Between hope and resignation

Three collective initiatives on climate change's understandings of agency for societal transformation

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ABSTRACT

Addressing climate change will entail groups of people working together to bring about changes in fundamental societal structures. This research investigates how the members of three collective initiatives on climate change in Sweden envision the process of change, based on their understandings of structures and agency. Margaret Archer and Pierre Bourdieu's theorisations on this matter serve as an analytical framework, and Maja Göpel and Erik Olin Wright's prescriptions of strategies for transformational change contextualise the participants' strategies. From conducting focus groups, this research concludes that the organisations' strategies lack coherent definition, yet partly reflect Göpel and Wright's recommendations. The absence of clarity can be linked to the participants' partial rejection of agency in the face of pervasive societal structures. These findings raise questions about the conditions that are needed for people to actively work towards the transformation of dominating neoliberal and capitalist systems.

Keywords: social change - structure/agency - collective action - sustainability - radical change - anti-capitalism

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

ESC   Ecosocialist Collective

TA   Thematic analysis

XR   Extinction Rebellion

1. Introduction

1.1. Responding to climate change: the why and how of radical societal transformation

Addressing the climate crisis requires "rapid and deep and in most cases immediate greenhouse gas emission reductions in all sectors" according to the most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Shukla et al., 2022). Mitigating climate change thereby entails changes that pervade all aspects of society: The way we use and produce energy, the buildings we live in, how we grow food and manage natural resources, and what activities are a normal part of our daily lives (Shukla et al., 2022). Therefore, a responsible and appropriate response to climate change, especially since technological fixes are likely to carry risks and reinforce injustices, requires the transformation of foundational structures of society (Fazey et al., 2018; Gillard et al., 2016; Parris et al., 2022). Such transformation is radical in that it is "major, fundamental change, as opposed to minor, marginal, or incremental change" (Feola, 2015, p. 377). This entails a stark departure from the current status quo, with the aim to go beyond mitigation and create conditions within which all people and nature can thrive (McPhearson et al., 2021)

Radical societal transformation can be brought about by groups of people actively working towards it (Göpel, 2016; Wright, 2010). While the structures that such transformative processes target predate and are partly independent of people (Archer, 2003), individuals and collectives affect these structures through their actions, thereby shaping and creating social reality. Namely, "actors reason and struggle with each other over how to organize people-people–planet relations, and create and apply technologies, infrastructures and institutions" that can over time produce radical changes in these relations (Göpel, 2016, p. 158). Independent individual decisions are, however, unlikely to create the changes in structures that are desired (Stuart, 2022). Rather, alliances are needed, between individuals and between groups of people approaching transformation at different levels or through different strategies (Pereira et al., 2018). Several authors argue that groups of people, such as social movements, personal networks, and others have the potential to shift the social fabric towards more radical discourses and practices (Gillard et al., 2016; Rooney & Vallianatos, 2022; Wittmayer et al., 2022). This is why, in this research, I seek out the experiences and perspectives of people aiming to address the climate crisis collectively.

I further align myself with the structural and enabling perspectives presented by Scoones et al. (2020) on the role of social agency in driving transformation. In line with the structural approach, I focus on the "perceived underlying foundations of politics, economy and society, and [assert] the

need for a complete overhaul of [their] ideological underpinnings" (Scoones et al., 2020, p. 66). Simultaneously, according to the enabling lens, I emphasise the importance of "creating the social attributes - capacities - that empower individuals and communities to take action on their own behalf" (Scoones et al., 2020, p. 67). To better understand what influences people's capacity to work towards the transformation of underlying structures, I seek out the perspectives and experiences of three groups aiming to create societal change in Sweden. These groups differ in their organisational structure and the activities they engage in, but they share a radical perspective on how society needs to evolve to enable holistic responses to climate change.

1.2. People's understanding of societal change informs transformational processes

Actors aiming at societal transformation hold certain beliefs about their agency to effect change, based on their particular position in society and the types of influence they experience structures to have on them from that position. These "deep-rooted assumptions" underpin any attempts at shaping social reality and "challenging [them] is itself an essential part of transformation" (Fazey et al., 2018, p. 25). The beliefs around people's potential to bring about change in structures, in turn, impact the activities that they engage in, the longevity of their engagement and the change that ultimately manifests. As such, for instance, the perceptions and emotions people hold about their ability to influence climate policy have been found to strongly influence their exercise of political agency (Wamsler et al., 2022). In this research project, I, therefore, aim to draw out and analyse how groups' understandings of agency in relation to societal structures play into their efforts towards positive socio-environmental change.

While this particular relationship has not been studied to my knowledge, case studies of collective initiatives engaged in transformation processes for sustainability allow insights into what people in such initiatives understand to be their role in bringing about change. A first pattern that becomes apparent is that the agency to enact structural change is seen to mainly rest on those who have legislative power or economic influence, meaning governments but also institutional investors and companies (Černoch et al., 2019; Connor, 2012; Gunningham, 2017; Isgren, 2018; Martiskainen et al., 2020; Reichel et al., 2022; Rivera et al., 2017; Stuart, 2022; Wolf, 2019). The role of civil society actors lies in getting those in power to act, either by leveraging public opinion, by becoming actively involved in decision-making, or, most commonly, through disruption by protest or acts of civil disobedience. Such collective action is assumed to be effective because it "pressures a target to pay attention to activists' claims and potentially [...] concede to their demands" (Gunningham, 2017, p. 378). A second way in which groups believe they can contribute to societal change is by popularising

new discourses (Apostol, 2015; Doblinger & Soppe, 2013; Maldonado-Villalpando et al., 2022; Nairn, 2019; Poland et al., 2019; Ritvala & Salmi, 2010; Rooney & Vallianatos, 2022; Smith et al., 2021; Westoby & Lyons, 2017). There is a sense that raising awareness on sustainability issues can change people's way of thinking about them, which may lead to action. A final way in which people feel they can bring about change is by allowing others to experience different ways of life (Carp, 2012; Fischer et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2016; Nairn, 2019; Piani et al., 2021; Rivera et al., 2017; Rooney & Vallianatos, 2022; Smith et al., 2021; Westoby & Lyons, 2017). In this approach, people's role in bringing about change lies in the creation of structures which enable community members to think differently about their livelihoods, work or personal behaviour, thereby opening up more possibilities (Ergas, 2010; Fischer et al., 2017; Maldonado-Villalpando et al., 2022; Rivera et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2021; Wittmayer et al., 2022).

In these case studies, the relationship between societal actors and the structures they aim to change is characterised by two assumptions. Concrete, large-scale changes are only seen as possible as the result of the actions of people in power, such as governments and companies. Meanwhile, the direct influence that civil society actors can have on structures is more diffuse, working through pathways of raising awareness, providing inspiration, and making an alternative reality feel possible.

1.3. The aim of this study

To gain a more complete understanding of how actors engaged in transformation understand the process of change and their role in it, I explicitly seek out the beliefs they hold about their relationship to the structures they encounter and attempt to change. I draw out these understandings through conducting focus group discussions with members of three radical change organisations in Sweden: the Ecosocialist Collective (ESC) in Lund, Suderbyn Ecovillage on Gotland, and Extinction Rebellion (XR) in Malmö. With the findings from this research, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of what factors support and constrict groups in their fight for societal transformation in response to climate change.

The questions I aim to answer therefore are:

1. How do people in collective initiatives envision the process of societal transformation in response to climate change?

   a. What do they aim to change?

   b. What strategies do they employ to achieve their aims?

2. How do these collectives understand the relationship between (themselves as) agents and structures?

   a. What do they understand as structures and to what extent are these relevant to them in their fight for change?

   b. To what extent and in what ways do they feel that they influence structures?

   c. How do they feel constrained and/or controlled by structures?

3. How do the understandings of structures and agency influence the strategies that the collectives employ?

In the following section, I expand on the theoretical framework that guided my data collection and analysis, diving into sociological perspectives on structures and agency as well as macro-scale analyses of strategies for transformation. Thereafter, I provide the reasoning for and description of my case selection, data collection and analysis methods. Having set up the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the study, I state the main results of my research. I then discuss these findings in relation to my theoretical framework and the wider research context and explore some limitations of this research. Finally, I conclude on the main insights resulting from this research and point out opportunities for further research.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Underlying transformation: theories of agency within structures

When envisioning processes of social change, we make assumptions about the way agents and structures in society relate to each other. Structures are "the more fixed and enduring aspects of the social landscape" while agency is "the ability of individuals or groups [...] to "make things happen" within given structural constraints and opportunities" (Stones, 2015, p. 1). Below, I present two sociological perspectives on the relationship between structures and agents, which I believe help understand (attempts at) societal transformation. Margaret Archer and Pierre Bourdieu assert that agents and structures both play a role in creating reality but provide different explanations of how agents come to act in certain ways and what influence they have on structures. Their theories provide an analytical lens through which I examine the research participants' understandings of structures and agency.

2.1.1. Margaret Archer: agents' conscious reflexivity is the basis for deliberate social change

Margaret Archer's theory gives a central role to agency, stating that "structural and cultural factors ultimately emerge from people and are efficacious only through people" (Archer, 2003, p. 2). Structures and culture, in Archer's thinking, are characterised by (1) having emergent properties, meaning causal power of their own that is not reducible to the components they are made up of or the humans who created them, and (2) pre-dating any actor that encounters them (Archer, 1995). Both structure and culture in Archer's terminology thereby make up what Stones (2015) defines as structures, and hence when I refer to structures, I encompass both types of properties. The difference between structure and culture lies in that structure is mainly composed of material resources, physical or human, while culture entails theories, beliefs, and values that are intangible (Archer, 1995). Structures and culture fundamentally shape the situations we find ourselves in and only what already exists as structure or culture can be reproduced, reformulated, resisted, or transformed (Archer, 1995).

However, the potential of structural and cultural properties to constrain or enable is only activated when they collide with agents' projects (Archer, 2003). Archer (2003, p. 6) asserts that "a project involves an end that is desired, [...] and also some notion, however imprecise, of the course of action through which to accomplish it." With these mentally defined projects, agents encounter the emergent properties of both structural and cultural systems (Archer, 2003). Agents thereafter consciously deliberate, using their capacity for reflexivity, on the limitations that they are confronted

with and come up with courses of action in response to these (Archer, 2003). The objective conditions are herein "reflexively mediated via our own concerns and according to how well we know our circumstances, under our own descriptions" (Archer, 2003, p. 139).

Agents are differentially placed in society, endowing them with certain privileges, vested interests, or deprivations (Archer, 2003). These affect what projects agents view as feasible or worthwhile, and therefore there is an interplay between structural conditions and subjective position (Archer, 2003). We may be able to deliberately change our situation, but that change is always in relation to conditions that we were involuntarily put in, and had no role in shaping (Archer, 1995). Our subjective interpretation of social reality can furthermore be misconstrued, irrespective of how reality has actually come to be (Archer, 1995).

Based on this assessment of agents' ability to shape social reality, Archer asserts, quoting Roy Bhaskar, that social change will come about through agents "actively searching for 'hitherto unrealized possibilities for change in the way life is currently organized'" (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016 quoted in Archer, 2019, p. 241). These agents remain, however, fundamentally influenced by the social structures they exist in.

2.1.2.   Pierre Bourdieu: subconscious structural influence hinders social change

Pierre Bourdieu's theory takes a different approach to Archer's in explaining how agents and structures interact, which provides a more concrete explanation of how social structures influence agents.

Bourdieu asserts that rather than people acting intentionally, most of the time, they are steered by "acquired dispositions", which lead them to make certain choices (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 97–98). These dispositions are provided by people's habitus, which is "a system of durable, transposable empowerments and constraints" (Kabele, 2016, p. 2). The specific dispositions that people's habitus is made up of vary by field and their specific position in it (Grenfell, 2008). Fields in Bourdieu's thinking entail the sets of relationships that create social spaces, and people carry different forms of capital, which they use per their habitus to act in fields (Kasper, 2009). Through exposure to the doxa, or rules, of the fields that they occupy, people develop a relatively stable understanding of what is appropriate behaviour in different situations (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Based on these dispositions, people act in mostly unconscious ways (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019; Kabele, 2016). Therefore, while Bourdieu acknowledges that "social agents construct social reality," he stresses that agents are deeply influenced by structural factors (Callaghan, 2005, p. 2). Given the stability of doxa and the

resulting consistency of the field, our habitus tends to make us reproduce existing social relations (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019; Decoteau, 2016; Husu, 2022).

While Bourdieu's theory is traditionally read as reproducing social reality, Decoteau (2016) provides a way for social change to occur within Bourdieu's thinking, by introducing Archer's notion of reflexivity. Decoteau argues that in Bourdieu's framework, social change can result from disjunctures between field and habitus (Decoteau, 2016). As people go through life, they inhabit several habituses which fade and morph into each other over time and can exist simultaneously in different social contexts. Thereby, people are situated in "unique positions from which to reflexively evaluate and navigate our structural and cultural conditioning through embodied practices" (Decoteau, 2016, p. 316). Reflexivity, then, is already integrated into habitus, due to the layered internal dimensions of people and the perspective that they have from their position in and across fields. When there is a disjuncture in a field, it challenges people to either incorporate a contradictory habitus or adjust it. This means that people may actively adjust their habitus in response to such disjunctures, thereby altering aspects of social reality.

2.2.   Strategies for radical societal transformation

Sociological theories such as those of Archer and Bourdieu provide an understanding of the micro-foundations for how agents can become active in processes of social change. To be able to assess the transformative potential of the collective strategies used by the organisations I study, I consult two proposals of concrete steps for transformative change within current societal conditions: Maja Göpel's (2016) *The Great Mindshift* and Erik Olin Wright's (2010) *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Wright's typology guided me in selecting the organisations I study, while both authors' analyses allow me to evaluate the strategies the participants present. In their prescriptions of the kinds of action that can engender the transformation needed to address socio-environmental crises, the conscious and deliberate actions of groups of people are at the basis. The resulting approaches differ however, with Göpel's strategy targeting underlying paradigms and Wright putting a spotlight on expanding agency through building political and democratic power.

