after their long, often busy days. In those, the rebels seem to transform a global movement into a local space of community and togetherness.

The overarching framing of what XR hopes to achieve culminates in the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly. However, the local arena of weekly plenary meetings appear more concerned with social neighborhood alliances and initiatives, planning and improving local and working group internal coordination, how to increase their outreach through innovative, decentralized ideas of Onboardings, and both small and big action planning (i.e. preparations for the upcoming Rebellion Wave). XR needs to be understood as more than simply its actions on the streets. It appears that XR's group nature gets solidified by little steps and tasks also categorized as "activism." As one participant voiced:

"In a huge network like this, [I think] that every little encouragement and every small task of writing protocol, offering to moderate, anything, every contribution has an impact." [Interview #1]

For another participant, XR's activism personally also meant:

"I was doing Onboardings, I was part of the action team, I was doing some flyering. All this activist stuff." [Interview #3]

While social change often gets associated with crowd events (Wagoner et al, 2018, p. 25), such as XR's Rebellion Waves, XR's internal meetings appear to challenge this assumption. Mass civil disobedience actions are seen as the most effective way for advocating directly for change, however, social action lies in more than just action planning, when looking at Berlin-Süd's rebels. It indeed appears that the rebels of Extinction Rebellion engage in the social practice of doing action by navigating their local spheres of meetings and fostering interpersonal relationships. Following Melucci's (1995) question of how participants make sense of their

togetherness, meeting and coordinating in those spaces seems to play a role in (re-) constructing their ends (or goals) of action.

6.2 Extinction Rebellion's Movement Culture

6.2.1 A Cycle of Action and Regeneration: Regenerative Culture

Fundamental in understanding not only XR globally, but more so XR in Berlin, is its Regenerative Culture. Anchored in one of their 10 principles is the need to create the so-called “Regenerative Culture”, as opposed to the “toxic system” that pervades most of humanity and XR's rebels. Not only is Regenerative Culture mirroring and encapsulating XR's movement culture - the rebels' values, belief systems and sense of community - but also transforming individually, depending on each rebel's own interpretation. During the time of participant observation, a perceived need was voiced by many rebels to incorporate more Regenerative Culture into each aspect of their activism, the plenary and working group meetings. Due to XR's highly adaptive and individually shaped character, this could be achieved by, i.e. giving mandates to two rebels focusing on each person's and the overall group's wellbeing during meetings, offering breaks, breaking down conflicts and reminding everyone of a common goal and a shared sense of grief and loss regarding the climate catastrophe.

As suggested by the rebels interviewed for this study, Regenerative Culture is a “magic word” [Interview #3], while it “means everything” for another participant [Interview #1]. Furthermore, Regenerative Culture appears symptomatic of XR's “change of narrative” [Interview #2], envisioning a positive future constructed against toxic outgroup pressures. Values highlighted continuously are cooperation, love, self-care, community, family, harmony, kindness and compassion. RC is a space for listening, being heard to whatever capacity, and a structure to recognize problems to solve them. By acknowledging conflicts as central and important part of a movement and social interaction in general, RC also works as a precautionary measure to ensure ingroup cohesiveness. Furthermore, RC connects to the issue of burn-outs in the field of activism, as

“[it’s] a real problem in every field of activism, every domain. Because it’s generally something that people want to do, it’s something very emotional or personal because they have [...] many reasons but it’s very important for them. So they give themselves too much. [...] I guess the first idea [of Regenerative Culture] was to avoid burnouts.” [Interview #3]

Offering a space for voicing the rebels’ worries, connecting with their emotions beyond positive reinforcement but connected to traditionally “negatively” connotated ones such as anger, grief and hopelessness, appears instrumental in sustaining their rebellion. Those feelings might be seen as part of the rebels’ emotional investment, by which they engage in the process of making sense and giving meaning, therefore constructing their collective identity. Although outgroup pressures and tensions were talked about by participants, relating to their family members, work colleagues and friends not part of the movement, RC encapsulates a culture of “no blame, no shame” both internally and externally when interacting with outgroup members. Thereby, Melluci’s (1995) fields of opportunities and constraints, translated into outgroup communication, become apparent. The rebels seem to move between those tensions by constructing their non-violent ingroup culture of RC.

This also plays an important role in delineating XR’s movement culture, relying on RC, to any movements before and currently active. While for many rebels XR is their first arena of activism, some have previously been active in other activist groups or social movements. A common attraction to XR - the key difference - hereby lies in its “mistake-friendly nature” [Interview #1], its “unprecedented change towards a positive narrative” [Interview #2] and its reactivation of “what it is to be with other people. What it is to take your time, to do things. What it is to think about yourself, not in a selfish way, more [in] a kind way” [Interview #3].

Furthermore, by creating OG Berlin-Süd, Regenerative Culture could be conducted more individually, as the new local group allows for more flexibility, questioning and re-envisioning of their shared, collective identity and active shaping of the movement. Roles and positions appeared to be less set in stone, more in flux, and while a perceived constant need for more people opposed the perception of OG Berlin as being “too big” before, this also enabled rebels to

bring in new ideas. OG Berlin-Süd has been described as a “fresh group with fresh people” [Interview #3] whereby the rebels engage in the process of “doing Regenerative Culture” [Interview #1; #3], i.e. offering a minute of silence before the start of each plenary or reading a “vision reminder” to center the rebels’ attention on why they are gathered in one - physical and virtual - room. One of the best things described by the rebels seems the “[...] very, very cozy atmosphere where everybody is kind to each other and it’s nice.” [Interview #3] Again, their social practice of not only doing actions, but indeed, doing Regenerative Culture is visible. Thereby, the rebels engage actively in the process of constructing the movement culture from within. While the movement overall wants to achieve the enactment of a Citizens’ Assembly, their social practices at the heart of the movement rely on many little tasks, building community and moving in between their fields personal relationships that get strengthened through Regenerative Culture. The notion “movement culture” hereby refers to the group’s shared values, beliefs, communication and personal interaction fields (Johnston, Klandermans, 1995, p. 191). Whereas culture appears hard to describe, this study is positioned within cultural social movement theory and finds XR’s movement culture to rest on its Regenerative Culture.

