Enlightened trust in governance

EnTrust

Integrated Report on the Role of Democratic Social movements

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WP3: The role of democratic social movements in the formation of trust and distrust

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Introduction to the Study of the Role of Democratic Social movements in the Formation of Trust and Distrust

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1. Introduction

The relationship between trust and social movement mobilisation is rarely researched directly and systematically.[1] Despite some convincing claims relating the recent decline of trust in governance to the emergence of new social movements, aimed at "reconstructing social and political trust from below" (della Porta, 2016), we lack relevant empirical research focusing directly on the relationship between distrust in governance, and collective mobilisation through social movements, as well as on the effects of social movements on trust-building: Do social movements aim to rebuild or renew trust in governance, and if so, what are their strategies and tactics in doing so?

One of the few studies that focused on the issue of trust among the population of activists and protesters shows that activists of social movements do not simply distrust institutions, but rather believe that they can be changed or amended via collective action (Andretta et al., 2015). Further, research shows that political distrust does not necessarily imply dissatisfaction with or rejection of democracy; on the contrary, activists are usually 'dissatisfied democrats' (Klingemann, 2014) – dissatisfied with the current regime and its incumbents, yet supportive of democracy, in general (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Dalton & Welzel, 2014; Klingemann, 2014). This is complementary to Rosanvallon's idea of "counter-democracy", a form of control that democratic governments and institutions need in order to re-invigorate themselves. In this respect, distrustful citizens could play an important democratic role, as their expression of dissatisfaction and frustration could potentially lead to representative institutions being made more accountable and responsive (Rosanvallon, 2008: 4,5). Finally, participation in social movement activities is strongly related to the acceptance of pro-social, emancipatory and democratic values (Inglehart, 2018; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel, 2013; Welzel & Deutsch, 2012).The rise of new social movements that distrust institutional politics (Glasius and Pleyers, 2013), but develop 'critical trust' through alternative conceptions of democracy and democratic spaces (della Porta, 2016), could, in fact, be seen as an answer to the problem of the decline in political trust found in contemporary democracies. To explore this potential of trust building, we conducted research about social movements' attitudes towards trust and distrust in institutions, in citizens, in experts, and in society in general,

[1] Representative handbooks, such as The Willey Blackwell, companion to social movements (Snow et al., 2019), or the Palgrave Handbook of social movements, revolution and social transformation (Berberoglu, 2019), do not even index the term "trust".

together with their attitudes towards democracy and the system of liberal democracy. Following some previous findings that democratic social movements refuse hierarchical structures and request wider and deeper democracy, through more participation and deliberation of citizens and other non-institutionalised political actors (Della Porta and Diani 1999; Della Porta, 2014), we also explored the respondents' perceptions perceptions of internal structures of the movements and internal democracy.

When it comes to trust in 'lay' citizens, democratic social movements have become fierce advocates of participatory and direct forms of citizens' participation, claiming that citizens themselves are better suited to defending their needs and values than elected decision-makers, accountable primarily to their parties and other power stakeholders (Della Porta, 2014). This also implies a political belief that citizens are competent enough – or trustworthy enough – to participate directly in decision-making processes, thus compensating for the distrust towards competitive elite democracy and technocratic governance (Roberts, 1998; Kitschelt, 1993). This participatory and deliberative turn of the social movements also impacted the trust relations between social movements and experts. Social movements were the first to introduce a more democratic and collaborative relationship between experts and citizens through the so-called ''advocacy research'' (Fischer, 2000: 37) – a type of research conducted by social scientists and other experts, who are also committed activists. They contest the notion of the 'value-neutral' ideology of expertise, and tend to engage their 'own' experts as providers of trustworthy knowledge from the position of the movements' mission. Some studies emphasise the hybrid character of experts–laypersons' identities within the social movements, claiming that 'hybridity' has a significant influence on trust relations – namely, that experts who belong to the movement and share its mission are deemed more trustworthy (Delgado, 2010). This is why, in our research, we also explored the re-articulation of trust in science and in experts' knowledge, given the recurrent use of expertise and science within the social movements, for persuasion and legitimation of demands and actions.

This report presents the findings of research carried out within the EnTrust project (Work Package 3). Its aim was to analyse the role that social movements, as alternative arenas of political participation, could have in creating and reproducing trust and distrust. Seeking to gather information on the interaction and possible interplay between two recent and growing trends: citizens' withdrawal from institutional political arenas, and the rise of contemporary contentious politics, manifested as increased participation of citizens in new social movement practices, the research within this Work Package (WP) focused on movements' elaborations on dis/trust issues. Thus, we carried out two focus groups with members of the two selected social movements from each of the following countries (thus, four focus groups per country): the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Serbia. The focus groups were held between March 2021 and May 2021; one focus group was held with core members of the selected social movements, and one with the movements' followers. By distinguishing between 'the core members' and 'the followers', we wanted to capture an array of attitudes, coming

both from those who are closely involved in all the movements' activities, and those who are intermittent supporters and close sympathisers (for more about methodology, see below).

The focus groups helped us collect qualitative comparative data about the capabilities of social movements to mobilise citizens' distrust in institutions, of making productive use of it, and eventually of transforming it into new practices of 'enlightened trust' building. Also, the collected data gave us the possibility to understand social movements' alternative visions of Europe – as a political and social space – and alternative ways of (re)building trust in its institutions. We also gathered insights into the way these social movements interrelate with more established mainstream civil society organisations (CSOs) and political parties; moreover, we explored their understandings of democracy, and their views about how democratic institutions could be improved on all levels of governance. Overall, the gathered data provided important insights into the relationship between the trust-distrust dynamic and social movement participation, and helped us design practical recommendations for trust-building at the stage of public policy implementation.

The following research questions of this study are prompted by the literature exposed above:

- What are the social movements' understandings of internal democracy?
- What are the preferred models of democracy, and what are the possible pathways to building it?
- How does the movement build relations with citizens and other social actors?
- What are the social movements' perceptions of experts? Are they seen as trustworthy actors, and what does the movement make of it?
- How much do they trust different actors in society?
- What are the social movements' general attitudes towards the role of trust and distrust in society?
- What are the cross-country factors that contribute to (dis)trusting attitudes of social movements?
- How could the social movements help to restore trust in institutions (at the local, national and European levels)?

2. Research methodology

This report presents the findings of WP3, whose main objective was to analyse the role and relevance of new democratic social movements in creating and reproducing trust and distrust.

We focused on social movements as political and social actors that represent a potential for reconstructing social and political trust from below, while simultaneously focusing on the problem of democratic and responsible governance.

In the first phase, we mapped and selected democratic social movements, and their members, in each participating country. Precise criteria for selecting the sample for each country were jointly discussed and accorded among all participants, so all cases conformed to the characteristics of new democratic movements: 1) they possess a democratic character (inclusiveness and non-discriminatory); 2) besides specific issues, they are also focused on the issues of democratisation and citizens' participation; 3) they are active concurrently with the research, and have a record of public activities at least six months prior to the research (public visibility).

Table 1, below, provides a list of all the movements that participated in the research, followed by the number of members (core and followers) that took part in focus groups.

Table 1:

	Case 1	**Issue**	**Core members**	**Followers**	**Case 2**	**issue**	**Core members**	**Followers**
Poland	Polish Smog Alert	environment	5	5	All-Poland Women's Strike	Women's rights (abortion law)	4	5
Denmark	NOAH	environment	6	6	The Friendly Neighbours	solidarity with the refugees (migrants)	5	4
Greece	Anti-gold mining movement in Chalkidiki	environment	5	4	Colour Youth – LGBTQI Youth Community of Athens	personal autonomy, sexual orientation	6	6

Germany	Fridays for Future	environ-ment	4	5	Housing Movement	housing is-sues	3	2
Czechia	Extinction Rebellion Czech Republic	environ-ment	5	6	Million Mo-ments for Democracy	the quality of institu-tions	7	6
Italy	Extinction Rebellion Italy	environ-ment	4	4	Non una di meno	Women's rights (the issue of male vio-lence)	5	4
Serbia	Defend the Rivers of Mountain of Stara Planina	environ-ment	6	6	Joint action Roof over your Head	prevention of evic-tions, legal right to home	5	5

Each country research team organised focus groups with two selected social movements. There were two focus groups per movement, one with core members, and one with followers, a total of four focus groups per country. There were some variations in the number of individuals that participated in the focus groups. While our aim was to organise focus groups consisting of approximately six participants, in some cases, that was impossible; specific explanations for those variations are described in detail in the country chapters.

The recruitment procedure for participants relied on snowball sampling and consisted of four steps:

1. Identification of one member of the core group of each social movement, serving as the initial interviewee, who suggested (or contacted) other core members to participate in focus groups.

Although it is impossible to define precise criteria for the selection of the core members of democratic social movements (they are most often horizontally structured and with a loose membership structure), the following guidelines helped the research teams to identify their first respondents (as well as other members of the core group) - these were the instructions given to the research teams, describing who can be considered *a core member*:

The member of the movement who is very visible in public; the member of the movement who often speaks on behalf of the movement (representative of the movement); in the case of a more formally-organised social movement, you may use a membership list that can serve as a sampling frame: choose the member of the movement occupying a specific role within the movement, e.g., movement leaders, decision-makers or founders, the member of the movement who participates in strategic planning of the actions, and/or decides on the priorities of actions to be taken.

2. Short interview with the first respondent, with the aim of collecting basic information about the movement. During the initial interview, we asked a member of the core group to give us the contact details of other members of the core group. Criteria for the selection of other members of the core group are the same as for the first respondent. The first respondent also participated in the focus group as a core-group member.

3. Making contact with the members of the core group suggested by the first respondent, and asking them to participate in the focus groups. Also, they suggested and provided the contacts of the followers (two or three) of the movement. Followers of the social movement could be defined as those who (often) participate in social movement activities, but are not involved in strategic planning, organisations of the actions, and do not have specific duties and responsibilities.

4. Making a list of followers, from which to choose participants of the focus groups so the sample of followers could reflect diversity in terms of gender, education and economic level and age.

In the second phase the guidelines for focus groups were developed with the aim of providing the data needed to answer the main research questions. The guidelines were translated into the respective languages by the teams, and pre-tested in two interviews per country, in order to check their feasibility and suitability. In order to obtain comparable results, IFDT team (WP3 leader) trained the moderators of the focus groups. The training was also used to finalise the guidelines, and define the structure of the national reports.

In the third phase, focus groups were held with two different groups of social movement participants: (a) representatives (core members) of the social movements, and (b) followers of the movements (active citizens). All national teams carried out the data collection in their respective countries. Focus groups were mostly held online due to the Covid-19 restrictions. For the same reason, the recruitment took longer than normal, and was delayed at times. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The average length was about 2.5 hours.

In the fourth phase, the analysis of the focus groups' data was carried out following a qualitative procedure of analysis with the MAXQDA programme through the coding scheme developed by IFDT researchers, based on the main research questions of WP3. Country teams also elaborated numerous memos to reflect on the meaning of trust in specific settings.

During all stages of our research, we followed the highest ethical standards. Interview and focus groups' guidelines and informed consent forms have been accepted by the respective ethical commissions from universities where research teams are affiliated. All participants gave us informed consent to participate in the study. At the stage of transcriptions, we paid attention not only to the technical security of files, but also to their immediate data anonymisation. We also deliberately did not provide detailed information about participants' demographic features.

This report consists of seven case studies on the relationship between the trust-distrust dynamic and social movements. Apart from the specific country case studies, it represents comparable qualitative data sets thanks to the standardised focus-group guidelines. The shared points found among cases suggest the presence of more general tendencies, problems and practices related to social movements and (dis)trust.

After the seven country chapters, a concluding chapter follows, seeking to list and analyse those salient repeating issues – themes which we deemed relevant in terms of (dis)trust functioning, following the structure of the guidelines and questionnaire. It also points to major similarities and differences among countries. Finally, our report highlights the practical implications of active citizenship and political contestations - found within the analysed social movements - on trust and distrust in democratic governance.

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‘Without Trust, there is no Society’ - The Role of Democratic Social movements in the Formation of Trust and Distrust in the Czech Republic

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements’ scene in contemporary Czechia

Political activism in the post-communist Czech Republic has been divided into five modes: (1) “old” participatory activism (e.g., trade unions) characterised by organisational membership, cooperation with other political actors, stable access to the political system, and rare protest events attended by many participants, (2) “new” transactional activism involving small groups and organisations (e.g., environmental, or focused on human rights) that often cooperate with each other or political actors, have varying access to the political system, and organise many events with a few participants, (3) radical activism (e.g., anarchist groups) characterised by loose organisational platforms with few members, limited ability to network, no access to the political system, and militant events attended by few people, (4) informal civic self-organisation (e.g., focused on the functioning of national institutions) with varying access to the political system and ability to cooperate, and many events with few participants, and (5) episodic mass mobilisation without any formal organisational infrastructure, based on very rare, but well-attended, demonstrations in big cities or nationwide petitions (Císař et al. 2011; Císař, 2008; 2013). Overall, social movement activism has been rarely radical and militant in the Czech Republic (Císař, 2013; Novák, 2018). Issues articulated by social movements have been predominantly socio-cultural, such as environmental, human rights, or the quality of institutions. On the other hand, economic issues have been much less frequent compared to other central European countries (a possible explanation is that traditional political parties have strongly articulated these issues; Císař & Vráblíková, 2015; Císař, 2018).

Recent years have seen several developments in the area of social movements. The largest demonstration, since the 1989 Velvet Revolution, was organised by the social movement Milion chvilek pro demokracii (Million Moments for Democracy, MM) movement in 2019. The focus of the event was on the quality of government institutions, and the conflict of interests of government members. Compared to previous instances of episodic mass (anti-government) mobilisation, the MM has started to build a permanent organisational infrastructure.

In connection with the "refugee crisis" of 2015, there was a series of large anti-immigration protest events (and counter-events challenging anti-immigration sentiments), typically located in bigger cities. Later on, some activists tried to transform anti-immigration activities, initially based on civic self-organisation and episodic mass mobilisation, into a stable social or political movement. However, these attempts were unsuccessful: the mobilisation gradually decreased, and the issue of immigration has been adopted by existing parliamentary political parties (Císař & Navrátil, 2019).

For a long time, the Czech environmental movement was represented primarily by transactional activism, that is, non-radical organisations with a limited number of members, oriented to advocacy and networking. In the second half of the 2010s, several new environmental social movements appeared: Limity jsme my (We Are the Limits), Extinction Rebellion CZ, and Fridays for Future CZ. These movements have been inspired by environmental movements abroad (e.g., Limity jsme my by Ende Gelände in Germany) and somewhat transgress the five modes of activism described above. Unlike transactional activism, they are more radical, and rely on direct action, but unlike radical activism, they are able to network with other organisations, and organise larger protest events (Farkač, 2020; Novák, 2018; 2020).

Social movements dealing with local issues of urban space and municipal budgets have also been visible in the last decade. Most of these movements have been non-radical and reformist, and there have been many examples of their successful attempts at transforming into political movements, and entering local governments and city councils (Pixová, 2018). The squatting movement played a limited role, of which the most prominent example was the squatted social centre Klinika in Prague, existing between 2014 and 2019 (Novák, 2021).

1.2 Case studies and organisation of research

Both Milion chvilek pro demokracii (Million Moments for Democracy, MM) and Extinction Rebellion CZ (XR) currently belong to the most visible social movements in Czechia. They fit well into the Czech social movement landscape due to their focus on socio-cultural (not economic) issues, such as the quality of institutions (MM) and environment (XR). At the same time, they partly violate the usual modes of local activism: the MM differs from previous episodic mass mobilisations by a considerably greater continuity in time, and the XR differs from "traditional" transactional environmental activism by a greater use of direct action. Neither movement cooperates with government institutions, but they sometimes cooperate with other movements and organisations. As for the most explicit differences between the movements, the MM has more followers and is able to mobilise more people, while the XR has more radical demands and strategies (although it is strictly non-violent).

Both social movements were interested in our research, and generally open to participating. Occasional difficulties were related to participants' lack of time, and the need to find a date suitable for all. In each movement, we contacted one of its key members, who approached other members and followers with whom we organised individual interviews. Some participants from the XR were also recruited using the personal networks of the researchers. We promised both movements that we would organise a lecture/workshop for them on our results in the autumn or winter of 2021. Basic characteristics of our participants are shown in the table. The MM followers somewhat differed from the other three groups, as all participants were under 30, and males prevailed. People with a university education prevailed in all groups. Most participants had stable work; only three people indicated that they were students, and two people indicated that they were taking care of another person.

Table 1: Sample characteristics of Czech case study

	MM – core	**MM – followers**	**XR – core**	**XR – followers**
Females / Males	5/2	2/4	3/2	5/1
Age 18-30 / 31-45 / 45+ / NA	4/2/1/0	6/0/0/0	1/2/1/1	3/2/1/0
Elementary school/ high school/ Bachelor/ Master	0/2/2/3	1/1/2/2	0/1/2/2	0/2/0/4
Stable work (full-time, self-employed, part-time) /other	7/0	3/3	4/1	4/2

All interviews and focus groups were online (MS Teams). The same researcher conducted individual interviews. There were lead and assistant moderators in every focus group. One researcher led three focus groups; another researcher led the remaining one. Transcripts were coded by two researchers. The individual interviews lasted 25 (MM) and 36 (XR) minutes. The focus groups lasted 117 (MM core), 112 (MM followers), 89 (XR core), and 120 (XR followers) minutes. 153 analytical memos were created.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note [2]

The MM was founded in Prague after the parliamentary election in autumn 2017, in response to the formation of a new government led by Andrej Babiš. Starting as a "public declaration" aimed at Babiš and his government, it transformed into a stable activist group early in 2018. The movement's goals have evolved away from criticism of Babiš (e.g., his conflict of interests, or alleged assaults on the justice system) towards a more general objective: to enhance Czech civil society, the quality of democracy, and citizens' civic engagement. These goals were established through an internal discussion within the movement. However, besides these system-level goals, the movement still focuses on more specific objectives (e.g., the resignation of actual politicians). The movement aims to represent about half a million people who have signed the movement's petitions, and other people who support them on social media. The movement acknowledges, however, that the group of their supporters is extremely heterogeneous. Although they typically agree with the criticism of Babiš, they have different expectations, preferred alternatives to Babiš, and views of the political means to achieve the movement's goals (followers criticise the MM for being too moderate, being too radical, being a single-issue movement, dealing with too many issues, etc.). A core team of the movement consists of 20-25 people, then there are about 50 active volunteers, about 100 local organisers across the country and in several cities abroad, and other people who are members of the local groups. The core of the movement is located in Prague, but the activities are spread across the whole country. There is also a network of "collection points" distributing the movement's materials. As for their action repertoire, the movement tends to use nationwide declarations/petitions, and large peaceful demonstrations (the largest one in Prague, in 2019, was attended by 250-300 thousand people). During the pandemic, they adopted strategies such as online protests (e.g., the online demonstration to commemorate the Velvet Revolution was followed by 30-50 thousand people), writing letters to politicians, and smaller and more creative events (e.g., the event to honour the victims of Covid in Prague in 2021, resulted in about 250 news articles, including one in the NY Times). Thanks to active local organisers, several hundreds of events linked to the MM were organised in the past years. The movement cooperates with other organisations from time to time, particularly when dealing with issues in which these organisations are specialised (e.g., the collaboration with environmental organisations on happenings focused on the environment). Some members and followers of the movement sometimes criticise these activities for being beyond the movement's main goals. At the same time, some organisations are sometimes reserved about collaborating with the MM because of the movement's strong anti-government ethos.

[2] All information in this section is based on individual interviews with one core member per each movement.

The MM does not belong to any international umbrella organisation, but they have occasional horizontal collaborations with foreign movements (e.g., the opposition movement in Belarus). Regarding communication with the public, the movement acknowledges that public opinion about them is very polarised (if people have heard about it, they either like it or hate it). Their communication strategy involves a regular newsletter, social media activities, and public events (e.g., debates or events).

The Czech XR was founded in December 2018 in Prague, inspired by the XR movement activities in the UK in the autumn of 2018. Since its beginning, the movement has adopted three main goals from the original British movement. These goals are: to push the government to tell the truth about the climate crisis (including declaring a climate emergency), push the government to take immediate actions to achieve carbon neutrality by 2025, and introduce citizens' assemblies that would come up with appropriate climate policies. The goals aim to change the whole system because the movement perceives incremental changes as insufficient and unable to reverse an overall negative trend. The XR thus aims to represent the whole of society, fatally endangered by climate change, according to the movement. The XR has about 50-100 active members at the moment, but the number used to be higher and decreased due to the pandemic. There are about 20 local groups across the country, usually located in bigger cities, but some are currently inactive (the number of permanently active groups is lower than ten). Considering demonstrations and petitions as ineffective, the movement employs the strategy of civil disobedience. It is performed either by single persons (to catch the attention of the media and the public), or as a mass event (to push on the system). The local groups, or individual members, are free to organise their own actions, or step back from them at any time, and there is an extremely low threshold for joining the movement's activities. The XR organised several dozen events in the past two years. The movement's largest actions are so called "Big Rebellions," the first of which was organised in the autumn of 2019, when about 150 people blocked the arterial road in the centre of Prague (about 500 people attended the event, but only some were directly involved in civil disobedience). The second was organised in autumn, 2020 (during the pandemic), when 50 people blocked the Czech Parliament in Prague. The movement cooperates with other environmental organisations, but this collaboration is problematic from time to time, as the XR considers some strategies of the traditional environmental movement ineffective, while conversely, some traditional organisations perceive the XR as too radical or inexperienced. Internationally, the Czech XR occasionally visits, or is visited by, other XR groups, for example, Polish or British, but the organisation of the events is entirely up to the local group. The movement communicates with the public via its webpage, social media, or public lectures. They acknowledge that some of their actions may be perceived as disturbing and troublesome, and elicit both positive and negative reactions from among the public. However, this outcome is not necessarily bad, according to the movement, because it raises public awareness about the severity of the climate crisis. As one interviewee put it:

> *Our role is similar to prodding someone between the ribs. It is unpleasant. It is outside their comfort zone. And our movement keeps trying to move people outside their comfort zones. And they react to it, even with repulsion* (CZ XR C).

2.2 Structure of the movement

Overall, there is consensus with only minor inconsistencies among the interviewees from the MM movement about the structure of the movement. The **formal structure** is perceived as **mixed** by the core members. In the MM, there is a legal entity that consists of the president, the vice-president, financial manager and executive manager. Then there are a few working groups that deal with specific functions, or a topic they are engaged in. Besides this, there are local groups that call themselves the MM, but are not a part of the legal entity. The local groups, as well as the functional working groups, are autonomous to some extent. Even though the followers describe the movement's structure **hierarchical,** the core members use the term **mixed**. Jan[3] describes the structure as a "pyramid" (CZ MM F), but Radek (CZ MM F) does not want to emphasise the word "hierarchy" because he perceives the core members as a well-functioning team of friends. However, the followers highlight that the core members take into account everyone's ideas, and there is an ongoing discussion in the movement. Lastly, some of the core members (not further specified) get a salary for their work in the movement.

This movement's **functional structure** is **predetermined**. There are working groups responsible for their specific tasks (e.g., fundraising, finance, PR and communication, etc.). Besides the predetermined function, the followers mention a **merit-based structure**, since there are various tasks set for the volunteers, and the volunteers can decide what they want to do based on their free time and willingness. Both followers and core members agree that **decisions** are made by the **core members,** but as said earlier, there is an ongoing discussion in the movement, and the core members listen to the opinions of others. To some extent, the **functional working groups** make their own decisions, and local groups are free to organise their local events (if consistent with the movement's goals and values), or put forward their ideas for nationwide activities.

As Anna describes, the MM is **fully inclusive**:

> *I think that everyone can join (the movement), at least as a volunteer. Plus, I know that sometimes they hire people for paid positions. I know that now, for example, they were looking for someone for fundraising or social media communication, so I think to get into the MM is very easy* (CZ MM F).