2.2.1.   Maja Göpel: Transformation is driven by paradigm shifts

Maja Göpel (2016) proposes that radical transformation relies on changes in the intangible, foundational basis of societal systems. These are what Donella Meadows calls 'deep leverage points', those parts of a system where change will have a great impact on the rest of the system (Meadows, 1999). One such leverage point is paradigms, meaning "the shared idea in the minds of society, the great big unstated assumptions" (Meadows, 1999, p. 17). This is where Göpel sees the starting point

for radical incremental change, arguing that through defining and starting to enact a radical new purpose for the system, the foundation is laid for taking the necessary incremental steps to alter existing structures. She argues that "some agreement about the direction of purposeful reorganization has to prevail for collective strategic action to take place" (Göpel, 2016, p. 8).

In line with Archer's conception of the relationship between agents and structures, Göpel (Göpel, 2016, p. 45) asserts that "humans live in structured freedom." This means that people live within structures "laden with beliefs, norms, social roles" etc. that they did not choose and yet are influenced by (Göpel, 2016, p. 15). Simultaneously, by acting purposefully within these structures, people shape and create structures that affect how people engage with each other and nature. For Göpel (2016, p. 45), freedom therefore lies in "becoming literate" in understanding how paradigms and mindsets create and reinforce destructive structures and using this understanding to try to change them.

Deliberate action to bring about systemic change, which Göpel titles 'repurposing', entails three aspects. Actors need to "delegitimize the traditional arguments, offer alternative meaning, and shine a light on alternative practice options" (Göpel, 2016, p. 168). In other words, we first need to be able to point out the flaws of the existing system and know where we can intervene. Second, we need to give alternative ideas of what this system could be based on, which "can foster deliberative co-creative processes—or at least delegitimize claims that there are no alternatives" (Göpel, 2016, p. 161). Third, we need to enact the new paradigm through our social relationships and practices. Each of these steps serves to slowly replace the old paradigm with the new, inside which "institutions, social relations, and ideas that live in science or canonized knowledge as much as culture" are (re)produced (Göpel, 2016, p. 151).

2.2.2. Erik Olin Wright: Strategies need to garner public support

Like Göpel, Erik Olin Wright (2010) bases his proposal of strategies for radical transformation on a critique of current capitalist economic and political systems. This critique leads him to define three different courses of action that civil society groups can take, which he titles ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic strategies (Wright, 2010). The first strategy entails a rupture in the system, while the latter two rely on metamorphosis without discontinuity.

Ruptural transformation entails confrontation and political struggle which create a disjuncture in institutional structures. Wright dismisses the potential for purely ruptural transformation, arguing that not enough public support could be garnered for such an approach due to the sacrifices that would have to be accepted in the time of transition. Within the two metamorphological strategies,

Wright describes interstitial transformation to entail "building alternative institutions and deliberately fostering new forms of social relations that embody emancipatory ideals and that are created primarily through direct action of one sort or another rather than the state" (Wright, 2010, p. 324). This can pave the way for rupture to occur or continuously erode the limits imposed on emancipatory change to the extent that a new system emerges. Wright does not believe that interstitial strategies will lead to the needed change in societal structures, due to the simplistic view of the state that they involve. Finally, Wright presents what he terms a symbiotic strategy of transformation. This is "any strategy for transformation that utilises dominant institutions of power to solve practical problems in ways that both serve some interests of dominant groups and expand the space for popular social empowerment" (Wright, 2012, p. 400). In this view, change will occur because elites and the numerical majority find a 'positive class compromise'. Wright sees the most potential in this transformational strategy because it may be able to garner broad public support and actively works with the state. Importantly, he relays that none of the three strategies is likely to be adequate by itself but that instead, transformative attempts need to draw elements from all three.

In conclusion, echoing Göpel's emphasis on deliberate action, Wright (2010, p. 370) asserts that the transformation he envisions "will not happen simply as an accidental by-product of unintended social change [, but that] if this is to be our future, it will be brought about by the conscious actions of people acting collectively to bring it about."

3. Methodology and method

The theory presented above provides a conceptual framework for assessing the perspectives of people involved in processes of transformation. In the following sections, I describe how I selected the groups whose perspectives I analyse and provide details on their organisational structure and activities. Thereafter, I present my reasoning for and application of the focus group method to draw out the understandings I aim to interrogate and describe how I analysed the resulting data.

3.1. Case selection and description

3.1.1. Selection process

I chose the Ecosocialist Collective (ESC), Suderbyn, and Extinction Rebellion (XR) with the intention to represent the three strategies of transformation that Wright (2010) describes. I did so to ensure that the results cover a range of approaches to transformation. However, I also chose initiatives that were accessible to me, thereby combining purposive and availability sampling (Daniel, 2012). For the ruptural strategy, I chose the ESC, of which I had been a member for a year and a half since it was the only organisation in the region that I could find which claims to use ruptural tactics in response to climate change. For the interstitial strategy, I contacted six ecovillages and chose Suderbyn since it was the only place to respond early on in which community members interact on a daily basis. In attempting to find an initiative that uses symbiotic strategies, I considered two social movements that I knew of, Fridays for Future and XR in Malmö, both of which demand political action from governments. I chose XR because they meet regularly as a group.

3.1.2. Case descriptions

3.1.2.1. Suderbyn

Suderbyn is an ecovillage on Gotland, an island South of Stockholm in the Baltic Sea, which was founded in 2008 (Suderbyn, 2023c). On its website, Suderbyn is described as "a pilot site for applying a holistic approach to create a small-scale regenerative society" (*Suderbyn*, n.d.). At the time that the focus group was conducted, Suderbyn was home to 17-20 people: 11 permanent residents, 6 volunteers, and 2-3 visitors (Suderbyn employee, personal communication, February 3, 2023). The volunteering programme, which is paid for by the EU, is a core part of Suderbyn's activities and volunteers stay at Suderbyn for one year. Everyone contributes time to the community every week (permanent residents: 10 hours, volunteers: 35 hours). There are four work domains: infrastructure, garden, administration, and educational projects (Suderbyn, 2023b). Several fixed meetings and social gatherings allow the community to organise itself: three meetings during the week, one

meeting for consent-based decision-making at the end of the work week, and brunch every Sunday (Suderbyn, 2023a).

3.1.2.2. XR Malmö

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a social movement that promotes "non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency" (XR, 2023). The XR group in Malmö has existed since 2019 (XR member, personal communication, April 17, 2023). Currently, they meet once every two weeks, with action groups on specific topics (e.g. action coordination, collaboration, finance, media) meeting in between (XR member, personal communication, April 17, 2023). The group has been focusing on low-risk actions, which I take from the member's description to mean legal actions such as protests, and some illegal actions that are unlikely to bring legal consequences (XR member, personal communication, April 17, 2023).

3.1.2.3. Ecosocialist Collective Lund

The Ecosocialist Collective describes itself as "a space for people in Lund to build solidarity for fighting current eco-social crises" (Ecosocialist Collective Lund, 2023). Ecosocialism in the understanding of the collective "means that dealing with the climate crisis is also about transforming social systems in a way that makes them more just, equitable, and inclusive" (Ecosocialist Collective Lund, 2023). The collective was established in autumn of 2021 and currently meets for alternating planning and content-based meetings twice a month. The four subgroups meet in between these general meetings. The people's kitchen group organises a weekly donation-based soup kitchen, the fitness club plans protests and acts of civil disobedience, the discussion group holds topic-focused events, and the regeneration group takes care of conflict resolution and awareness structures.

3.1.3. Fit of cases with theoretical strategies

None of the initiatives I chose fit perfectly into one of the three strategies, which aligns with Wright's (2010) assertion that transformation is likely to entail a combination of approaches. From their self-description on their website, the ESC appears to combine interstitial and ruptural strategies. From my personal experience with the collective, I know that the more disruptive tactics are also intentionally kept hidden, to avoid suppression. Suderbyn, meanwhile, presents a strong interstitial strategy, being a space for living differently and for others to be able to learn and develop. XR generally combines symbiotic and ruptural strategies, relying on direct action to promote policy change from governments, without actively targeting a rupture in existing systems.

3.2. Methodological lens and positionality

Following Archer's standpoint, I employ a critical realist view of reality in this research. Based on the understanding that there is a real, objective reality out there that is however always filtered through subjective interpretations, I aim to uncover the causal relations underlying the events that I observe (Sayer, 2000). My choice of philosophical orientation is motivated by the argument that "we will only be able to understand - and so change - the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate [particular] events or discourses" (Bhaskar, 2011, p. 2). Hence, I am not only interested in what the participants predominantly discuss in the focus groups concerning their relationship to structures but also hope to provide explanations of what underlying mechanisms create these perceptions.

I further conducted this research from the position of being currently involved in one of the groups (ESC), being politically aligned and running in similar circles as another (XR), and having a personal interest in the activities promoted by the final one (Suderbyn). This overlap between my and the participants' political positions and activist identities makes it crucial for me to reflect on my positionality. In line with the activism stance described by Fine (1994), I position myself intentionally in support of the struggles of the groups I investigate, all the while aiming to uncover new understandings of what this struggle entails and could benefit from. To ensure objectivity in doing so, I firmly situate the participants' statements within the theoretical foundations of my research to uncover "tensions and contradictions in their statements, for example between ideals and practices" (Hansen, 2021, p. 51).

3.3. Method of data collection: focus group discussions

Focus groups allow gathering a wide range of perspectives in a compressed timespan compared to individual interviews, and provide insights into the way shared meanings are created by groups of people (Hennink, 2014; Marková et al., 2007). As such, they are a particularly fitting method for investigating group and collective dynamics, norms, values, or beliefs (Colucci, 2007; Marková et al., 2007) - as is the purpose of this research. The three focus groups I conducted had 5-6 participants each and lasted around two hours with a break in the middle, which is within the range recommended in the literature (Hennink, 2014; Marková et al., 2007). I received consent from participants to use their answers in my research, to record the focus group, and statements on whether they wanted to remain anonymous, through forms which were filled out before the start of the discussion (Appendix 1). I then used Otter.ai (2023) to transcribe the recordings and fixed any mistakes in the generated transcripts.

In focus group discussions, it is not only about what people say, but also how they do so, and how their statements respond to and build on each other (Marková et al., 2007). In how I structured and conducted the focus groups, I tried to enable participants to engage in an interactive discussion. I, therefore, took the back seat throughout much of the discussion and probed people to react to each other's statements (see examples of transcripts in Appendix 2). Furthermore, I set up the discussion guide to begin with more practical, easily accessible questions, on which more abstract questions followed, which is in line with the structure suggested by Hennink (2014) (see Appendix 3 for the full discussion guide). This meant to allow the participants to ease into the discussion before getting to the more complex questions. As a final step, I conducted each focus group in a space that the groups meet in regularly: in Suderbyn this was the dining room, with the XR group we met in the basement they use for organising, and with the ESC I met in a local socialist café the group uses as a meeting place.

In addition to the verbal discussion, I incorporated a drawing activity in which participants were asked to illustrate their relation to the obstacles and support they encounter when pushing for change (detailed instructions in Appendix 3, drawings in Appendix 4). Focus groups that incorporate stimulation activities may help draw out narratives that would otherwise remain hidden, engaging different forms of reflection (Caretta & Vacchelli, 2015). Activities "accomplish their role best if the moderator goes further than the fulfilment of the task and invites participants to describe their answers more in-depth" (Colucci, 2007, p. 1430). Accordingly, I asked people to describe what they depicted and probed where they see the possibility of influencing the factors they portrayed.

3.4. Method for data analysis: thematic analysis

I applied reflexive thematic analysis (TA) as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) and described by Terry and Hayfield (2021). This form of TA aims to tell the best possible story of the data using themes, which are "rich, multifaceted patterns of shared meaning situated around a central organizing concept" (Terry & Hayfield, 2021, p. 50). I also partly followed Fryer's (2022) advice to adjust TA to a critical realist view of reality, which led me to look for themes that provide a causal explanation of the events and experiences the participants present.

3.4.1. Preparing the data for analysis: familiarisation and coding

Before working with the data, I familiarised myself with the transcripts and drawings, taking notes of the process (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry & Hayfield, 2021). To make the data ready for analysis, I then coded all three transcripts using NVivo 12 (Lumivero, 2023). TA can be both inductive and deductive (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). I coded deductively in the sense that my choice of which parts of

the data to code and how I interpreted them was strongly influenced by my theory, and inductively in the sense that I built up the codes as I went through the data. Periodically, I looked through the codes I had created, recoded sections that did not fit into the code I had placed them in, and regrouped the data (as recommended by Braun & Clarke, 2022). This led me to a set of codes that I felt accurately captured the parts of the data that are of relevance to my research (Appendix 5).

3.4.2. Answering research question 1: analysis of patterns

Having broken down the transcript into codes, I analysed the codes relating to aims and strategies to answer the first research question (see Table 1). I herein did not follow the process of theme development prescribed in TA, because I felt a more descriptive analysis was appropriate to match the nature of the question. I searched for patterns in the data about the types of aims and strategies described by the participants, and report on the similarities and differences I see in the prevalence of the different patterns between the three groups.

Table 1: All codes analysed to answer research question 1, grouped by sub-question.

Categories	Codes	Research question 1.a.: aims	Research question 1.b.: strategies
Personal Dimensions	need to see a purpose	▓	
Aims	aims are not clear	▓	
	can't choose just one issue	▓	
	clarity on what needs to go	▓	
	important to be radical	▓	
	sharing a fundamental concern	▓	
	the outcome is not the goal	▓	
Strategies and process of change	activism goes in circles		
	belief in strategies		▓
	building human capacity		▓
	change needs to come from the outside		
	enacting the alternative		▓
	good to be accessible		▓
	have to disrupt structures		▓
	influence through presence		▓
	lack of clear strategy		▓
	need the right foundations		
	need to engage with everyone		▓
	personal un- and relearning		▓
	raising awareness		▓
	small actions are meaningful		▓

3.4.3.   Answering research questions 2 and 3: development of themes

In answer to research question 2, I developed themes in line with TA in an iterative manner, since initial themes are unlikely to be the deepest way of interpreting the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry & Hayfield, 2021). In a first step, I mapped out all the codes I had created and developed an initial set of themes by clustering 5-10 codes together that I saw as linked by a concept. Choosing the theme that I felt had the most coherence, I started to write out the content of its codes. In the process of writing each theme, I realised things about the data that I could not have seen from purely looking at the code titles and shifted the codes around until I reached the three themes that are presented in the results section (see table 2 for codes used in each theme). In doing so, I looked for themes that best express the way the participants understand societal structures and their relationship to them, and I was careful to represent codes which were predominant in the data (in line with the criteria presented by (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 111); see Appendix 5 for the prevalence of all codes). I then evaluated to what extent these conceptual themes relate to the strategies revealed through the process described in the section above, in answer to research question 3.