Furthermore, during Berlin-Süd’s plenaries it appears like “[...] they’re [the rebels] are one blanket” [Interview #3], implying the importance of the rebels’ activation of personal relationships. Both the offline meeting spaces and their Regenerative Culture appear to make sense of and sustain the rebels’ so-called rebellion. Out of those fields of action, their relationships and movement culture, they construct their communication channels and technologies of communication (see: 6.5 Connective Action Repertoires). Returning to the question of unity within collective action, through Regenerative Culture and the rebels shaping their movement culture (that is encapsulated by RC), it appears that the rebels can produce and maintain their self-identification with the movement. Whereas this research suggests that Extinction Rebellion’s strength lies precisely in its self-expressive character with varying interpretations of Regenerative Culture and to what extent it should be part of their practice of doing action, the rebels also appear unified in the sense of locating themselves within a field of relations, coming together for a shared cause or vision and finding comfort in their community.

6.2.2 “XR has nothing to do with throwing stones”: The Concept of Nonviolent Communication

As aforementioned, XR’s movement culture gets shaped by the rebels from within. However, delineating their movement culture from the outgroup and other movements also serves to construct their understanding of a shared, collective identity. Thereby, they again activate and construct their ends of action (Melucci, 1995), i.e. why it makes sense for them to be active.

By listening to one participant’s experiences during alliances and other movements, both their personal reason for becoming active within XR - as opposed to any other movement - and XR’s difference becomes apparent:

“For me it’s important that when there’re actions by Extinction Rebellion that it’s clear for everyone else [alliances] to be involved, that they are agreeing to our action consensus. And they [other movements] are very welcome to continue what they’re doing. And when there’re actions happening in one city, it’s important that they are at least spatially or timewise separated. Because [...] Extinction Rebellion definitely doesn’t have anything to do with throwing stones. [...] There’s a lot of coordination with *Ende Gelände* right now. For instance, regarding police contact because *Ende Gelände* does a lot in this field and is quite progressive [...] That’s only my experience [...] but many movements in the past rather had the idea of not talking to the police [...] then the police people are the ‘bad ones’ and, I don’t know, [...] ‘No one needs to be part of the police’ [...] There’s more fear and pictures of enemies painted. In the sense progressive because *Ende Gelände* also does it differently and says: ‘We talk to the police’ and it’s important to talk to the police.”
[Interview #2]

Regarding their experiences with alliances, another participant voiced that: “I know the movement that is involved [in alliances] is *Ende Gelände*. Many of the XR-founders in Berlin [...] are from *Ende Gelände*. We did some actions together, same for *Fridays for Future*.”
[Interview #3]

Thereby the importance of joining alliances for external coordination, information exchange and internal improvements, becomes apparent. However, as Extinction Rebellion is creating its own

strong outgroup image, i.e. through artwork and utilizing online platforms, to maintain emphasis on their own actions and profile is also highlighted.

Nonviolent communication as part of XR's 10 principles is also shaping the rebels' interpersonal relationships, how to relate to each other, and is an important backbone for how to deal with ingroup and outgroup tensions. A variety of conflict solution strategies for internal conflicts are employed by the rebels. These also mirror XR's decentralized organisational network (see: 6.4.2 The Decentralization Contradiction), as they work both online on Mattermost (as a field of personal relationships) and offline.

Two participants interviewed voiced their involvement in an Mattermost channel for conflict solution, whereby participant one:

“[is] in a nationwide channel for conflicting messages [...] where I at first inform people that don't read it, but I do read it, so that they know: 'Okay, there's a conflict.' And it should actually be solved by working on it with empathy and by communicating this to the people who will then do this.” [Interview #1]

Another participant, on the other hand, had been directly involved in solving ingroup conflicts through their previous experience with nonviolent communication. They described their opinions regarding conflict solutions as the following:

“[The conflict solution working group] tries to build a system for how to deal with internal conflicts. [...] Conflicts simply occur and they are also beneficial because they help us to learn and to grow with each other. And [it was created] simply out of a need because there wasn't really anything like that but conflicts occurred constantly. There is the wish: How can we solve these things? Because what we're getting from society in terms of conflict solution systems is more a punishing exclusion system that's not really making sense for a movement like we got it where we want to keep people and where, due to its structure, we don't have an authority that could decide on who is right and who is wrong, and who needs to be punished and who doesn't. And if you're looking at conflicts, it's often not that simple of a black-and-white-thing. That's why

there's the idea of a conflict system that is built on the reactivation of relationships [...] with the basics of nonviolent communication, meditation, Restorative Circles [...]" [Interview #2]

Aforementioned Restorative Circles are used for internal conflicts, to offer a "space of direct communication" [Interview #2] whereby one person serves as a mediator between two, or more, people in conflict, slowly working through the tension by putting emphasis on what has been said and understood. XR's reliance on nonviolent communication is essential both for the rebels' communication with each other, and in terms of their outgroup communication (to i.e. police or civilians), exemplifying their fields of opportunities and constraints in which they construct themselves collectively.

6.3 The Rebels of Berlin-Süd Revisited

6.3.1 The Extraordinarily Ordinary Rebel

By asking the question of who the rebels of Extinction Rebellion Berlin-Süd are, one is faced with manifold answers. While this study does not attempt to generalize the voices of few rebels to paint an "overall picture", it has also often been voiced that due to its decentralized nature, there appears to be a conflict in few rebels speaking on behalf of Extinction Rebellion, i.e. when presenting XR to neighborhood alliances. However, the study will attempt to, tentatively, present an outline on similarities between rebels and ultimately states that the rebels of Extinction Rebellion appear extraordinarily ordinary in bridging their daily and activist lives.

Linking back to XR's flexible and self-expressive movement nature, the rebels are encouraged and continue to shape the movement from within, by actively bringing in their own set of expertise, engaging in those subfields best suited to their strengths, and learning new skills through the movement. The rebels interviewed for the study have voiced an "easy" entry into the movement, and continue to use XR differently, each person being active within their own field.

While a strong importance of Regenerative Culture, XR's movement culture, was voiced by all rebels, differences occur naturally, depending on the longevity of their engagement with XR and their personal strengths. For participant one, joining a lot of different working groups, dipping their toes into the procedures and offering suggestions, seemed linked to their personality; participant two contributed by founding the de-escalation team during XR Berlin's first Rebellion Wave, later culminating in the de-escalation working group. Participant three, on the other hand, is also engaged in many different working groups at the same time - a sentiment symptomatic for the rebels of XR, as both a lack of people and its decentralization makes swift working across subfields necessary and possible. Since new working groups can be founded at any time, the field of activism is diverse, ideally offering the rebels a wide variety of spaces to become active. While some lean closer to creative and recreational procedures, such as the AG Art or cooking during Onboarding weekends, others are engaged in securing XR's Outreach, giving talks and hosting cafés that attract new rebels.