Jan agrees with Anna that anyone can join the movement, but they should have "the same values" (CZ MM F) as those upheld by the movement. Otherwise, it makes no

[3] All the participants' names have been anonymised.

sense to join. The core members' opinion is the same, but they emphasise that incomers who want to become more active members of the movement (e.g., to establish a local group, or organise an action) have to fill in some forms and tell each other their expectations. Regarding **action initiating**, the movement is affected by events (usually political ones) in Czech society, but usually, the **core members** initiate an action. The core members say that, because they work together daily, there are impulses for new ideas and actions. Both core members and followers state that sometimes the local groups initiate their own action (**any member of the movement**) or **anyone**, but as the core members emphasise, the action needs to be in accordance with the movement's values and agenda.

The formal structure of the XR movement is perceived as **decentralised** by followers and some core members. Alex says:

> *…actually, we're trying to have the structure decentralised on purpose, non-hierarchical, so it's not that there would be some management and people under them, but it is that everyone has the same authority, completely the same possibilities, and the only thing that is something a little like management are coordinating roles, but their function is only to supervise the information flow among people. And otherwise, how the usual system functions, uhm, you choose what you want to do, choose the roles you want and if you can't do it, pass it down to someone else and do whatever you see fit* (CZ XR F).

Another interviewee describes the movement as a "self-organising system" (CZ XR C), meaning a decentralised one. Among the core members, there was disagreement about the XR's structure because one interviewee claims the decentralised structure is an ideal state, but the reality is that there is some hierarchy (due to the fact that the group in Prague is bigger than other groups, and thus they might feel that the communication "comes [to them] from above" (CZ XR C)). However, the interviewee perceives the decentralised structure in the team she is part of.

As described earlier by Alex, the functional structure is **merit based**. The core members talk about assigning mandates on the level of a team or an individual. This mandate gives a person a "relatively wide" (CZ XR C) range of activities and competencies on which to make decisions. When speaking of the structure, the followers mention "regenerative culture" (CZ XR F) in the movement. It means that the XR emphasises values such as respect, tolerance, care for mental health, care for each other, and prevention of burnout.

In XR, the **attitude against formal decisions** is prevalent. Interviewees claim that there is an emphasis on group discussions and argumentations, and usually, a common goal is something that holds the group together: no voting and no leaders. One interviewee emphasises that if someone wants to do something (e.g., organise an action), it is against

the XR principle that that person would be forbidden from carrying out the action. Whoever does not like the action, does not have to be a part of it. She adds that there are long discussions on social media, afterwards. The core members also talk about the **plenary** decision-making process and **functional working groups**. These decision-making processes are mostly used on the national level when a country-wide action has been organised.

The membership in the movement is **fully inclusive**. Both followers and core members agree that if potential members uphold the movement's values and principles (e.g., non-violence), they can join the movement, or act under the XR's name. Sofi says:

> *…we don't do any admission interviews or anything. I think, no? Literally anyone can register, and then they're just contacted and can choose what they want to do. But no one goes through some, eh, like if someone wants to be a volunteer, no one goes through any selection procedure or anything* (CZ XR F).

The core members and the followers agree that **anyone** can initiate an action when sticking to the movement's basic principles. Soňa describes in detail how an action could be initiated, and also what the decision-making process might look like:

> *…so, you want to organise an action, (…) there are twenty of us at this meeting, and now each one of us wants to say something about it, and then we come to an agreement. But that's totally against the principle by which we try to function, (…) because when twenty people try to say something about it, and usually the action is radical in a way, it means there is always someone who would not be okay with it…But the person (the one that wants to organise an action) has a right to do it.*
>
> *Interviewer 1: What happens when people disagree?*
>
> *Soňa: The people will never come to an agreement. They don't have to agree. So, there will be a team created by a few people who want to do it, and the others are screwed…they can do something on their own; they can disagree…* (CZ XR C).

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

Interviewees often talk about their **perception of general (dis)trust** in terms of **function of (dis)trust**. Consequently, the boundary between the perception and the function is not often evident in the focus groups. In all focus groups, **trust** tends to be perceived as rather **positive and important**. The core members from both movements talk about trust as a key element in society, and about a lack of trust as being somehow negative for society:

Marek: (…) society stands and falls with it (trust). If people don't trust each other, society no longer exists. Afterwards, everyone's alone and afraid of what the others are planning against them. And this is even truer in a state which is democratic and based on (the principle) that people trust those whom they've elected (…) and trust the institutions which represent the state. And if this stops working, the whole system gets stuck (CZ MM C).

Hana: Trust is extremely important for building a sort of strong society. But I think that we don't have it (trust in society). I think that there's (in Czech society) still (…) lots of fear and (…) we're (…) still trying to foresee what else will come and bite us. And I think that this prevents us from (…) truly creating something (CZ XR C).

Similar to Hana's notion, interviewees from both followers' focus groups think there is a predominance of distrust in Czech society that is associated with their **negative perception of distrust**. Dita (CZ XR F) thinks that, in general, the Czechs are very distrustful, and she perceives this as "a mess". Pepa (CZ MM F) relates this to his opinion that **distrust can lead to resignation/apathy of citizens** towards the political affairs – he says that "lots of (…) evil in our society (…) is driven by the fact that the people have more distrust than trust" and thinks that when people distrust, they are more likely to "bend down and give up" (CZ MM F).

However, at the same time, the interviewees in all focus groups mention that **distrust can be conditionally positive**. Interviewees often associate this perception of distrust with its **function**, namely **promoting critical thinking, wariness and alertness** towards politics. The interviewees think that when people are distrustful, they usually do not automatically believe everything they read or hear, and they tend to verify the information. Such people also pay more attention to what is happening in politics, in some interviewees' opinion. Correspondingly, according to some interviewees, "thoughtless trust" (CZ XR C) can lead to greater vulnerability to believe conspiracy theories. Some interviewees also say it can prevent people from verifying information; consequently, they base their political decisions on unverified information.

Regarding the **perception of (dis)trust in institutions**, the interviewees rarely speak about it explicitly. Core members from the MM movement seem to perceive **trust in institutions as positive and important.** According to them, it is important that people trust the institutions, even though they do not trust their representatives (for a more detailed description, see the paragraph on **trust of the movement**). This can be illustrated in the following quotation:

Vlasta: (…) I assume that the absolute majority of this country has no trust in Miloš Zeman (the current Czech President) and, at the same time, I strongly wish it didn't mean that people wouldn't trust the institution of the president (…), and this is an issue we're dealing with a lot that very problematic to say: 'the government does something wrong', because a part of the people has

> *no idea what it means, and who represents it (the government), and that (…) different people might represent it differently in the future* (CZ MM C).

Closely related to this issue is an opinion of some MM core members that **untrustworthy representatives undermine trust in the institutions** they represent.

Both followers and core members from the MM movement talk about one more **function of trust** – they think that **belief[4] in the possibility of change can mobilise citizens**. The interviewees relate this notion to large demonstrations organised by the MM movement. In their opinions, hundreds of thousands of people participated in the demonstrations because they believed that some issues in Czech politics (e.g., independence of justice) could move in a more positive direction.

The interviewees from the MM focus groups agree that they **trust** the political system, in general. Marek says that "the system is well thought out for man" (CZ MM C), or Pepa says:

> *I, personally speaking, definitely have huge trust in the political system. Not the one (political representation) that is there right now … but I trust our political system, and I believe that if someone, who is not an idiot, takes charge, then we will have it nice here…* (CZ MM F).

Other interviewees from this movement also mention their trust in democracy. Furthermore, the MM interviewees describe how important the people who represent institutions are. This personalisation of trust can be seen in Pepa's quotation, but also in how other interviewees describe their trust towards certain institutional changes based on its representatives. Interviewees highlight how important the people representing institutions are, and that the system will never function when the representatives are not trustworthy. According to Erika (CZ MM C), "…a person can give a meaning to an institution". For Franta (CZ XR C), it is very important when people see a politician act in an honest way. Regarding people working in institutions, he thinks that the processes and bureaucracy that tie them are bad, but not necessarily the people.

Some of the interviewees from the XR trust political parties, such as the Czech Pirate Party, the Green Party, the Mayors and Independents, and the movement 'Future'. Interviewees from the MM trust the Senate. The XR followers trust academic institutions, and they trust the XR movement because it uses scientific knowledge. A few interviewees mention that they trust certain media, journalists, and European institutions.

In all focus groups, there is considerable **distrust** towards the current Czech government. Bella says:

[4] The interviewees use the word 'důvěra' which means 'trust' in English. However, the word 'důvěra' is closely related to the word 'víra' which can have the meaning of another Czech word 'přesvědčení'. Both 'víra' and 'přesvědčení' can be translated as 'belief' in English. Because the word 'belief' seems more understandable to us in this context, we have opted to choose this one, instead of 'trust'.

> *…it can be said, from my childhood, I've had inside me deep distrust towards any political figure, the government, anyone like this. I think that it is because of what it's looked like for years here in the Czech Republic … And because I am relatively young, it is deeply rooted inside me, what others were telling me during childhood from every side: my parents, the teachers, from everywhere. I have actually never heard from anyone that they would like it now, how it is* (CZ XR F).

Vanda says the current politicians "don't deserve the trust" (CZ XR C). According to Hana (CZ XR C), the government does not consider the young generation as "important", and therefore, she does not perceive many reasons to trust the government. Most of the interviewees say they do not trust the current prime minister, Andrej Babiš, nor the president, Miloš Zeman. From the political parties, the ANO movement, the Communist Party, the Freedom and Direct Democracy[5] movement are mentioned as untrustworthy. However, the XR interviewees, in particular, claim that they do not trust any of the politicians or parties. The MM followers mention some media (Sputnik, Parmlamentní listy), and members of the Council of the Czech Television, namely Hana Lipovská, Pavel Matocha, and Luboš Xaver Veselý as untrustworthy.

Interviewees mostly talk about who the citizens distrust, and how distrustful Czech society is. However, some of them mention that **citizens trust** the police, law courts, the army, public media and European institutions.

According to the interviewees, Czech citizens **do not trust** the government, institutions, and politicians, in general. Jan says:

> *I think that currently, there is a clear trend that citizens of the Czech Republic do not trust their government … and the government itself undermines the citizens' trust. [then speaks about the wrong steps taken by the government during the pandemic, and the hypocrisy of the government] ... So, I think the government is the main institution, along with the president, that do not have excessively big trust of the Czech citizens. And actually, the curve is constantly decreasing* (CZ MM F).

[5] The ANO movement is led by Andrej Babiš. The movement was the major governmental party and Babiš was the prime minister at the time of the data collection. The movement is often labelled as 'populist'. It was criticized by the media and the opposition due to the failure during the covid pandemics. Moreover, Babiš was criticized because of conflict of interest and was prosecuted because of the misuse of EU funds at the time of data collection.

The Communist Party is a successor of the then Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which was the sole governing party in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989 responsible for violation of human rights, judicial murders, etc. The current Communist Party has never fully distanced itself from its totalitarian past. Though not a governmental party, it was supporting Babiš' government at the time of data collection.

The Freedom and Direct Democracy movement is a national-populist movement. Sometimes, it is described as xenophobic and placed to the far-right. The movement has strong anti-EU, anti-Islam and anti-immigration attitudes. Together with Freedom Party of Austria or French National Rally it is a member European Identity and Democracy Party.

However, the interviewees reflect that it is hard to say who the Czech citizens distrust because their social bubbles might differ. Interviewees again mention the current prime minister and the president as untrustworthy people (so viewed by the citizens). Some think that a part of the citizens does not trust the European Union. Dita (CZ XR F) describes the Czech Republic as a very distrustful nation, and she thinks that Czechs do not trust "anyone, not even a word". The followers of the XR also see the Czech nation as conservative and as those who prefer what they know. They think that the Czechs might be afraid of something new, and maybe that is why they keep voting for the current prime minister.

Interviewees from the MM movement say that the movement **does not cooperate** with any **governmental institutions**. The XR core members say that the movement could **cooperate** with governmental institutions in the future. However, this cooperation is described rather as communication (to create a "dialogue" (CZ XR C)), and is perceived as **instrumental**. Zuzka says that cooperation with a governmental institution "would not make sense" (CZ XR F) because the movement does not trust the government. Vanda also says that cooperation with governmental institutions themselves "does not make sense to me" (CZ XR C), and highlights that they should rather communicate with experts. She thinks cooperation with governmental institutions could **undermine the trust** of the citizens in the movement. Sofi has a different opinion:

> *I have a feeling that if a governmental institution collaborated with us, we would simply get bigger credibility, we would be put (…) in a category that is different than 'some radical freaks' (...) And I think that if there were an institution that people know and it's familiar, so maybe on the other side, it would gain trust because it's known, because it's familiar* (CZ XR F).

Interviewees from the XR say that sometimes they **cooperate** and communicate with **NGOs**, but they do not "create strategy with other movements" (CZ XR C) because other movements are "too conservative" (CZ XR C) for them. The interviewees from the MM say that the movement cooperates with some NGOs; they mention ecological NGOs, and smaller citizens' initiatives (the MM tries to help other initiatives with the goal of a more active civil society). According to a core member from the MM, it is **not clear** whether this cooperation has affected citizens' trust in the movement.

According to the interviewees, there is **no cooperation** between the XR and **political parties**. Alex says they "cannot unite" with a political party, and they "have to be independent of everyone" (CZ XR F). However, some interviewees say that the movement communicates with political parties to speak about climate issues, or share the movement's ideas on what is important. The interviewees emphasise that such communication does not mean that they support the political party.

Although the interviewees describe the MM movement as "apolitical" (CZ MM F), there is some **cooperation with political parties based on shared goals**. The followers say that

the movement cooperates with the parties in opposition, and the core members describe them as parties that still fall into "the limits of democracy" (CZ MM C). The core members agree that the effect of the movement's cooperation with political parties on citizens' trust in the movement is **not clear**. Vlasta is the only one who says that, because people can see the movement communicating with the party leaders, and therefore having some "direct effect" (CZ MM C) on them, some people have gained trust in the MM. She adds that maybe some people have remained sceptical. Other core members describe that some party supporters cannot stand the other parties. This leads to a complicated situation because some party supporters, who also support the MM, tend to reproach the MM for its cooperation with other parties. Therefore, according to the core members, cooperation with political parties affects citizens' trust in the movement.

Interviewees' opinions on **what can be done at the local** and **the national levels to enhance trust** often overlap and are very similar, therefore, they are presented together in this section. The interviewees, in all focus groups, highlight the importance of the **communication** levels of institutions. There seems to be a broad consensus across all focus groups that the communication of institutions towards citizens should be improved. The interviewees think that, in order to enhance trust, the institutions (e.g., the government, regional councils) should explain their purposes, competencies and responsibilities, and should inform citizens about the results of their work. Some interviewees also point out that the institutions should be more transparent, and provide citizens with a means through which important information can be searched:

> *Kača: I think that, to enhance trust in institutions, even at the local level, it'd be probably good to improve communication, so that, simply, everyone, absolutely everyone, could transparently find out what the institutions are doing, why they are doing that, how they are doing that, and what, simply put, the result is. (…) And I think that this is something in which the government, and, generally, Czech institutions are lagging behind* (CZ MM C).

Moreover, the XR followers claim that the communication of the institutions should be understandable and that politicians should try to "get closer to ordinary people" and "be in touch with all people – poor, rich, different ethnicities, different genders" (CZ XR F). The XR core members put more emphasis on *dialogue* between institutions and citizens. They stress that the institutions should consult citizens about their decisions, involving them in the decision-making process, in order to enhance trust. The XR core members often associate this opinion with the establishment of the so-called citizens' assemblies (see Section 2.5 for more details).

Besides different aspects of communication towards/with citizens, the interviewees often speak about **specific qualities of individual politicians** which could, in the interviewees' opinion, help with trust restoration. The followers from both movements think that the representatives should demonstrate their competence – they should "know what

they're doing" (CZ MM F) and make "evidence-based decisions" (CZ XR F). The XR followers also believe that politicians should be sincere about their failures, should be able to "admit mistakes" and "apologise" (CZ XR F). This opinion is similar to other requirements concerning the integrity of politicians – Franta (CZ XR C) thinks that "less corruption" could help enhance trust; the MM followers say that politicians should be less "hypocritical" (i.e., they should follow the same rules as are required of their citizens), and should pursue their personal or party interests less. Vlasta (CZ MM C) interrelates the role of politicians' integrity with the above-described importance of communication:

> *Vlasta: By the way, regarding this topic* (communication of institutions*, it's very interesting when the politicians do that on behalf of the institutions versus when they do that on behalf of themselves, or the party. (*then contrasting communication of a regional politician who informs on behalf of the region on his Facebook account, with the communication of the current Prime Minister, who informs citizens only as a part of his PR) *And I think this is an important step to enhance trust in institutions, and to build a relationship with the institutions, so that people would say: "Our regional council president did this," instead of saying: "Babiš did this," but they, actually wouldn't know that he's the prime minister* (CZ MM C).

The interviewees talk much less about **what can be done at the EU level to enhance trust**. Only interviewees in the MM focus groups cover this issue. The MM followers, as well as core members, claim that the EU should improve its communication and say that "it has underestimated its self-propagation" (CZ MM C). The MM followers also perceive the narrative about the EU, promoted by some Czech politicians, as problematic. They say that the EU often serves as "a scapegoat" (CZ MM F) for some politicians, who blame it for problems which the EU is not responsible for. They are also convinced that "the current Czech government nurtures distrust towards the EU" (CZ MM F) on purpose, due to the EU audit, which warned about the Prime Minister's conflict of interests.

Some interviewees think that it is not the primary role of social movements to enhance citizens' trust. Instead, the movement should enhance people's critical thinking, interest in state politics, and mobilise people to increase pressure on state institutions. By **repairing institutions**, trust can be increased as a side effect. Vlasta thinks that the political leaders (naming the President and the Prime Minister) need to be replaced first. Then they can "push" (CZ MM C) the institution to communicate with citizens, which she perceives as the movement's role. Dita, from the XR movement, also talks about pushing and "kicking them (the politics) in the butt" (CZ XR F). The MM core members say that maybe by talking about the importance of the institutions and democratic system, they could theoretically enhance people's trust in them. Jana thinks that the MM movement's role is to "remind people to vote" for people who are "trustworthy" (CZ MM C). Marek adds that their role is to communicate and explain (e.g., the role of the Czech television and its importance). According to Rut, the social movements' role is to "take back" (CZ MM C) the right to speak up and participate in the running of society.

The XR followers say the role of the movement is to communicate with citizens, explain things "humanly" (CZ XR F), and cooperate with experts. The XR core members have various opinions about what the role of the movement should be. Soňa thinks the movements should be radical. Vanda emphasises that the movement's goal is not to be liked or loved by people, but to point out the urgency of climate change. Their role is to disrupt people's comfort zones, so that they start to think more about the climate. Franta says:

> *I think that the movement's intention is to enhance the political culture in general, and with that, there comes trust. So, I don't think that the primary intention is to increase trust. In what? (...) Now there is nothing to trust in, right? So, at first, something that makes sense has to come, that can be trusted. And then, trust is a natural thing. It cannot be increased artificially, I'd say* (CZ XR C).

According to some MM followers, **social movements can help in trust building by correcting institutions**. For example, Radek says:

> *The movements primarily point at and can enhance the interest [in institutions]. And when the interest is increased (…) it can create some pressure, and when that pressure is put in the right direction, then it can enhance the trustworthiness [of the institution]. But it is not like in the first place, that is like consequences* (CZ MM F).

Other interviewees from the MM agree that social movements can enhance trust, and the MM succeeded in enhancing trust/belief in the possibility of change (e.g., in 2019, there was a large demonstration in Prague). According to Marek, at least there was an "awakening of a belief in the fact that the public can do something" (CZ MM C).

2.4 Expertise

There seems to be quite a strong consensus throughout all the focus groups regarding the **role of experts in decision making**. On the one hand, the interviewees perceive **expert knowledge as an authority**, and believe that expert knowledge should be a crucial factor determining political decisions. They say that the institutions "should cooperate and look for solutions together with experts" (CZ XR C), that the role of experts should be "essential" and "bigger" (CZ XR F), and that "the people who are elected should have some experts below, who would advise them how to do it (i.e., make decisions in specific areas)" (CZ MM F). On the other hand, in all focus groups, interviewees express an opinion that the role of expert knowledge in decision making in Czechia is currently insufficient. Some interviewees perceive the fact that politicians do not rely on expert knowledge, and are indifferent to it, as problematic. Other interviewees think there is a lack of demand for expert knowledge, and that expertise has been "losing its credit in

society" (CZ MM C) as a whole. These opinions can be illustrated in the following quotations:

> *Jan: (…) it doesn't matter whether there are any experts who have something to say if, eventually, they're not listened to. Or more precisely, that the government or the politicians don't rely on them. (…)* (CZ MM F).

> *Dita: (…) nobody cares about any effective steps (…) I think that the demand for scientific approach equals zero. (…) So, now I'm sceptical a lot and I don't know whether it's similarly bad in the rest of the world, or whether the politics isn't based on science at all, and it's about something completely different; I haven't comprehended it yet* (CZ XR F).

At the same time, all focus groups reflect on specific issues associated with expertise, and the role of experts in the society and decision making. Firstly, core members from both movements point out that people tend to trust those personalities whom they perceive as authorities. However, these authorities often express opinions on issues that are not part of their expertise, the interviewees think. Secondly, core members from the MM movement consider funding of experts as problematic because it can create a conflict of interest, and experts can be somehow influenced by the governmental structures. Finally, in all focus groups, interviewees raise an issue of presenting expert knowledge and scientific findings to the public. For instance, they stress that opposing expert opinions is often presented in the media, possibly leading to confusion among citizens. As a result, it is difficult for the public to get oriented within scientific findings and comprehend them, in interviewees' opinions:

> *Pepa: Unfortunately, the problem is, regarding Covid or any other topic, that they (media) invite one bacteriologist, one virologist, one epidemiologist, one biochemist, and one associate professor of linguistics, and each of them is given some space in the media. And it's absolutely all right that we have such plurality of opinions. Unfortunately, regarding the scientific work, in order to enhance trust, and not only create a collective confusion (…), it's necessary to make these gentlemen sit together in a conference room and reach a consensus which could then be presented* (CZ MM F).

In relation to this issue, the core members from the MM movement reflect that, eventually, people tend to trust those experts who present opinions that are in concordance with what a given person has already believed before. The MM followers also discuss that media sometimes oversimplify some expert opinions, which, in interviewees' opinion, can be related to the fact that the public often looks for simple and unambiguous solutions. The XR followers also think there is a lack of popularisation of science. Dita (CZ XR F) emphasises that the scientists do not do enough to popularise their findings, and she thinks it could be potentially beneficial if scientists participated in events organised by the XR more directly. However, according to Bela (CZ XR F), social movements are the ones who can put themselves in the role of popularisers of scientific knowledge:

Bela: (…) I have a feeling that the movement puts itself in the role of a populariser of scientific findings. A typical example [talking about an event organised by the XR CZ in Brno]: an info-gate in Brno – that's an event where (…) a person's standing under a banner 'You're walking through a climate crisis', has a thousand other banners with different charts beside them, and is standing there explaining to the people who are interested: 'It's like this and this, I can explain it to you simply, right here' (CZ XR F).

Concerning the **role of experts in the movement**, both movements seem to rely on expert knowledge, at least on the **advisory level**. Both the core members and followers of the MM movement mention that the movement somehow cooperates with experts, and relies on expert knowledge. At the same time, they claim that the movement does not comment on issues when its members feel that an expert opinion is beyond their capabilities (such as during the Covid-19 pandemic). According to the MM core members, the MM movement even has its own expert teams which collect data and do their own research:

Interviewer 1: So, is it important to you to have your statements, decisions or some attitudes, to have them founded (on expert knowledge/data)?