Table 2: All codes analysed to answer research question 2, grouped according to theme.

Categories	Codes	Theme 1: The structures that need to change are too pervasive for us to have control over	Theme 2: To stand a chance against societal constraints, we need to build supportive foundations	Theme 3: People's individual experiences and perspectives hinder the creation of collective agency
Strategies and process of change	activism goes in circles		▨	
	change needs to come from the outside	▨		
	need the right foundations		▨	
Agency	agency is more accessible individually			▨
	finding strength in community			▨
	lack support in society			▨
	need to work together			▨
	not able to make big changes	▨		
	not well-connected enough			▨
	privilege can allow or inhibit change			▨
	social stability and cohesion are the basis		▨	

Category	Label	Col 1	Col 2	Col 3
	support through knowing about other groups			●
	we have agency together			●
	experiencing disjunctures			
Relations to structures	false sense of safety inhibits change	●		●
	hard to imagine systemic change	●		
	need the right structures		●	
	need to be separate from oppressive structures			
	structures determine starting conditions		●	
	subjective positioning matters			●
	systems influence us subconsciously	●		
	tangible constraints limit capacity		●	
	unable to escape the system	●		
	we can't affect big structures	●		
	we exist inside oppressive structures	●	●	

4. Results

In this section, I introduce the findings in relation to my three research questions. In sections 5.1 and 5.2, I respond to questions 1.a and 1.b. respectively. Following this analysis of the three organisations' aims and strategies, in section 5.3 I present the themes of participants' understandings of structure and agency, in answer to the second research question. At the end of each theme, I draw links to the strategies presented in section 5.2, in response to the third research question.

A note on how I refer to the three organisations:

I only interviewed 5 (Suderbyn and XR) or 6 (ESC) people from each organisation, which means that their views do not necessarily represent those of everyone in the organisation. However, for the sake of brevity, in the following text, I use the name of the organisation to indicate the particular group of people from that organisation that I did a focus group with. I use single capitalised letters to refer to the individual participants.

4.1. Aims for change

4.1.1. Aims are not defined

The three groups explicitly state during the discussion that they do not have clearly defined goals, with all participants voicing or agreeing to this sentiment. This is immediately apparent in the reactions of the Suderbyn and XR participants to my asking about the aims of their group. In both cases, people react with joking exasperation, with P from Suderbyn asking "Can we have this as the last question where we get the answer?" In contrast, in the ESC discussion, it is only once I already moved on to the next question that D brings up that they don't feel the collective has clear aims, and the conversation expands on this for some time. Another similarity between Suderbyn and XR is that, following the assertion that there are no commonly decided aims, people describe the goals that the organisation has in theory. In Suderbyn, these are the intentions set by its founders, while XR has demands that all local groups share. However, in the rest of the conversation, the shared statement is that the aims of their group aren't agreed upon.

4.1.2. United by a need to be radical and to oppose a common enemy

Although the participants assert that they do not have concrete aims, through their discussions, some common goals become apparent. First, the ESC and Suderbyn participants describe the importance of being radical, meaning fundamentally different from mainstream society, in their

practices. In Suderbyn, a radically different way of life is seen to be needed due to the urgency of environmental issues, with all participants except for P describing this pressure. In the ESC, the need to be radical is slightly less prominent but becomes apparent, for instance, through H's assertion of a need for "substantive change". Second, despite asserting that their group's aims aren't clear, the ESC and XR have a defined enemy: capitalism (the ESC) and climate change (XR). These 'enemies' provide a framework within which the groups' activities operate. D from the ESC, accordingly asserts that "capitalism is going to kill us all and it's horrible and violent, and we need to get rid of it." However, in both groups, the discussion becomes livelier and more nuanced once it turns to issues beyond this base concern. In XR, participants talk about aspects of equality and justice, while in the ESC, people discuss ideas they would like to change in society, such as hierarchies and individualism. The two groups, therefore, share that they have a defined enemy, which provides the basis for criticising other aspects of society.

4.1.3.   Achieving aims matters to an extent

The participants have a mixed relationship with the need to achieve aims, it being a driver of their involvement but not an essential part of why they stay engaged. On the one hand, all three groups, XR especially, express the need to see an impact of their engagement. In Suderbyn, for instance, M and K turned to ecovillages when they didn't believe that activism would lead to change. Accordingly, participants across groups are frustrated that it often feels as though all their work leads to nothing (ESC: D, F; Suderbyn: S, XR: C, A, T). On the other hand, especially in the ESC and XR, participants assert that just being active in itself is meaningful, regardless of whether aims are fulfilled. In all three groups, at least one participant exclaims the sentiment of "at least we tried." E from the ESC illustrates this in their reflection on a conversation with H where both concluded that they would do activism even if they knew the world would end in a year.

4.2.   Strategies for change

4.2.1.   Influencing others: changing mindsets within and beyond the group

The strategy which is roughly equally present across all three groups is that of influencing others by changing their mindsets and thereby affecting societal discourses. While this is the central strategy for XR, it is less consciously practised in the ESC, and in Suderbyn, views on whether this strategy is important differ.

The ESC and Suderbyn share that their internal deconstruction of beliefs and thinking patterns provides the basis for what they bring to people beyond the group. F from the ESC, for instance,

asserts that the collective's un- and relearning of values and beliefs, and practice of different ideals, is "in the end how we can also learn to bring these ideals to a wider community or society", which is met with general agreement. In Suderbyn, this unlearning comes from experiencing life in the community. This has, for instance, pushed people to embrace a more simplistic life with less consumption, which M describes through the example of having one car for the community. Both groups, therefore, emphasise the need to practise acting in accordance with different ideals, but Suderbyn embodies this aspect in a more applied sense.

The groups differ in the importance they put on reaching people beyond their organisation, and how they attempt to reach them. In Suderbyn, it is through experiencing life in the community that people may start to adopt different beliefs about sustainability, which they then carry with them. However, several participants express their uncertainty on whether this can have far-reaching impacts (K, M, S). Meanwhile, in the ESC and XR, changing broader societal discourses is seen as an essential role of their group. In XR, A describes "wak[ing] people up [as being] one of the overarching themes," while for C it is essential to bring "the roots of the problem to the discussion". For this strategy to have an impact, the ESC and XR participants emphasise the need to reach people in society that are not already involved in environmental activism. Both groups feel that they are easily accessible to people, which is a good basis for being able to raise awareness, but also reflect that they may need to engage more with different groups in society, such as people from the political right (XR) or non-students (ESC).

4.2.2. Enacting change: creating real examples of alternative structures

The strategy that is most strongly present in the ESC and Suderbyn focuses on small or local practices according to radically different ideals, echoing Wright's (2010) interstitial strategy. In the ESC, the term 'small revolutions' is brought up by H and taken up by other members, and signifies radical changes enacted on a local scale or in small steps. In Suderbyn, a similar strategy is presented with a stronger focus on practical dimensions, this being a way to go "into this transition in a more concrete way and not just protesting about it" (M). In both groups, the choice of this strategy appears to be partly motivated by the lack of faith in other strategies. In the ESC, F and H both contemplate their sense of despair at times, to which practical change is a sort of antidote. However, this strategy by itself is perceived as not enough, which is also echoed in the only mention of it in XR.

What this strategy entails differs between the two groups, being a foundation for wider change in the ESC and a goal in itself for Suderbyn. In the ESC, a large part of enacting change is creating spaces for people to come together outside of dominant social structures. These spaces are a foundation "to

then build upon and then use them to raise awareness further" (H, all but E agreeing). In Suderbyn, meanwhile, the choice of enactment on a smaller scale is driven by the need for accessing skills and resources, and the wish to avoid dependence on larger societal structures. Enacting alternative structures allows participants to prepare for societal collapse (K, M, R), or at least to be truly sustainable (P, S). Therefore, while the ESC and Suderbyn share the belief in change starting from local enactments, their purpose differs.

4.2.3. Disruptive strategies are not central

Strategies that directly target societal structures, which would mirror Wright's (Wright, 2010) ruptural strategy, are only mentioned twice by the ESC and XR participants and not at all in Suderbyn. In the ESC, F refers to wanting to engage in direct action, and sometimes being frustrated that they are mostly involved with regenerative activities. In XR, direct action tactics are brought up in J's vision of all of Sweden supporting activists in stopping a bulldozer from entering a forest (Figure 1). Both groups use tactics of direct action such as blocking infrastructure (described in section 3.1.2.), but in the participants' discussions, no strategy comes up that involves these tactics.

Figure 1: Drawing by J, XR focus group. The entire Swedish population, represented by the flag in the lower right corner, dreams of an infinity of activists preventing a bulldozer from entering a forest.

4.2.4. People's evaluation of their groups' strategies are mixed

While certain strategies are apparent from the discussions in all three groups, the ESC and XR groups state that their group does not have a clear strategy. For instance, D (ESC) concludes that while they may be using certain tactics, no strategy links them together, which F, B, and N agree to. Furthermore, participants across the groups express their doubts about the strategies that their organisation appears to follow. This sentiment is strongest in XR, with A, C, and T asserting that they would join a different group if there was an alternative. In contrast, in the ESC, people appear to generally stand behind the strategies their group uses. Similarly, K from Suderbyn presents a clear view of how the world may be changed, by "coming back to a tribal scale of things" which is in line with how Suderbyn operates.

4.3. Themes on understandings of structures and agency

4.3.1. Theme 1: The structures that need to change are too pervasive for us to have control over

The structures that need to change in the participants' perspective feel outside of their reach, leading to the conclusion that they cannot bring about fundamental change. The participants describe themselves as being entwined in and partly controlled by structures, which makes it impossible to imagine themselves having an impact.

4.3.1.1. *Structures are beyond our control*

Across the groups, the perception is shared that the structures that need to change are outside of the participants' reach. D (ESC) describes this in their painting (Figure 2), where they have depicted a "monster in the sky" that is controlling most people, asserting that "it doesn't feel possible to get all the way up there," which the other participants seem to agree with. Similarly, K, and M from Suderbyn draw limiting structures as something they cannot have an impact on (see Appendix 4b). Based on this analysis of conditioning structures being beyond their reach, the participants reject any agency over bringing about fundamental changes in structures. This lack of agency is stated most repeatedly by the Suderbyn participants, followed by the XR and ESC groups. Lines are drawn between what kind of change their groups can and cannot achieve, with the "global revolution" (H, ESC), "the overall system" (M, Suderbyn) or "big changes" (A, XR) being on the other side of the line. In the Suderbyn and XR discussions, some participants, especially K (Suderbyn), J (XR), and L (XR) assert that they cannot achieve anything at all.

Figure 2: Drawing by D, ESC focus group. The people from the ESC are in the middle, keeping warm around a fire and protected by a hut. Outside it is a dystopian winter, with everyone else in society either sleepwalking or being controlled by the "monster in the sky" that is capitalism. There are distant 'comrades' visible through their fire, and nearby comrades on the far right of the drawing that the ESC people cannot see.

4.3.1.2. Structures run every aspect of our lives

A core reason why the participants don't believe they can affect destructive structures is that these structures are present in every aspect of society. K from Suderbyn, for instance, exclaims that they're "in a system that is absolutely everywhere [, that is] holistic in the sense that it runs everything." These omnipresent structures exert control over people through the beliefs, values, and preferences that they imbue in them. In XR and the ESC, one belief that inhibits their fight for change is the conviction that Sweden has already done enough for the environment and social justice, which people see as being fed by the 'greenwashing campaigns' of the government and private companies. In Suderbyn and the ESC, participants further describe preferences they hold that reflect dominant norms but are counterproductive for their engagement in their respective group: from the norm of working a full-time job (M, Suderbyn & H, ESC), to desiring a certain standard of living (K, Suderbyn).

Across the three groups, these preferences are described as the result of an intangible process by which societal structures push people to accept certain things as fact.

4.3.1.3. *Since we cannot transform them, it is up to more powerful people to change fundamental structures*

From this sense that the structures they try to change are omnipresent and have a pervasive influence on people's mindsets, participants in all three groups find it hard to imagine truly systemic change. Systems appear too complex and dominating to know where to begin adjusting them. The changes that participants can imagine, meanwhile, are judged to not have a big enough impact. M from Suderbyn, for instance, says, referring to changes he could make to Suderbyn's economic structure that this "will still be inside the system, so [he doesn't] know how much system change that would be in that sense". This analysis leads to the conclusion for the participants from Suderbyn and XR, that large-scale change must come from elsewhere. In Suderbyn, K and M (Suderbyn) put 'faith' in societal collapse to bring about these more fundamental changes, while P and K assert that politicians need to act. This is reflected by participants in the XR group, with A asserting that "economy and politicians can act on it with strict policies." Activism is thereby not the main way to bring about change but plays a supporting role.

4.3.1.4. *Link to strategies: enacting change and influencing others*

This theme is reflected in the focus in the ESC and Suderbyn on enacting change on a small or local scale. In Suderbyn, having to an extent rejected the expectation that their actions need to reach beyond the community, their strategy focuses on building the alternative locally. In the ESC discussion, meanwhile, people less decisively reject the agency over big changes. Their strategy of enacting change echoes this, being understood as a step towards creating change beyond the collective. The understanding of the way structures influence people's norms, values, and beliefs may be connected to the strategy of influencing others, most clearly in the ESC and XR groups. From the perception that current discourses and mindsets are massive obstacles, both groups focus on reaching out to people and perhaps changing their minds in some way. Finally, the Suderbyn and XR groups conclude that certain important changes have to be brought about by more powerful societal actors, such as politicians. This is reflected in their lack of strategy for how such large-scale changes may be brought about.

4.3.2. Theme 2: To stand a chance against societal constraints, we need to build supportive foundations

Beyond the abstract pervasiveness and influence of structures, participants also describe more concrete ways in which the system they operate in makes it hard to pursue their aims. From this awareness of the way structures affect the range of possibilities that are accessible to the groups, a focus on building supportive structures within or around their groups develops.