The rebels of Berlin-Süd appear "ordinary" in the sense of juggling their private and activist life, however their constant switching and incorporation of their activist lives into their private lives also bears space for constructing their collective identity in continuous process. This is suggested by the following participant's quote:

"I'm a software engineer. That's how I spend my work time, [...], being on the laptop. [...] I got three screens. And one of the screens is Mattermost and all the things inside. So I can be reactive when people ask questions about anything. Or when they need contact or when they need to find the right person or want to publish an event on Facebook. This online stuff, I can do instantly. So I'm helping in this way." [Interview #3]

For many rebels XR has become a space for meeting like-minded people and making friends. Those interpersonal relationships are central for XR's internal cohesiveness, as well as the rebels' motivation to be active. Due to the nature of XR, some rebels find it easier to connect their private life with their activist life than others.

One participant's sentiment regarding the division between their private and activist life appeared indeed counter-intuitive, as

“[...] everything is kind of mixed together. And honestly, it works. For me it shouldn't be completely separated. If people want that for themselves, then good for them. For me I don't know, why should I do that? There's nice people [...]. Why would I do that?” [Interview #3]

It appears that the “ordinary” rebels, having jobs, families and connections beyond XR, take on an extraordinary character when engaging in activism. Participant two, founding the de-escalation working group due to their previous involvement with the philosophy behind nonviolent communication, feels that “[...] Extinction Rebellion, my working life and my family life - a lot has to do with the idea of nonviolence and nonviolent communication. There's this red thread connecting everything.” [Interview #2]

In applying Melucci's theoretical lense of understanding collective action, the construction of a shared identity as a process, rather than a stable notion of unity, XR's rebels can be seen as mirroring their movement nature. Extinction Rebellion's organization is in constant motion and takes on many different, yet similar, shapes across local groups. So is the rebels' collective identity. Whereas the term “identity” implies stability and is often associated with internal unity in order to distinguish the self from others, Melucci (1995) invites one to rethink the concept in regards to collective identity. What appears as stable to the outgroup, i.e. during actions in the streets, needs to be seen as the result of an active, yet not always visible, process by the rebels of XR. Their extraordinarily ordinary character becomes apparent through their previous experiences and skill sets with which they in turn shape the movement from within. Thereby, this “invisible process” described by Melucci (1995) lies in their social practices of engaging in action planning, bringing in their own visions and ideas, coming together through their RC and activating their personal relationships. As will be discussed in 6.4 Extinction Rebellion's Movement Nature, due to its autonomous and non-hierarchical character, stepping down and rotating positions is encouraged, adding to XR's changing nature. It is in these processes of

continuous flux and motion, in which the rebels express themselves, that their collective identity gets (re-) constructed. XR continues to change, evolve and harbor potential to become “something else” in the future, as it has already transformed since its founding days in 2018. Therefore, the term “extraordinarily ordinary rebel” also suggests change and adaptation, as the movement changes, being just ambiguous enough to account for the rebels’ complexity.

6.3.2 Challenging the Homogenous Unit

Challenging both the assumption of Extinction Rebellion’s rebels to appear as a completely homogenous unit and its utmost necessity for engaging in the process of constructing a collective identity, will be looked upon. While Melucci (1995) offers a definition of collective identity as a process of repeated activation of relationships linking individuals and groups, this process can be seen as ripe with tensions within XR.

As conflicts are seen as necessary, but something to be avoided or at best solved before breaking out (i.e. through RC and the basics of nonviolent communication), certain topics appear to cause disarray within XR’s movement landscape. Mattermost being one of the most contentious fields, many rebels seem overwhelmed by the information density and navigating the cyber space of their activism. However, to see Mattermost as hindrance would be overly simplifying, as it is also enabling their decentralized, global connectedness.

During Berlin-Süd’s plenary meetings, the often discussed question of ingroup identity and what OG Berlin-Süd should be encapsulating, caused tensions between rebels. Hereby, XR’s conflict solution strategies rely on its Regenerative Culture, reminding the rebels of their shared goal and activating their, indeed constructed, collective identity as a movement. However, being able to voice questions and worries also appears essential in XR’s non-traditional, leaderless organization. This, furthermore, highlights Melucci’s processual collective identity, being by nature changeful and up for negotiation.

Furthermore, a tentative typology of XR’s rebels can be outlined. Important to understand hereby is the aim to not overly generalize, however, some participants have suggested sentiments regarding two types of rebels. The first one, often inclined to take on the “small tasks”, relying

on the wish for harmony and listening, can be categorized as “Regenerative Rebel”, as one participant voiced:

“[...] the other ones are: ‘What can I do? What is needed? [...] How can I help?’ [...] and they are quickly overwhelmed and are grateful for ‘Regen’ [Regenerative Culture] and maybe work on something political or are in the IT working group or doing something quiet, so to speak.” [Interview #1]

Whereas the second type, the “Action Rebel” appears more concerned with

“[being] very engaged, outreach-like, constantly doing something, organising something [...] and also demanding from others and almost crying while doing so, and wishing and being really engaged [...] and then demanding that others are the same. It’s not like they’d help the others, more that they have people around them that are exactly the same. And you can’t always expect that.” [Interview #1]

Another participant linked ingroup tensions to the often expressed wish for more Regenerative Culture by expressing that

“[...] I have this feeling and I heard this from several other people, but of course that’s in my Regenerative-Culture-bubble. But I also heard it from other people. Also those that mostly plan actions. Actually everyone agrees but it’s a big question mark: How to?” [Interview #2]

It appears that despite ingroup tensions, RC bears the potential to bridge diverging understandings and help construct the rebels collective identity. Ultimately, if dealt with, conflicts within a movement can prove beneficial in pointing out rifts and increase their sense of collective identity as an interpersonal field of opportunities and constraints. Furthermore, despite tensions it appears that XR’s 10 principles, encapsulating their means and movement culture, also work to remind the rebels of their shared goals.