Vlasta: We definitely don't do it in every issue and always (…), but we're trying, I think, to keep a good track of and test, for example, our own campaigns, their functioning, public opinion, to get information from various agencies.

Interviewer 1: So, do you have your own, a sort of, expert panel?

Vlasta: We have even got our own research panel (CZ MM C).

Regarding the XR movement, both core members and followers claim their movements rely on expert knowledge and cooperate with experts. According to the XR interviewees, the movement often refers to scientific findings, especially from the field of climatology, and, apart from other activities, they organise lectures called *Rebel Talks,* where specific topics are discussed with an invited expert. Moreover, one interviewee points out that the activities of the movement have somehow evolved from scientific findings (especially with regard to climate change):

Hana: I think that it's simply very clear, indisputable, that the actions and what we're striving for, are simply based on science. (…) I think that it's quite clear that our demands are appropriate if we look at them scientifically (CZ XR C).

As noted in the XR followers' focus group, the movement's strategy and its form of actions are also based on scientific findings. The movement's actions are usually radical or performative, to some extent, because "sociologists have found that most of the people need an emotional experience" (CZ XR F) to change their opinion. However, it is unclear

whether experts are also members of the XR movement – the interviewees themselves are not sure about this.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

Regarding the perception of the **importance of voting**, the MM followers are the only focus group where the opinion that voting is **the most important form of political participation** prevails. These interviewees mostly say that voting is "the greatest' form of political participation, or 'the main (thing) a citizen can do for their country" (CZ MM C). The interviewees in other focus groups rather emphasise that **voting is important, but other forms are also important**. They mention that voting "does not suffice" (CZ MM C), or that it is "a minimum" (CZ XR F) a person can do, but it should not be the only form of political participation.

Across focus groups, diverse opinions on **other forms of participation important for democracy** are expressed. **Participation in political parties** (or more precisely, standing for election), and **participation in social movements** (or supporting them) are mentioned by followers of both movements. The XR and the MM core members say it is necessary for the public to be "an active civil society" (CZ MM C) – i.e., to be continuously interested in politics, to monitor politicians and to contact them whenever necessary. These attitudes can be illustrated in following quotations:

> *Jana: I'd say that yes (i.e., that voting is one of the most important forms of political participation), but I'd add (as another form of political participation) contact with politicians, even between elections. Because the elections aren't the end – you vote for someone and you monitor them a bit after, and, for example, you try to send them your opinions (…)* (CZ MM C).

> *Vanda: Well, I think that the politicians need to be monitored by the public. And it means (…) being interested in what is happening, which laws are approved (…) what they (politicians) propose. It means attending sessions of local governments, being interested in what is happening in my neighbourhood (…)* (CZ XR C).

Non-institutional forms of participation, such as "civil disobedience" (CZ XR F), or demonstrations, are mentioned a few times. The MM followers also discuss the significance of talking to other people about politics as an alternative form of political participation. Pepa says it is important to talk to young people, and to "positively influence them" (CZ MM F); Mišo thinks it is also necessary to talk to "older generations" (CZ MM F); Radek believes it is valuable to talk to "people with different political opinions" (CZ MM F).

The interviewees do not give concrete answers on **citizens' capability** (or competence) **to make** (democratic) **political decisions** very often. A few interviewees say **citizens are**

capable of making democratic political decisions. However, these interviewees' primary understanding of this is that "democracy means that everyone has one vote" (CZ XR F). The MM followers do not openly say whether citizens are capable of making democratic political decisions, or not. Interviewees from the XR movement mostly think that **citizens are** only **partially capable,** or that they **are not capable** due to external factors, such as limited resources and opportunities. These interviewees usually interconnect this opinion with their belief that the current system disables people from making genuine democratic decisions, and does not provide them with space and/or tools to participate democratically. One interviewee expresses her attitude on the issue as follows:

> *Zuzka: I think that, currently, they're not (capable of making democratic political decisions). Because we're swamped with responsibilities, earning a living (…), we don't have an opportunity to educate ourselves adequately (…). So, most people don't have time to really research, translate some scientific or other adequate sources from abroad. So, most of the people just ask their friends who they'll vote for (…) but they (…) don't have time to make an adequate decision. Although they'd like to, but they simply don't have either energy or capacity* (CZ XR F).

Similar to the MM followers, neither do the MM core members explicitly talk about citizens' capability to make democratic decisions. Rather, they point out that one of the aims of the movement is to build a sense of political competence in people. They try to lead people towards being more proactive and interested in politics, which, as a result, should help people to feel more competent regarding political decisions. This attitude seems to be closely related to two of the **citizens' empowerment pathways** indicated by the MM core members, namely that **citizens should be more proactive themselves**, and that they **need more information and knowledge**. The MM core members say they try to "raise civil self-confidence" (CZ MM C) – they strive to increase citizens' awareness that political affairs affect them, and they highlight that people should take responsibility for what is happening around them. This goes hand in hand with building knowledge of politics and, consequently, feelings of competence:

> *Rút: Well, the competence is built by continually being interested in things. That is – I can start at the local government, for example. Or I can join a civic initiative which is interested in a certain issue. And, thereby, I become more competent. If I start once, I gain more and more knowledge, I build historical memory (…)* (CZ MM C).

Though not that explicit, the idea that **citizens should be more proactive themselves** is partly expressed in other focus groups, too. For instance, some MM followers think that citizens would participate more if they witnessed the participation of other people around them. Similarly, the opinion that **citizens need more information and knowledge** is formulated in the XR followers' focus groups by two interviewees, who believe that the empowerment of citizens should begin at primary and secondary

schools. These interviewees say that children should be educated about democracy, and should be encouraged to believe that they can be initiators of political change.

All focus groups discuss possible **institutional changes towards citizens' participation,** as well. However, interviewees in every focus group also express scepticism about the willingness of the institutions, the representatives, or the whole system, to engage citizens more. They say that "the people in (…) the state institutions (…) don't feel like activating people to participate more" (CZ MM F), or that 'there's response lacking in the system' (CZ XR F) regarding the citizens' participation. The XR core members even think that the system is "set so that people won't participate", and that "active citizenship cannot be built in the current system" (CZ XR C). As described above, the XR core members, as well as a few interviewees from other focus groups, believe that the current system disables people from participating more because people are too busy earning a living and, consequently, do not have enough time, space, and/or energy.

As a solution to this problem, interviewees from the XR movement mention **setting the tools for more direct involvement**, specifically establishing the so-called *citizens' assemblies* (CAs). According to descriptions by the interviewees, the CAs are based on a principle that a predetermined number of citizens are randomly selected to make decisions about a certain issue. The citizens should be selected so that they create a representative sample of the population. Members of the CAs are somehow educated about the issue (e.g., by experts on the issue), they discuss the issue, and then they vote about it. Moreover, members of the CA should get financial compensation for their participation. The XR interviewees perceive CAs as good, for several reasons: (1) they can enable participation of people who would not otherwise be able to participate in decision-making (e.g., members of minorities), (2) members of the CA would vote for such steps which are 'unpopular', but which should be beneficial for the public (e.g., regarding climate crisis) because they are not motivated to be re-elected (they are randomly selected), (3) CAs provide the members with space to truly educate themselves about discussed issues, and to carefully deliberate about it. The XR interviewees are not the only ones who talk about CAs, though. Marek (CZ MM C) also mentions the CAs. He finds them "interesting" and thinks they could promote citizens' sense of "being part of a whole (…) which I'm responsible for, and where I have a chance to influence something". At the same time, not all XR interviewees perceive the CAs positively – Dita (CZ XR F) expresses scepticism about it, and thinks that members of the CAs would be easily manipulated by different lobbyist groups.

Among other **tools for more direct involvement**, the MM interviewees mention *participative budgeting,* or *local referendum* – both already functioning in some Czech cities and towns. Finally, some interviewees talk about **changing the legal framework to be more encouraging of participation**. The interviewees, especially from the XR movement, again relate this to their opinion that people do not have enough time to participate because they are preoccupied with economic activities. Therefore, some of them

propose introducing *unconditional basic income,* or *lowering the number of working days*. This idea is also promoted by one of the MM core members, though indirectly:

> *Erika: What the state could do to enable people to participate more is (…) to focus on people having satisfied their basic needs so that they would have the possibility of devoting their free time to it (i.e., participation). Because, when a million people live below the poverty line, or they have debts, they'd hardly spend their free time actively attending local government sessions and building a community together* (CZ MM C).

Many interviewees think that social movements are **successful** in bringing more citizens' voices to governmental institutions. Alex says:

> *I can see that there is success in pushing the public opinion about the climate and that people didn't care about it at all before, now [they do], at least a little bit. And about the influence on the institutions; it's happened many times that after some action in front of an institution, someone came and [said]: 'Hey, we'd like to discuss it with you, would you?' Yeah, so, great. There was some response; I am not sure how it ended. (...)* (CZ XR F).

Dita (CZ XR F) has a similar opinion; the action of social movements dealing with climate change "makes sense". According to Vanda, civil participation in the Czech Republic is very low, but the social movements have been "changing it (for the better)" (CZ XR C).

More specifically, the MM interviewees think that social movements are successful at 'activating the civil society' (CZ MM F), and increasing "interest in the activity of politics" (CZ MM F). Marek talks about the large demonstration in 2019 that the MM organised:

> *(…) it was able to mobilise the whole society. (…) Yeah, maybe like there's a question whether there was trust, or it was awakened, but at least trust in the fact that the public can do something has been awakened* (CZ MM C).

However, some MM and XR followers think that the movements are **partially successful**. Zuzka (CZ XR F) says that the movements "at least help to connect people", and are "psychological support", but she is not sure whether "it'll get to the institutions as a follow-up step". Sofi (CZ XR F) thinks there have been some improvements, but this is not the "ideal state". However, Bella (CZ XR F) is more sceptical, and says that she does not see "the results".

3. Conclusion

After analysing all four focus groups, these are the main findings. Both movements put emphasis on an open and ongoing discussion, and are fully inclusive. In the XR, the attitude against formal and hierarchical decision-making structure is prevalent. Meanwhile, in the MM, the core members have somewhat more important roles in decision-making

than other members and followers. When the basic principles and values are upheld, anyone can initiate an action in both movements.

Regarding the topic of trust, interviewees tend to perceive it rather as positive and vital. The core members consider trust as crucial in society (e.g., for building a strong society), and the lack of trust as something negative for society (e.g., because it can lead to a feeling of resignation among citizens). On the other hand, some interviewees perceive distrust as conditionally positive; for instance, it can promote critical thinking. Moreover, interviewees consider Czechs as very distrustful; some of them think it is because of the historical context of the Czech Republic. Others say that Czechs are conservative and afraid of change, which could relate to their distrustfulness, as well. According to the interviewees, distrust can be conditionally positive in terms of promoting critical thinking, wariness, and alertness towards politics. According to the interviewees, the Czech citizens and the interviewees themselves do not trust the government, the current prime minister and/or the president. However, some interviewees emphasise that their opinions might be based on their social bubbles and are not necessarily representative of the Czech population.

Both movements are highly concerned with the issue of institutional and system trust. The MM core members perceive trust in institutions as positive and important, and think that untrustworthy representatives undermine trust in the institutions they represent. This movement trusts the political system and democracy, and this could be related to one of their roles, namely explaining the functions of different institutions to the public. There is a noticeable difference between the movements as the MM interviewees rather trust the political system, and some think that by replacing untrustworthy representatives, the political situation could get better. Meanwhile, some XR interviewees trust the system much less and others do not trust it at all, and strive for a more robust reform. Some of these interviewees do not believe that there is such a thing as democracy or society (in the sense of 'real' connections between people) right now. The majority of MM interviewees think that a belief in the possibility of change can mobilise citizens. Some of the XR interviewees trust a few political parties and academic institutions.

There are both similarities and differences in how the movements establish their cooperation with other actors. Both movements sometimes cooperate with NGOs, and the MM occasionally cooperates with some opposition political parties. At the same time, neither movement cooperates with governmental institutions. From the interviews, the effect of different cooperation is usually not clear; this is not very developed by the interviewees and in XR, there is disagreement over whether potential cooperation with governmental institutions could benefit trust, or undermine it.

Several strategies are proposed by the interviewees to enhance citizens' trust in institutions. They emphasise that communication of the institutions with the public is very important, and should be improved. The institutions should put greater effort into explain-

ing their functions, informing citizens about their outcomes, and being more transparent. In comparison with the MM interviewees, the XR interviewees put much more emphasis on involving citizens in the decision-making process. Some interviewees highlight that better representatives could increase trust, as well. Regarding the role of social movements, the interviewees agree that it is not their primary role to increase trust in institutions. However, some interviewees say that trust can be increased as a side effect of the social movements' activities (for example, by monitoring institutions). Although it is not the social movements' primary role, some MM interviewees think that social movements can enhance trust, something that the MM has succeeded in.

There seems to be an agreement between, as well as within, both movements regarding the role of experts in decision-making. The interviewees are convinced that experts should play a crucial role in the decision-making processes, and that politicians should rely on expert knowledge. However, the interviewees also think that, currently, expert knowledge is taken into consideration insufficiently by both the politicians and the public. The interviewees associate this state with several issues – e.g., lack of demand for expert knowledge in society, insufficient popularisation of science, or confusing and misleading presentation of expert opinions in the media. Some interviewees perceived that these factors might contribute to citizens' distrust of scientific knowledge.

Similar to the role of experts in decision-making, the interviewees highlight the importance of expert knowledge in the movement. Both movements rely on experts to some degree, though there might be different approaches towards the role of experts. For instance, some experts are members of the MM movement, and the movement even conducts its own research and opinion polls. Information collected in such research is used to test the effectiveness of the movement's campaigns. Therefore, one approach to expert knowledge can be to understand it as a *means* to reaching the movement's key goals (e.g., enhancing active citizenship, monitoring politicians). At the same time, it is possible to understand expert knowledge rather as *content* that should be delivered to the public and to politicians to reach goals reflecting this expert knowledge. For example, in the case of measures against climate crisis, the XR followers, as well as core members, emphasise that the movement relies significantly on expert knowledge, and that the movement's demands are strictly in accordance with scientific findings. The membership of experts in the XR movement is less clear when compared to the MM, which might be caused by the movement's looser structure and its 'low-threshold' membership.

With the exception of some MM followers, the interviewees mostly perceive voting as an important form of political participation, but, at the same time, they stress that there are other forms of political participation which are similarly important. Core members from both movements put emphasis on active citizenship, in terms of having an interest in public affairs and monitoring politicians. Occasionally, the interviewees across the focus groups mention other forms of political participation, such as non-institutional forms

of participation (e.g., demonstrations, civil disobedience, talking to others), participation in local politics, or participation in social movements.

In general, the interviewees talk about citizens' capability to make democratic political decisions reservedly. Nevertheless, the way this issue is perceived by both movements differs. The XR interviewees often point to obstacles within the system which incapacitate people from making genuine democratic decisions (e.g., preoccupation with economic activities leading to a lack of time for democratic participation). Correspondingly, they often express scepticism about the possibility of helping people participate more. In comparison, the MM core members talk about trying to make people feel more competent with regard to political participation (indicating that at least a part of society does not feel capable). Compared to the XR interviewees, they more often mention promoting possibilities for citizens' participation in the frame of the current system. These dissimilarities are often reflected in the attitudes of both movements towards citizens' empowerment paths. While the MM interviewees emphasise the role of raising people's interest in politics, and encouraging citizens to be active themselves, the XR interviewees rather tend to point out possible institutional changes which could facilitate citizens' participation (e.g., establishing citizens' assemblies, introducing unconditional basic income). However, the MM interviewees peripherally mention a few institutional changes that introduce more participative elements, as well (e.g., participative budgeting, local referendums).

The interviewees across focus groups believe that, at least to some extent, social movements have an impact on citizens' participation. The MM interviewees seem to be a little more optimistic concerning this issue, though. They reflect the activisation of civil society through the massive demonstrations organised by the movement, and they say that they can see some improvements in civil participation in their surroundings. On the other hand, the XR interviewees more often talk about the current state as being not the ideal one. This might be caused, for instance, by a perceived insufficient impact of the movement on political steps concerning climate change. However, the XR interviewees also mention that the society-wide debate on climate change has moved forward recently, and the credit for it could be partly attributed to their own movement's activities.

Based on the results of this study, it seems that trust is mostly perceived as positive and important by both social movements. Some interviewees consider trust as the basic element in the building and functioning of democratic society, and they believe that excessive distrust can undermine it. Both movements perceive Czechs as a distrustful nation. Most of the interviewees agree that trust in the governmental institutions can be enhanced through better communication and transparency, and through greater integrity and competence of their representatives. Although it is not the role of social movements to increase trust in politics, the movements can increase citizens' trust as a side effect of their activities, according to the interviewees.

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Trust and Distrust – New Challenges and Dilemmas in Danish Social movements

Anne Brus

1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Denmark

In this introductory paragraph, we will present some of the most visible and vocal social movements in contemporary Denmark. Lindekilde & Olesen (2015:31) recommend four core concepts to describe social movements: Social movements (SM), social movements' organisations (SMO), activism, and political protest. SMs are characterised by their collective political protests, and their development of solidarity and collective identity. SMOs are organised with a clear organisational structure and use political protest as part of their repertoire. Activism is a more individualised form of social movement. Activists participate in political protest but are driven by reflections on what the activists themselves can gain from being part of the movement. Political protest can be performed either collectively, or individually. Usually, political protest is a public articulation directed towards the 'system of authorities', and a demand for political change. "Voluntariness" is another form of participation in democracy, and it has certain overlaps with how people participate in Danish social movements (Brinderkrantz 2020). Further, voluntary associations, interest associations, and cooperative movements have played a major role in building democracy in Denmark and the rest of Scandinavia (see Denmark WP2 report for further information), but they are not recognised as a social movement if we use Lindekilde & Olesens (2015) definitions as a starting point. This report will not discuss the consequences of the different typologies and definitions but will focus instead on the challenges that have been raised, through an investigation into two cases. The point is that many of the social movements in Denmark cannot be distinguished along these typologies since they combine rather different features. The field of social movement studies is also not clearly demarcated in Danish academia but is shared between different areas of research.

Since the late 1960s and until now, the Danish environmental social movements have had a long tradition of mobilising people for the protection of the environment and protesting climate changes. According to Linda Sonerud and Åsa Wettergren (2015), the environmental movements in Denmark have undergone an early institutionalisation, with a high degree of specialisation and professionalisation. From the very beginning, the environmental discussions have been widely supported by the Danish people, as well as the state and industry that have incorporated the environmental questions into their policy. One result of this mainstreaming process is that many of the environmental

movements seek dialogue, rather than confrontation, to achieve their aims (Sonerud & Wettergren, 2015). Over the years, numerous environmental movements in Denmark have seen the light, and many of them are still active, for example NOAH, the first environmental movement (founded in 1969), Danmarks Naturforening (the Danish society for Nature Conservation), the internationally oriented Verdensnaturfonden (Worldwide Fund for Nature), and Greenpeace Nordic, among many others. One of the newest actors is the global youth movement, Friday for Future. The Danish section[6] has organised school strikes, information meetings, and climate strikes to show their dissatisfaction with the government's climate policy regarding, for example, CO2 emissions.

The Danish refugee social movements are also important actors on the social movement scene in Denmark. The latest so-called "September mobilisation" (Toubøl 2015) was activated in connection with the influx of refugees from the Middle east and Northern Africa at the beginning of 2015. On the one hand, the Venstre (Liberal-Democratic Party) government pursued a policy with the national conservative and immigrant critical Dansk Folkeparti (the Danish People's Party) where one of the shared goals was to reduce the number of immigrants entering Denmark; on the other hand, a growing number of Danes were mobilising in local groups to meet the refugees and immigrants with kindness (Toubøl 2015). It is important to mention that some refugee movements already existed before 2015 (see 1.2. for more information). That fact may have affected the September mobilisation protest because the social movements already had experience in organising social activities, handling linguistic barriers, and offering legal help to asylum seekers and refugees. But other activities, such as civil disobedience, were arranged. For example, some Danes helped the refugees without legal residence with transport, medical help, money, and shelter (Toubøl 2015). Other examples of refugee solidarity movements are Venligboerne (the Friendly Neighbours), Venligboerne Flytningehjælp (the Friendly Neighbours – Aid to Refugees) and Trampolinhuset (the Trampoline House). Venligboerne is one of two cases that will be discussed. The Trampoline House (TH) is situated in the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, and is described as a 'political civic based' empowerment project, based on a political open and inclusive atmosphere where everyone is invited to express themselves as they wish (Carlsen, Doeer, & Toubøl 2021).

An interesting social movement development is the new potential to activate and mobilise people on the Internet and via social media, thereafter, turning the mobilisation into physical protest meetings and demonstrations (Jørgensen & Olesen 2022). As will be described, one of our cases uses Facebook to organise all their activities and communication. Another change is a more individualised form of political activism that has not been seen before. Jørgensen & Olesen (2022) mention, for example, the feminist activist, Emma Holten, who was made a victim of revenge porn on the Internet. Her experiences have motivated her to engage in feminist activism on her own. She describes her

[6] https://www.klimastrejke.dk/

activism as designed "… *to make people change their minds*" (Jørgensen & Olesen, 2022).

1.2 Case studies and organisation of research[7]

Our two cases represent the first environmental movement in Denmark – NOAH[8], and the refugee solidarity movement – the Friendly Neighbours – Aid to Refugees (VbF) which will be presented forthwith. If we follow the typologies of a social movement, NOAH's intentions, from the very beginning and up to today, have been a protest for change directed towards the established system, both at national and global levels. For example, NOAH represents Denmark in the global movement, Friends of the Earth. The purpose of NOAH has been to work on improving *'… the living environment by actively fighting environmental degradation and its causes, and suggesting alternatives',* as is formulated in their clause from 1969. The clause is still a central point of departure for NOAH. As of today, they formulate their purpose as '*…all current and future generations* ought … *to have equal access to the Earth's resources - without the environment being overloaded'.* NOAH calls it '*environmental justice'.* NOAH is also a well-organised SMO. For example, NOAH differs from other environmental movements, such as Greenpeace or the WWF, by having a flat structure in which all activists have a say in the decisions. All communication in NOAH takes place via a monthly electronic magazine, 'NOAH Internal'. Here, any local group, or the board, can make a proposal. The activists either accept or react and propose alternatives to the proposal. Twice a year during one weekend, the activists gather to talk about the organisation, economic issues, and ways for further development. Time is also accorded to the different topic groups, so that they can exchange experiences about their actions, thus contributing to better communication and cohesion within NOAH. Another characteristic is related to the typology of a social movement. Since 1988, NOAH has represented Denmark internationally in the social movements, Friends of the Earth International, Friends of the Earth Europe, and Young Friends of the Earth. The internationalisation of the social movement can be seen as a coordinated political protest. The purpose is to challenge globalisation and to support solutions towards sustainable societies with social justice. Like many other environmental social movements in Denmark, NOAH receives financial support from various governmental and non-governmental sources. According to NOAH's website, they receive money from the European Board pool B, DG AGRI, DUF, ERASMUS, Global Focus, the GAIA Foundation, and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

[7] In this paragraph, the information is based on two social movements' websites, www.noah.dk and http://www.venligboerne.org/

[8] NOAH is an acronym for Naturhistoriske OnsdagsAftenener (Wednesday Evenings of Natural History). The H is a 'misunderstanding', written in an invitation to the first meeting by one of the organisers, but NOAH has chosen to keep it (www.noah.dk).