4.3.2.1. Structures have felt impacts on us, from outside and within

In all three groups, people describe practical limitations that disable them from doing things differently. D from the ESC asserts that "capital has won out so hard against the people's movement," with schools being privatised, wages lowered and police interventions crushing radical movements. A from XR, meanwhile, mentions a law that was passed recently which is "shrinking the space" for activism. Further, K and M from Suderbyn describe that the support they get from the EU, which helps them pursue projects, keeps them dependent on the very system they try to escape (as exemplified in K's drawing in Figure 3).
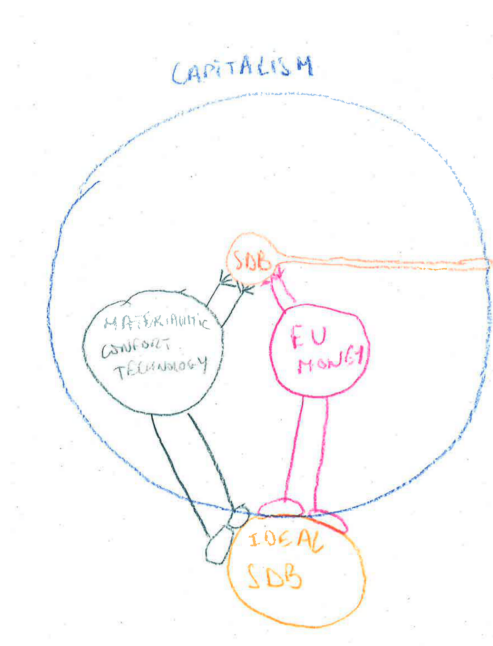

Figure 3: Drawing by K, Suderbyn focus group. Suderbyn (SDB) is being supported by EU money (purple) and materialism, comfort, and technology (dark green), unable to reach outside of the blue bubble of capitalism. Ideal Suderbyn (Ideal SDB), meanwhile, is also prevented by the same things that support real Suderbyn.

Beyond the influence of external structures, the way the groups are set up has a conditioning effect on what the participants can do. M from Suderbyn describes this by saying that their "system is also another system [...] that you need to kind of follow". In Suderbyn, this is reflected mainly through the physical conditions of the community: the fact that it neighbours a military base blocks the community from building more permanent buildings, and the way the land is set up determines how the farming and infrastructure teams do their work. In the ESC and XR, participants stress that their organisation being volunteer-based limits their ability to effect change. In both groups, people assert that they would like to dedicate more time and energy to the group but feel unable to since they spend so much time studying or working.

4.3.2.2. We need certain conditions to achieve change

For their activities to have more impact, the participants therefore conclude that they need to set up the right conditions within their group. First, the participants see better organisational structures as an essential part of being able to work towards change. Suderbyn illustrates that the right set-up can make activism so much easier, with the participants appreciating the work that has been done in the past. In the ESC and XR, meanwhile, the dreams of a more thought-through institutional structure are not yet realised, with D (the ESC) asserting that they need better decision-making procedures to be able to devise more concrete aims. Second, all three groups share the perspective that having a stable group of people provides a strong foundation for creating bigger changes. In Suderbyn, the lack thereof is partly created by the centrality of the volunteering programme, where the same cycle of teaching and learning repeats every year. Similarly, the XR participants assert that the coming and going of members and the lack of commitment makes it hard to build a solid movement. In the ESC, the overlap between people's student, social, and activist life is seen as a strength of the group, making it easier to be engaged in the collective than if these were all separate.

4.3.2.3. Link to strategies: enacting change

From their experience of how much dominant societal systems limit their ability to affect change, the participants raise the need to focus on building supportive structures inside of their groups. This theme is echoed in the way Suderbyn and the ESC focus on enacting change, and raise the importance of deconstructing their own thinking patterns to raise awareness beyond the group. With XR mostly focusing on reaching as many people in society as possible, this theme does not appear to influence their strategy.

4.3.3. Theme 3: People's individual experiences and perspectives hinder the creation of collective agency

To oppose the pervasive and constricting structures the groups experience, they emphasise the need to work together in groups and with large parts of society to achieve change. However, getting people together is hard when everyone starts from a different position.

4.3.3.1.   Agency is only real if it is truly collective

The participants draw strength and experience a hint of agency through working on their respective aims with others. In Suderbyn and the ESC, this comes through being in their organisation (as illustrated in figure 4), while for the ESC and XR, support also comes from knowing other groups are working on similar projects. F from the ESC illustrates how being part of a group provides each member with a sense of agency: the people from the collective are "holding hands and being strong together and turning inwards to see [that they] have the strength to resist this". Based on agency mainly being meaningful at a collective level, participants from all three groups describe the importance of collaborating with other groups to bring about change. Importantly, across the groups, the view prevails that for real change to be possible, they would need the full support of society behind them. This is apparent in J from XR's drawing (Figure 1), or K from Suderbyn's assertion that "it needs to be something that we all look at it together". However, in contrast to how collective the participants imagine change-making to be, currently, their groups are rather isolated and fighting against a prevailing resistance in society. As such, the XR participants problematise the fact that in Malmö, activist groups are often unwilling to collaborate with others. In the ESC, the participants also share the sense that they are not connected enough with other groups working towards similar goals.

Figure 4: Drawing by F, ESC focus group. F has drawn the people in the collective and the wider social bubble in the middle in colours, with the symbols floating over their heads representing the values and ideas they share with each other. They face inward, drawing support from each other. Meanwhile, the people in society who are not politically active are drawn in grey, disconnected from each other.

4.3.3.2. Everyone experiences structures and agency differently

The ESC and XR participants assert that the fact that individuals have differing opportunities and limitations hinders the creation of a mass movement in which the collective agency that the participants desire could be realised. People's particular privileges lead large parts of Swedish society to be unwilling to fight for change. F's statement that "not everybody wants to think about and struggle against [the system] because it means giving up things" illustrates the sense of not being supported by most people in society. Even among people wanting to work towards sustainability, privilege makes options accessible to some and inaccessible to others. A perspective on environmental action that emphasises consumption changes is thereby, in XR, described as a privileged position. A, as such, exclaims that people choosing not to fly is "a privileged sacrifice because some people would never even dream about taking a plane somewhere". From their individual positions, participants across groups find it easier to feel agency to make smaller, personal changes than to effect macro-level change (ESC: B; Suderbyn: P, S; XR: C). P illustrates this in their

drawing in figure 5, where they have placed themself and their daughters in the centre, emphasising that they focus on what they can reach from this position. However, in the ESC and XR groups, people also assert that such individual changes can distract from the more collective action that is needed.
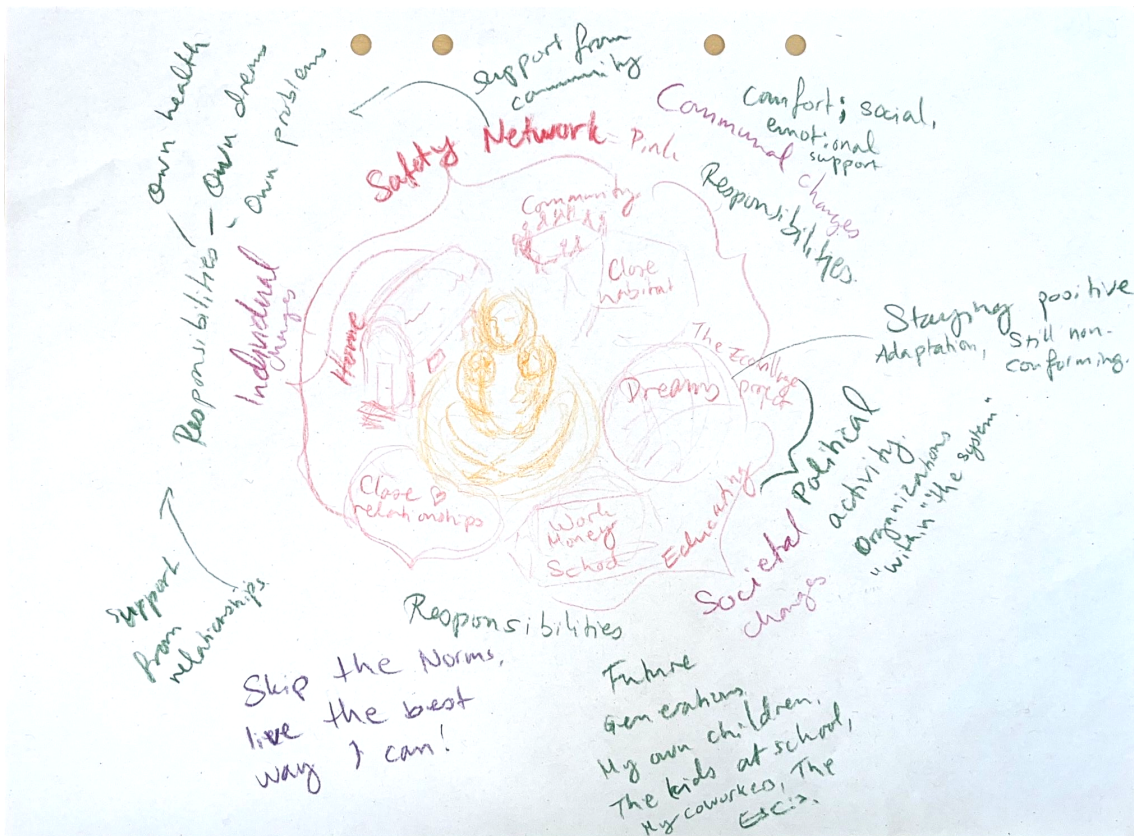
Figure 5: Drawing by P, Suderbyn group. P and their daughters are drawn in yellow in the centre, surrounded by different areas of life (e.g. close relationships, the community, school) which provide support and entail responsibilities. In purple, P has written a principle for themself: Skip the norms, live the best way I can.

4.3.3.3. Link to strategies: influencing others

The conclusion that change is only possible if a large part of society acts together supports the choice in all three groups to emphasise raising awareness as a strategy. This strategy is much more dominated by the focus on reaching beyond the group in the ESC and XR than in Suderbyn, which is reflected in the lack of discussion on constraints to working collectively in Suderbyn.

5. Discussion

5.1. Foundations of transformative action: guided by elusive aims and strategies

The groups' understanding of the process of societal transformation, which is the focus of the first research question, partly reflects what Göpel (2016) and Wright (2010) see as the basis for success of strategies for radical change. However, the lack of clear definitions of aims and strategies raises questions about the groups' potential to bring about the targeted transformation of structures.

In all three groups, there is a strong sense of what is wrong with the current organisation of society, and the participants stress the importance of raising awareness on these issues. They, therefore, fulfil the first aspect of 'repurposing' that Göpel (2016) emphasises: pointing out the flaws in predominant arguments. This is also known to be a key task for the framing of a social movement to fulfil, namely the diagnosis "of some event or aspect of social life [...] as problematic and in need of repair or change" (Snow et al., 2018, p. 396). For this step to be successful when it comes to pervasive systems such as capitalism, Fisher (2009, p. 20) asserts that it needs to show how the dominant system is "in some way inconsistent or untenable." Some participants' statements do just that, they describe how current societal structures result in unjust and unsustainable realities which are in few people's interest. The foundation for creating a paradigm shift is thereby laid. However, when it comes to the second part of repurposing, that of providing an alternative (Göpel, 2016), or prognosis in the language of social movement framing (Snow et al., 2018), the groups vary in the extent to which they fulfil this step. Only Suderbyn has an actualised alternative to contrast with predominant social patterns, while the ESC promotes a society based on socialist principles, and XR is least explicit about what the alternative to the current system could look like. Therefore, the groups' visions of what could replace current societal structures are partly still in the defining stage, meaning that they do not have a clear goal to work towards.

The groups' strategies thereby at least partially follow how Göpel (2016) envisions a mindshift to occur, but only reflect one of the strategies described by Wright (2010). The interstitial strategy, which echoes the third aspect of repurposing for Göpel (2016), is followed by two out of the three groups. Suderbyn enacts a different paradigm in practice, and the ESC aims to do so through a more dispersed set of activities. However, while in the ESC, this strategy intends to create the foundations for wider change to occur, the lack of such an intention in Suderbyn indicates that the enacting may not occur as a strategy for transformation but in its own right. Meanwhile, neither of the other two strategies presented by Wright (2010) are reflected strongly in the groups. Finally, the strategy that is most present across all groups is that of influencing others, which ranges from community life

showing different beliefs and values to people (Suderbyn) to people's minds being changed as the wider discourse in society evolves (ESC and XR). This strategy directly mirrors one way the collectives in previous research envision change to come about (Apostol, 2015; Doblinger & Soppe, 2013; Maldonado-Villalpando et al., 2022; Nairn, 2019; Poland et al., 2019; Ritvala & Salmi, 2010; Rooney & Vallianatos, 2022; Smith et al., 2021; Westoby & Lyons, 2017). Similar to these studies, the participants in this study barely describe how the process of raising awareness may occur, which is an issue if Göpel (2016) and Wright's (2010) definition of transformative change relying on targeted action is taken seriously.

The participants across the groups share a desire to make a difference, which can be seen in the importance attributed to the achievement of aims, the presence of the strategies of enacting change and influencing others, and the resistance the participants experience across the themes concerning their perceived inability to effect certain changes. The groups' intentions thereby entail the two components of what Archer (2003, p. 6) defines as an agent's project, namely a desired end (the ESC: the end of capitalism, Suderbyn: radical sustainability, XR: climate justice) and a semi-defined "course of action" that is plausible to lead to it. However, the lack of clarity on both the end and the course of action makes it questionable to what extent the groups are acting in a deliberate and directed manner. This conflicts with Göpel (2016) and Wright's (2010) assertion that for transformative change to occur, people need to act consciously and deliberately to bring it about, and the centrality for Göpel of having a clear ideological goal. In this obvious difficulty of defining what their group tries to achieve, the lack of predetermined goals that Bauman (2000) sees as an essential part of modernity is reflected. In Bauman's (2000) thinking, the lack of a collective, societal understanding of what goals are meaningful in modernity keeps people stuck in trying to set goals without being able to progress to the question of means. That the groups described here lack a common understanding of their aim and a concrete strategy for achieving this aim, therefore may be in part the result of the predominant functioning of modern society.