The tentative rebel distinction needs not be seen as merely a site for harboring tensions. As the rebels move within and between the spheres of XR's movement culture and movement nature, and in turn shape both through their personal contributions, it appears that the wide variety of activist fields within the movement also attracts different personalities. Ultimately, the extraordinary ordinary rebels do not appear to be homogenous when casting a look at the heart of the movement. However, if reminded of their 10 principles and 3 demands, their characters and personal experiences can foster a further sentiment of self-expressiveness whereby every rebel has their own, very personal, reason or driver for their engagement and continues to shape the movement at the intersections best suited to themselves.

As Melucci (1995) points out that “collective identity enables social actors to act as unified [...], but conversely they can act as collective bodies because they have achieved to some extent the constructive process of collective identity” (Johnston, Klandermans, 1994, p. 46), the constructive work of each rebel lies behind the invisible process of becoming a collective. The study's findings regarding a heterogeneous, diverse set of rebels therefore serve to highlight Melucci's constructive process of collective action.

6.4 Extinction Rebellion's Movement Nature

6.4.1 “Human evolution, basically”: SOS and Decentralization

Returning to the question of how XR is internally organized, the concept of SOS and decentralization are of importance. While SOS is the overarching structure, enabling the creation and diffusion of working and local groups across the globe, its organizational structure is anything but directed top-down. On the contrary, XR needs to be understood as a leaderless, non-formal and non-hierarchical movement, rooted in their SOS principle. Thereby, local and working groups appear to grow organically, out of a perceived need both context specific and facing diverse constraints, i.e. the perceived lack of people to take on positions of internal importance within XR Berlin. No one local or working group might look exactly the same, although all unite among the 10 principles and its SOS structure, guiding but not prescribing XR's movement nature locally.

By looking at non-traditional and leaderless movements, i.e. *Occupy*, the potential for its participants to shape the movement from within becomes apparent. The SOS structure observed during the research period arose out of XR Berlin's initial formation days, trial and error periods and the proceedings during the first Rebellion Wave in April 2019. As one participant reflected on the changing nature:

“[...] people just saw that: ‘Okay, we need this.’ Something like this also already existed in the UK. I think it was also called ‘SOS’. Even though they interpret it a bit differently. And there were people in Germany that just saw, too: ‘Hey, we need this’, after the Rebellion Wave in April. ‘And we need to somehow find a way to structure our organisation a bit better.’ To find a more structured way, even though it’s still chaotic.” [Interview #2]

SOS furthermore also means “freedom” for the rebels to start working on whatever appears important to them, however, in tight coordination with their fellow rebels. Stressing transparency and the continuous need for information exchange highlights the rebels’ extent of coordination. Despite their decentralized character, they appear to feel connected through their local meeting spaces and put emphasis on their communication repertoires, i.e. Mattermost, to facilitate coordination. Whereas the particularities of SOS can change, its structure is not seen as “necessary” but nonetheless important for the proceedings of XR-internal work, as one participant suggested:

“I would say there’s a base structure with different walls [...] The SOS basically is the structure the group can have. It’s not necessary. But it’s better and it works nicely, at least that’s why I use it. [...] It’s own work. But also to be efficient in cooperation with other groups. So, that’s the roots of the SOS system, to empower the group, but the whole group. Each small group and the whole group.” [Interview #3]

However, within any decentralized and self-expressive movement, ensuring information exchange and coordination appears an on-going challenge, as one participant expressed:

“The thing with the SOS and decentralized system, the biggest challenge is basically how to share the information properly. And updating information. [...] It’s work in progress but I think that it’s working, honestly.” [Interview #3]

Furthermore, XR was categorized by its rebels as a “living organism”, arising out of the independent character rooted in each rebel’s own experience of learning and trying what works best. Consequently, action and communication repertoires need to be adapted to and arise out of XR’s changing, flexible movement nature, as will be shown in 6.5 Connective Action Repertoires.

Due to XR not employing a subscribed member system, but rather relying on the freedom of each individual to join and leave however they see fit, the movement is also changing quickly. Typically, rebels come and “get lost”, a process described as “classic in XR” [Interview #3]. As the extraordinarily ordinary rebels of XR work both online and offline and often activate their personal feeling of responsibility for engaging in activism, it appears not always clear which delegate will be present during which local or working group meeting. Confusion easily arises regarding which rebel may hold which position, a condition against which SOS’ idea of rooting positions to people should, in theory, account for.

Despite its leaderless character, to avoid hierarchies on a local level is a challenge and oftentimes “tricky” [Interview #3], however also in principle meant to be alleviated by RC and the continuous stressing that, i.e. the person moderating working or local group meetings acts as a mere “facilitator” and this role can be taken up by anyone. Transparency regarding which rebel takes on which position seems crucial, as well as a felt need to “step back” in order to not appear as the “big elephant in the room” [Interview #3]. Thereby, the rebels show reflexivity and experience from previous involvements in movements or organizations possibly more hierarchical.

Decentralization was expressed as overly positive by all interview participants, enabling them to

“[...] just start running and simply do things. It meant that I had to talk about it with people and inform people but that I didn't need any sort of authorization and nobody needs to tell me: 'Yes, it's okay, you can now create a de-escalation team!' It was just possible and I didn't need permission from, for instance, a central authority.”
[Interview #2]

Furthermore, through XR's decentralized nature, connections beyond the rebels' local sphere could be established. One participant stressed their personal importance of decentralization by stating that

“[decentralization] made its international spread possible. And it's a really good thing. The international character is really important for its goal. But it also makes it exciting. It also means so much more to me when I'm able to call people from all across Germany in support circles. Or even from all across the world [...] or simply being able to offer people a place to sleep when they are visiting, for conferences and such. It opens up a whole new world for me because I'm actually not really like that. I'm actually a very calm person who's massively stepping out of their comfort zones in the last few weeks [...]” [Interview #1]

XR's SOS and decentralization, although interpreted differently, enable the rebels to work autonomously, put their emphasis on those fields within the movement most important to them, and mirror their movement culture, namely an openness and freedom that appeared important for the rebels' involvement. In social movement research, a strong collective identity is often mentioned to be necessary for both ingroup cohesiveness and communicating the group's profile effectively to the outgroup. Non-formal movements often face the difficulty of having to account for “resource mobilization” (McCarthy, Zald, 1977) through various channels. Thereby a strong collective identity appears crucial in gluing members together. If not given, a movement needs to rely on alternative resource mobilization strategies for offering incentives to become active. Hereby, it is assumed that individuals naturally are to free-ride on the costs of the collective, ultimately posing the question of why anybody would engage with their time, passion and possibly money for a common good. However, it appears that XR Berlin's rebels have constructed a strong, yet nonetheless decentralized, movement culture through their shared

emphasis on RC and openness that might challenge traditional assumptions of resource mobilization.