Using the presented typology on the second case, Venligboerne Flytningehjælp (VbF) can be described using the concept, a social movement. On the VbF website[9], the movement also identifies itself as a movement, or a 'concept'. Established in 2013, the Venligboerne is based on experiences from a health project in Hjørring Municipality. One of the results of the health project is the idea that a mutual show of human kindness raises people's sense of well-being. In continuation of this, an idea of training people to be friendly is also raised. The training is based on three principles: 1. Be friendly in encounters with others. 2: Be curious when you meet people who are different from you, and 3: Meet differences with respect. In 2014, Hjørring received around 500 asylum applications. Further, the founder of Venligboerne, Merete Bonde Pilgaard, underscores the idea that Venligboerne's principles can contribute to a friendly acceptance of asylum seekers. As we have described in the introductory part of this report, the political landscape was divided into two parts: very roughly speaking, some were pro giving the refugees asylum, while some were against. Pilgaard declared that she was not interested in taking a political stance, but from a humanitarian point of view, she thought that the Venligboerne, in the very least, could meet the asylum seekers with friendship while they waited for a decision from the Refugee Board. Thereafter, Venligboerne Flytningehjælp (VbF) was established as a subdivision of the original group. Rapidly, the VbF became a national-wide movement with around 150,000 volunteers in 90 cities[10]. In addition, the movement mobilises friendly groups in other European countries, e.g., Norway, Sweden, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, France. The mobilisation to other countries is feasible because everyone, in principle, can establish a Venligboerne group. The only requirement from Pilgaard is that the groups respect the original idea of meeting other people with kindness.

VbF is an offshoot of Pilgaard's experiences with a preventative healthcare initiative in Hjørring municipality. After the idea of VbF became established, the movement promptly and successfully mobilised volunteers from all over Denmark. VbF does not see itself as a political protest group, but rather a movement with a humanitarian-motivated agenda.

1.3 Recruitment

Focus group participants have been recruited via their contact information on the two social movements' websites (NOAH.dk), as well as on the VbF's Facebook site. From the very beginning, both movements showed interest in participating in the research and have been helpful in the process of getting in contact with potential focus group participants. Our contacts in the social movements have helped us with the recruitment of participants to the four focus groups through a snowball sampling. On the day of the

[9] http://www.venligboerne.org/venligboernes-organisation/flygtningehjaelp/

[10] Numbers from the website, presumably around 2015/2016

respective focus group interviews, we received three sincere apologies. All focus group interviews lasted a little over two hours and were conducted online in April, May, and June 2021. All the preliminary contact, online pre-test interviews, and the online focus group interviews are conducted by postdoc, Anne Brus. The transcription of the online interviews was carried out by two student assistants. Anne Brus was responsible for the coding, analysis and writing process. The other member of the Danish team, Hans-Jörg Trenz, participated in all three processes and has contributed with his knowledge and expertise, especially during the last period of the writing process.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

Before the focus group interviews were conducted, the participants were asked to fill out a socio demographic questionnaire. In the table below, some of the respondents' demographics are presented.

Table 1: Sample characteristics of Danish case study

	Number of participants	Average age	Gender	Level of education	Employment
NOAH core members	6	30-45	3 males, 3 females	Master's degree	precarious, free-lance, full time
NOAH followers	6	45+	5 males, 1 female	Master's degree, bachelor, student, high school, other	precarious, part time, retired, full time
VbF core members	5	45+	1 male, 4 females	Master's degree, bachelor, other	full time, part time, freelance
VbF followers	4	45+	1 male, 3 females	Bachelor, other	retired

The participants predominantly represent the 45+ age group; the average age of the VbF-followers is higher; they are all retired from the labour market. Regarding gender, NOAH is represented by more men than women; VbF, the opposite. There is also a tendency for the followers' level of education to be lower than that of the core members.

DK NOAH: On the date of the pre-test interview, and according to one of the core members of the movement, NOAH has around 100 activists; 20 activists are described as core members. They are engaged in different environmental topics, e.g., they are against new constructions of unnecessary motorways. One of the respondents is from Greenland, a

former Danish colony, and now an autonomous part of Denmark. During the last election in Greenland in the spring of 2021, NOAH was engaged in information campaigns about risks of uranium mining in Greenland. One central part of the activists' work has been to translate many documents from Danish and English into Greenlandic. Other activists are working with the development of sustainable food, and others still are developing training material to educate people in green manners. NOAH uses a broad spectrum of activities to show their dissatisfaction with environmental policy. They write letters, carry out signature collection campaigns, hold demonstrations, are on social media, etc. In addition, one of the core members emphasises the movement's tradition of creative and innovative activism. For example, they demonstrate against the trend towards over-consumption at Christmas, by singing songs that critically address the issue.

Only a few of the youngest activists describe themselves as followers. All the other participants in the focus group interviews see themselves as core activists. No matter how long the activists have been part of the movement, they highlight NOAH's values and goals as a motivation factor for joining the movement. Further, some of them emphasise NOAH's group-based working methods. NOAH is based on participation and basic democracy. Every initiative is discussed with everyone, but both the local and theme-based working groups in NOAH decide what to work on, and how they will practise their environmental activism.

DK VbF: The VbF pre-test responses estimates that there are over 100,000 actives in the movement. This means that the number has dropped by 50,000 citizens since 2014/2015. In the socio democratic questionnaire, the core members identify themselves as members of a management group. The followers describe their role as volunteers. Several times during the pre-test interview, it is underlined that anyone in principle can establish a VbF group. The only claim is to comply with the basic core principles and values of the Venligboerne, as they are described above. According to the pre-test responses, all the VbF communication takes place on Facebook. During the last couple of years, the VbF group has experienced an increased number of negative statements about asylum seekers, as well as about the volunteers themselves. Every VbF group works independently of the others. The focus of work depends on individual group's priorities, time, and interests, and the asylum seekers' needs in the local communities. Some of them describe themselves as mentors and coaches. Some groups organise dinners, others arrange coffee mornings, homework help, job applications, etc. There are also groups with specific, nonlocal purposes such as placement communication, needlework, translation, legal assistance, etc. These groups appoint their own administrators and are managed in many ways. To meet society's requirements for registering, reporting, and handling financial resources, many friendly neighbourhood groups have created support associations. Many of the VbF are active daily. One of the core members describes participation in the movement as 'a lifestyle'.

2.2 Structure of the movements

The formal structure of DK VbF is described as de-centralised, or '*flat*' as the volunteers prefer to call it:

> *Our movement has a very, very flat structure; we are characterised as having no leadership … and we try not to interfere. If one has an engagement and a spirit to do something, then they do it* (DK VbF C).

But both the DK VbF Cs and the DK VbF Fs talk about a **functional structure, where the assignment of roles is practice based.** The movement has chosen to gather what they call a management group. Up to a point, it means that membership of the movement can be described as **conditionally inclusive**. It is the management group that handles the unpleasant comments on Facebook and holds onto the movement's original value on being un-political. The management group was met with a major discussion at the beginning of the movement's lifetime. Because of the arrangement, the movement has been divided into two groups: The DK VbF and the Venligboerne København (the Friendly Neighbours, Copenhagen). The Friendly Neighbours, Copenhagen criticised the VbF management group for holding onto movement values that did not tally with the delicate situation that some of the refugees were in:

> *Well, we are not the same movement [nation-wide movement] anymore. It slipped out at some point because there were some disagreements about the values … The idea was that you should only talk about everything that is positive and you should not criticise something because it should be good. But it did not keep up with the situations some of the families were in. So, there were some who stood out in different fractions* (DK VbF F).

According to DK VbF C, the conflict about how and on what basis to make decisions ended up in court, and a long and exhaustive battle about the right of the movement's name, Venligboerne, was fought. They have since put the controversies behind them. The DK VbF management group has still the overall responsibility to hold onto the original idea about friendliness, but in practice, they try to avoid interfering with the local groups' practises. **Anyone** can start a local Venligboerne group:

> *We [the management group] try to keep our management to a minimum, to what is necessary, e.g., legal stuff and who has the right to call their group 'Venligboerne'. We characterise ourselves as someone who is there to support the groups, stepping forward when it is necessary and otherwise, we try to interfere as little as possible, and set out as few guidelines as possible for what people [the volunteers] may and may not and should and should not do …* (DK VbF C).

From an overall perspective, the DK VbCs highlight that **everyone is allowed to initiate actions** in the movement. Action is, for example, evenings at the group's café, or a

group's second-hand shop, sorting through a collection of clothes, computers or furniture, excursions with children, a communal dinner with Danish, Syrian or Iranian food, or preparations for a demonstration[11]. In addition, a more specialised kind of action involves helping families to communicate with the police, social workers, advocates, doctors, and hospitals.

Both the DK NOAH Cs and DK NOAH Fs give a clear indication that NOAH's **formal structure is horizontal,** for example, by using concepts such as "*flat*", like the DK VbF does. But NOAH also describes its formal structure as a "*consensus democracy*" and an "*active democracy*". The movement is **open for everyone**. They describe their functional structure as **dynamic.** The roles in the movement are changeable and fluid. They relate the dynamic structure to the **levels of decision-making.** When they say something, they always express themselves on behalf of the theme group they are part of:

> *That is, every time you have to say something as a NOAH actor, or what you have to say, you say it again in principle as a group, and then it is clear enough that there is someone within the groups who are spokespersons, and all that. But everything is initiated on a group basis and becomes … hmm …and becomes, how to put it, also verified on a group basis. So, it is the group that is the guarantor; what you say as a group… fits under NOAH's purpose clause. It is basic to being part of NOAH* (DK NOAH C).

Although the flat structure is highlighted as the movement's strength, a few of the DK NOAH C and DK NOAH F members mention that it pressures the decision-making process:

> *The diversity [the fast development in new technology solutions in the environmental area] pressures a social movement like NOAH … and our flat structure. When knowledge is new, then we have problems in understanding what is up and down in the story telling… I am really worried about our flat structure when the solutions become more and more technologically oriented… because the worst paradoxical decisions must be taken very quickly… and I think that the structure we have, we must become better and better at finding some tools, where we can talk about things quietly and help each other* (DK NOAH F).

This openness has had consequences. The openness does sometimes lead to … *'total chaos. In our local group, we have had the most remarkable members, but it has also been fun'* (DK NOAH C). Although most of the activists agree on the openness for everyone, many of them also highlight that there is a kind of '*filtration process'* (DK NOAH F) that takes place during the initial period after joining. Some leave the movement quickly

[11] At the time of the interview, the Danish government started to strip some Syrian refugees of their provisional residence permits, and to expel them to Syria.

afterwards. Still, all the respondents insist on describing the movement as **fully inclusive**.

Regarding DK NOAH's actions, **any member can initiate an action**:

> *It is not something you have to seek special permission for, but of course we expect it to take place within the political message that NOAH stands for, and of course within the framework of the law* (DK NOAH F).

As examples of actions, they mention teaching activities with children and young people about environmental issues and promotion via different digital channels.

When the DK NOAH activists are asked about how they react to **disagreements**, both focus groups refer to the social movement's flat structure that sometimes creates problems:

> *In other words, the thing about being in a position of having to decide, about having to be part of something, or not wanting to be part of something … hmm … There is a time pressure which means that you can't come to a decision … And then the decision becomes a non-decision! It means that some in the group are forced to say, 'we do it this way'. And the other part must go with the others, so to speak… we have not had the time and space and profit and space to make a democratic decision. It has happened once, but it is really, it was really a big, a big thing. So, time pressure, especially time pressure combined with having to completely agree on everything, may well be a problem* (DK NOAH C).

Summing up, the structure of both social movements is de-centralised and dynamic. DK VbF has been challenged because of disagreements on the movement's values, but after a politically oriented group of people left the movement, both the DK VbF Cs and DK VbF Fs now agree on how to organise the movement. Regarding DK NOAH, the movement is challenged because their consensus democracy takes time.

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

All the participants in the four focus groups see **general trust as a significant factor** in Danish society. People in general have a high level of trust towards each other:

> *It plays a huge role in relation to how you organise yourself and how you behave towards your fellow humans. This is something you know from your own life; if there is mutual trust between people and between groups and between people, then it is possible to make a lot of things that are impossible without trust, right? I think that it is crucial for social cohesion that there is a high level of trust* (DK NOAH C).

Some of DK NOAHs even describe their movement as a microcosm of how general trust in society should look. DK NOAH is a movement that is based on mutual trust. The social movement has no hidden agenda. The same applies to many of the VbFs. The values of friendliness are one of the reasons why they joined the movement.

However, most of the respondents in both social movements emphasise general trust as **conditionally positive.** On an individual level**,** you might have less trust even though you agree on the importance of general trust:

> *Basically, I have confidence in the system; that it works, but the system is not perfect, and it is not always true that I am satisfied with what the system does, or the scope of action the system has… For example, integration. It's something that occurs between people. Our system is not geared towards that. I think it is fine that the system works in this way. But when civil society does not engage with the problem to a greater degree than is the case, then the system needs someone to solve the problem* (DK VbF C).

Further, some of the respondents in both social movements pass comment on the democratic development in Denmark which they find is going in the wrong direction. Because of this, their trust has decreased. For example, this is how the DK VbF Fs refer to the refugee situation:

> *You ask about trust in society. I think it is probably general for all of us who work in the movement that we have had great trust in Danish society. And when I emphasise it, it's because it's faltering colossally right now. I had never dreamed of Denmark as it is now. I would not have believed it if you had asked me about trust in society 20 years ago. Never!* (DK VbF F).

Regarding **general distrust in society**, and the possibilities of understanding distrust as something useful, we have observed small differences in the level of understanding across the movements. Some of the DK VbFs, and a few from DK NOAH, agree on general distrust as a **negative** factor for society. Distrust is viewed as negative and destructive. On the other hand, most of the respondents see general distrust as **positive.** For example, it can be used as a form of wake-up call on an individual level: *"One can get so angry … when you don't trust those who have the power, then you must act! It is why I joined NOAH"* (DK NOAH C).

Many of NOAH's participants underline that NOAH started as a movement because of distrust in society:

> *We started our work like that. Someone distrusted something, and it [the distrust] was our starting point… Now, we use it as a work tool. In the beginning, we are often very much alone [with our statement]. Sometimes, we can use this seemingly insignificant distrust to promote our own views* (DK NOAH F).

Or as some in the VbF F discuss, distrust activates people:

> *If you have the energy to take an interest in a subject, and I have experienced that many people have, then distrust may activate them. I can also see that people get engaged and arrange demonstrations and meetings and seek information and such. Distrust has pushed them to act [on the Syrian refugee situation] and now with the insecurity [they are about to be sent out of Denmark] … It must be stopped … Now, it is purely political. We must act in relation to getting the decisions changed. So, I also think there is someone who can work with distrust* (DK VbF F).

Both the DK NOAHs and the DK VbF Fs say that their **perception of trust in institutions** from an overall perspective is **conditionally positive and trusting**. DK NOAH C states a more general reflection on governmental institutions:

> *They [the think tanks] are quite good…Because if a think tank must be valid, and credible, their work must be of high quality… The older and bigger think tanks are doing a good job, although you can disagree enormously with them. That's fair enough, but you can use their results also as scare examples. I have always strongly disagreed with the Rockwool Foundation, but no matter what, they do a hell of a good job, and yes, there are also some others who do some good, okay work* (DK NOAH C).

Both the DK NOAHs and the DK VbF Fs say that their movements' **perception of trust in institutions** from an overall perspective is **conditionally positive.** An interesting perspective on perceived positive trust in institutions is stated by the VbF F. As volunteers, they are working to improve refugees' trust in the Danish institutions by helping refugees with their many daily problems with the Danish authorities. It means that many institutions are interested in cooperating with the movements' representatives. They give several examples of how they have started up a cooperation with the church, the police, the Immigration Service, the Job Centres, and Kriminalforsorgens Udrejsecentre (the Outward Journey Centre under the Prison Service). In addition, they give examples of municipalities that support their work to build more trusting relationships.

On the question of distrust **of institutions**, the DK VbFs continue their argument about general trust as a positive factor. As a matter of fact, they see the raised question about distrust as problematic:

> *Anne, the thing about distrust you are angling for, I can't feel it, and I don't want to join the discussion [that the DK VbF movement may be a distrustful reaction towards the way Danish society treats refugees]. I do not think about it as distrust of the system… It is the way we treat people.* (DK VbF C).

The DK VbF Fs are not criticising the question of distrust. But the authorities' treatment of the refugees is something that the DK VbF Fs are occupied with, as well. They have changed their perspective on their social movement's unpolitical starting point. As one

of the respondent's remarks, it is different now when they have become friends with the refugees. For example, the DK VbFs Fs are now engaged in arranging demonstrations towards the political decision about sending the refugees back to Syria because that country is now considered safe to stay in. The new situation requires a political statement.

Many of the **functions of trust and distrust** have already been mentioned in the analysis. For example, that **distrust can mobilise citizens to act** (DK NOAH and DK VbF), that **distrust in institutions created the movement** (DK NOAH), that **distrust is raised because of distrustful politicians and a distrustful political system** (DK NOAH and DK VbF). In addition, some of the DK VbF Fs mention that an important function of trust **is about explaining and enlightening citizens about the complexity of the Danish society:**

> *At least I use a lot of time explaining to them [the refugees] or at least trying to explain to them that some of the things that happen, they are statutory, and it is not the individual case worker who sits on the municipality who has power over those decisions. So, in that way, our function is also to have a smoothing role between the public authorities and the individuals… I can feel the distrust arise until they [the refugees] find out, well, it is difficult to understand Danish legislation* (DK VbF F…).

Another function of **trust is the foundation of both movements in that what they highlight is fundamentally based on confidence in all that are active:**

> *It is a really difficult thing for some of the new Danish citizens to believe in, and have confidence to trust, so it is a very central concept in this context. But I think much of our work is carried by our trust. So we have a basic trust partly in the message we bring, but also in the people we work with, and I think we do not have much control between us, or we have no control between us, but we have trust in the fact that the other one wants the right thing; also, if some want something that is a little different from what I want, then I have confidence that we want the same destination; it may be we have to go two different routes, so I think trust fills very much of this* (DK VbF C).

Regarding **the social movements' trust and distrust towards governmental institutions**, both movements mention Røde Kors (the Red Cross) as a governmental institution they trust in. DK NOAH F explains it as something related to the fact that the organisation is trusted by both sides of the political spectrum. Further, a few of the NOAH activists and the VBF volunteers are/have been members of a political party, and as one of the respondent's comments, it means that there is at least one political party that the respondent trusts the most. Again, there is some critical feedback on the question asked by the interviewer. The question of trust and distrust depends on the situation and the context in which trust is raised:

> *I think this is a very difficult question you are asking, and it is probably in fact impossible to answer because sometimes you have trust and sometimes you do not. But to put up something that all people trust, it is not possible* (DK NOAH F).

The predominant attitude is a **critical and conditional trust and distrust** targeted towards **the politicians and political parties** in Denmark, both at the local and national levels. They show distrust to political parties because of their stances on refugees (DK VbF), or because they do not keep electoral promises (DK NOAH C):

> *Well … we have tried to punk our local politicians. And among other things, we wrote a letter, two of us wrote it, and then there were 42 who signed it, and then we sent it to all our politicians, and then it also appeared in the newspaper, and so on. And I know there are some of our local politicians who do NOT agree with the foreign policy that is being pursued now. They do NOT agree that the Syrians should be sent home. But then I say to them that they must go out and say it in public. If not, it's no use* (DK VbF F).

But is depends on where you live in Denmark:

> *We had a demonstration in my town last Saturday. And there were various humanitarian organisations involved, also nationwide. Plus, we had the Radical Liberal, we had the Socialist People's Party, the Unity List, the Alternative, and the Greens with us as co-organisers, and we had a Social Democratic speaker, and we had a few of the Social Democratic city council members with us as well* (DK VbF F).

After the question of the social movements' opinion on trust and distrust towards institutions, they are asked how they consider citizens' take a stand on the question. DK NOAH F focus group says that people will always tend to have trust in institutions in Denmark. Of course, a few institutions may follow private interests, or have bad intentions, but this is not something that DK NOAH F speculate a great deal about. Looking at the flow of speech in the focus group interviews, it seems somehow easier for all the respondents to offer their thoughts on **citizens' distrust**. According to almost all the respondents, many of the citizens distrust **Danish politicians and Parliament**. They mention several examples to describe citizens' distrust. The politicians only think of themselves, not the citizens that have voted for them. In addition, politicians are seen as being engaged in promoting their own career and using populist attitudes to attract more voters.:

> *… because we cannot trust the politicians. Their knowledge is based on power struggles and selfish career-promoting measures, etc. and populist attitudes* (DK VbF C).

Some political parties, for example, the Social Democrats, use their power to control and threaten researchers' knowledge because it is critical towards their policy:

> *It's important that public employees feel safe in speaking professionally, critically, and publicly without any reprimands, and I think there is a tendency that the government wants to control everything, e.g., with the Social Democrats. They wrote to different researchers, and almost threatened them … for example, because the researchers had commented critically on their policy. Such a thing is bad!* (DK NOAH C).

They take foolish decisions and change their position on important subjects:

> *There have been a lot of 180-degree turns in the announcements they have made. It is, of course, mainly corona-related, but it is very often that it is reversed. So, one day they say something and 7 days later they say something else. And there, you see a trend in conspiracy theories that I think is growing out of distrust because they have made so many reversals* (DK NOAH F).

Yet, all the focus groups underline that in comparison to other countries, **citizens' trust in governmental institutions and politicians** is high:

> *I think most people, if you compare Denmark with other countries, will say that we have a society that is very well connected in many ways, and where we can, with good reason, show public institutions, and politicians, and push trust a long way along the way* (DK NOAH F).

Sometimes, citizens are even too trustful:

> *Then I think, there is too much trust in those who have the power in Denmark. And that's one of the main reasons why we cannot motivate people to act …to defend their democratic rights* (DK NOAH C).

Both movements **cooperate with governmental institutions and NGOs that share the same goals as the movement.** Most of the DK VbFs see this cooperation as a **positive and constructive** part of their help towards the refugees. The DK VbFs' mention Røde Kors (the Red Cross), and Dansk Flytningehjælp (the Danish Refugee Council) as their primary partners. In particular, the DK VbF Cs discuss how important it is for their movement that they have cooperation with different governmental institutions. DK VbF C highlights the importance of Facebook as a communication tool. During the corona pandemic, DK VbF announced information material in different languages prepared by the health authorities to their members on Facebook. DK NOAH refers to their cooperation with other NGOs in the environmental field, for example Friends of Earth, Greenpeace, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, the Organisation for Renewable Energy.

On the question of **cooperation with political parties,** all in the DK VbF C focus group react with a '*no*'. Instead, they stress that they '… *cooperate with people'.* The remark corresponds with the VbFs' values and with the movement's non-political starting point. But they mention that they give speeches to many political parties which they consider

as a form of information service that puts a spotlight on the movement's work. The DK VbF F is not that categoric in their discussion. They talk about their experiences with local politicians that stay silent in the public debates about refugees, which the DK VbF Fs' find is a major problem.

DK NOAH has a completely different approach towards cooperation. A few at DK NOAH indicate that the movement cooperates with all interested political parties. Others talk about having an informal cooperation with the two left-wing parties, the Red Green Party, and the Alternative Party, but the Conservative Party is also mentioned:

> *I have collaborated with the Conservatives by virtue of being both forest owners and landowners. So, true conservatism is good, that is, if it is genuine. But then, they can do something bigger than that, right? They are not the ones destroying it all, they are not. They even have that growth problem. So, they do not mind zero growth because they know they will survive anyway* (DK NOAH F).

Both the DK VbF and the NOAH focus groups highlight that they **restore trust at the local level by using dialogue and discussions.** They find dialogue and discussions as the most important tool to promote the movement's ideas and values. In addition, we have seen both movements' engagement with enlightenment as a way of **educating young people** (NOAH) and **the new Danish citizens** (VbC):

> *It is the same with many of the refugees who came to Denmark. A part of this is to tell what democracy is, and what is the parliament… Yes. Enlightenment* (DK VbF C).