5.2. Underlying assumptions: limited agency in relation to controlling structures

The groups' discussions provide insights into their understanding of their relationship with the structures they target, painting a nuanced picture in response to research questions two and three. The participants seem almost painfully aware of the way they are influenced and constricted by society, which reflects the consciousness of agents that Archer (2003) affirms. However, their conscious perception of structural and cultural conditions largely leads participants to reject true agency over these conditions, which more so mirrors Bourdieu's understanding of agents not having an active influence on social reality (Callaghan, 2005).

As predicted, both theorists' perspectives on how agents relate to structures are reflected. First, the way the participants describe structures as something that is out there (theme 1), which they see pervading society (themes 1 and 3) and as having practical impacts (theme 2) echoes Archer's (1995) assertion that cultural and structural properties predate social agency. Simultaneously, in the entangled feeling that participants describe in themes 1 and 2, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the controlling influence of doxa, field, and habitus is also discernible (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019; Kabele, 2016). This is especially apparent in the participants' discussion of norms that they act according to, but which are in direct opposition to the aims of their projects. This dynamic indicates that the participants may be at a disjuncture between an old and new habitus or field, which Decoteau (2016) argues to be the basis for agents bringing about social change within Bourdieu's thinking.

While the participants openly portray their perceptions of different types of constraints, from cultural (e.g. prevailing individualists mindsets) to structural (e.g. financial barriers to enacting alternatives), they only describe conscious agency in relation to tangible constraints. The conclusions reached in themes 1 and 3 indicate that it is difficult for the participants to apply agency to devise concrete strategies when they only understand the influence of structural and cultural properties in the abstract. In comparison, in theme 2, where structures and culture operate at the level of the group, such as in their own organisational structures, the groups can come up with approaches to strengthen their ability to effect change. This is at odds with the argument that the type of transformation required to respond to climate change and interlinked socio-environmental crisis is situated in macro-level structures (McPhearson et al., 2021). If groups' experience of structural influence, as it appears in this research, leads them to surrender from the fight to effect structural change, their attempts are unlikely to bring about the desired transformation.

It, therefore, appears that the participants' acute awareness of cultural and ideological barriers to change in their societies only partly helps them figure out ways to respond to these barriers. The participants' experience of the prevailing dispositions around them being a huge barrier to change echoes both Archer's (2003) description of individuals' particular privileges and Bourdieu's (1998) assertion that habitus and doxa make people act through intangible control. In response to these overwhelming cultural constraints, the participants attempt to leverage the power of collective action by reaching out to wider society. However, doubts about whether such a cultural shift is possible and whether it can be brought about by the actions of their small groups simultaneously dominate. This coexistence of active attempts to address cultural constraints with the perception that these constraints cannot be grasped creates a complicated experience of agency that the participants struggle to navigate.

5.3. Explaining the experience of constrained agency: current ideological systems

The dynamics described above can partly be explained by analysing the particular structures of society that the participants exist in. As such, the perception of structures being eluding and impossible to change in any fundamental way that is presented in theme 1 can be understood as a logical consequence of neoliberal thought and capitalist structures. Through the way neoliberalism and capitalism inhabit every aspect of modern society, the very possibility of imagining life without them is, if not removed, then made incredibly hard (Bauman, 2000; Brown, 2015; Davies, 2016; Fisher, 2009). Fisher (2009, p. 6) describes this through his concept of 'capitalist realism', namely "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it." This reflects the feeling described by the participants in this research that it is hard to even imagine creating structures that don't reflect current societal systems. Their conclusion that they cannot effect meaningful change on such structures further echoes what Bauman describes through his concept of a 'liquid' modernity. In such a liquid, meaning fluid, shape-shifting, society, "there are no buildings where the control desks of the system are lodged and which could be stormed and captured by the revolutionaries" (Bauman, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, the participants' perception of the target of their engagement being impossible to grasp, constantly slipping through their fingers or never being close enough to hold to begin with, is likely to be at least partly a symptom of the particular societies that they exist in.

Furthermore, the struggle between individualist and collective thinking that the participants describe in theme 3 reflects what Bauman (Bauman, 2000, pp. 5–6) terms the liquidisation of "the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions". He further asserts that it is now entirely "up to the individual to find out what [they are] capable of doing, to stretch that capacity to the utmost, and to pick the ends to which that capacity could be applied best" (Bauman, 2000, p. 62). Thereby, the struggle which the groups find themselves in of negotiating between the ease of focusing on their own, personal actions and the logical need for working in collectives mirrors Bauman's analysis of contemporary society. Across the three groups, it is visible that participants look for ways to be meaningfully involved in a fight for change, but this search is complicated by how much more common and easy it is to do so in an individualised way.

5.4. Limitations

In trying to cover a range of topics, from the groups' aims, over the change they desire, to the role they see their collective to play in bringing about this change, I sacrificed gathering details on some

topics that were brought up. The choice to focus on a particular aspect of societal transformation would have allowed me to gather more detailed responses on this aspect. However, I thought it necessary to stay broad in my questions to be able to cover as much of the range of constraints that the participants encounter as possible. Furthermore, the cases I chose are far from a perfect representation of the different kinds of strategies that civil society groups can employ. There is also quite a lot of overlap in the activities of the ESC and XR, while Suderbyn is noticeably different. If I were to expand on this research, I would aim to gather data from groups explicitly working with or putting pressure on governments, and perhaps balance out the sample by bringing in more ecovillages. Finally, in the design of the focus groups, a range of improvements could be made, for instance regarding the presence of a note-taker and the drawing exercise instructions. More importantly, it would be beneficial to conduct more than one round of discussions with each group. This would allow for the answers to the descriptive questions to inform the design of consecutive discussions, making it possible to draw out more particular dynamics of people's experiences of structures and agency.

6.   Concluding remarks and opportunities for further research

Starting from the premise that climate change requires rapid and pervasive changes in societal structures, the findings of this research provide a somewhat sobering insight into the beliefs that the people in the three organisations hold about their ability to bring such changes about.

Across the groups, when it comes to aims and strategies, the predominating dynamic is one of struggling to create clear visions of the process of change and partly resigning from this endeavour. Still, in all three groups, the goals and strategies that are present are partly in line with the prescriptions for transformative change in current societies that Maja Göpel (2016) and Erik Olin Wright (2010) propose. They criticise existing systems, come up with somewhat fleshed-out alternatives, spread these critiques and alternatives beyond their group, and focus on enacting the alternatives on a small scale. Still, because no specific direction is stated in which their activities are meant to lead, nor a precise image of how desirable outcomes may be achieved, it is questionable how much deliberate transformational change can be the result of these groups' activities.

It further appears that the experience of cultural and structural constraints has mostly erased a sense of agency that can be leveraged consciously against structures. Despite being actively involved in organisations that embody a radical approach for responding to environmental crises, the participants share the feeling that whatever impact they can have is extremely limited. This has led one of the groups, Suderbyn, to focus on practical, personal changes, while the participants in the other two groups, the ESC and XR, pursue the de facto aim of systemic change without being convinced that they can achieve it. The rejection of agency and focus on small, practical changes seems to be an attempt to resolve the friction that the participants experience between their aims for change, and what they believe to be possible based on their experience of dominant systems.

Further research would do well to investigate this dynamic between the desire for change and the difficulty of believing in one's agency to bring about such change in other contexts, perhaps outside of Sweden and Western Europe. This would contribute to an understanding of how people's fights for change and experiences of agency compare across different cultural conditions. In any context, it would further be interesting to attempt to assess organisations' impact on their surroundings and contrast this with the way their members perceive their efficacy. Finally, this research raises the question of whether it is necessary for groups to work deliberately towards a concrete goal for societal structures to evolve towards a more just and sustainable equilibrium - or whether other factors, such as commitment to the cause are more important.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Example of consent forms from each focus group

Appendix 1a: Consent form from the ESC focus group

Consent Form

Name of the interviewer: Lisa Conzemius
Contact information: Phone: +46793577435; Email: lisaconzemius@icloud.com

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Purpose of the study

I have asked you to participate in a focus group as part of a master thesis which I carry out in the last term of the International Master Program in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science at the University of Lund in Sweden.

The group discussion will be focused on how you, as a member of the Ecosocialist Collective, understand your role in bringing about a more just and sustainable society, what obstacles and support you encounter along the way, and how you relate to these. All information is confidential and will not be revealed or associated with your name unless you agree to it. If you do not want to answer a question you do not need to, and you can leave the room at any moment.

Do you consent that I can use your answers for my thesis project?

☑ Yes   ☐ No

Your answers may be associated with your name or kept anonymous, depending on your preference. Please tick one of the following boxes:

☐ I accept to be identified by name in the results of this research.
☑ I accept to participate in the focus group on the condition that I will not be identified by name in any of the results of this research.

I want to record the group discussion to transcribe the conversation and analyse the results. The file will be stored safely and deleted latest when I hand in the thesis (May 8th 2023).

Do you consent to having the discussion be recorded?

☑ Yes   ☐ No

_____   _____

Printed name of participant   Signature of participant

ECOSOCIALIST COLLECTIVE LUND   *22/03/2023*
Organisation and position of   Date
participant (if you agree to it
being noted down and used)

Appendix 1b: Consent form from the Suderbyn focus group

Consent Form

Name of the interviewer: Lisa Conzemius
Contact information: Phone: +46793577435; Email: lisaconzemius@icloud.com

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Purpose of the study

I have asked you to participate in a focus group as part of a master thesis which I carry out in the last term of the International Master Program in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science at the University of Lund in Sweden.

The group discussion will be focused on how you, as an inhabitant of Suderbyn, understand your role in bringing about a more just and sustainable society, what obstacles and support you encounter along the way, and how you relate to these. All information is confidential and will not be revealed or associated with your name unless you agree to it. If you do not want to answer a question you do not need to, and you can leave the room at any moment.

Do you consent that I can use your answers for my thesis project?

☒ Yes   ☐ No

Your answers may be associated with your name or kept anonymous, depending on your preference. Please tick one of the following boxes:

☒ I accept to be identified by name in the results of this research.
☐ I accept to participate in the focus group on the condition that I will not be identified by name in any of the results of this research.

I want to record the group discussion to transcribe the conversation and analyse the results. The file will be stored safely and deleted latest when I hand in the thesis (May 8th 2023).

Do you consent to having the discussion be recorded?

☒ Yes   ☐ No

MATTEO ZAMPATTI
Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

SUDERBYN
PERMANENT RESIDENT
Organisation and position of
participant (if you agree to it
being noted down and used)

26-01-2022
Date

Appendix 1c: Consent form from the XR focus group

Consent Form

Name of the interviewer: Lisa Conzemius
Contact information: Phone: +46793577435; Email: lisaconzemius@icloud.com

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Purpose of the study

I have asked you to participate in a focus group as part of a master thesis which I carry out in the last term of the International Master Program in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science at the University of Lund in Sweden.

The group discussion will be focused on how you, as a member of XR Malmö, understand your role in bringing about a more just and sustainable society, what obstacles and support you encounter along the way, and how you relate to these. All information is confidential and will not be revealed or associated with your name unless you agree to it. If you do not want to answer a question you do not need to, and you can leave the room at any moment.

Do you consent that I can use your answers for my thesis project?

☒ Yes   ☐ No

Your answers may be associated with your name or kept anonymous, depending on your preference. Please tick one of the following boxes:

☐ I accept to be identified by name in the results of this research.
☒ I accept to participate in the focus group on the condition that I will not be identified by name in any of the results of this research.

I want to record the group discussion to transcribe the conversation and analyse the results. The file will be stored safely and deleted latest when I hand in the thesis (May 8th 2023).

Do you consent to having the discussion be recorded?

☒ Yes   ☐ No

███████████   ███████████
Printed name of participant   Signature of participant

XR Malmö   13/3/23
Organisation and position of   Date
participant (if you agree to it
being noted down and used)

Appendix 2: Excerpts of transcripts of focus group discussions

Appendix 2a: ESC discussion in answer to question 1.2 from the discussion guide.

In italics: Notes on non-verbal communication. facial expressions, body movements,...

* I am using the term 'general agreement' if everyone in the group agreed on something silently, through facial expressions, nodding.

Lisa Conzemius 10:55

1.2. So the next question is, and I think some of you already touched on this to an extent but what do you see as the aim or aims of the collective and now it's whoever wants to talk can talk, not going in a round. Yeah.

[pause]

[H exhales loudly]

E 11:27

So one of my initial thoughts what was, what H already mentioned, like creating a space that we,… that implements what we criticize in the whole system and to criticize the system. So to raise awareness on what's going, not going well and then implementing it in a really small scale.

B agrees nodding – goes into laughter

[pause]

B 11:59

I think it would be like, for me, like two aims at the same time, like sort of, just by existing is already like an aim. Just being there like the collective and doing the things that it does and creating discussion around topics and doing movie screenings doing,… just having the spaces to share our thoughts. I think that's already, like, doing so much on,… creating a vision or a utopia of how things could really be and how they should be like how people relate to each other at the same time. But also all the other things like I don't think our collective can do, like big global changes, of course, so I agree with that like just our tiny demonstrations are actions that raise awareness, which just target specific issues. That's like, already very important. And yeah, I think it's also nice to just it's always like, open in the sense that of course, we target capitalists and all the bad things about the system we live in, but also like it's not only about climate change, environmental problems, it's also about like social problems and and we are always keen to join this group or this group or this demonstration or this other struggle, and I think that's also very nice thing as an aim. Yeah.

People don't seem to understand/follow yeat what he is trying to say

D 13:35

So would you say that can be summed up as consciousness raising?

B 13:41

One of the things, yeah. I guess it would depend on everything that we do, right, because if I think most of the things we do is consciousness raising but if we were to do another thing, maybe we will target another,… I don't know. Yeah,… I have to think.