Furthermore, within XR, people come and go, the movement grows (typically after Berlin's Rebellion Waves attracting new rebels) and might decrease in numbers again. Predictions on how the next weeks and months to come appear difficult even for the rebels most intricately woven into the movement. XR's movement culture and action consensus, as well as the 10 principles as guidelines, need to be continuously stated as people join new meetings swiftly. Thereby, Melucci's collective identity as a process is highlighted again, in which the ends of XR's actions (goals)⁶ are often covered by outreach-events, such as Onboardings; whereas the means (how) of their action get constructed by the self-expressive process of SOS and the activation of their interpersonal relationships crucial for coordination and the, sometimes observed, blending of the rebels' social and activist lives.

To conclude, one participant suggested that XR appears

“[...] like human evolution, basically. Everybody can create [their] own group, own idea, and basically nobody can predict in which direction the movement is going [...] It makes the thing like a cell, basically. It's growing in any direction, developing in different directions, you have a living organism. And that's also because we are decentralized [...], everybody is kind of independent. But with the same vision, that's step number one. And that unifies people and [enables them to] live free.” [Interview #3]

6.4.2 The Decentralization Contradiction

Despite the freedom of decentralization, during the research, an apparent contradiction inherent in XR's movement nature could be observed. The movement's internal coordination and communication strategies appear to serve as a tool to translate their work procedures into visible action on the streets. However, as suggested before (see: 6.2.1 A Cycle of Action and Regeneration), the rebels are “doing action” by more than merely blocking traffic. Rather, the

⁶ Those goals relate to their 3 demands and serve for outgroup communication as well as a loose set of ideas. Individual goals and reasons for engagement can, however, differ, linking back to the movement's self-expressive character and the degree to which the “extraordinarily ordinary” rebels bring in their own experiences.

miniscule interactions between rebels play a role in understanding what lies behind XR's actions and goals proclaimed to the outgroup.

Whereas XR's decentralization was expressed as a driver for the autonomous creation of new working groups, enabling rebels to simply start working on what appears to be in need, its movement nature also mirrors an activist landscape hard to navigate, both for experienced and new rebels. The concept of decentralization is shaping XR's organization, together with SOS, and also reflects their communication and action strategies and repertoires. Mattermost as XR's main communication tool links the movement across the globe. The platform functions to facilitate the movement's decentralization with a myriad of channels that can be created by anyone, once one has been granted access to Mattermost. However, many rebels have voiced a sense of frustration and information overload regarding the information mass that gets produced daily. Furthermore, with XR's nature changing rapidly, it appears hard to stay updated on important matters and to distinguish the information most important for the rebels personally.

One participant described their experiences with Mattermost as the following:

“In the beginning I read everything, of course. And the more channels I followed, the more messages I got, and it became more difficult. And then I had something personal to do, for myself, in the offline area and suddenly I had 25 messages... that made me a bit stressed. And then I took my time to read all of them and to work on them and to also write some messages to people. And then I sorted through my channels because you can also leave them again, right? [...] I choose this consciously because I always have the feeling that I want to keep updated. You know, I want to be aware of what's happening. [...] There are several people who don't want to read it anymore [...]" [Interview #1]

Additionally, one participant described being on Mattermost as a “first hindrance already” [Interview #2], as not everyone, but almost every rebel, is on Mattermost. The chat forum was furthermore described as

“[...] the medium is a chat. And insofar it is like a chat. Meaning, to hold onto something isn't really possible. [...] It's very messy. [...] At some point, one is in several channels and then one constantly gets notifications and one doesn't really know: 'What's actually important and what isn't?' It's a bit hard to oversee. But one can also stay updated very well. [...] For instance through the 'What's Up Berlin Rebels?' where there's a message every day about: 'Those kinds of events are happening and this is needed.' And that's the right way to do it, that's working very well, in my opinion.”
[Interview #2]

Thereby, the nature of XR's decentralization contradiction becomes apparent by both enabling and hindering their internal work procedures. The strength of its decentralized nature furthermore links to not only using one media platform, but switching between technological offers, such as Telegram, Signal and Zoom meetings, depending on the context and purpose (see: 6.5 Connective Action Repertoires). Additionally, its decentralization also shows in XR's outreach and rebel recruitment strategies. By creating many virtual and offline channels through which new rebels can join, those are like streams coming together on the overarching connective tool of Mattermost. While many rebels already within the movement stay updated on internal meetings and actions through Mattermost, new rebels often first hear about onboarding events or open local/ working group meetings through Facebook. The offline meeting space - an XR Café, Talk, onboarding or action training - then serves to get access to Mattermost from where new rebels can ideally find the area they are most interested in.

As each local group plans its own actions, those are spread out conceptually and geographically across Berlin. While sometimes working groups can work together to increase their outreach and ensure a number of participants deemed sufficient, due to its decentralization this does not necessarily have to be the case. Thereby, the rebels can bring in themselves, can learn how to plan and frame actions, especially in the case of OG Berlin-Süd that is younger and more flexible in its positions.

Despite their decentralized network, internal coordination appeared tight with issues of transparency and information exchange highlighted. Autonomous working could be ensured and

was set alike with the concept of freedom to “simply start running” [Interview #2]. This study argues that while a variety of aforementioned factors constrain the rebels’ coordination, it seemed suited to their flexible movement nature. As Tarrow (2011) has stated that decentralized networks often permit the lack of coordination and continuity and offer a lack of sustained interpersonal interactions, they can easily break into fractions (Tarrow, 2011, p. 131). However, what might appear as “tyranny of decentralization” (ibid) takes a rather different shape in the younger, more personalized network of Extinction Rebellion. Decentralization here works to both enable and, at times, hinder the rebels’ proceedings within the movement. This inherent contradiction is born out of XR’s movement nature - the organizational structure - and might be the price the movement pays for holding onto the often voiced freedom of self-expression and autonomy.

6.5 Connective Action Repertoires

By applying Bennett’s and Segerberg’s (2013) connective action approach, it is hoped to highlight XR’s new, self-expressive movement type and to show how the movement uses a variety of media agents to bridge their decentralized nature with previously mentioned issues of resource intensity that are traditionally assumed to be utilized when creating a collective identity.