At **the national level,** the DK VbFs mention two former politicians' (Öslem Cekic and the deceased Bent Melchior) project, Dialogue Coffee. Dialogue Coffee is about building bridges across political and religious divides:

> *So, I think it is difficult with democracy because there are fewer and fewer members of a party, and that means that there are fewer and fewer to choose from. Um, of course, yes, I know this, why it's something known in advance. So, for example, I feel pretty outside the parties now. I have no idea who to vote for because I had never dreamed it would go wrong and I have lost … I have lost the trust of quite a few of our politicians. Someone mentioned Öslem? I am crazy about her project. I am a member, but it is something else* (DK VbF C).

Additionally, DK NOAH discusses the EU. The progressive left and social movements in Denmark traditionally take an anti-EU stance. This is also reflected in our respondents' attitude. They cannot understand why their own generation are pro EU and have so much trust in the Union. They explain it with people's lack of knowledge about the EU; that the complexity of the Union frightens people away from learning more.

DK NOAH has a high level of confidence in the movement's capacity to enhance trust in society. They also highlight themselves as societal trust builders. First, they always come well prepared for the meetings and when they make a statement about the environment:

> *I would say that for a movement like NOAH, trust is a capital that must be managed with care. It will be destructive if we come out with a message that turns out to be very wrong. So, it can take years to rebuild the population's confidence in what we bring, so I would say that it is one dimension of it. In terms of our confidence in our work, then it is based on information. We are good at reading reports, and we are good at finding some heavy arguments. So, it's cool… It's nice that we can always refer to some solid things* (DK NOAH F).

Secondly, DK NOAH highlights **their cooperation with other NGOs**. The cooperation strengthens the movement's credibility within the population. The NGOs stand together and unite the interests from the different movements:

> *Some of the noble things about NOAH is that we cooperate with many different organisations… depending on which subject we are working on … I think it increases the citizens' trust in us; it makes our movement more trustworthy* (DK NOAH C).

And thirdly, they work with trust as part of their internal strategy:

> *The other thing where I see trust as a potential to enhance trust in relation to NOAH, is our internal work, the relationships we have with each other which are based on trust that we do our things as we should, that we fill out the roles we have. Yes, so it is also something that the network builds a lot on* (DK NOAH F).

The VbF movement has had an overwhelming success in trust building on a local level. Many Syrians are now an integrated part of Danish society. But they also underline that it is not all people who appreciate their trust building. Some people have negative reactions on their trust building work with refugees.

All in all, we have seen a rather high conditionally positive perception of general trust and perceived trust in institutions. The most remarkable is that the level of scepticism in both movements towards politicians and political parties has increased the last couple of years. This is explained by describing politicians as populists because of disagreements between politicians at a local and a national level, and a decline in the freedom of speech for public employment and researchers.

2.4 Expertise

As a starting point**,** DK VbF and DK NOAH have an overall positive approach to expert knowledge in the decision-making process in society, and in the role of using experts in the movements**.** Almost all are concise, and answer with a short yes when they are asked about their **reliance on expert knowledge as an authority voice in democratic debates:**

> *In my view, the only way we can deal with these challenges we face is by tackling it scientifically with a methodical approach, right! Because if we must discuss (…) climate change with emotions, or something like that: 'I do not feel that the climate is changing because yesterday it was raining outside', then we have a problem. As a starting point, we must make big decisions based on methodological studies and scientific methods* (DK NOAH F).

Some from the DK VbF movement highlight the movement's scientific foundations:

> *The experts are wildly important; they are also the ones we must lean on in relation to our own movement* (VbF C).

But almost all the respondents in both movements also express a **critical perception of experts and expert knowledge.** Not all experts can be trusted, and not all expert knowledge is trustworthy. The DK VbF focus groups raise a criticism about the dilution of the concept; that everyone can call oneself an expert. They also think that experts are sometimes distrustful because they express themselves on behalf of what the politicians have told them to say:

> *I think the word 'expert' requires a much clearer definition. We just need to find out what the expert really represents and what the expertise consists of. For example, Nasar Khadar12. For example, he is referred to as an expert on the Middle East, but he is not! He is not a professional! I think this expert term is also violently abused* (DK VbF C).

In the NOAH focus groups, they have academic discussions about experts and science. For example, there ought to be more focus on the epistemology of science; that the scientists disagree between themselves because of different epistemology. They also criticise the universities in Denmark for being in the hands of the private sector, and raise the question of whether science is as free and independent as it should be:

> *Science is not necessarily objective or the absolute truth. Science is also influenced by all sorts of interests. E.g., there is a huge number of funds that come from outside. They are not neutral funds. It is companies, large companies, huge companies, or interest organisations. For example, Dansk Energi [Danish Energy13]. They order science that can help to substantiate and*

[12] Khader is an independent politician of the Danish parliament. He has been excluded from the Conservative party because of accusations of several sexual harassment cases.

[13] Danish energy is a lobby organisation for Danish energy companies.

> *justify their opinions … And companies are moving into the universities, getting their own institutes, etc. I think it is Novo Science14 that has its own department at Aarhus University, and I think it is very critical in terms of how research should be carried out, and what kind of science we should trust* (DK NOAH C).

Summing up, both movements rely on experts. They take a point of departure in scientific knowledge and highlight the importance of this as fundamental to the movements' existence, but they also raise criticism of the experts' role in society, as well the scientific knowledge that is produced. It is sometimes hard to trust in experts because of some experts' hidden political and/or lobbying.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

Democracy and engagement are topics that both movements and all the respondents have a say about. Some of the respondents agree that **voting is important:**

> *If it is in relation to which government we should have in Denmark, then the most democratic way is probably to vote. It is where we have our free right to put our cross [on the ballot paper] where we want* (DK VbF F).

But most of the respondents find that **other forms of participation are of great significance, too, sometimes even more important than voting.** Democracy is not the ultimate objective but needs to be developed further in a direction where participation will be more direct in its form. In continuation of this, DK VbF C and DK NOAH F highlight two new forms of participation in democracy called "citizens' assemblies"[15] and "proposals from citizens" [16]. They find the new initiatives ground-breaking and important. But a few in the VbF C, and especially the DK NOAH F, raise a critical voice towards the new initiatives:

> *On the surface, it sounds like a very fine idea, but it becomes a kind of pseudo involvement. There are very few places in the world where you … I think Barcelona is an example of how citizens can be involved, but there are very few*

[14] Novo Nordick is a Danish pharmaceutical company. NOVO has its own research centre.

[15] *A citizens' assembly is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate on, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues* (cited from the English website https://citizensassembly.co.uk/). See the Danish website: https://borgersamling.dk/

[16] The citizens' proposal scheme means that all persons with the right to vote in parliamentary elections can submit a citizens' proposal if at least three people want to be co-sponsors of the proposal and it complies with the rules of the scheme. If 50,000 citizens with the right to vote in parliamentary elections then support the citizens' proposal, it can be presented as a resolution and treated and voted on in the Danish Parliament (Folketinget), see https://www.borgerforslag.dk/

places in the world where you intend to let your political doings and negotiations be influenced by something like that … (DK NOAH F).

Regarding the question about **citizens' capability to make political decisions**, almost all the respondents find that citizens are capable**.** In both VbF focus groups, they bring up the question about the possibility for citizens to **take a political decision on an informed basis.** Once again, the discussion is turned towards (some) politicians who are destroying the debate, but the criticism is more pronounced than earlier on in the focus group interviews. As something new, the DK VbF focus groups mention misinformation on social media and alternative news media. They refer to "Den korte avis" (the Briefly Newspaper) and Rasmus Paludan, a radical Danish politician and lawyer who is known for his Islam critical events and demonstrations. The alternative news media and the social media are spreading lies, taking the debate to an unpleasant level with a shrill rhetoric:

I think the press is helping to add firewood to that bonfire, you could say. Everything is reduced to one-liners because the political discussion takes place on social media. And therefore, we are not enlightened enough to make any decisions, we are not enlightened enough to vote. I think that the press has a basic responsibility for this. I miss the conversation on television where a politician was allowed to speak without being interrupted all the time. And where you were allowed to come up with some professionally based messages, that were backed up with academic scientific arguments (DK VbF C).

In the DK NOAH focus groups, they discuss the complexity of society. The development in scientific knowledge, lobbyism, the thought of economic growth as a principle of developing democracy somehow complicates the case for citizens to take a stand on an informed basis. Further, they discuss whether the age limit ought to be lowered[17] without coming to an agreement in the focus group. In addition, **other** issues, such as a lack of time and energy to take an interest in politics and democracy are mentioned as issues that prevent citizens from participation.

Regarding the citizens' possible **empowerment** paths in the political decision-making process, the DK VbF focus groups continue to discuss the negative conversation tone that hinders citizens from participating in the public debates. Many of the VbFs' statements are based on their own experiences as volunteers, who have been exposed to threats in their inbox from people they do not know. But they also mention politicians from det Radikale Venstre (the Danish Social-Liberal Party), Zenia Stampe and Kristian Heegaard, who have been exposed to anonymous threats as well. DK VbF C says that it is difficult to empower citizens when the atmosphere is built on fundamental distrust between the citizens themselves. But there is a solution. **Citizens needs more information and knowledge**:

[17] It is currently18 years old.

It is a question of general education. We need to focus on good manners in democratic discussions; where we can disagree, but still talk to each other despite the disagreement (DK VbF C).

Many in the NOAH F focus group comment on the topic on a more general basis. For example, they call attention to the well-known Danish institutions, such as the Danish højskole (folk high school) and the public schools, where there is **a tradition of involving citizens in the decision-making process.**

When the focus groups are asked about the need for institutional change towards citizens' participation, only a few of the respondents have a say on the subject. It may be because of a feeling of general fatigue after a long discussion in front of the screen, as some of the respondents are mentioning. The few active on this question recommend **a more local and decentralised approach,** where it is easier for institutions to handle the citizens' interests:

I work in a municipality where we are working with co-operation [In Danish "samskabelse"] …In other words, where citizens produce new solutions in the welfare area, at any rate. I have to say that it is a mega difficult discipline. That's what we must do, and civil society must be activated much more because we can't solve the welfare task without any help from civil society… We need to involve each other much more in the task performance, also in the way we approach things in the public sector. So, I think that's something we just must do because there's no way around it (DK VbF C).

The fatigue in the focus groups is still noticeable when the last question is posed about the social movements own success in bringing more citizens' voices to the institutions, and the possibility of that increasing. Most of the focus groups' participants find **that social movements' impact on citizens' participation is partially successful or successful.** When the respondents talk about their own movement, they are more positive than they are when considering social movements, in general. In particular, the two VbF focus groups take a point of departure in their own movement. Many people express their sympathy for their work in the cafés, as VbF F1 remarks. Their work is also successful because of the impact it has had on the refugees. The refugees have learned a great deal of information about Denmark because of their movements' kind meetings with them. In addition, they highlight the many civil resources that are hidden, and just need to be brought to life.

In the DK NOAH focus groups, they point out that success depends on the citizens' involvement in a case. If the citizens are motivated for personal reasons, and they spend time on the matter, then the likelihood for success is great. DK NOAH F thinks the social movements play a role, but how big a role they play is hard to say:

I don't know. I think that Denmark is – there are so many associations and there are so many people who express themselves in the debate. Therefore,

> *it is not always possible to set an agenda right away, but after all, you can get things going in the long term and correct me if NOAH has not been part of setting an agenda in important places around food irradiation, genetic engineering, nuclear power. There are some front runners … their agenda may seem utopian at the beginning, but still, it helps to push in a direction* (DK NOAH F).

DK NOAH C brings up a challenge for all social movements' success, in general. After a while, some of the social movements' ideas are incorporated in the political parties, but without reflecting the movements' ideals on the matter. Consequently, the central ideas from the movements are at risk of being devalued:

> *I think that the biggest challenge is how the social movements succeed in changing discussion to action; what they as social movements would like to focus on. Then the established parties could incorporate the discussions, but the messages will not necessarily reflect the ideals in the movement. Maybe, they will use the same language to appeal to the same target groups. For example, the EU is now using the word solidarity, but in the EU, solidarity does not mean what it originally meant, but it may be that it can appeal to voters that the EU has not been able to reach before. Many major movements have tried to make the EU more socially responsible. But when the EU takes these initiatives seriously, they will often just be addressed rhetorically because it is difficult to communicate to so many people. So, I think the challenge is how to get the concept introduced in a way that the movement originally imagined* (DK NOAH C).

Summing up, democracy and engagement are themes that the four focus groups devote themselves to, although the energy of the conversation appears to have fallen a little during the last section of the interviews. The respondents see voting as important, but other forms of participation have a high position in the discussions, as well. A new form of civil participation – "proposals from citizens" – is critically discussed as an interesting renewal of participation, even though some indicate that there is a risk of "pseudo involvement". Citizens are only partially capable of making political decisions, and could be more empowered to participate e.g., on more science-based information.

3. Conclusion

We can conclude that social movements in Denmark, as in other countries, are agents of critical trust (della Porta, 2012). In Denmark, this means that they are part of local civil society and promote forms of civic engagement in support of local community and society. Our two cases are both organised after a decentralised structure. We have covered how this traditional left-wing organisation is challenged when the social move-

ments are organised on the Internet, as we see in the case of DK VbF and in the acceleration of expert knowledge, as we see in the DK NOAH case. In fact, the two cases mirror some advantages and challenges to contemporary social movements. On a positive note, we can see how very short a period it is from critical individual reflections on the government's policy and decisions in a specific area to an explosive engagement and mobilisation of citizens via social media. Another key theme is the importance of physical meetings, both in relation to the internal decision-making process, and in meeting with potential new activists (Jørgensen & Olesen, 2022). There is a better basis to agree and to disagree when people are in the same physical room, especially in a small movement where the engagement is not only focused on the cause, but also on democratic processes themselves. Thus, we can argue that the flat organisation structure still functions as an important identification marker and gives the activists a feeling of solidarity and belonging. The flat structure is a practice that constitutes the movements' shared goals and interconnectedness. On the negative side, the open and flat structure is challenged by the same acceleration of interconnectedness on the Internet that makes them able to mobilise citizens in no time. For example, the social movements have less control over their communication and their shared values when they rely on social media as their preferred organisation tool. The point is that online communication opens for digital stalking, unwanted contact, and harassment. We can also note that a movement's flat structure, based on consensus, is challenged by the complexity of new specialised knowledge, for example, as is required for a global and environmentally oriented movement as we have seen in our DK NOAH case.

In both cases analysed, social trust is promoted in a form that also encompasses minorities (like refugees) and global concerns (like human rights and environmental sustainability). As agents of critical trust, social movements thus contribute to questioning the trust base of Danish society as an exclusive political community. Apart from social trust, social movements are also important mediators of political trust towards Danish political parties and government. In this function, the two movements analysed find themselves increasingly in opposition to the government. This experience of opposition is partly new in Danish democracy, where civil society has always played a supportive role in government functioning. Political opposition is also paired with experiences of alienation of social movement activists, who feel that their causes are not supported by political parties and a feeling of betrayal by the government, which follows a political line in sharp opposition to the movements' objectives.

Despite this process of disillusionment, it is interesting to note that Danish social movements are rather reluctant to embrace 'distrust'. Denmark remains a country where the level of general trust is high, but this is paired with a low threshold of tolerance for mistrust. To show mistrust is not socially acceptable and seen as harmful for social cohesion. There is, in other words, a normative expectation that as a good citizen you should be trustful. Being truthful is part of constructive citizenship and a contribution to the com-

munity. This high expectation in trust puts social movements in a dilemma. Social movements are traditionally distinguished by their distrust in institutional actors and procedures. In Denmark, such attitudes of distrust would, however, risk marginalising them, or make their mobilisation strategies less effective. In addition, many social movement activists are politically socialised in a political culture that values trust, and thus they feel unconfident in their role of undermining trust. This high trust culture, however, has been shattered by recent scandals and controversies, meaning that social movements might find support more readily for their confrontational strategies against government. Social movement actors have thus grown into their new role as non-parliamentary opposition and a catalyst for the indignation of the minority of the Danish people against their government, and in support of humanitarian causes and the defence of the global public good. This form of spontaneous and non/institutionalised distrust is relatively new in Danish politics and is variously linked to new forms of protest action, often with global reach, and fighting for global concerns such as human rights and environmental sustainability, as in the two cases examined in this study. A series of political scandals over the last decade have contributed to this alienation process. Indicators for a more structured distrust relationship between citizens, social movements, political parties, and governments are the increase of street protests (e.g., in support of refugees or the environment), the decline of partisanship, and a sharper contrast between the capital and the countryside. Therefore, the civil society-government relationship becomes 'less friendly' and 'more adversary'. The government and political parties are not (yet) the enemy, but a political opponent which stands for fundamentally opposed principles and interests.

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Social movements' Role in Trust building: Citizens' Empowerment and the Limits of Social inclusion. Insights from Germany

Ulrike Zschache and Stephanie Schneider

1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Germany

The social movements' scene in Germany is vivid and multifarious; it is routed in a long tradition of collective action and has substantially shaped society and policymaking in this country (Roth/Rucht 2008). During the past decade, social movements have been active in Germany on behalf of various issues and in manifold forms of political activism and protest. Some of them are more closely related to local or regional problems, but have gained considerable national visibility. Others are locally organised, but address more general issues and belong to national (and transnational) networks and alliances. Issues addressed during the past decade include, for instance, democratic participation and citizens' rights, capitalism and economic globalisation, austerity policies during the financial crisis, workers' and social rights, ecological damage and climate change, housing rights, gender equality, women's and LGBTQI rights, antiracism and refugee rights, and concerns expressed by right-wing social movements regarding, for instance, migration issues and the role of Islam in Germany. In the following, we describe several examples that have been particularly salient in the public sphere. One of the movements that originally formed around a local issue is the Action Alliance against Stuttgart 21. Since 2010, civic initiatives and groups (including many citizens from the middle class) have mobilised against the major construction project "Stuttgart 21" aimed at relocating the Stuttgart main station underground, and regaining attractive construction areas above ground. Protest has not only been directed against the highly expensive project, regarded as needless by its opponents. It was additionally fuelled by and targeted against the way in which the regional government sought to push its plan through despite many voicing concern. Against this backdrop, "Stuttgart 21" is widely perceived as a negative example of insufficient open dialogue, citizens' consultation and democratic participation (see e.g., Gualini 2015).

In the last decade, several movements that are critical of capitalism have gained public visibility. In the context of the global financial crisis, the Occupy Germany movement engaged in protest calling for global justice and protesting against the (speculation) practices of the financial and banking sector between 2011 and 2013. In Germany, the centre of protest was in front of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt/Main to raise

awareness about the deficits of global capitalism. Protest camps were also established at symbolic sites in other German cities. Moreover, anti-capitalist protest was organised by the Blockupy movement in reaction to the financial crisis. In comparison to the barely structured Occupy movement, Blockupy was rather an alliance of existing anti-capitalist groups (e.g., Attac, Antifa), trade unions and various left-wing parties which mobilised strongly against the European austerity policy during the financial crisis. The movement was active until 2016, with the centre of protest being mainly in Frankfurt/Main. Blockupy engaged in protest demonstrations, blockades and other forms of civil disobedience. In contrast to the relatively peaceful protest of Occupy, Blockupy was criticised because a number of its activists behaved in more radical and verging on violent ways. On different occasions, protesters clashed with the police. The movement itself distanced itself in particular from violent activists who attacked police officers and committed vandalism. Furthermore, a broad alliance of civil society groups and organisations, critical of capitalist globalisation and demanding fair global trade, engaged in protest demonstrations against TTIP and CETA in various German cities, mainly during 2015 and 2016. Of high national visibility was also the G20 counter summit of 2017. In July 2017, a broad range of civil society organisations, initiatives and social movement activists critical of capitalist globalisation gathered for protests against the G20 summit in Hamburg, criticising the leading industrial nations as the chiefly responsible actors for the devastating impact of the current capitalist world order in terms of global injustice, poverty, war and ecocide (Ullrich/Knopp/Frenzel 2018). Protest forms were varied, including major demonstrations, public discussion rounds, art happenings and civil disobedience. However, what gained most public attention were the more radical forms of protest that eventually escalated into massive violent clashes between protesters and the police (Malthaner/Teune/Ullrich et al. 2018).

Furthermore, the increase in refugee arrivals since 2013, and the opening of borders during the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015/2016, led to noteworthy protest in various German cities by xenophobic and Islamophobic movements, while at the same time counter protest was organised widely by anti-racism movements demonstrating against far-right agitation and for a pluralistic, tolerant society in solidarity with refugees (see also Schmitz/Marg 2017). In particular, the so-called “refugee crisis” gave rise to the emergence of many local solidarity initiatives and groups across Germany, providing direct help and support to newly arrived refugees, running parallel to political activism opposing the German (and European) asylum policy (Zschache 2021).

In recent years, the issues of climate protection and affordable housing have gained particular relevance. While protest against coal mining and the climate crisis are not new on the agenda of social movements in Germany, they have gained increased visibility and mobilisation power over the past years. Of national reach are, in particular, Fridays for Future (FFF), as well as groups like Ende Gelände or Extinction Rebellion. While most of the activities are locally implemented (yet often nationally and internationally

coordinated, e.g., FFF Global Strike for Climate Protection), some instances of protest became particularly salient on a national level. In 2018, for instance, media attention was high when protest camps of Ende Gelände against deforestation, for the sake of new coal mining areas in the Hambach Forest, were cleared rather violently by the police. Among the climate protection movements, Fridays for Future puts particular emphasis on peaceful protest and applies a rather dialogue-oriented approach towards the state, while maintaining its independence and impartiality. For Ende Gelände and Extinction Rebellion, civil disobedience constitutes a central form of protest (e.g. blockages of public spaces, chaining), but they also strive to abstain from violent forms of action (see Ruser 2020; Teune 2019).

Housing is by far not a new issue for social protest in Germany. In fact, the German housing movement has its origins in the 1960s. Yet, in recent times, mobilisation against housing problems has gained new impetus. Since 2018, the housing movement has become particularly active in the form of a nation-wide alliance against gentrification, displacement and expensive rents ("rental insanity"), organising major demonstrations in various German cities (see Rink/Vollmer 2019). On the one hand, protest is directed at the unscrupulous practices of the big powerful private housing and investment companies. On the other hand, it addresses the state demanding that politics should take action to diminish the power of these companies, impose regulations in favour of affordable rents and social housing, invest in public housing cooperatives and/or expropriate private housing landlord companies. While major demonstrations on the streets are the most visible form of protest, members of the housing movements are also engaged in forms of resistance at the ground level, such as house squatting, on the one hand, and political engagement such as organising petitions, on the other.

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, social protest has also evolved around the lock-down and anti-Covid 19 policy of the German government. While the early stages of demonstrations involved a broader variety of groups and concerned citizens, including people from the political centre, as well as alternative, green, esoteric and anti-vaccination milieus (Grande et al. 2021), increasing polarisation and radicalisation have taken place within the movement, with right-wing, conspiracy-related, anti-government and anti-democratic ideas on the rise.

Overall, social movements in Germany make use of a multitude of protest forms, reaching from public demonstrations, flash mobs, chants and singing, posters, stickers and banners, petitions and discussion rounds, to sit-ins, camps, blockades, occupations and other forms of civil disobedience. Lately, mobilisation, exchange and protesting on the Internet and in social media have increasingly gained importance. This trend was further enhanced during the height of the pandemic.

1.2 Case studies and organisation of research

After an initial round of open research into possible case studies, sampling concentrated on environmental movements and housing politics movements, as these promised to fulfil the criteria for comparative analysis across countries. The specific cases we chose to study are Fridays for Future (FFF) and a local initiative in the field of tenant rights and the right to the city (for reasons of anonymisation, we use the broad label Housing Movement [HM] here) that is part of the countrywide *Action alliance against displacement and rent madness*. Both climate protection and housing issues were high on the public and political agenda during fieldwork, and both groups campaigned very actively at the time of data gathering.