No further reactions, maybe confusion

H 14:23

I mean, that's maybe like a bit vague, but I still see like this distinction between like reform and revolution in a way and I also like really like the idea of like, there's also this distinction between like revolution with a capital R and revolution with a small r and like this idea about like, like revolution with a capital r is maybe like okay, that's like one all-encompassing revolution which is like the same for everyone. And then this can be like this seems like such a like big aim that is so hard to achieve. And like obviously I don't like see our group as like the leading global force for like the global revolution, but then it's the I still think it's like essential that we maybe do not try to like change a particular thing in society and then it will work out or like, just there's just like a little thing which needs to be fixed with a system and then it would work out but that there's actually like, need for like a substantive change. And I think this can even be like achieved this like, smaller steps. And I at least hope that we kind of,… umm that we're kind of going this steps towards more like a, like a small revolution for like our like local context and with creating spaces that are like, entirely outside capitalism, and that are not monetized and like at the same time, like disrupting things within the capitalist system. Umm, yeah.

Understanding nods from F and B

F 15:46

Can I just say something? Yeah, I, I definitely agree with that. And I also think that what you said earlier, with the already living like parts of a different world or like a different society also plays into that in that like I see a big part of the collective in educating ourselves, honestly, and finding like in theory, but also in practice, like making the things that we stand for more precise, and enact them. And like be able to defend them with words as well, or in arguments, and I think to make that, yeah.

Attentive listening of the others, no obvious, clear reactions

This is like super abstract, but I think what I'm thinking about is, for instance, this thing of okay it's like somewhere about climate action, maybe but this is really an intersectional problem. And there's so many aspects that we're trying to tackle here and so many factors that we can, like, that are part of this. And so like the ways that we communicate, the ways that we organize, the ways like like skill sharings, maybe, or learning of like how to facilitate groups, or like how to have awareness structure or things like that, for me are also like part of these small revolutions, and these small enactments and I think yeah, that's like this way of okay, how, how are we with each other and how do we organize?

General agreement through nodding

It feels like such a tedious work, but in the end, if I look at it, that's most of the time that I put in goes, like, is for these topics. And I think that's also important because that's in the end how like, we can also learn to like brings these ideals to a wider community or society. And then yeah, the outreach, I guess, as well, but I honestly don't see us doing that so much.

N 18:40

I really relate to that. I was thinking that yeah, both what we do like as an counter hegemonic as a way to share the skills and create the capacity for organizing maybe like since we're in Lund, maybe for just like, few years, then each one of us arries it with them and maybe share it somewhere else. And so yeah.

General agreement

D 19:07

Like activist baby school

[laughter from H and others]

Lisa Conzemius 19:12

2.1. so then, I would like to kind of broaden the scope a bit. And I think you've again, already touched on maybe some of this, but what aspects of the way society is right now, would you like to change and in what way and you can just start with one thing it doesn't have to be the complete picture.

D 19:31

Could I say one thing more about aims?

Lisa Conzemius 19:34

Yeah!

D 19:37

One thing is, while I love having this conversation is that I don't think we have a very clear idea of our aims as a collective. Yeah. And it mostly works because we do generally share them. But for example, this question of are we doing consciousness raising, like of who? are we doing direct action or disruption? Are we like a revolutionary like capital R revolutionary group, are we like trying to consciousness raise around that and prepare for the future or not? And it sometimes leads to like little conflict in meetings where people are like huh? because we have never actually sat down and been like, this is what we're gonna do. I feel like that's important to note for your research

General agreement, laughter

H 20:19

you should write about this

D 20:22

But also maybe this is just me and I'm not paying attention.

F 20:25

No I agree

B 20:25

I also agree

N 20:26

I think that's also cool about it, we can be creative with it and like see where it goes. We don't have to decide.

H 20:36

Yeah, it shows that we can like combine like, I don't know, maybe like different perspectives and different standpoints and we can still like and be active in the same struggle and like kind of work together and think without maybe having exactly the same idea how this is going to work out.

D 20:54

Yeah we've got anarchists and commies.

F 20:57

Yeah, but also sometimes it's difficult for like, knowing what to prioritize. And, I mean, there are repeated attempts of like speaking about these aims more explicitly, that are more or less successful, and I think that will like keep going on as well.

Lisa Conzemius 21:24

Somebody else feel like saying something to the first question?

2.1. Otherwise, yeah, just repeating the question of what aspects of the way society is right now do you want to, would you like to change and in what way and you can start anywhere, at any scale?

Appendix 2b: Suderbyn discussion in answer to question 2.1. of the discussion guide.

Lisa Conzemius 20:20

I think there's already like some things about,... well I'm understanding that there's kind of different aims maybe what was at the beginning and what it feels like now, but then also some issues with this aim of it being a learning place and what that does to the long term. I think timewise it would be great if we could move on and I hope that there's still space for some of those thoughts, because I think they're gonna come back up. Yeah. So the next,... from this like you described aims of, Okay, moving away from consumerism, learning about a different way of being also like a different way of doing things.

2.1. So then that leads me to the question of what is it that you personally would like to change about how we do things in society? What are your thoughts? That's what I'm gonna,... (nervous laughter)

R 21:15

I can start, I haven't spoke for the last question. I would like people to remove fences, I mean, that we like to make very clear where barriers and where my property is. Where my house is, my personal house and then I would love to see people be more trusted and therefore benevolent to each other. That they would, they would be more you know, like, why do we have everyone has like small gardens? Why don't we have a big garden altogether? Why do we need to everyone cook his little meal at the evening after work and why can't we, you know, twoo three people that that cook for the 50 neighbors that are around what can we like? Yeah, this like break apart of this individualism that is very much present in our society. Well, why do we have to take everyone the same different car and we see like hundreds of cars passing by the road and like I always, always see like one person sitting and driving. What? Like, is it so difficult to share a car? Is it so difficult to,...Yeah, I don't know. To ask? Hey, can I come with you in the car, is it fine? Hey, would you like to cook together next week? But in a more radical way I think like not only to people but like more of this, ehm, local neighborhood activities, which [?] thinks differently would build up communities and in the time resilience as well.

P 23:12

I see,... I mean, everybody needs to shift from where they're at and to a more. I mean, we're at very different places and very different like phases in our lives. And I think that the shift is very different from in different phases in life where I can't do very, or I probably can do big adjustments in some way. But in others, I can do less like there are,... I still operate in a society where I need to provide for my daughters and I don't want them to to work themselves in that sense, like we did 100 years ago when the kids had to start live working at the age of 10 or even earlier. So it's kind of like I can make it, I can make a better shift, like downsize where I live and live in a community. That's my aim and what I can do and that's like, looking at your situation and see what can I do to to, to improve? But then there's like, yeah, there are this dissonance between what I can do as an individual and feeling that whatever you do as an individual is never enough. And that you have to push politically to to make the major changes and consumerism like just boycotting things is not so helpful. It has to come through a politics that that changes consumers and changes the laws around it.

Lisa Conzemius 25:04

I think so you're saying that you yourself may be focused on less consumption and like but then you're also saying these individual level changes arre not enough. And I'm wondering if you have a specific idea of not enough for what? like what's the aim that should be achieved that's not being achieved then?

P 25:26

I mean, to,... I mean, me shifting to an electric car or something like that would be that's something that many people think that Okay, that's enough, now I've done my part or I have done my recycling, pat on my shoulder and that's, that's good enough for me. But on one hand, that's really just a little drop in the ocean. It doesn't really help so much the shift it does. It has to be done as well, but it's not enough. So the we have to make, like, be active, or activists in a political sense to to shift the mindset and I'm also like, yeah, relearn, re-teach.

Lisa Conzemius 26:25

Yeah.

M 26:25

Yeah. For me what, many things that I would like to see a shift and a change,... energy consumption and the way we treat energy, emotional awareness of people like how we interact with each other, it's also about this individualism. And yeah, I see also a problem in the information for example, for example, thinking that taking an electric car is a sustainable choice, because it's not, looking at the data and how you need, how many, how much energy, how much consumption and how much stuff you extract from the earth to build an electric car for the battery and so on. And then when the bacteria are gone, you just throw away the whole thing. So for example, this is way less sustainable than an old petrol car, which also is not sustainable, but also this understanding of the information and knowledge of all these things, which I totally feel I don't have and I also feel, sometimes a push to okay, I should learn more, read more, listen to more podcasts or more things to get more of this knowledge, but then also, there's so many information and all contrasting each other. So it's also difficult to get the information in the sense,.. or maybe I didn't search enough yet for myself. but yeah, like awareness of what really sustainability is and and also,... what another shift that I feel is important and then for like, at least for myself or the group of people I'm interacting with is going towards degrowth of again, energy consumption or food, consumerism or, also, in terms of work, for example, not overwork ourselves and not apply this schedule of work that are totally mad for me. Like also when,... I was saying before, I was starting looking for a job in an office and doing interview and things and I did eight hours a day, five days a week, which feels totally normal for many people. To me now, I cannot do that. I will never go doing that. And I'm privileged between that as well because maybe I don't need that amount of money to maintain a family or to pay the rent for a house and so on which is allowed also to the facts of living in a community. But still, I feel it feels so far from what I feel like I would aspire for anybody in a sense. And also this idea of that yeah, shifting also from this idea of like a work need to be something painful or something that you don't want to do or something hard or something that you need to complain about. You need to wake up in the morning "Oh, I need to go to work. I don't want to go". and of course there is always going to be this

feeling after you do certain things for a long time and so on. But yeah, like a shift of this mindset as well. If you don't like to do something just don't do it. There will be somebody else doing it or if there is something that is a burden for many people, maybe you can do it together and go over it or ,...Yeah, going away from this individualism. From there, yeah, of course many more.

R 30:03

There was one thing that you were saying like it's about electric cars, which I don't need to talk about that but like, more this, you know like, you know in the main society there is this, I think, strong believe that, you know, with technology we can achieve more sustainability, whatever that means. And here we we have a biogas car but I think the most important is that we have a very low level, a low number of cars for so many people. And that that's how I see whatever you can call degrowth of rethinking aspects of our society where we don't need to have so much objects so much, cars or house, even this house is not a fantastic house. It's not like the high tech of the most isolated house at all.

M 31:05

snickering

R 31:05

But I still believe that it has we are we are consuming much less energy or resources to live here in this house because we are so many in it

K 31:20

I would like to remind people that if everybody in the world is Suderbynean, week 20 we already consumed all the all the resources a planet can offer,... week 20. So, yeah, degrowth is more than that. And if there's a billion things that I would like to change, but if I had to choose one, it would be politicians that understand that we are in the same boat and we have different interests, of course, because we're not going to get hit as the same by the challenges that are ahead, but that understand there are universal, like global challenges. And that listen to scientists and start organizing extremely quickly political and social structures to manage the degrowth and not to have you it on our all faiths without us being propelled into having capitalistic structures that are absolutely not able to to to handle a degrowth situation that is going to happen anyway, or another.

Lisa Conzemius 31:37

So I feel like a lot of different levels of change are brought up like more the more collective ownership less individualism, less consumption and then also now like more political changes, I suppose.

2.2. And then based on these changes that you would like to see where do you see what do you see as your role as a member of Serbian and bringing about some of them?

R 33:13

what is the question?

Lisa Conzemius 33:14

2.2. What do you see as your role as a member of Suderbyn in bringing about these changes or some of these changes?

K 33:25

Personally, none. I stopped fooling myself that I can change anything. I'm just here to be able to say to my nieces whene everything goes up to shit, that I tried my best not to participate too much. That's it.

Appendix 2c: XR discussion in answer to question 2.3. of the discussion guide.

In italics: Notes on non-verbal communication. facial expressions, body movements,...

* I am using the term 'general agreement' if everyone in the group agreed on something silently, through facial expressions, nodding.

Lisa Conzemius 41:19

2.3. So I think my next question would be, what obstacles you encountered and like what barriers,when you're trying to like, be it now like, open people's eyes and get more attention to issues that you care about or even you want to get certain policy change, you want governments to act. So what are the obstacles that you experience? And I think what you've just talked about is already an obstacle. It's like, it's not a coherent, like a movement that stays stable and you can kind of count on it and it's also difficult to stay engaged. But yeah, I'm wondering if you can think of some other things that you feel make it harder for you to stay in this activism and also to create the changes that you would like to see.

C 42:05

I think the main one is that we are all humans, you know? Shit,... I don't know, so many obstacles.

A, L, T agree with laughters

Lisa Conzemius 42:20

What do you mean with that?

C 42:22

I mean, that I really like to see people doing stuff. I get excited. like big actions I know that I I talked about the definition of activism blah blah. But for me it's like it's really nice, I almost cried,.. Yes, I swear, that I go to this big actions and I am like, 'this is so nice this is,..' so in my head it's important to have a people for me, you know like around and really active. And in a constant. But this is impossible because we are all humans, of course people are not gonna stay forever, of course everyone has different schedules, different lives, ways of living and it's impossible. So for me personally, not talking as a group and organising actions, it's hard to see people leaving and people not staying. That's so sad,right? Yeah, that's sad.

A 43:32

I think with what,... we had a lot of meetings I feel like in autumn and like trying to evaluate ourselves and the obstacle that we will never be as good as we want to be like we will always make mistakes and we'll have actions that will eventually harm people, individuals, society groups. Like we're not as inclusive as we wish to be and like being aware of that makes you almost like frozen. because it's like, I don't want to make anything worse, so then maybe it's better not to do something but so that's also bad. This is my biggest obstacle.

C and L agree

L 44:11

A lot of complexity and cognitive load.

C 44:17

And I think what you said there,... oh you said something,... can you repeat it?

A 44:28

that we're gonna harm people?

Lisa Conzemius 44:30

not as inclusive?

C 44:32

Yeah, yeah. So yeah, the thing then I, I'm always comparing in my head like, of course, I can't, but I'm always comparing in my head like how activism work works here in Europe in general I can say, and I'm from Brazil, so. And I talk about this with my dad because my dad is really active also. And the other day, I remember that I laughed that we were having like this demo or action and asking for a cut in the emissions of fossil fuels and everything bla bla bla. And you see the difference of demanding here in Europe and here in Brazil, you know, it's so sad. So I feel sometimes, I'm here and of course, what we are asking for, what we are demanding it's important, but in a huge scale,... when you talk about priviliege, people in the global south, in Brazil, in my country,... like they just need food you know? Like it's it's a completely discrepancy. So how we are here demanding for something that it's important and have also impact on the global south. But it's not the main the root of the thing you know? I don't know if it makes sense.

L and A agree

Lisa Conzemius 45:55

So that makes it feel less meaningful?