The theoretical starting point hereby is the observation that new, more personalized collective action types are less likely to see conventional political organisations as “avenues for engagement” (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013, p. 23). Extinction Rebellion being a non-formal organisation relying on the voluntary engagement of their self-prescribed rebels, the movement is critiquing precisely those “conventional” politics that have so far failed to tackle the climate crisis appropriately. Furthermore, as described by Bennett and Segerberg (2013), those new types of collective action have the possibility of scaling up more quickly - mirroring XR’s global spread in less than 3 years - and enable large mobilization of people. Furthermore, they make use of adaptive protest repertoires, share open-source software and encapsulate an “ethos of inclusiveness” (ibid, p. 25), which can be found in XR’s Regenerative Culture and its “openness” to everyone. Like personalized, digitally-mediated collective action types, XR combines

common technologies (such as Telegram, Facebook, Signal) with physical camps (i.e. the camps erected for local groups coming together during the Rebellion Wave) and actions.

While Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have outlined three types of digitally-mediated networks, those theoretical concepts can in reality blend together and be less distinguishable. However, central for recognizing a network as digitally-mediated to any degree, is its usage of digital media creating new internal dynamics, no longer relying on a strong organisational control or the symbolic construction of a collective identity (ibid, p. 29). This is especially helpful in terms of a decentralized, non-formal network built on autonomous cells like Extinction Rebellion. By moving away from employing a traditional understanding of collective action and towards connective action, the networks at hand are often showing a great complexity. Extinction Rebellion has been described by the interview participants as “huge” [Interview #1], “a living organism” [Interview #3], and “quite holistic” [Interview #2]. By making use of various connective action repertoires both during physical actions and online, the rebels of XR Berlin are employing those to help them doing “what they were already doing” (ibid, p. 23). It becomes important to look into how the rebels use those connective action repertoires in detail, how they hinder and enable them to shape the movement and achieve their 3 demands.

While using media networks has become common in the digital age, it is not so much about the mere usage of media agents that transforms a network into applying connective action, but rather about how to use media agents differently than more conventional, formalized movements. Hereby, Mattermost classifies as a case in point. The free, access-only, platform serves to connect the movement globally as well as locally. Its self-expressive character is exemplified through the freedom for each user to generate their own channels and create content. While conflict solution channels and strategies are employed by XR to oversee and guarantee its nonviolent and inclusive character, there appears no overarching authority controlling self-expressed content. However, this seems to cause confusion and highlights XR’s decentralization contradiction, as one participant expressed:

“So everybody complains about it. But for me it’s a classic ‘blaming the technology’ [thing] instead of trying to find something. [...] the whole movement, internationally uses [it]. Most of the countries,

actually. It works very nicely but it's growing as the movement is growing, so of course it's messy. Because the movement is growing as messy as a living organism. [...] There's a lot of information but it's not because of Mattermost. It's just because of the movement itself. Because the movement is alive, it's a lot of things going on. So any platform will have the same issues, I would say." [Interview #3]

Hereby, the importance of accounting for the personal ways in which Mattermost is used becomes apparent. As the participant suggested, the issue or strength might not arise out of the nature of the platform, but rather out of the rebels' utilization, and consequently, XR's movement nature. While Mattermost is used for XR-internal communication, it also serves to recruit rebels to different working groups internally through its channel "Mitmachzentrale⁷", as well as the aforementioned "What's Up Berlin Rebels" channel updating rebels on events and free positions to take. Furthermore, the rebels of XR are able to change and adapt the platform itself, a process showing reflexivity and awareness to the issue of "information overload" and the hard to oversee cyber landscape. Tutorials on how to work with Mattermost are currently planned by the rebels and new step-by-step guidance has been put into place to help new rebels find their way through the platform, an adaptation that has been added as

"[...] we send them an email with instructions, like: 'For Mattermost you should start by this, you can click there and you can look for information like this.' [...] And that's what we didn't have before. That's why people got lost on Mattermost." [Interview #3]

XR's connective action repertoires take on a physical character when employed during actions. As Mattermost is access-only, however, built on ensuring communication and information dissemination, certain XR-internal work procedures are assumed to be "too sensitive" [Interview #2] to discuss on the platform. Its decentralization showing in switching and adapting media

⁷ "Participation centre"

agents depending on the context, during the Rebellion Waves⁸ Signal chat groups were created to ensure encryption and swift information exchange.

As this type of movement makes use of connective action repertoires, more personalized action frames become apparent. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) divide those into two fundamentals. First, personal action frames are categorized by a symbolic inclusiveness with little to no persuasion needed. Reframing actions continuously, as well as bridging differences between the rebels (see: 6.3.2 Challenging the Homogenous Unit) is both emphasized and on-going through XR's movement culture of RC. Different personal reasons for becoming active and thereby contesting the lack of legislative measures regarding the climate crisis by the rebels, have been pointed out throughout this study. Second, technological openness with employing a variety of personal communication technologies appears important (ibid, p. 37). Hereby, Extinction Rebellion makes use of Mattermost, among many other media agents, to personalize those platforms. While personal action frames, as opposed to the more classic assumptions of collective action frames, offer greater opportunity for the expression of the individual and to shape the movement, they do not spread automatically. Rather they rely on an “interactive process of sharing, spreading and shaping” (ibid, p. 39) which is done by the rebels through both their online and offline interactions. As Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have based their research on movements such as *Put People First* and *Occupy*, this study has hoped to elaborate on their findings by showing intersections with Extinction Rebellion. Furthermore, *Occupy* was part of the *Rising Up!* network out of which Extinction Rebellion arose in 2018, with similarities in its organizational network appearing intuitive yet need not be taken for granted.

Following the logic of connective action (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013), Extinction Rebellion might be categorized as “crowd-enabled network”. As this theoretical concept merely serves to understand what is, in reality, a complexly webbed organisational structure, this study appears to give a first tentative outlook on Extinction Rebellion's overlaps with Bennett's and Segerberg's

⁸ Note that due to COVID-19 Extinction Rebellion had to adapt its action strategies. Instead of the “conventional” joining of local groups during a week for the upcoming Rebellion Wave, a digital Rebellion Wave has been proclaimed, activating the movement's decentralized, global capacity in applying connective action repertoires and connecting rebels beyond the local sphere.