As regards Fridays for Future, we contacted a local FFF group in a large German city in the east of the country. Here, we experienced a great deal of support for our research endeavour by both the individual contact persons and the plenary assembly. Still, it took some time to recruit participants, agree on suitable meeting dates, and complete the interview with a core member and focus groups discussions with core members and followers because group members were highly engaged in other activities. The focus group discussion with local core members of FFF consisted of four female participants who were between 17 years of age and in their early 20s (unfortunately, two male participants dropped out shortly before the agreed date), and took place online in a secured DFN conference room. The focus group discussion with local FFF followers involved three male and two female participants aged 17 or 18 years, and was conducted in a face-to-face meeting.

Regarding HM, we approached several initiatives in different cities over the course of four months. The response rate was rather disappointing. Although individual contact persons were very supportive of our endeavour and circulated our call widely among their networks, it took a considerable and persistent effort to come in contact with further members and agree on a date for the focus group discussions. In contrast to FFF, we had the impression that these difficulties were not only related to the busyness of group members, but might additionally have been influenced by a certain cautious attitude towards scientists among some of the members of this movement. We eventually conducted one interview with a core member and two small focus group discussions, one with core members and one with followers of a local group in a larger city in the west of the country. [18] The interviews were conducted online in a secured DFN conference room. The focus group discussion with core members consisted of three male participants (unfortunately, the only female participant had to cancel shortly

[18] Additionally, we conducted an individual interview with a core member of a local initiative in another large city that is also part of the countrywide *Action alliance*. It provided useful background information, but was not systematically analysed for this report.

before the scheduled meeting) who were in their thirties, or of retirement age. The focus group discussion with followers involved a young female and a retired male.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted by Ulrike Zschache (FFF) and Stephanie Schneider (HM). Interviews lasted approximately one hour, focus group discussions lasted approximately two hours. At the outset, we both coded the same transcript, discussed the coding process and each other's coding, and exchanged initial ideas regarding the analysis of the most salient issues. Subsequent focus groups were coded separately by the researcher who moderated the discussion, but we continued the exchange regarding interpretation and analysis and first findings while drafting this report. In the coding process, we generated several memos providing a valuable basis for comparing and contrasting findings.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

FFF is a global, but decentrally structured, climate strike movement that is mostly organised by pupils and other young people who fight for climate protection and seek to raise awareness about the need to take urgent action on the climate crisis. In particular, FFF aims to put pressure on governments so that they take immediate and effective action in order to meet the climate goals, as agreed by the Paris climate conference, where limits for global warming and global emissions were adopted. The most common form of protest are the school strikes for climate on Fridays, from which the movement takes its name. FFF was initiated in Sweden by the activist Greta Thunberg, in summer 2018. Soon after, local FFF groups were founded across many countries worldwide, including Germany. According to FFF, there were about 500 local groups in Germany by summer 2021. The German local FFF group taking part in our study was established in January 2019. Basically, this group ascribes to the general goals of the FFF movement. In addition, it has developed further aims that are more specifically oriented towards local needs and demands. For instance, crucial aims relate to an early fossil-fuel phase-out (by 2030), the establishment of climate protection as a key priority in political decision-making, an ecological traffic turn and issues of climate justice. Apart from school strikes and demonstrations (in crucial local places, but also by bike), other common forms of action are vigils, climate camps, workshops, participation in discussion rounds and conferences, open plenary discussions, visiting sites (e.g., coal mining areas), hanging banners and posters, participation in civic dialogue formats or contributing to open letters and petitions. FFF explicitly distances itself from more radical forms of action and civil disobedience in order to remain a social movement for the young, but also older people and others seeking to protest peacefully. The local group consists of about 50 members (organised in a WhatsApp group), among whom 20

persons are very active and form the core organisational team of the local FFF group. In the last global strike before the Covid-19 pandemic, on 20th September 2019, the local group was able to mobilise 15,000 people in its city. One year later, during the Covid-19 pandemic, about 4,000 people participated locally in a global strike. While pupils and young people remain the main target group, the local FFF group (like many others) has increasingly mobilised people from various other age groups, too. In line with this development, a local group, Scientists for Future, Parents for Future and Students for Future, has been established.

The local HM-group is part of a movement focusing on housing politics that aims to support people affected by urban restructuring, energetic modernisation, rising rents, forced evictions, and homelessness. It mobilises in support of individual cases, but also engages intensively in public awareness raising through demonstrations, protest campaigns, petitions, etc. The local group that participated in our study formed in 2013, and is part of national and international convergence processes of different initiatives fighting for a right to housing and the city (e.g., the national *Action alliance against displacement and rent madness*, or the *European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and to the City*). Although there is a long history of housing movements in Germany, the issue is prominently on the agenda, and the movement has grown substantially over the last five years, particularly in terms of networking and breadth. According to our interviewees, professed aims of the movement are the representation of interests of the inhabitants of particular quarters, defending the right to the city, and, in more general terms, legal changes regarding property rights and tenant rights, and changing the neoliberal system of housing politics towards greater regulation. During preliminary conversations and interviews, the urban sociologist Andrej Holm and his studies (commissioned by the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung) were mentioned as important elements of expertise to the movement. The movement is also influenced by the works of Henri Lefebvre. According to an interviewee, their translation into German was part of the founding moment of the movement in Germany. The most important forms of public action of the local group that participated in the study are demonstrations, including the international housing action day, in which a number of initiatives in several cities across the country take part. While the active core of the local HM group is rather small (interviewees speak of three to ten core members), they have succeeded in mobilising roughly 2,000 people at local protest events and demonstrations. Other important forms of action mentioned during interviews include workshops and nationwide networking events, and local acts of civil disobedience, such as squatting and anti-eviction actions, although interviewees carefully evaluate and discuss the signalling effects of such actions before deciding to participate or not.

2.2 Structure of the movement

Regarding their formal structure, both FFF and HM are associations of individuals, and do not have the status of a legal entity. They regard themselves as grassroots movements and are decentrally organised in local groups that, in principle, are open to everyone. Local groups are self-organised, self-responsible, and structured **horizontally,** without formal hierarchies.[19] This also means that there is no elected leader or board. While both movements are part of larger nation-wide alliances, networking, information exchange and coordination on the federal level seem less formalised and more issue- or situation-specific with HM than with FFF. [20]

Concerning the functional structure, the picture is somewhat mixed with regard to FFF. On the one hand, there are elements of a **predetermined structure** because members can have specific roles, such as being a delegate to the federal conference, or being a member of a permanent working group (dealing with long-term tasks such as politics, finances, PR, social media, photography, IT-support). On the other hand, there are **dynamic** elements because working groups can be established for time-limited periods and very specific purposes (e.g., planning and organisation of a specific protest event or activity), and may also depend on the interests of groups members. This means that the roles within the group can be interchangeable and more fluid. Moreover, the assignment of roles is grounded in **both practice- and merit-based** reasons. Becoming active in a working group is shaped by the specific long-term and short-term needs of the movement, and also by given circumstances and pressing issues. At the same time, the participation of individuals in a working group depends on their own abilities, preferences and time resources:

> *Well, we have different working groups, for instance, Social Media; we have a PR working group, we have a Politics working group, we have a Finances working group, we have a group dealing with formalities, e-mails and such things, taking photographs during demonstrations. New working groups are built every now and then. For instance, before a Global Strike or so, it's always the case that certain people who just feel like it team-up with each other* (DE_FFF_C).

Within FFF, decision-making takes place at various levels. Basic decisions, or those that are critical or contentious, are discussed and voted on in a plenary (either at a weekly plenary assembly, where the number of participants varies according to members' availability, or also via the WhatsApp group and/or a Doodle list). In comparison,

[19] However, in practice, informal hierarchies tend to play a role that has to do with the intensity of engagement, knowledge and length of experience in the group.

[20] In the case of FFF, local groups send delegates to conferences and working groups at the federal level. The federal conference of delegates is responsible for decisions and activities of national reach or relevance. As with the local groups, there is no elected leader or board of FFF Germany, even if, in practical terms, some individual activists are particularly visible in the public sphere.

decisions that are related to more ongoing, practical, implementation-related issues are subject to the core organisational team ("orga team") and the specialised functional or thematic working groups that work relatively autonomously in their area if no contentious issues are addressed. Thus, the core members of the "orga team" and the various working group members have considerable scope for action. At the same time, the "orga team" and the working groups are fully open to anybody who wants to engage more actively in the movement:

> *I think for people who are interested in getting more strongly engaged within the orga team, there are good contact points where one can become familiar with the orga team and network. For a while, I quite intensively took pictures for them during demonstrations, and then they asked me if I wanted to join the orga team. […] In my eyes, this showed that it is quite easy and does not require certain preconditions to be able to engage oneself more strongly* (DE_FFF_F).

In comparison to the local FFF group, the interviewed local HM group does not have a very pronounced division of labour. Interviewees attribute this to the relatively small size of the local group. Members meet twice a month on a regular basis; the number of participants in those meetings varies, depending on time resources and the availability of members. There are **no formal hierarchies** or positions; tasks and responsibilities (for keeping minutes, moderating discussions, etc.) are allocated anew each time they meet. Decisions are taken in the plenary, and according to the principles of grassroots democracy. During the focus group discussion, core members state that when more people are involved (e.g., in the planning of larger demonstrations), **informal hierarchies** – in terms of knowledge and length of involvement – tend to become more important, suggesting that responsibilities are to some extent based on a **merit-based structure**. The interviewed followers problematise what they perceive as a tendency to use informal, bilateral communication channels between core members, and say they sometimes have difficulties in understanding how, where and by whom decisions are taken. They attribute this mostly to the size of the group, and the fact that a small number of very active core members does almost everything. In their view, these limitations have also been aggravated during the Covid-19 pandemic's restrictions on face-to-face meetings:

> *[The division of tasks], as is often the case within such small groups of activists, is strongly shaped by the activists, I would say. There are probably also a lot of sympathisers who show up every now and then, and get involved in concrete action. But those who have long breath and build the organisational […] background, those are only very few. On the one hand, this is understandable, on the other not without problems […] The ambition to be grassroots-democratic quickly reaches its limit whenever something is supposed to be decided in the short-term. […] And this is often at the detriment of a […]*

> *broader opinion formation. […] During Covid-19, this is of course twice as difficult because we do not see each other regularly or have a beer before or afterwards or so, where we could informally talk on the side-lines* (DE_HM_F).

Regarding membership, there is consensus in both movements that, in principle, they are **fully inclusive** and open to everyone. According to an interviewee from FFF, they reject excluding anybody from the group because 'nobody is legitimised to do so' (DE_FFF_C). If conflict emerges, for instance, because of internal disputes or decreasing commitment, they seek to solve the issue by means of discussion (and, in the case of FFF, sometimes even with the help of external mediators). However, following their key principles of independence and non-partisanship, FFF avoids having members who apply for or already hold a political office (e.g., MEP of a specific party). At the same time, sharing basic values seems important, in particular the rejection of racism, discrimination and social exclusion.[21] In the case of HM, belonging to right-wing parties or groups would constitute a reason to reject people willing to join the group, although this is not something that happens in practice anyway.[22] In this respect, both movements seem to apply a membership approach that is at least to some extent **conditionally inclusive**:

> *So far, it did not occur. We also aren't expecting it, but […] there is no place for AfD [Alternative for Germany) or some ultra-right-wing forces with us. But this applies to the entire – to all that somehow belongs to movement, if this is 'Traffic turn" or climate people or anything else, this applies to all* (DE_HM_C).

When it comes to the question of who **initiates actions** of the movement, core members and followers mostly agree that **any member of the movement** can make proposals which are then discussed and voted on in the plenum. In the case of HM, core members differentiate between local actions and coordinated actions across the country. Regarding the former, they usually start from a local problem or an individual case, and try to mobilise different forces, using their extended network to organise small to medium-sized protests. In this sense, actions may also be initiated by affected citizens from outside the movement. Regarding the latter, dates are usually predetermined, and the decision they take locally only concerns the question of whether to take part or not. Core members agree that usually there is little dissent concerning the nature and breadth of actions, adding that Covid-19 reduced the number of people involved in initiating action and, in this sense, led to even more consensus and less debate. Overall,

[21] Followers highlight that many FFF activists have a critical opinion about Extinction Rebellion since they would not sufficiently distance themselves from right-wing groups and ideas within their movement.

[22] Apart from that, interviewees from HM mention Covid-19, the complexity of the issue, inappropriate communication styles, and the lack of social-media channels or chat groups as factors not restricting membership, but forming obstacles for people to become involved more intensely.

interviewed core members and followers agree that the movement has the ambition to be grassroots, democratically-organised and inclusive, while they are also aware that, in practical terms, this is not always realised. According to discussants, a member's role in the movement and their individual influence depends largely on one's own commitment in the group, suggesting that decision-making processes are also shaped by a **merit-based structure**.

Core members of FFF highlight that it is important for them to lead a lengthy debate in the plenum to deliberate on an issue and take account of all arguments, in order to find a compromise and a solution most members are satisfied with instead of seeking a simple majority.[23] While both core members and followers describe the process of **action initiation** as open and democratic, indicating that **any member of the movement may initiate action**, one follower, nevertheless, wonders if group members who do not belong to the core organisational team have, practically speaking, the same chances to promote their ideas, or whether it is necessary to get support from a core member in order to make one's proposal visible and put it on the agenda.

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

2.3.1 The perception of (dis)trust and their role in the eyes of social movement members

Regarding their perception of **trust in society**, interviewed activists agree that some bedrock of **trust is essential and important**. It is considered as 'the basis of all human coexistence' (DE_FFF_C) and 'life in societies is not possible without trust' (DE_HM_C). This concerns not only trust in friends, or people in general and their benevolence and willingness to contribute to the functioning of society (DE_FFF_C), 'but […] I also have to trust that the bridge I am crossing will hold' (DE_HM_C), and trust in the decisions of politics and government: 'for example, now in the context of Corona, I have to trust that these are the right measures to protect us humans' (DE_HM_C). Participants of the focus group (FG) with core members of HM add that trust and a certain leap of faith are essential for the work of the movement, too. Hence, they underline that trust has an important **function** in that it constitutes a **basic foundation of the movement**. This applies not only to trust among its members, but also to trust between different initiatives when joining forces, in particular protest campaigns. 'Without such trust, we wouldn't get anything done at all. That is a very, very important factor' (DE_HM_C). **The function of trust**, in this sense, is to reduce uncertainties and complexities (concerning the intentions and the capability of actors involved) so that collective action becomes

[23] Contentiously and lengthily discussed was, for instance, the question as to whether the group should solidarise with and participate in protest events that are not directly related with the issue of climate protection, but target other, partly interrelated goals, such as anti-racism.

possible. Trust concerns keeping each other informed, but also knowing – without having to discuss it – that people stand on the same side and share certain basic attitudes, e.g., towards the police, other state actors, or political parties.

Furthermore, activists argue that trust is **crucial for the functioning of democratic systems**. Indeed, it is considered as the **basis of (political action in) democracy,** insofar as it is essential that we can trust 'in citizens who are aware of their political responsibility and act accordingly' (DE_FFF_C). This includes trusting in societal institutions, in society in general, 'although some of its members may hold opinions one does not approve' (DE_FFF_F).

When reflecting about **distrust**, FG participants distinguish between positive and negative forms of distrust. First of all, both core members and followers underline that a certain **"healthy" extent of distrust is important**, highlighting that it is **essential for living together in society as much as trust**. Some distrust is considered wise and healthy because living together in society involves uncertainties and risks, due to the fact that people are different, and we 'cannot look into each other's head' (DE_FFF_C). In this respect, distrust is seen as a means of self-protection and a kind of survival technique:

> *Social human co-existence is based on trust, but, in fact, also on distrust. Of course, I do not like to live together with someone I know is dangerous. Well, it is just […] a healthy survival technique that we actually also scrutinise and mistrust* (DE_FFF_C).

Moreover, distrust is considered positive insofar as it makes people deal with and discuss an issue from various perspectives, query and control things. This involves a critical stance, a continuous questioning of the positions from which people speak, or the interests that they represent:

> *Trust in politics, hence, if political parties say something and the government decides something, for example, now in the context of Corona, then I have to trust that those are the right measures protecting us humans, for instance. […] I've also learnt […] trust is good, but control is better. That such unconditional trust is not always the best way, and that control is sometimes necessary and important* (DE_HM_C).

In all four focus group discussions, such critical, reflective forms of distrust are also highlighted as a **crucial element of democracy**:

> *If you distrust someone, then you question them. And that, well, that is also very democratic. To not just believe everything, but also to think twice for yourself, or to form your own opinion on something* (DE_FFF_C).

Participants add that such forms of distrust are not only important on the level of the individual citizen, but are also built in the institutions of democracy, for example in the

form of parliamentary investigation committees, and provide a form of control of those in power.

In sum, both core members and followers share the view that healthy distrust is useful not only as a social survival technique, but also as a core element of democracy as it makes people **attentive and alert** to what is happening around them and in politics. Moreover, it can work as a **corrective factor in society, and in democracy in particular**, insofar as it stimulates reflection and revision, thus contributing to the improvement of social relations and democracy.

In contrast, there is consensus that **distrust** turns into something **negative,** and even **destructive and dangerous for society,** when it manifests itself as a generalised, fundamental attitude that makes people categorically deny and reject everything and stops them from listening to each other. Our interviewees share the diagnosis that trust has been eroded substantially over the last few decades, and that **society is increasingly divided**. In the perception of a follower, an uncritical, naïve generalised trust in authorities has given way to a generalised distrust of authorities, especially in science (DE_HM_F). Particularly in the FGs with HM, these trends are attributed to growing social inequalities. Furthermore, the interviewed activists from both movements raise concerns about populist parties like the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland), or populist movements such as "Querdenken" ("lateral thinking", which mobilises against the governmental measures against Covid-19 and related scientific expertise), arguing that they mobilise, fuel and take advantage of generalised distrust in governance, and contribute to social disruption:

> *What shapes these people a lot, for example "Querdenken" or such, is distrust, which does not necessarily work on a basis, in the form of […] evidence that trust has been abused or something, but rather on a general "I'm distrusting now everyone who is not me" and so on. And I think that is really very dangerous. […] The distrust we are seeing a lot of in current politics, is […] distrust that divides, that is not supposed to make people think and question, but rather to encourage people to say "no" to listening to each other. And that's really, really dangerous* (DE_FFF_C).

When movement members are asked about their **own trust in various social and political actors**, considerable differences between FFF and HM emerge. While the interviewed activists of HM express a **general mistrust of powerful actors and institutions**, even though they acknowledge this is not always justified, FFF-activists draw a nuanced picture of trust that is rather based on **individual-level criteria** than on systemic or structural features.

HM-participants agree that it is first and foremost the ruling relations of capitalism and the increasingly deregulated, neoliberal system of housing politics that they distrust:

I am very suspicious when the public space belonging to the people is misused for capitalist purposes. So, if the public space is supposed to serve, yes, to increase people's capital or to support their interests. I'm really, really, really very suspicious of that (DE_HM_C).

Discussants of HM state they distrust actors who follow the logic of profit maximisation, or aim to preserve the status quo. Besides market actors, and in the political sphere, this includes the "usual suspects" (Liberals, Christian-Democrats), but also parties on the left (Social Democrats, Greens, Left Party) that in the past became accomplices to political compromise with housing companies, and 'sold the silverware' (DE_HM_C). One participant elaborates that, in his view, distrust is related to two logics of domination: profit-orientation and hierarchical organisation, including state institutions, and sums up: 'The higher the hierarchical level, the higher the mistrust' (DE_HM_C).

In comparison, FFF-participants have more nuanced views and highlight **criteria of trustworthiness and factors that help them to build trust**. For both core members and followers, credibility, reliability, coherence, independence, integrity, incorruption and the absence of conflicts of interest rank highly as criteria that make **institutions and politicians** trustworthy in their eyes: 'So, if politicians are really politicians […], if you can rely on that, that generates more trust for me than if I always have to ask myself: Is there something else behind the decisions?' (DE_FFF_C). In this context, both core members and followers argue that they have become less trustful of individual politicians in recent years because their own enhanced political engagement made them more aware of instances where conflicts of interest, accepting or granting advantages, or corruption played a role. While FFF-discussants still trust the institutions or the political system, some of the followers, nevertheless, wonder if there is something wrong with the political system when for those in power it appears to be relatively easy – and often remains without serious consequences – to take advantage of their position and betray citizens' trust. In their eyes, individual **untrustworthy representatives undermine trust in institutions**:

A1: Would you then say that your trust is generally eroding with regard to the system of democracy, […] the system how we practice it in Germany, in the representatives or so? […]

A2: To some extent this goes hand in hand.

A3: Exactly, I was going to say the same. So, if you just look at this scandal with face masks where people somehow pinch money from it. Of course, then you wonder: Well, what's going on there? Why is someone like this not yet removed from its office. […]

A1: I would agree. […] Because a system that makes it that easy for politicians, there must be a defect (DE_FFF_F).

From an even more critical standpoint, HM-interviewees start out from the premise that as soon as somebody represents an institution, a party, or an association, their loyalties lie not with the affected citizenry or the "clients" of the institution, but also, and often in the first place, with the institution they represent, or the "club" they belong to (DE_HM_F). In this regard, they rather recount experiences where their initial mistrust had transformed into more trustful relations through discussion and exchange on the local level of politics (DE_HM_C).

The local level, closeness and personal experiences and contacts are an important factor underscored by activists from both movements. They agree to be much more trustful towards institutions and politicians at the local or regional level, and less trusting with regard to the national and EU level. Indeed, personal connections and experiences, and direct insights into political and governance processes and structures emerge as key pillars of building trust in governance:

> *For me, personal connections or experiences, or something like this, are closely linked to the extent to which I trust someone. I'm active for Fridays for Future in [name of anonymised town]. […] There, you can just attend the town council [meeting], what I already did several times. And then you just see what they say about it, in parts how they prove it, into which direction they argue, what they vote for. And this helps me personally a lot to judge someone or so. To see effectively how a person works there, and not to notice it in a distorted way, for instance, via the press, how this person behaves* (DE_FFF_C).

In comparison to governments and politicians, interviewed activists express higher **trust towards social movements** and their form of organisation (i.e., flat hierarchies), although they stress that this strongly depends on content, too. Nationalist and right-wing social movements are mentioned as examples of social movements not to be trusted, even though they might have flat hierarchies, too. A basic precondition for trust in social movements, civil society organisations or other initiatives – that is sometimes implicitly taken for granted – is a minimum of shared values and ideas:

> *Organisational forms, just like social movements, initiatives that represent their interests with a minimal hierarchy, well, there I would generally have trust […]. But next to the kind of organisation it has, of course, always a strong content-related dimension. Hence, if some evidently autonomous nationalists with flat hierarchies were in favour of affordable rents for white Germans, then I would still not trust them* (DE_HM_C).

Some discussants also state more explicitly that the closer another civil society organisation, initiative or movement is, both in geographical and content-/value-related terms, the more they are inclined to trust it. A follower of HM emphasises that she is always distrustful when particular social groups (e.g., women, LGBTQI, migrants, people

with handicaps) are not represented or not sufficiently heard, pointing to the importance of a movement's inclusiveness. Other factors that contribute to trustworthiness, particularly in the eyes of interviewees from FFF, is the perception that they have a clear position and clear objectives; it is easy to see what they stand for and they 'do not beat about the bush' (DE_FFF_C).

What is striking for FFF is their explicit **trust in science and scientists**. Indeed, the movement grounds its demands strongly on scientific, fact-based evidence, and values this expertise highly. Some discussants even say they trust scientists the most among the various social and political actors. Nevertheless, even trust in science and expertise is not unconditional. As with governments and politicians, independence, integrity, incorruption, the absence of conflicts of interest, as well as transparency about purposes, funding sources and contracting entities are relevant factors for trust building:

> *Q: Which social and political actors do you trust the most?*
>
> *A: I personally would say, scientific figures, facts, as long it can be verified by whom or from where they have been financed. Hence, if I have a proof that these are people who gained their PhD title in a legal way, and not sponsored by any right-wing party. […] If the research work looks as independent as possible, then I trust even a little more* (DE_FFF_C).