C 45:57

Yeah, kind of for me. I know it's important and I know the importance but I feel that how I'm here like asking for this when people have nothing. It's the difference is is too big. And, and I know we try to be inclusive we try to bring the other perspectives and we try, we try, but,... yeah.

Lisa Conzemius 46:40

Is there anything,...? Like now, this has been a lot about kind of what makes it difficult to even be in the movement. So you have like conflicting schedules, like you said, like we're all human and so you, it's difficult to just stay in it. If you don't see other people showing up as often, then also the need like we want to do it perfectly. And then you just talked about, well, sometimes the things we're asking for feel not so meaningful in comparison to all the other shit that's going on that feels almost like more essential.

2.3. And then I'm still wondering if we take a demand like, Okay, we've asked the government to cut emissions or we demand this, like, is there anything that you feel like from what outside the movement that's kind of pushing against you? I don't know if this was clear in any way.

A 47:37

I mean, definitely three days ago, they decided on the new terrorist law. I mean, definitely, the government is like shrinking the space for it.

General agreement

I mean, I don't think, I hope no one of us is going to be trialed for that but we'll see.

L 48:00

I think like the social norms that we have, are like yeah, not very much inviting of important issues. But rather exclusive. You know, you'll notice when you talk to friends and family that this is, these are definitely not going to come up in conversations and,.... It's like, yeah, cognitive Load is a band so to speak. And it is quite difficult to reach people I think via conversation. It is like one always has to have some kind of event like disaster or forest fire, something to talk about to have like a justification to talk about important stuff about climate change. Without that, it's like,they just turn off

Lisa Conzemius 49:53

Where do you see the norm in that? you said social norms.

L 49:59

Well I see that as part of the social norm, kind of like a protocol to follow almost, it feels like that when you see it so repeatedly.

Lisa Conzemius 50:24

Alright, I think I would take a break here if that's okay.

2.4. But yeah, so then the next thing I would like to think about is, what do you feel like? Oh my god, okay, I have to get back into my mode of thinking. What factors support you in being in activism, in trying to like even though there's all these issues that make it hard to stay engaged, kind of and to keep trying to ask for change? What do you feel supported by?

L 51:23

The group. Like fun, interesting people, interesting conversations. And the projects we work on, making banners, doing actions, stuff like that. The engagement.

T agrees nodding

Appendix 3: Discussion guide for focus groups

- *Introduction to the group*

  - *Aim of the study*

    Thank you for being here today, I appreciate it a lot! You are one of three focus groups I am holding for my master's thesis. I study sustainability science, and in my research, I look at how different groups try to address climate change and other environmental crises. I am super intrigued to hear all of your perspectives on how change can come about in our society!

    I will lead the discussion, asking questions that you can talk to each other about.

    If note-taker is present: presents herself and her role

  - *Practical stuff*

    This discussion will take around 2 hours in total, with a short break in the middle. We will do an activity where I ask you to draw something - If someone does not feel comfortable with this, you do not have to participate. I would still encourage you to try, it is not about a complex end result but about the way this engages your thinking.

  - *Ethical considerations*

    You are not obliged to say something to every question, and can always leave if you do not feel comfortable. All of what is said in these 2 hours should be kept confidential by all of us. I will record the conversation so that I can go back to it, and transcribe it,... once I have done that, I will delete the recording. Here is a consent form which describes all of what I have said in more detail, and I need all of you to sign it.

  - *Type of engagement*

    This is supposed to be a conversation between all of you, more than with me. So you are free to respond to someone else's statement, to agree, add on, or also disagree,... Please try to let the other person finish their thought before jumping in, and also, despite you knowing a lot about each other, try to only share your own

thoughts and experiences and not someone else's. Please ask me to clarify anything that you don't immediately understand!

- Check-in: Names and pronouns, how are you feeling?

1. *Warming up*

   1.1. Opening question

      1.1.1. Going in a round:

         1.1.1.1. ESC: Why are you in the ecosocialist collective?

         1.1.1.2. Suderbyn: What is your reason for being in Suderbyn?

         1.1.1.3. XR: Why are you involved with XR?

   1.2. Introductory question

      1.2.1. ESC: What do you see as the aim of the ecosocialist collective?

         Probe: revolution, socialism

      1.2.2. Suderbyn: What do you see as the aim of Suderbyn?

         Probe: alternative living, leading by example, pilot site, regenerative society

      1.2.3. XR: What do you see as the aim of your XR group?

         Probe: generally, policy changes, attention

2. *Core questions*

   2.1. Transformation

      Now, I would like to broaden the scope a bit to what you would like society to look like.

      2.1.1. What aspects of the way society is right now would you like to change and in what way?

         Probe: climate change, social injustices, community, daily lives

      2.1.2. What do you see as your role as a member of XR in creating this change?

    2.1.2.1. ESC: activities with the ESC

    2.1.2.2. Suderbyn: activities in Suderbyn, impact on society outside the community

    2.1.2.3. XR: Probe: your activities with XR, as a group

5 Minute Break: Bathroom, drink

   2.1.3. What obstacles do you encounter in working towards fulfilling this role?

   Probe: Group vs individual, norms in society, policies, economic limitations, physical barriers

    2.1.3.1. ESC: How do you experience these obstacles in your engagement with the collective?

    2.1.3.2. Suderbyn: How do you experience these obstacles in your everyday work(life)?

    2.1.3.3. XR: How do you experience these obstacles in your activities with XR?

   2.1.4. What factors support you in creating the change you seek?

   (Probe: community, democratic norms, funding)

Note-taker writes down factors on big piece of paper

Possibly: 5 minute break

 3. Drawing activity

   I would love us to step out of the thinking/talking mode for a little bit, and would ask all of you to take some paper and a pen/pencil. You will have about 10 minutes to create a visual representation of your answer to the following question.

   When you are done or when the time has passed, it would be great if we can put them on the table so we can all look at them. If you would rather not share your drawing that is of course fine.

  3.1. <u>Description</u>

Think of the barriers and support we just talked about that you encounter when trying to push for change.

What is your position in relation to these factors?

How do you experience the relationship between yourself or your community/activist circle and these factors?

What types of interactions do you see?

3.2.   Discussion

3.3.   How would you describe the relationship that you depicted? (Probe: influence in which direction, power, active or inactive)

   3.3.1.   Is there a difference between how you feel about this relationship (and/or the opportunity for change) individually and how you feel as part of this group?

   3.3.2.   Where do you see the possibility of influencing the barriers you represented (in your/the drawing(s))?

   (Probe: beyond drawings, broader, if discussion stalled)

   3.3.3.   In what ways are you able to affect the barriers?

4.   *Closing*

These were all of the questions I wanted to pose. Let's take a few moments to reflect back on the conversation.

4.1.   In a round: What is your most important takeaway from the discussion?

Appendix 4: Drawings from participants
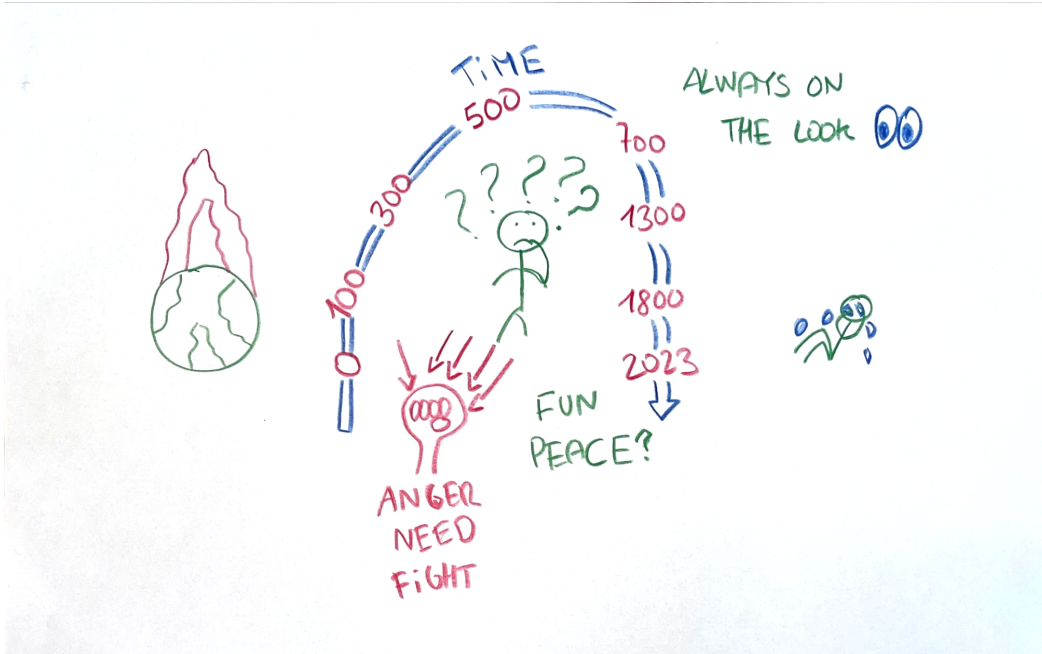
Appendix 4a: Drawings from the ESC group

Figure 4a-1: Drawing by B.
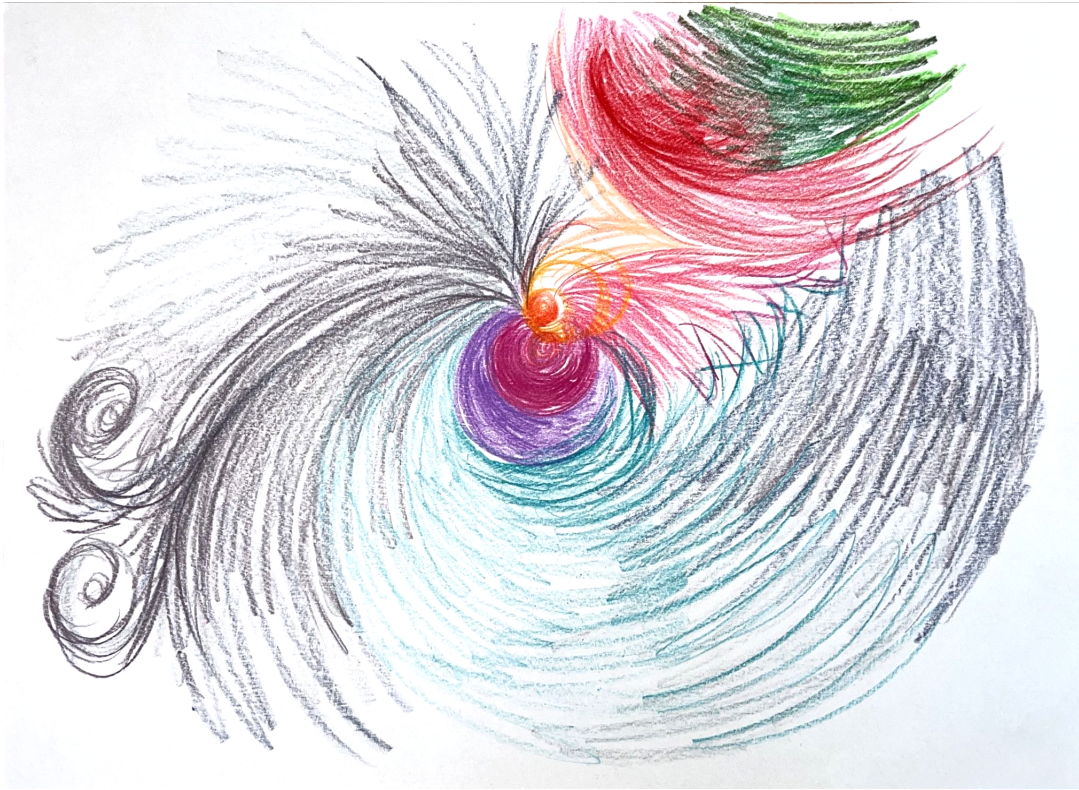

Figure 4a-2: Drawing by D.

Figure 4a-3: Drawing by E.
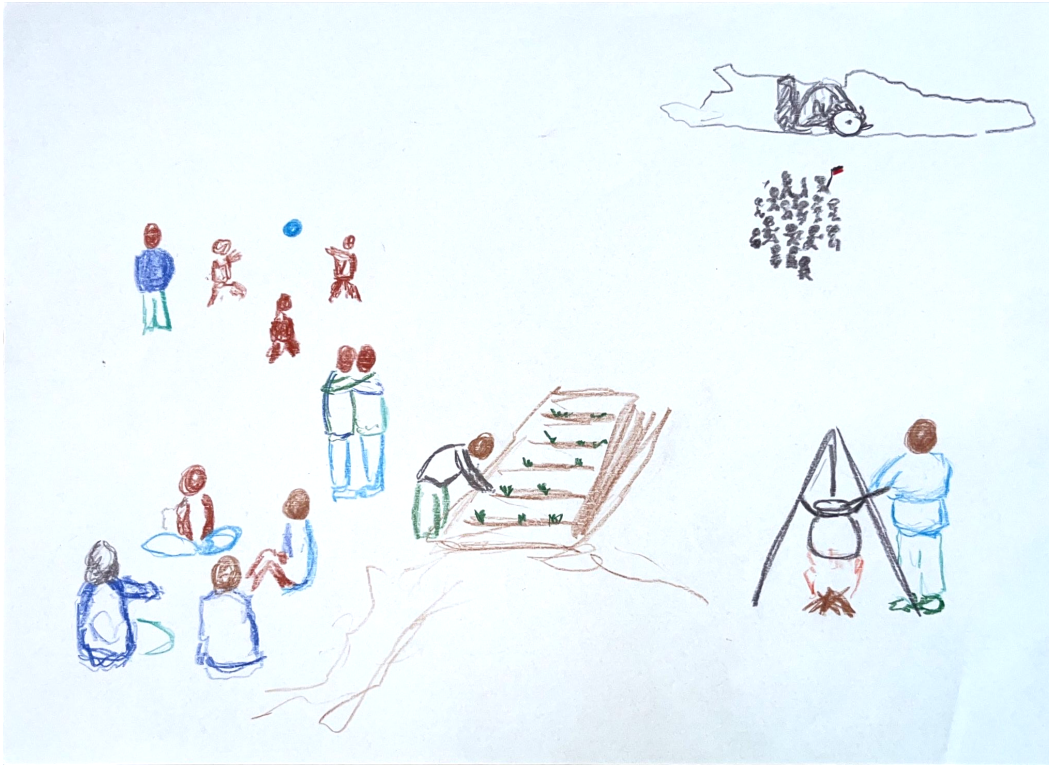

Figure 4a-4: Drawing by F.