(2013) network types. XR's crowd-enabled, personalized and connective network highlights how their internal coordination is carried out and facilitated. Each rebel seems to use the movement differently, is active where they see their personal skills fostered, and each local group is connected through connective action repertoires, yet remains autonomous and free enough to act self-expressively.

7 Concluding Discussion

The results of this study are threefold. Orienting alongside Melucci's (1995) three axes comprising the action system, XR Berlin-Süd's ends, means and fields of relationships could be pointed out. Through these interactive processes, the rebels' collective identity is constructed in continuous flux.

Section 6.1 Local Arenas of Social Change suggested to direct attention to non-traditional spheres of action planning, and to widen the reader's understanding of what amounts as action. Through their meeting spaces the rebels seem to engage in the social practice of doing action by planning those, coordinating themselves, exchanging information and seeking comfort in coming together. While the overall ends of XR's action are anchored in their 3 demands and the final establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on environmental policy issues, personal ends can differ as both the weekly plenary meeting and XR overall poses as a diverse field of personal learning opportunities. The meetings play a role in symbolically constructing the end of their actions by connecting them personally.

The rebels' means of action become visible through exploring how their internal organization functions. Both the Self-Organizing System (SOS) and its decentralized network are of importance. Expressed to at times hinder and enable the rebels' working, a contradiction could be observed. While voiced as overly positive by the participants interviewed, the described freedom of autonomy appears to both enable the rebels to shape the movement from within and to cause confusion. Ensuring efficient information exchange between the local and working groups was mentioned to be the biggest challenge within their decentralized network. Constantly trying to work against this contradiction, the rebels' extent of coordination seemed tight. While

no authority appears present to dictate or judge personal decisions, the rebels seek information transparency. Furthermore, the research described their use of connective action repertoires for internal communication. The online platform Mattermost exemplified what has been described as the decentralization contradiction (see: 6.4.2 The Decentralization Contradiction), whereby the rebels navigate the online activist sphere by individual, self-expressive means. A variety of channels serve for getting updates on events, planning actions in a decentralized way, connecting with local groups beyond Berlin, solving and informing about conflicts and recruiting rebels to new working groups internally. To follow up on Bennett's and Segerberg's (2013) network typology, this study finds XR to be categorized as crowd-enabled network. As XR is non-formally organised through its SOS with an emphasis on the autonomous creation of cells and they rely on the aforementioned social technologies of Mattermost (as main entity). However, by adapting their digital media agents depending on the purpose, use and context, they also employ chat-apps, i.e. Signal, Telegram, and use online call apps to coordinate themselves. Each user seems free to create content through their digital media agents, using them for their autonomous working. Personal expression within those fields of communication could be observed, with no overarching autonomy moderating the content. The aforementioned conflict solution channel does, however, aim at ensuring the network's nonviolent and inclusive movement culture online. Furthermore, XR appears to make use of personal action frames by the rebels planning and framing actions themselves and finding tools to self-express themselves, as well as bringing in their own skills. Lastly, Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have highlighted that crowd-enabled networks seem likely to shun the involvement of formal organizations (ibid, p. 47). While XR remains connected to alliances both in and beyond Berlin, those appear mainly of the self-organizing, non-formal kind, i.e. *Ende Gelände*, *Fridays For Future*. Through the rebels' connective action strategies, they foster their social practice of doing action. Thereby, they translate their means of communication and coordination into action in a broader sense. When looking at the cells of Berlin-Süd, the actions carried out on the streets appear to take shape in the online and offline meeting spheres.

Within Melucci's (1995) action system, the fields or relationships between which the rebels move also became apparent. While the outlined connective action strategies served to facilitate

their coordination, and arose out of their movement culture and nature as quickly changing, their movement culture is positioned in a field of opportunities and constraints. By delineating their own movement culture to other and previous movements, as well as outgroup sentiments (i.e. by the police, co-workers and family members), a stronger sense of collective identity seemed to be constructed. As suggested by the participants, XR appears different from other movements because of its positive reinforcement, its reliance on Regenerative Culture, listening and sharing emotions and employing a spirit of “no blame, no shame”. Their Regenerative Culture encapsulates XR’s movement culture with its values of love, sharing, community and togetherness. Through engaging in the social practice of not just doing action, but doing Regenerative Culture, the rebels construct their meanings, reinforcing why it seems to make sense for them to come together voluntarily for a sustained amount of time. Here the extraordinarily ordinary rebels are encouraged to bring in their own skill sets and experiences, are listened to and feel heard. Especially regarding participants that were previously active in other movements, Regenerative Culture seems to play a role in making the difference and sustaining their rebellion. This highlights why the rebels of Berlin-Süd are active and continue to do so. Both their voluntary togetherness and their decentralized connective action strategies serve to challenge traditional assumptions of rational choice (Olson, 1965) and resource mobilization (McCarthy, Zald, 1977). This study suggests that while there is also more to actions than what is visible on the streets, the interactive processes of relationships, re-negotiating their positions and personal action frames and sense of community also widen the reader’s understanding of what drives a social movement. As it appeared necessary to move beyond large-scale, structural lenses of collective action, the intersections between processual collective action constructed by the individual (Melucci, 1995) and its usage of personalized connective action repertoires (Bennett, Segerberg 2013) served to highlight the processes behind what at first seems visible.

By moving between the fields of these action systems, the rebels’ collective identity appeared to be constructed in motion. In XR’s flexible, self-expressive movement that is both challenging and offers the capacity for personal adaptation, the rebels seem to constantly move between internal positions, re-negotiating their ends, means and fields of action. The extraordinary

ordinary rebels need not necessarily be seen as a homogenous unit of collective actors, as XR poses as a personal learning and trying opportunity, attracting diverse characters. However, through their shared emphasis on Regenerative Culture their collective ends of action get reinforced to the extent that this study describes the rebels of Berlin-Süd as more than individual actors. The rebels seemingly moved between their daily and activist lives, taking on an extraordinarily ordinary character when engaging in activism. Through these interactive processes, Melucci (1995) sees collective identity constructed and here lies the answer to how the rebels balance their individual motivations with their collective coordination in a decentralized network. Through activating personal relationships, employing personalized action frames and adapted connective communication repertoires, their individual ends seem to both play a role in shaping the movement and are being reflected to the extent that the rebels feel heard and keep sustaining their rebellion.