Finally, **trust in the media** is addressed by both core members and followers. Here, discussants distinguish between trustworthy quality journalism (particularly appreciating independent investigation formats), and less trustworthy media sources (e.g., tabloid newspapers, alternative media, social media channels, other outlets that are sensational and aim to catch attention, rather than inform citizens).

Concerning their **perceptions of citizens' (dis-)trust**, focus group participants find the question difficult to answer due to the heterogeneity of the population, ranging from citizens completely distrusting of citizens fully trusting the government and other state institutions. Overall, they share the impression that, in recent years, society has become more divided between (the majority of) those who trust in **government** and other established actors, such as **traditional mass media** (e.g. national broadsheet newspapers, public broadcasting), **mainstream political parties**, the established **science community** with its **experts**, institutions and associations, and (the minority of) those who distrust the "establishment" and tend to trust in alternative actors, like anti-establishment social movements and political parties, alternative/anti-mainstream experts or media. Social inequalities, a lack of knowledge and media competence are mentioned as factors contributing to this trend. In addition, FG-participants assume that citizens' trust or distrust are shaped by **criteria of un/trustworthiness** similar to their own. In particular, they believe that closeness – both geographical and thematic-ideological – and hence a certain degree of connectivity, comprehensibility and identification, are crucial factors that align with why people trust:

> *I think you trust those where you say they are like me. Well, I think there is a tendency there to give a lot of credit of trust. This is sometimes justified, sometimes guaranteed to be unjustified. But it probably depends a lot on your own coordinate system, or whatever you want to call it. If someone fits in there, then you are probably much more open than with other people who come from a completely different - in quotation marks - camp. There, the down-to-earth mistrust is almost inevitable. Yes, both are probably not always completely unproblematic, no!* (DE_HM_F).

In addition, they assume that citizens' trust in government representatives, politicians and other publicly visible actors is also influenced by the aforementioned criteria of trustworthiness, such as credibility, reliability and coherence, integrity and incorruptness, while a violation of these principles would decrease trust or fuel distrust. One core member of FFF also underscores the admission of one's own mistakes, assuming responsibility and revising one's own positions as trust-generating forms of behaviour, referring to the example when Angela Merkel apologised for her government's short-sighted change in Covid-19 regulations shortly before the Easter holidays, 2021.

3.2.2 The impact of cooperation on (dis)trust building

The social movements of our study cooperate with other collective actors to varying degrees, and suggest that **different kinds of cooperation** have different implications on the extent of trust their members and broader constituencies have in their movement. To start with, participants of both movements emphasise that they cooperate with **governmental institutions and political parties** only to a very limited extent and, **as a principle**, only insofar as there is no political influence,[24] but a clear advantage for promoting the movements' goals (e.g., in the sense of creating publicity, raising public awareness and pressurising or motivating state actors to engage with the movement's concerns in the form of agenda-setting). For instance, representatives of the local FFF group participated in a local round table in order to help improve the municipality's climate protection concept; the local HM group has had positive experiences with getting the city council and administration to support projects that, initially, started off with protests in the form of civil disobedience, like squatting.

Regarding the **effects of cooperation with political actors** in terms of sustaining or promoting trust in their movement, they find that it may arouse a certain form of **mistrust** from more radical left-wing movements, or can lead to internal discussions. However, discussants from both movements find that being on speaking terms with

[24] The interviewed local FFF members explicitly mention that a core principle of FFF is to remain impartial and independent.

members of the city council, the mayor, or the administration can contribute to actually moving and changing things. In the sense that they succeed in alleviating problems and furthering citizens' interests, therefore, such forms of cooperation are perceived as **increasing citizens' trust**:

> *I think that these examples of cooperation, in which we are currently involved, tend to be received positively in urban society, while internally they give us one or the other problem ourselves. […] Well, internally it can rattle a bit then. But I think that, overall, it helps us because it also shows that it - you can make things happen if you try to pull forward with enough strength and with enough support. And that's something positive, something that creates trust, too* (DE_HM_C).

With regard to **political parties**, FG-participants from FFF follow the **principle to reject engaging in joint protest or other forms of political action,** or to express support for certain political parties, while they do accept support from political parties (e.g., the Greens), for example, by using their meeting or storage rooms, or accepting their invitations to intervene at city council meetings. More far-reaching cooperation with political actors is seen very critically because this might undermine their credibility in terms of impartiality and independence, and could eventually lead to a **decrease in their followers' trust**.

FG-participants from HM also, as a principle, distance themselves from party politics, but do not outrightly reject joining forces with individual politicians on the basis of shared goals and for the purpose of furthering the movement's aims. They do emphasise, however, that one needs to be very cautious regarding lending politicians a stage for furthering party interests, especially during election times. In their view, the same can apply to cooperation with established CSOs. One follower puts it very explicitly:

> *There is always the risk that they will put their club in the foreground - in quotation marks. And, of course, there can easily be an imbalance. So, you really have to be careful because they are also players who like to instrumentalise the movement, according to the motto: Yes, yes, nice that you exist, as long as you represent what we also represent - wonderful! Because you can always adorn yourself and say: Ah yes, that's not just us as [name of CSO], but the activists […] they also agree. Of course, that can always be sold well in public. In this respect, I think that such a basic mistrust is appropriate, you have to be careful. And as I said, the same applies of course to political parties. Sure, parties have an interest in saying: We are very close to the movement. Excellent! Always sounds great. […] So, to take a closer look and say: Where is he still acting as a cooperation partner in the alliance, or where is his association/club now spilling over heavily - in quotation marks? I think that is always necessary in principle* (DE_HM_F).

Both interviewed movements state that **cooperation with other civil society groups and social movements** is much more common. It takes place particularly at the local level, and is used to build alliances and join forces, e.g., in joint protest events, open letters or petitions to policymakers. In this respect, cooperation is to some extent **instrumental**. At the same time, it is based on certain **principles**. In particular, such cooperation is based on shared goals and ideas of solidarity. However, according to both core members and followers, it is not always clear and indisputable what shared goals are. In all our focus group discussions, core members and followers agree that questions of cooperation with other civil society actors are among those most contentiously discussed at the plenum.

With regard to FFF, for example, a narrow understanding according to which cooperation and solidarisation should take place only with regard to ecological and climate protection issues, contrasts with a broader approach shared by many, but not all members of the local FFF group. According to the latter, cooperation should reach out to groups and movements concerned with intersectional and neighbouring issue fields, such as social justice and anti-racism[25]:

> *What just comes to my mind is the repeated discussion as to what extent we are only a climate movement, or how far do we also solidarise with movements such as Seebrücke26 or so. Repeatedly, this leads to big discussions about where do we participate, where do we give support, or in how far do we have to stay a typical Fridays-for-Future movement. In my view, that is a big issue, contentiously debated not only in our local group, but also at the federal level and in many other local groups […]. If you cooperate with NGOs or other initiatives representing other issues, I agree […] that you can also lose people. […] At the same time, what's also the argument of the other side among us, […] we also lose people if we do not take a clear position with regard to other issues and that people then say: "They are too one-dimensional in my view"* (DE_FFF_C).

Beyond that, there has also been a debate about whether cooperation with ecological or climate protection groups should be confined to those that, in addition to the common goals, also share the same basic values and ideas (Extinction Rebellion being a particularly contentious example).

With regard to **related effects on citizen trust in the movements**, our focus group participants from FFF believe that cooperation with similar civic groups or movements will certainly be **beneficial** because it strengthens their voice and can help to increase

[25] This development goes along with a somewhat revised focus from "climate protection" to "climate justice", which took place not only in the FFF group of this study, but is more widespread in the FFF and the wider ecological movement.

[26] English: "Create safe havens", movement for safe routes for refugees and against the criminalisation of sea rescue.

their influence and success, and this would probably contribute to fostering the citizens' trust in FFF in order to achieve its goals. Similarly, HM members argue that cooperation with other social movements (e.g., addressing climate change and transport politics) usually **strengthens citizen trust** since the movements are united in their quest for wanting politics to actually act and implement movements' claims. While joining forces with other social movements is perceived by all FG participants as a positive factor that can enhance the citizens' trust, views are divided as to whether cooperation should involve a narrower or broader range of social movements. Some of the interviewed FFF members wonder, for instance, if citizens would take them more seriously when they stick to their issue field, or if it would be better to shift more attention to intersectional and contextual issues and actors, thus dealing more pointedly with the complexities of climate protection.

Apart from the effects on citizens' or their constituencies' trust, HM members also point to cooperation effects on their relationship with other civil society actors. In particular, they suggest that cooperation or exchange with established civil society organisations, such as the tenant association, helps to strengthen other actors' (the 'big tanks' like the DGB, the Partitätischer Wohlfahrtsverband, Caritas, Diakonie, etc.) trust in the movement:

> *When they sat at a table with one of us, which has happened, and we had been invited by the tenants' association, then they think to themselves: Yes, okay, yes, these are not really extreme left-wing radicals, but you can still talk to them somehow. And maybe that's not so bad after all, it might help to reach a wider audience, which is our goal, too* (DE_HM_C).

3.2.3 Improving citizens' trust in governance

Concerning the question of what institutions can do to increase trust, interviewed activists from both movements put a strong focus on the **local level** of politics. According to both core members and followers, trust in governmental institutions is strongly shaped by the extent to which institutions and their representatives are **approachable and close to the citizens** (both in terms of geography and in terms of issue-related connectivity). In their perception, the local level provides various low threshold opportunities for direct experiences and encounters of citizens with local government (e.g., open city council meetings, consultation hours, various forms of civic engagement, and opportunities for personal encounters with representatives). However, they emphasise that local institutions should do much more to become more approachable and create more points of contact, for instance by strengthening citizens' dialogue and other forms of discussion and exchange with citizens. This should also involve better communication and explanation of the institutions' responsibilities, tasks, and procedures in an accessible, easily comprehensible way:

I think transparency and closeness are the magic words. So, simply to be approachable for the citizens, showing what one is doing, engaging in dialogue, possibly, and also to be transparent about how things work, what one is doing. Not only for public institutions, but generally for politics, political parties and whatsoever, this is what is missing and what often quickly leads to mistrust (DE_FFF_C).

HM members, in particular, but also core members of FFF, stress there should also be more opportunities for the **direct involvement of citizens in decision-making**, particularly at the local level where citizens and their lived environment are directly affected by those decisions:

In any case, elections are a basic requirement. But it is, of course, also correct that it won't work if we do that every four years and during the time between elections, we lie down on the couch […]. That's not democracy. Direct democracy, […] hence, do we want to make it like the Swiss? Do we want to exert more influence on the everyday decisions taken on various levels? Sure, I am in favour of it. […] regularly to cast our vote, the people's vote, for or against, let's say, Glyphosate, or brown coal surface mining or affordable housing (DE_HM_C).

Accessibility, approachability and closeness are also considered crucial factors influencing trust in **national governments and the EU**. Yet, our discussants consider this to be more difficult at these levels. In fact, they believe that the citizens perceive them as remote, over-bureaucratic, complex, opaque and difficult to connect and identify with, and are consequently more hesitant and cautious to build trust in national or European institutions. They suggest that national and European institutions should develop more suitable strategies and means of connecting with citizens and of entering into exchange and dialogue that may compensate for the geographical remoteness and the related perceived lack of direct experiences and connectivity:

My own trust is eroding with regard to the federal level, because […] it is somehow far away. […] Looking at the federal state parliament, there are more realistic debates somehow concerning myself or my environment, my fellow people. And also, at the city level (DE_FFF_F).

Q: And these approaches, do they apply to the different levels, hence local, national, EU, equally? Or would you perceive differences in this regard?

A1: Of course, it always depends on the opportunities, to what extent these means are available. Simply, when there are obstacles of distance and language […].

A2: I think there are opportunities. I just thought, well, citizens dialogue is more difficult at EU-level. But if they were, for instance, conducted stepwise? There are opportunities. Citizens' consultations. And if they were done staggered according to languages. […] The question is in how far this is actually possible in terms of the extent of time (DE_FFF_C).

Even more than local institutions, national and European institutions would need to inform citizens in a more accessible way, helping them not only to better understand the structures and procedures, but also to better comprehend the direct relevance and consequences of their policymaking:

Q: Looking once again at the EU-level, […] do you see means and ways to strengthen the citizens' trust? What should be done?

A: Well, I would say everything mentioned before, but perhaps in parts in an amplified form, such things like approachability. Because it is really very far away. I would describe myself as a person with political interest; still I find it partly very difficult to understand what's going on there. […] And they don't really make it more transparent. Instead, you have the feeling that they like to be somewhat more inscrutable and that everything is a bit complicated, bureaucratised […] In this respect, I just think that an enhanced transparency, disclosure of what is done, […] what can we actually do [is necessary]. Then, an understanding can be gained in terms of when something is done, what consequences it can have, and which not. Because otherwise, it is difficult to make claims (DE_FFF_C).

Closely interlinked with the aforementioned elements are **transparency and openness** which are underscored as further important factors for trust-building. They are perceived as a matter of opportunities for gaining direct insights into policymaking (e.g., public city council meetings), of comprehensibility of issues and decisions, of overcoming bureaucratic complexities and opaqueness, and of improving controllability and accountability:

Q: What can institutions do to regain trust?

A: Transparency of decision-making processes, in particular; also, with regard to administration. In my opinion, how I perceive it, this is very untransparent and very strongly shaped by internal orientations and power games […]. My impression is that it can perhaps be achieved more easily at the local level, that the people can experience it and perhaps also comprehend. It is always desired that transparency also exists at the federal state level, or European level, but […] I think that this is all/there are many very complex procedures (DE_HM_C).

> *Transparency. Well, if they just manage to disclose things. Well, it's always about the same examples. […] Where there are files that cannot be consulted* (DE_FFF_F).

Discussants suggest that citizens' trust in governance at all levels can be enhanced by increasing institutions' communication about and explanation of institutional structures and procedures, and of responsibilities and tasks. In particular, political institutions should reveal to the citizens clearer information about the functioning of politics and the challenges and limits of policymaking (e.g., the necessity to find compromise).

FG-participants from HM stress that there should also be a more positive and productive use and display of **conflict and debate** on all levels, to show that things can be changed from within civil society. In the face of a perceived diminished capacity of the state to steer and reign global capital and a loss of democratic power of the people, greater transparency on the local level, and conflict, discussion and debate on all levels, would lead to greater politicisation of the people:

> *I think I would rather say that the subject of conflicts is a subject where I think that it would also be quite fruitful at higher hierarchical levels, i.e., at the federal or European level, to put a bit more focus on it there. Because I think that politicises more people again. […] I believe, a more conflictual contestation of positions is required, but that also creates a chance for more people to understand themselves again (...) politically and to become active* (DE_HM_C).

In this regard, interviewed activists from both movements shift particular attention to the importance of **civic education** and the need to improve and strengthen the role of **political education** at school: 'Because trust always comes from understanding' (DE_FFF_C). In addition to awareness raising about political structures and processes, FG-participants find it crucial that citizens are **well informed** about current societal issues. Apart from institutional information campaigns, they consider it decisive that citizens have access to and use a plurality of information channels and journalistic media to acquire knowledge and form their opinion. Echo chambers and filter bubbles spreading one-sided, biased information or even fuelling fake news and conspiracy in social media communication, are seen as relevant factors of distrust in governance. Members of both movements also emphasise that the citizens' level of information and knowledge is strongly affected by social inequalities and the pressures of the labour market. In particular, the lack of time and resources are seen as a major obstacle for many people to educate themselves and to actively participate in politics. In this context, they also formulate a critique of the lack of representation of particular social groups, both within politics and within social movements themselves.

Furthermore, there is broad agreement that **authenticity, coherence and promise-keeping** of political representatives or institutions across the various levels are key to

trust-building, while the widespread discrepancy between announcements and their implementation is perceived as a major reason why citizens find it hard to trust. In the activists' view, citizens' trust in governance might be improved or distrust diminished if governmental institutions and policymakers were more cautious when making promises and announcements. In addition, they assume that dashed expectations could be prevented by strengthening civic education and raising public awareness about the conditions and limits of policymaking.

Moreover, **integrity, honesty, incorruptness, credibility and reliability** are repeatedly addressed as core pillars of trust in governance, but first and foremost, with regard to the national level. Here, various examples are given where governmental representatives or politicians failed to comply with these principles, either because they took advantage of their position, were dishonest or hid information, gave priority to their own personal interests rather than to comply with their mandate and represent the interests of their institution and the citizens, were unreliable or corrupt. According to our discussants, such misconduct should be prevented more strongly by strengthening independent control mechanisms and by making the respective persons more seriously accountable.

Finally, an aspect that is less extensively discussed, but nevertheless found important by both core members and followers, is that politicians should **respect all citizens alike,** and they should have a sincere interest in their opinions and input rather than engage in citizens' dialogue as mere symbolic policy without consequences. With regard to their own experiences, FFF members complain that they have often been treated like children whose demands and concerns were not to be taken seriously. HM members stress that particular social groups are not represented and heard, and that the institutions should be more proactive in making information accessible without barriers, and involving all affected groups in decision-making processes.

When it comes to the **capacity and role of social movements to enhance trust in society**, different aspects are highlighted. Core members of both movements underline that social movements can and should **help building or sustaining citizens' trust in democratic governance** by contributing to a critical reflection about and **correction of deficiencies in current policymaking**, for instance, through constant control and critique of governance at various levels, but also through productive input into the development or revision of political concepts and policy drafts. In this context, core members also argue that social movements should encounter a decline in citizen's trust in policymaking and their disinterest in and disenchantment with politics by offering an 'alternative to hierarchically organised political acting and administering' (DE_HM_C), promoting citizens' democratic participation and showing that civic collective action can actually move things. In this sense, an HM core member underscores:

> *Political disenchantment does not automatically make someone say "Well, now I have to get engaged and do something against it". Instead, on the contrary "It does not interest me, I don't care about it". And this is bad. And to get people out of this [reasoning], of course, this makes/ happens also in social movements. But way too little and, eventually, much too weakly. What you hear mostly is: "I am not interested, I don't care. Sure, I am against it but still I do not get engaged." And it is our job, at least how I see it, to change this* (DE_HM_C).

Overall, strong emphasis is put on the **role of direct action**, such as demonstrations, camps in public spaces and other self-organised awareness raising and information campaigns. Indeed, core members highlight that their movements' main strategy is to raise awareness and inform citizens about the issues and concerns they address. FFF core members, for instance, draw attention to their effort to increase the citizens' knowledge about the climate crisis and climate protection, and thus to enhance their understanding of and support for the measures to be taken to fight climate change. In this regard, they assume that their actions indirectly contribute to enhancing citizens' trust in and support of climate protection policies. Attention is also shifted to the role of citizens' engagement in social movements, or other forms of political activism. Here, it is argued that citizens' political engagement leads to a better understanding of political processes and structures, among themselves and their direct social environment, and may thus increase trust in politics. At the same time, however, these insights might, to some extent or in certain instances, also cause some distrust because politically active citizens are more aware about failures and weaknesses of political institutions and policymakers. Yet, when speaking about distrust, core members first and foremost refer to anti-government or anti-establishment movements like those that emerged during the Covid 19 pandemic, which they criticise for fuelling anti-establishment and anti-mainstream resentments and generalised distrust in governance, science and the mass media, for being anti-democratic and provoking divisions within society. In comparison, followers accentuate that also democratically-oriented social movements do and should have the function of **channelling citizens' distrust of government** because it is their purpose to criticise the government and utter discontent. Moreover, they consider distrust of the government, or certain politics, as a main reason why citizens become active in social movements, either in order to protest against existing policymaking, or to demand different policies.

2.4 Expertise

Concerning the role of scientific expertise in society in general, interviewed activists agree that policymakers need to consult **scientists in their role as authorities** from the respective relevant fields, and seek their advice before taking decisions on complex

issues they have no expertise in. Collecting a sound basis of evidence is seen as crucial for legitimising and securing decisions, particularly in cases where basic rights are concerned, or when in crisis situations executive forces gain exceptional power and parliamentary influence is narrowed. Discussants underline that policymakers should consult a variety of scientists in order to get a more comprehensive and solidified picture. At the same time, they find transparency about the used evidence important. Not only should the names of consulted experts or the sources of scientific evidence be made public, but also funding sources and the period of research. In this regard, they call for a certain amount of caution and a critical reading of scientific statements:

> *So, scientific findings are not necessarily immediately believable because they are scientific findings of some sort, but you always have to check: who gave the order? From whose pens did what was written down come and such? So, you have to be a bit critical and careful* (DE_HM_C).

They are critical of the simplification and one-sidedness they observe in medial representations of science/scientists and the dominance of individual scientists. Overall, political and mass media communication should enhance citizen awareness of scientific evidence as not being absolute fact, but that it should be revised and, hence, can be refuted and corrected, and that verification and contradicting evidence are not something that should decrease, but, on the contrary, strengthen trust in science and expertise. In this respect, education and informing citizens about the principles and functioning of science is regarded important:

> *In terms of trust, I also find it highly important that it is made transparent for the people how scientific evidence comes about. In my view, […] mistrust of science […] also emerges because scientific findings get disproved and re-placed by new scientific evidence, and is sometimes only temporary. […] It is reported too little how scientific hypothesis, evidence and refutation actually work* (DE_FFF_C).

Particularly for FFF, experts and scientific expertise play a **key role in the movement** since all critique of current policies and FFF's political demands are grounded in scientific evidence. In this respect, experts on climate change appear to be an important **authority for this movement**. While at the very start, FFF mainly referred to expertise of climate change experts from the scientific community, they soon got more powerful support from climate experts who joined the movement, establishing the Scientists for Future as part of FFF. Expertise is used to legitimise FFF's demands, building their central foundation for debate. Experts, and particularly those who are members of Scientists for Future, are regularly consulted as advisors, for instance, when a new catalogue of demands has to be elaborated on in detail by a working group. Moreover, Scientists for Future serve as important advocates for the movement, and help FFF to be taken seriously by policymakers and other adults questioning whether pupils have the

knowledge to challenge politics. In this sense, they contribute to enhancing the legitimacy of FFF and its demands, meanwhile strengthening citizens' trust in the movement. Scientists for Future members also intervene as speakers at public events, in political discussions or in the media, and thus play a considerable role for FFF public relations activities.

Core members of the local HM group, too, state that **expertise is an essential basis for the work of the movement,** and a prerequisite for trust to develop:

> *Because there is nothing worse - trust again, which is lost very quickly - if you make a statement and afterwards it turns out: This is complete nonsense. That doesn't fit at all. So expert knowledge is, I believe, a major requirement here - a prerequisite for success, in order to maintain positive contact with people* (DE_HM_C).

Scientific expertise and knowledge are seen as providing a sound basis for the movement to develop and justify its claims. Interviewed core members of HM state they regularly read scientific studies and try to stay up to date with legal and scientific developments. They also feel they have to become experts themselves in order to act and be perceived as trustworthy on the local level of action. Interviewed followers, in contrast, emphasise that, especially **when it comes to housing issues, everyone is an expert**:

> *What I find when it comes to renting, I mean, that's what every person experiences for themselves. So, everyone needs a house or a roof over their heads. And can experience for themselves what the situation is like. I think, yes, that's why I think - so many people can experience that first-hand, that's why I think it's much closer to citizens than other topics, like climate change, for example, which you may not notice so much now. But everyone can tell whether rents are rising. How much rent you have to pay. How much - yes, what your rights are - most people notice because they are simply exposed to it. So, I think that almost everyone who is in a tenancy is actually an expert in that sense* (DE_HM_F).