Figure 4a-5: Drawing by H.

Figure 4a-6: Drawing by N.

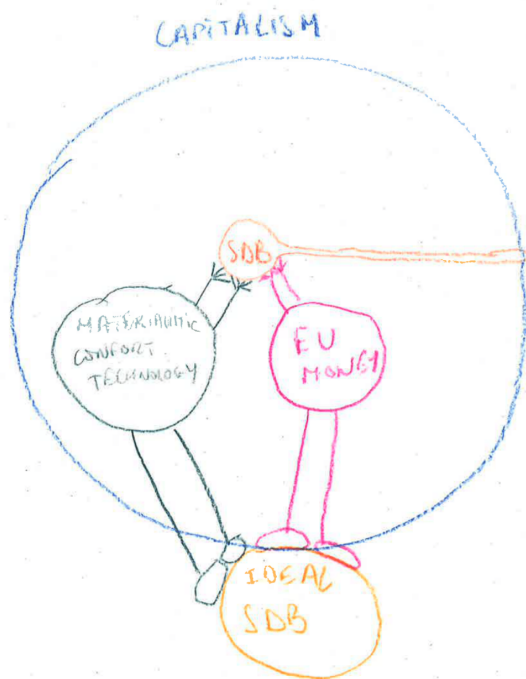**Appendix 4b: Drawings from the Suderbyn group**

Figure 4b-1: Drawing by K.
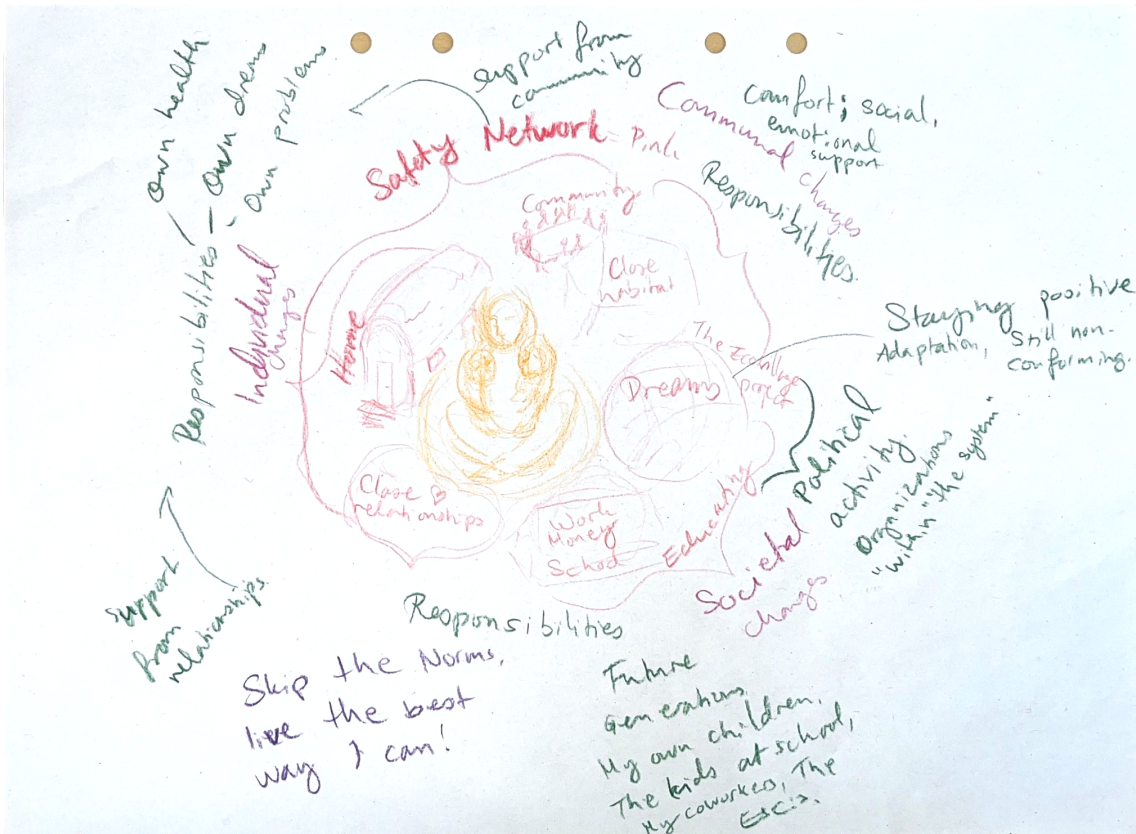

Figure 4b-2: Drawing by M.

Figure 4b-3: Drawing by P.

Figure 4b-4: Drawing by R.

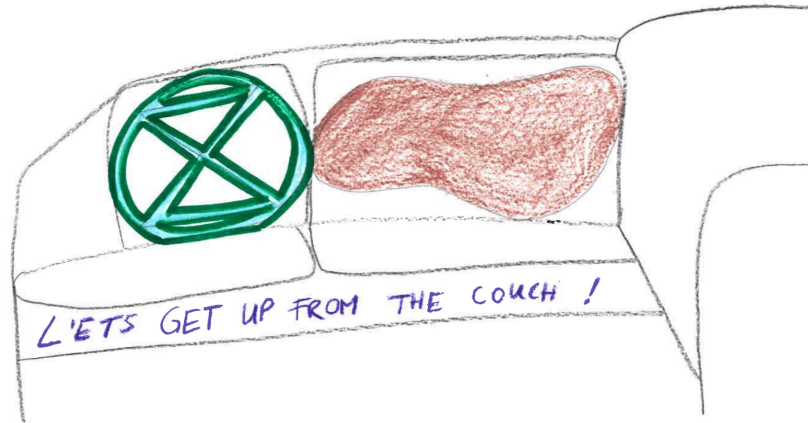*Figure 4b-5: Drawing by S.*

Appendix 4c: Drawings from the XR group
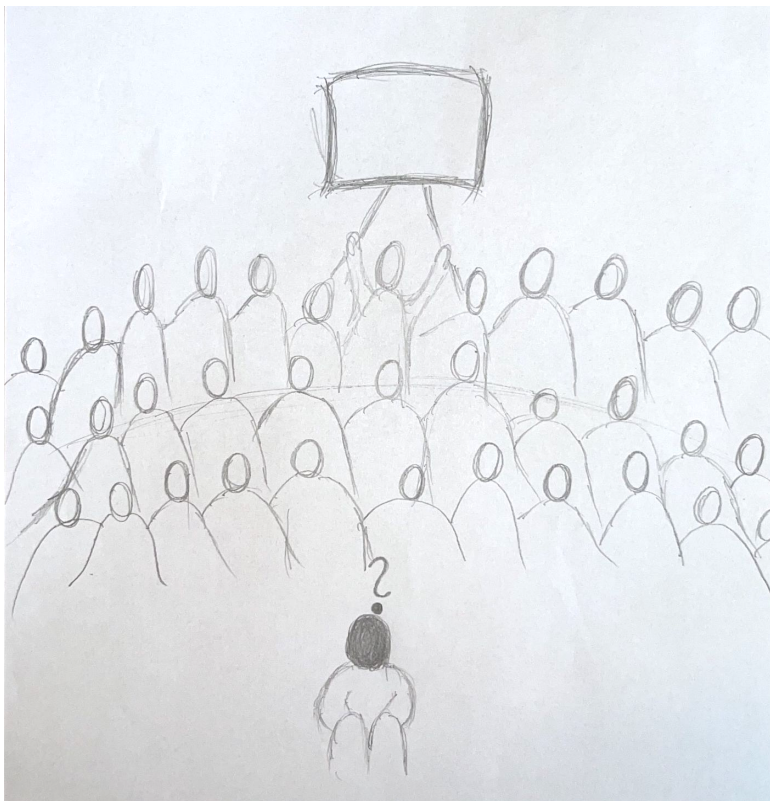

Figure 4c-1: Drawing by A.

Figure 4c-2: Drawing by C.
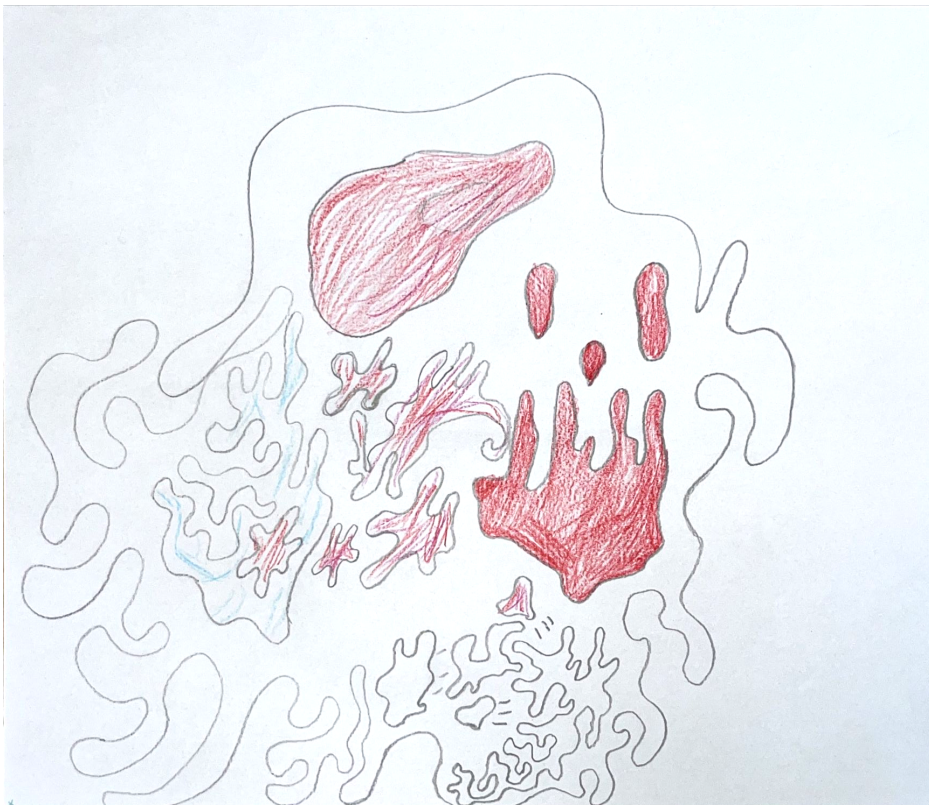
Figure 4c-3: Drawing by J.

Figure 4c-4: Drawing by T.

Appendix 5: Final set of codes as well as their absolute prevalence (number of references per code) and their prevalence by group.

In the number of references, red indicates less than 10 references, orange indicates between 10 and 20 references, yellow indicates between 20 and 30 references and green indicates more than 30 references. In the group-level columns, red shading indicates up to 5 references, orange indicates between 5 and 10 references, and green indicates more than 10 references.

Categories	Codes	Groups	Which groups if not all?	Number of references	ESC	Suderbyn	XR
Personal Dimensions	contradicting thoughts	3		23	5	10	8
	driven by personal experience	3		8	6	1	1
	internal barriers to change	3		17	3	3	11
	need to feel active	3		22	9	2	11
	need to see a purpose	3		19	5	5	9
	not here on purpose	3		7	2	2	3
	strong internal drive	3		8	2	4	2
	two simultaneous thoughts	3		14	5	5	4
Aims	aims are not clear	3		13	2	5	6
	can't choose just one issue	3		10	3	1	6
	clarity on what needs to go	3		18	8	5	5
	important to be radical	3		19	4	11	4
	need things to get better	3		5	2	1	2
	need to focus to have an impact	3		9	4	1	4
	sharing a fundamental concern	3		9	2	3	4
	spreading collective ideology	2	ESC, Suderbyn	7	2	5	
	the outcome is not the goal	3		14	5	3	6
	this is not the end goal	3		10	1	2	7
	understanding is unspoken	3		8	3	3	2
Strategies and process of change	activism goes in circles	3		16	4	4	8
	belief in strategies	3		23	9	7	7
	building human capacity	3		8	4	3	1

	change has negative consequences	3		7	1	2	4
	change needs to come from the outside	2	Suderbyn, XR	12		7	5
	enacting the alternative	3		20	7	11	2
	focus on concepts and ideas	3		19	14	3	2
	good to be accessible	3		14	7	2	5
	have to disrupt structures	2	ESC, XR	5	2		3
	important to reach beyond the group	3		12	4	2	6
	influence through presence	3		13	8	3	2
	lack of clear strategy	2	ESC, XR	14	6		8
	need the right foundations	3		17	9	6	2
	need to engage with everyone	3		13	5	3	5
	personal un- and relearning	3		28	3	17	8
	raising awareness	3		11	6	2	3
	small actions are meaningful	3		16	8	7	1
Agency	agency is more accessible individually	3		12	2	6	4
	finding strength in community	3		35	14	8	13
	lack support in society	3		21	9	4	8
	need to work together	3		9	2	4	3
	not able to make big changes	3		18	3	9	6
	not well-connected enough	3		15	7	1	7
	privilege can allow or inhibit change	3		9	5	1	3
	social stability and cohesion are the basis	3		14	4	4	6
	support through knowing about other groups	2	ESC, XR	11	8		3
	we have agency together	3		27	11	7	9
Relationship to structures	can create change from within	2	ESC, Suderbyn	5	2	3	
	everything is interconnected	3		15	2	5	8
	experiencing disjunctures	3		12	3	3	6

false sense of safety inhibits change	3		14	5	2	7
hard to imagine systemic change	3		15	2	4	9
need the right structures	3		11	3	5	3
need to be separate from oppressive structures	2	ESC, Suderbyn	10	6	4	
structures determine starting conditions	3		11	3	6	2
subjective positioning matters	3		29	12	8	9
systems influence us subconsciously	3		20	5	6	9
tangible constraints limit capacity	3		23	7	7	8
unable to escape the system	3		16	2	12	2
we can't affect big structures	3		10	1	6	3
we exist inside oppressive structures	3		25	13	6	6