This ethnographic case study of Extinction Rebellion's local group Berlin-Süd has shown how it needs to be understood as a new, personalized, informally organized and self-expressive movement type. Due to the highly personal character of each local group, working group and sub-working group, this case study needs to be understood as telling the story of Berlin-Süd's rebels in closer detail, however not attempting to describe Extinction Rebellion in its global variety and difference. Further research might shine light on how similar or different Regenerative Culture and SOS gets interpreted in different local groups across the world. The question of coordination within decentralized movements (Savio, 2015; Halupka, 2017) also deserves more attention by moving away from large-scale analyses of complex structures of social interactions leading to collective action.

Afterword

I am leaving Berlin amidst a storm. A global pandemic is taking hold of the capital of Germany. This unprecedented situation has yet again proven how interconnected our lives in modernity are. Globalized struggles become localized, as I am looking into the familiar faces of my fellow rebels during our last personal plenary meeting in a start-up office somewhere in Kreuzberg. The rebels of Berlin-Süd appear unsure about how to proceed, everyone is these days. We end this meeting differently, not anticipating to see each other in person for a while. Everyone is struggling to find words to describe their feelings with weather events. There are a lot of storms blowing in our faces that night. We hear a wave crushing from afar. The future seems less set in stone, even more in flux than Extinction Rebellion's organization. Weeks of relentless preparation for the upcoming Rebellion Wave, the biggest civil disobedience action the city should ever see, now come to a sudden halt. The rebels' eyes are worried and tired; they are always tired yet fiery in the wake of global mass extinction. I do not doubt that we will meet again. It is just not clear whether humanity will have overcome two crises so intricately connected by then.

Bibliography

- I. Abbruzzese, Teresa; Wekerle, Gerda (2011). Gendered Spaces of Activism in Exurbia. Politicizing an Ethic of Care from the Household to the Region. *Frontiers*. 32(2). [Accessed 12.11.2019].
- II. Andrews, Kenneth; Edwards, Bob (2005). The Organizational Structure of Local Environmentalism. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*. 10(2): 213-234. [Accessed 10.11.2019].
- III. Beineke, Frances (2015). How to Unleash Climate Action: Values, Politics, and the Inevitability of the Clean Energy Future. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*. 82(3). pp. 713-724. Johns Hopkins University Press. [Accessed 13.11.2019].
- IV. Bennett, W. Lance; Segerberg, Alexandra (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of collective action*. New York. Cambridge University Press.
- V. Chenoweth, Erica; Stephan, Maria (2012). *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. Columbia University Press.
- VI. Franzke; Aline Shakti; Bechmann, Anja; Zimmer, Michael; Ess, Charles and the Association of Internet Researchers (2020). *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0*. [Available at: <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>]. [Accessed 18. 01. 2020].
- VII. Gamson, William A. (1975). *The strategy of social protest*. Dorsey Press.
- VIII. Gunningham, Neil (2019). Averting Climate Catastrophe: Environmental Activism, Extinction Rebellion and coalitions of Influence. *King's Law Journal*. 30 (2). Routledge. [Accessed 28. 10. 2019].
- IX. Hallam, Roger (2019). *Common sense for the 21st century. Only nonviolent rebellion can now stop climate breakdown and social collapse*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- X. Halupka, Max (2017). What Anonymous can tell us about the relationship between virtual community structure and participatory form. *Policy Studies*. 38 (2). 168-184. Routledge. [Accessed 21. 03. 2020].
- XI. Hine, Christine (2000). Virtual Ethnography. Chapter 2: *Internet as Culture and Cultural Artefact*. Sage. London.

- XII. IPCC (2018). *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty*. In Press. [Accessed 23. 11. 2019].
- XIII. Johnston, Hank; Klandermans, Bert (1995). *Social Movements and Culture*. University of Minnesota Press.
- XIV. Manilov, Marianne (2013). Occupy at one year: growing the roots of a movement. *The Sociological Quarterly*. Vol. 45. 159-228. Midwest Sociological Society. [Accessed 21. 03. 2020].
- XV. McAdam, Dough (2017). Social Movement Theory and the Prospects for Climate Change Activism in the United States. *The Annual Review of Political Science*. Vol. 20. Annual Reviews. [Accessed 28. 10. 2019].
- XVI. McAdam, Dough (1982). *Political process and the development of black insurgency, 1930-1970*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.
- XVII. McCarthy, John D.; Zald, Mayer N. (1973) *The Trend of Social Movements in America: Professionalization and Resource Mobilization*. General Learning Press. Morristown.
- XVIII. McCarthy, John D.; Zald, Mayer N. (1977) 'Resource mobilization and social movements: a partial theory'. *American Journal of Sociology*. 82(6). pp. 1212–1241. [Accessed 07. 04. 2020].
- XIX. Melucci, Alberto (1995). *The Process of Collective Identity*. In: *Social Movements and Culture*. University of Minnesota Press. Chapter 3.
- XX. Melucci, Alberto (1996). *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
- XXI. Michels, Robert (1915). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. The Free Press. New York.
- XXII. O'Reilly, Karen (2009). *Key Concepts in Ethnography*. Sage. London.

- XXIII. Olson, M. (1965) *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Harvard University Press. Cambridge.
- XXIV. Savio, Gianmarco (2015). Coordination outside formal organization: consensus-based decision-making and occupation in the Occupy Wall Street movement. *Contemporary Justice Review*. 18 (1). 42-54. Routledge. [Accessed 21. 03. 2020].
- XXV. Tarrow, Sidney (2011). *Power in Movement*. Cambridge University Press.
- XXVI. Wagoner, Brady; Moghaddam, Fathali; Valsiner, Jaan (2018). *The Psychology of Radical Social Change*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Appendix

Interview Guide

1. What has led you to become active within XR?
2. How can you participate within XR?
3. What does “Decentralization” mean to you?
4. Can you explain, in your own words, what SOS means to you?
5. What, if so, bothers you with XR (or XR Berlin-Süd)?
6. What are your experiences with Mattermost?
7. What are your experiences with action planning and/ or participation so far?
8. What does “Regenerative Culture” mean to you?
9. To what extent do collaborations with other (environmental) activist groups play a role for XR and you personally?
10. To what extent does climate change influence your life?
11. To what extent, if so, is climate change connected with social inequality for you?
12. What are your thoughts regarding XR’s Citizens’ Assembly?
13. How do you see the connection between your work as a rebel and your daily life?
14. What do you like the most about XR?
15. What do you hope to achieve with XR?
16. How do you envision a livable world in the future?