Nevertheless, when it comes to politics on the federal level, another follower adds that personal, subjective affectedness and experience are not enough, and that one needs experts to generate and argue more general claims. In sum, followers of HM agree that **science and expertise are important, but argue that it does, or should not, stand above politics and cannot replace politics**.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

Participants agree that **voting at elections is an important element,** a necessary foundation of democracy, **but** they are also convinced that democracy is more than that and requires continuous efforts in other, **additional forms of political participation**. Here, attention is drawn to the **role of a strong civil society** (particularly in terms of democratic control, critique, awareness raising), and **citizens' engagement in social movements, participating in petitions, and taking part in protests and demonstrations**. As a core member of HM puts it: 'The first duty of the citizen is to demonstrate. Namely expressing one's opinion in public space […] I think it's important that democracy can be experienced on the street and shape politics' (DE_HM_C).

In this context, the importance of **basic rights** such as freedom of speech, gathering, demonstrations and the press are repeatedly highlighted as crucial pillars of political participation in a democracy. **Referenda** are also mentioned as another form of political participation. However, discussants have ambivalent views on their usefulness. In their opinion, such forms of direct democracy can be suitable at the local or regional level where citizens are more directly concerned with the political decisions at stake. At the same time, concerns are raised as to whether citizens would base their decisions on the facts and the available scientific evidence, or if their decisions would rather be led by fear, anger, or gut feeling.

When explicitly asked about their perception of **citizens' capabilities to make political decisions**, core members of FFF emphasise that democratic participation should not be a question of a person's capability because democracy means political self-determination of the people and an equal right to vote for all citizens. Across FGs, participants share the opinion that de facto **citizens' capabilities vary,** and may be severely restricted by social inequalities in various dimensions – in particular, citizens' social and educational backgrounds, access to information and time resources. In addition, some of the FFF-followers are rather sceptical about citizens' capabilities to make democratic decisions because they feel that many would base their political views and voting decisions more on emotions rather than on rationality and facts. In the followers' viewpoint, this impression is particularly nurtured by recent negative examples such as the Brexit referendum (June 2016, the UK), or the German anti-government Querdenker movement during the Covid 19 pandemic.

When reflecting on the ways in which citizens can be empowered to participate in political decision-making more actively, our discussants highlight three dimensions where **institutions should do more to involve citizens**. First, discussants from both movements argue that **institutions should improve the legal framework** to alleviate social inequalities and enable citizens to participate in democracy more equally. In their view, **democracy is severely flawed when particular groups of citizens** (the working poor, women, migrants, or people with handicaps) **are systematically excluded from**

the formation of the political will. Vice versa, **social justice is seen as an important prerequisite for democratic participation**. While in the discussions with FFF, the focus lies on ways to enhance the political participation of marginalised citizens, by helping them overcome survival mode and gain more freedom for dealing with political issues (e.g., through higher minimum pay, or the introduction of a basic income so that nobody has to commit to several jobs in parallel), the discussion with HM followers goes beyond that, in that it also includes reflections on how the political participation of all could be enhanced – e.g., through a reduction in the working week to four days, or less:

> *I think you would just have to, in order to be politically active at all, be able to participate, well, in a democracy, you simply cannot have a full-time job and children. You have to have a different system where you simply have more time for things like that. That kind of thing takes time. To get involved in politics. To inform yourself. It takes time. And most people don't have the time when they're in a full-time job* (DE_HM_F).

In addition, members of FFF argue strongly in favour of reducing the general voting age for participating in federal, regional and local elections to 16 years (or even lower), rejecting the argument that young people would not be capable of voting because of insufficient knowledge, while adults do not have to prove sufficient knowledge to be entitled to vote. According to FFF members, the climate protection policy shows, in particular, how important it would be that all age groups have equal rights to represent their interests. At the same time, they consider an equal participation of young people in democratic elections as an important means to foster their interest in politics, and to make them engage more actively in political processes and issues, thus experiencing the practical relevance of political education in school.

Secondly, they agree that the political **institutions have a major responsibility to inform citizens more and better,** and argue that they have to improve the distribution, accessibility and comprehensibility of information in order to make politics more transparent and accountable. Furthermore, the institutions should **improve education in general, and enhance civic or political education, in particular**. Discussants argue that it is the responsibility of the political and educational system to empower everybody to represent their own interests. In this context, discussants from both movements criticise the domestic school system for its systematic insufficiencies in the provision of political education and opportunities for a lived democracy. FFF members explicitly favour a school policy that introduces civic education at school at a relatively early stage, makes it obligatory until the completion of school education, and offers opportunities for more practical engagement, such as democracy weeks or Model United Nations simulations:

> *I believe that you really have to start with political education at school because you do not get the people in the afternoon, well, somewhere to a workshop that is voluntary. "Everybody, please, go there!" That's not working. Therefore, I really think that you have to do this at school; we always have democracy days each year, where you are informed about different issues, engage practically – such things, that such things are established in all schools. That the focus is shifted more strongly on this* (DE_FFF_F).

Thirdly, **institutions and individual politicians should engage more directly with citizens, create more and better tools to increase citizens' participation** (especially on the local level), and demonstrate that politics is actually capable of initiating change, and a matter concerning everybody. Here, both core members and followers argue that political institutions should considerably strengthen citizens' dialogue and consultations, not as a mere symbolic act of participation, but as a serious form of taking citizens' views into account:

> *One thing that I sometimes saw, and that could be strengthened more, would be citizens' dialogue or citizens' discussions or so. Yet, perhaps with a possibility – well, this would imply another vote – to bring up issues. Not to just go there and complain, and to be taken along as a complaint. But through the citizens' dialogue to really get an active opportunity as a citizen to address matters that are really forwarded to the level of parliament, hence locally the city council, or the federal state parliament, and that are really listened to. Because currently, even with petitions, it does not necessarily happen […] that they reach the plenum* (DE_FFF_C).

While positive developments in this regard are mentioned for the local level, clearer deficits are perceived for the higher political levels that are more remote from the citizens. With regard to FFF's role as representatives of children and youth, for example, it is suggested that more youth parliaments should be established to give young people more opportunities for direct political participation. Concerning housing issues, inhabitants of particular quarters should receive more information, and have more say concerning land-use, building projects, remodelling of public spaces, etc. Discussants from FFF also underline that the conditions and procedures of petitioning should be simplified and improved. This would help, in particular, to give social movements a more effective voice in policymaking.

In evaluating the **capacity of social movements to enhance democratic participation**, participants have a differentiated view. Core members and followers share the impression that many citizens have no interest in politics, feel excluded and detached from it, and find it difficult to understand its mechanisms. Social movements would encourage their members and followers to directly engage with a political topic, and provide **low-threshold occasions** to get immediate experiences with, access to and

insights into processes of policymaking, helping citizens to gain a better understanding of political structures and procedures and, in general, to become more critical, politicised and prepared to act as responsible citizens. One FFF members puts it like this:

> *I really believe that there are people across all age groups who are not interested in politics at all because it is too boring and too difficult to get into, and simply because the way in which politics works here is not inclusive at all. […] I believe that social movements offer a different form of access for everybody. […] And when you go out onto the streets, then you see just more quickly that reactions take place. I believe that is something that often attracts different people and many more people* (DE_FFF_C).

Members of both movements underscore that social movements are there to channel and represent the interests, concerns and views of individual citizens with common goals (such as climate protection), or shared concerns (such as rising rents) and, by joining forces and becoming a mass of people, make them **more visible and powerful** in the public and political sphere. Core members highlight that social movements are a mediator and give voice to their members' perspectives by directly engaging with policymakers in discussion rounds and other forms of exchange. On a more critical note, they suggest, however, that social movements should **make more of their potential by becoming more inclusive for citizens**. For instance, they should not only take account of their members' views (e.g., through plena), but should provide more diverse and inclusive access points, opportunities for input and forms of dialogue with interested citizens. In addition, some followers are of the opinion that the strong public visibility of a movement does not always translate into substantial political results, and wonder how an actual influence on political decision-making and a contribution to policy-change could be achieved.

Finally, one of the issues more diversely discussed was the question about discussants' perception of **social movements' success in bringing more citizens' voices to governmental institutions**. Interviewed activists share the view that the respective movements were **successful in raising awareness and sensitising** politicians, policymakers, and the public alike, to climate change and housing issues, respectively. In comparison, **views divide about the actual success of social movements with regard to their influence on policymaking** (but also on people's everyday behaviour). Core members of FFF emphasise that both FFF and many other social movements have already achieved a great deal, and contributed considerably to a change in public awareness and policymaking. Without the engagement of social movements, we would not stand where we are, they argue:

> *So first of all, I would say on the subject of "Role in society and in democracy", as a movement we are, of course, an incredibly important functional element of democracy because that is exactly what democracy lives from. Democracy*

means, means confrontation and we try to live that. [...] I believe that our future would look super different if there weren't any such social movements because I think we have already achieved a lot, changed a lot. And we would definitely not stand where we stand if we didn't exist, and other social movements in other areas (DE_FFF_C).

Core members of FFF consider their own movement, as well as other social movements, as important and effective voices for the concerns of citizens with regard to policymaking, as they unite a considerable mass behind them, have gained high visibility in the public sphere (including in media coverage), and are in exchange with policymakers, variously. In line with this positive view, one follower also suggests that FFF has certainly contributed, to some extent, to recent electoral results at the regional 'Länder' level and the participation of the Green party in regional governments. In contrast, other followers are less enthusiastic about FFF's success. They agree that FFF was very successful in mobilising civil society and attracting attention to the climate crisis. Yet, they find that social movements have little influence on policymaking, and wonder how social movements could increase their pressure on government so that they take their demands more strongly into account.

Discussants of the local HM group, too, are of the opinion that social movements are important and do succeed in giving citizens' concerns and interests a voice, in making them heard, and feeding them into the political sphere. However, despite this generally positive assessment, they consider them only as partially successful. A core member of HM attributes this to the greater strength of counterforces:

Yes, there are many positive examples; that is something that you can always build on when you have achieved such a success somewhere. On the other hand, we're just way too weak. And there is far too little movement. Or you can also express it the other way round: The opposing forces [i.e., powerful business interests] - and those are again the forces that don't make money from it [i.e., issues in the interest of the common good], but from other things. As a rule, earnings are generated from other things than such general tasks [oriented at the common good]-. They are way too strong and have a lobby that is way too big (DE_HM_C).

Activists of both movements draw renewed attention to the **question of representation and inclusiveness,** and emphasise that social movements are eventually limited in their efforts since their work requires resources (above all, time) that only a privileged segment of the population has access to, so they never represent the citizenry as a whole:

In this respect, this political engagement in initiatives, in I-don't-know-where, is actually something. Who do you see there? This is the educated bourgeoisie, these are the people who don't have stomach-aches about money every

> *day, who have the problem to some extent under control. Hopefully, they'll be able to pay their rent and are not under total pressure because of that. It's a very small group. You have to be clear about that* (DE_HM_F).

In this context, followers of HM argue most clearly that political participation might have become a form of luxury that only the privileged can enjoy. They also relate this to trust, in the sense that researching information that one can trust in, acquiring the competencies so that one trusts in oneself, takes time, too. Trust is not just there; it needs to be built on knowledge, experience, information, etc. As one follower puts it:

> *You can only have confidence/trust in yourself that you are informed well enough to make a decision that makes sense to you - that is, so that you can say: this is the decision and I have confidence in/trust the decision* (DE_HM_F).

In addition, followers of FFF raise the point that ecological movements tend to represent and mobilise only the privileged middle classes because their living conditions allow them to be concerned with environmental and climate protection, while less privileged groups in society have to deal with more immediate existential issues:

> *In my view, a large number of the people participating in the demonstrations are people who live in relatively secure financial circumstances and have also socially a quite stable basic framework. […] Fridays for Future is for people who do not have financial worries in their lives, and who mostly are from the middle class, if not upper middle class. […] If you are a person who receives social benefit, then you definitely have other problems: How do I pay my rent? What can I do so that my children have enough to eat? And you do not think: Well, now there is the climate issue, what can I do about it?* (DE_FFF_F).

Thus, overall, activists from both movements highlight structural barriers to participation in social movements, underscoring in particular socio-economic inequalities as a major factor affecting citizens' participation and restricting the representation and inclusiveness of social movements.

3. Summary and conclusions

In sum, interviewed social movement members agree that a certain bedrock of trust is essential for living and acting together in society, and for the functioning of democracy because trust helps to reduce uncertainties and complexities, making interaction possible. In comparison, the role of distrust is perceived in a more nuanced way. On the one hand, FG-participants share the opinion that a "healthy" degree of distrust is an equally important element of both social coexistence and the democratic political

system because it renders people attentive and alert, and stimulates revision and improvement. On the other hand, distrust is regarded as something negative, destructive and dangerous when it takes the form of generalised, fundamental distrust that leads to categorical rejection and denial, and a polarisation of society.

When it comes to their own trust and distrust, there are more remarkable differences between the two movements. HM members have a general distrust in the capitalist system, the involved mechanisms of profit-orientation and neoliberal deregulation. They also tend to distrust powerful actors and institutions as a default position because they are perceived as representatives of the existing system and established power asymmetries. In contrast, FFF members have basic trust in the political system and its institutions (despite being aware of the negative ecological effects of existing capitalism). At the same time, they take a differentiated stance towards political actors and individual institutions with their representatives, highlighting that key criteria of trustworthiness must be met, most importantly credibility, reliability, coherence, independence, integrity, incorruptness and the absence of conflicts of interest. Thus, while HM members base their distrust on systemic or structural features, FFF members rather make their judgements on the individual level, and distinguish between trustworthy and less trustworthy actors. More converging views can be found with regard to other societal actors. Activists of both movements have considerably more confidence in civil society groups and scientists. Yet, trust in these actors is not unconditional. In fact, principles of trustworthiness, like credibility, independence and the absence of conflicts of interest, play a relevant role, too. As for other civil society groups and social movements, trusting is particularly encouraged if they share the same goals and values.

Generally, there is a consensus that trust-building is easier, or more likely, at the local level, while it is perceived as more difficult and contingent at higher, more remote levels. Activists unanimously emphasise that trust-building is decisively bound to direct personal experiences, first-hand information, closeness, connectivity and comprehensibility, and that these criteria are most likely met within the direct local environment and at the local level of policymaking.

For governmental institutions, this means that they have to be approachable, open, inclusive, transparent and close to the citizens, for instance by communicating in accessible, easily understandable way, offering low threshold opportunities for direct, practical insights and encounters with citizens, strengthening citizens' dialogue and exchange, and direct involvement of citizens in decision-making. Because understanding is considered as a key precondition of trust, activists also underscore the importance of awareness raising about political structures and processes, the functioning of politics and the challenges and limits of policymaking, as well as sufficient and clear information about current societal and political issues. Here, civic education and an extensive and

vivid, practice-oriented political education at school are perceived as key pillars. Furthermore, FG-participants shift emphasis to the role of authenticity and coherence between communication, on the one hand, and acting and results, on the other, including the need to either keep or make fewer promises.

Overall, FG-participants have a consensus that trust in governance and the functioning of democracy depend considerably on lively, lived forms of political participation that go beyond the act of voting. Apart from the access points that need to be provided by governmental institutions, activists emphasise the importance of civil society activism and social movements. In their view, social movements not only play a crucial role in democracy because they criticise societal and political deficiencies, mobilise protest and give voice to citizens' concerns and political claims, they also constitute an important social arena for awareness raising, politicisation and lived, directly-experienced democracy. For FFF, this also involves relevant opportunities for building informed trust in governance, exactly because of their assumption that this lived experience of democratic participation and enhanced engagement with current issues leads to a better understanding of ongoing political decisions and the functioning of democracy, in general, while the immediate sense of the movement's achievement in moving things and shaping policymaking also seems to improve the political trust of engaged citizens.

At the same time, FG-participants from both movements point to the limits and obstacles of democratic inclusion and participation, and citizens' representation, in both social movements and political decision-making. Social inequalities are seen as the main reason why particular societal groups tend to be systematically disadvantaged when it comes to their chances of gaining adequate information and knowledge, engaging actively in civil society, fighting for, or even being adequately represented regarding their concerns, and making use of the various opportunities for citizens' engagement in politics. While FG-participants most explicitly highlight socio-economic and time constrains (both relating to the pressures and inequalities of the labour market) as core issues, their arguments and examples suggest that the unequal availability of cultural and social resources plays a relevant role, too, so that insufficient inclusiveness and participation across the various dimensions of democratic citizenship appear to be routed in multi-layered discrimination. These observations resonate well with social movement and democracy research where attention is shifted to the role of resource availability (first and foremost, time and money) as an important prerequisite of collective action (e.g., Edwards/McCarthy 2004; Schäfer 2010). According to the FG-participants, these social inequalities have direct and indirect implications for citizens' trust in their own capacities, collective action and governance. With regard to the interlinkages with trust in governance, FFF members argue that inclusion in the various dimensions of democratic citizenship, and awareness raising about opportunities of democratic participation and influence, are important factors, if not substantial prerequisites for developing informed political trust. Moreover, they make the point

that the well-functioning of democracy and the maintenance of a basic bedrock of trust require the enhanced empowerment of citizens at various levels, including better education and information, and changes in economic and employment policies (e.g., increase in minimum wage, reduction of working hours) to enable all citizens to participate in democracy and exercise citizenship. Hence, while existing scholarship has already suggested that differences in socio-economic and other resources are interlinked with differences in trust of governance (e.g., Goubin/Hooghe 2020; Schäfer 2010), our FGs participants draw particular attention to the intermediary role of democratic inclusion and participation in civil society and politics, and the role of social movements as an important social arena of low-threshold awareness-raising and direct experiences of lived democracy. While they perceive resource inequality as a serious problem for both democratic participation/representation and trust in governance, they also suggest various solutions that may help to improve democratic inclusiveness and citizens' trust.

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Functions of Dis/Trust in and via Social movements. The Cases of Environmental and Human rights movements in Greece

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Greece

Globalisation, modernisation and Europeanisation, immigration, as well as environmental causes, gender interests, the rights of LGBTQI people, and educational issues, brought about a series of social mobilisations in Greece after the turn of the 20th century. During that period, the landscape of social movements took a post-materialist direction, with materialist claims and anti-austerity protest dominating during the period of the economic crisis. After the outbreak of the financial crisis, the austerity measures and the strict economic policies that provoked the deterioration of working and living conditions of employees were responsible for the revitalisation of the, until then, steadily declining labour movement in Greece. Although the response of the institutional labour organisations to the austerity policies was rather weak, grassroots entities of precarious workers have been linked with the anti-austerity protest that emerged in direct reaction to austerity policies (Vogiatzoglou, 2018). Austerity measures caused not only a new protest cycle, but also new forms of mobilisation, among which the mobilisation of indignant citizens ("Aganaktismenoi") was the most prominent, following the pattern of the so-called 'movement of the squares' that developed in many European cities (Georgiadou et al., 2017). The decline of the movement of the squares, like "Aganaktismenoi", at the beginning of 2012, ended an intense anti-austerity protest cycle characterised by an increased number of protest events, demonstrations and strikes (Karyotis & Rüdig, 2017; Kousis et al., 2018; Simiti, 2020).

The increased contentious anti-austerity mobilisations were followed by alternative forms of resilience, including local grassroots initiatives and solidarity groups aimed at helping deprived people, while expressing anti-EU/anti-euro and anti-establishment claims. There were groups for the restoration of electricity to households that could not pay the bills (the so-called 'I won't pay movement'), the organisation of food markets without middlemen (the so-called 'potato movement'), social kitchens and food distribution groups, social pharmacy and clinics, and similar other initiatives alongside popular assemblies in neighbourhoods, transformed the mobilisation scene with all their un-

conventional repertoire action (Kousis, 2017; Malamidis, 2020). Another form of solidarity that developed intensively over the past years concerned refugee assistance. The abovementioned groups, along with many NGOs operating in Greece, took on the role of assistance and guidance of many refugee groups, especially during the period 2014-2016. Moreover, during the economic and refugee crises, far right entities, among which the militia-like organised neo-Nazi Golden Dawn was the most prominent (Georgiadou, 2020), developed a rich action repertoire, as well. A significant number of Golden Dawn's organisational activities were violent events directed against specific targets, such as migrants, Roma, Jews and members of the LGBTQI community, as well as individuals, or civil society initiatives that had expressed solidarity with Golden Dawn's targets (ibid.; Galariotis et al., 2017). Counter-demonstrations of right-wing mobilisations, initiated by the radical left and antifascist movements, tried to demobilise extreme right actions, curtailing their violent practices (Ellinas, 2021).

Nevertheless, the key characteristic of contentious politics in Greece is the interconnectedness of parties and social movements that often 'undermines social movements autonomy' (Simiti, ibid.). In the case of anti-austerity protests, the most important actors were trade unions affiliated either with the Communist Party (KKE) or SYRIZA, extra-parliamentary left groups and anarchists (Kanellopoulos and Kostopoulos 2014).[27] After the 2015 legislative elections, with SYRIZA in government, this contentious anti-austerity protest cycle ended (especially after the third package of austerity measures implemented by the SYRIZA and ANEL coalition government), and movements with post-materialist claims, which the SYRIZA government often supported, had the political opportunity to gain significant presence with conventional and alternative repertoires of action. The LGBTQI movement is a typical case, with increased interventions after violent attacks against members of the LGBTQI community post 2012 and during the period of deliberations regarding gay rights' issues that were being voted on in the Greek parliament from 2015 to 2019. Environmental groups and organisations were also present, but with mostly with local spectrum and, in some cases, with a radical repertoire.

1.2 Case studies and organisation of research

The two selected cases for this study are an anti-gold movement and an LGBTQI movement. Both movements are concerned with post-materialist issues, including those related to the protection of natural resources and biodiversity, as well as to personal autonomy, sexual orientation and recognition. However, Colour Youth (**CY**) has a clearer focus on post-materialist issues, whilst the anti-gold mining movement (**AM**) combines resistance against economic (mining) investments with green/environmental claims.

The anti-gold mining movement is one of the most prominent environmental movements with radical action in contemporary Greece. It started with the inhabitants of

[27] See also data from event analysis here: https://socioscope.gr/dataset/claims

Chalkidiki, a region located in Northern Greece, who protested against the gold mines that operated in the area, and went on to develop a broad environmental movement. Colour Youth belongs to the general LGBTQI community, and it is located in Athens. It was created in 2011 and, since then, CY has become a formal legal entity. Its goal is to protect the rights of young LGBTQI people, eliminating discrimination based on gender and sexuality; along with their institutional initiatives for the modernisation of the legal framework regarding gender issues, CY aims to raise awareness against stereotypes, prejudices, violence, and racism. It also runs educational meetings to inform people about human rights, and offers support to LGBTQI people. Both movements belong to the postmaterialist-libertarian mobilisation landscape, and have been very active over the past decade.

The recruitment method, in both cases, took place through our social contacts. For the **AM,** we used personal contacts acquired via our previous research on the movement. We came in contact with a core member via her social media account, informed her about our research and invited her to participate. She replied in the affirmative immediately, and we conducted a preliminary interview with her. Although she was willing to help us with recruitment, and we maintained contact, she then informed us that she had to be hospitalised because of a Covid 19. Infection. She made it clear that it was difficult for her to help us because of her bad health, and because she had lost her close friend – also a member of the AM movement - to Covid, and that she needed time to recover. For that reason, we had to diverge from the recruitment protocol, and find different channels of communication with potential participants. We contacted a researcher who had conducted interviews with **AM** members, and with her help we organised the first focus group with the core members of the movement. Although we asked the movement's core members to introduce us to people, despite their initial willingness, we did not manage to engage people through them. Then we contacted a professor we knew, an advocate who visits the area, to organise the second focus group with followers of the **AM**. Similarly for **CY,** we contacted a personal acquaintance who offered scientific advice to **CY**, and were introduced to their coordinator and leading figure of the movement. We conducted the preliminary interview with her, and she went on to organise the focus group with core members of the movement. Again, we did not manage to organise the followers' focus group through contacts of the core members, and therefore, we referred to people who had studied the LGBTQI movement, and they organised a focus group with followers of **CY**.

Regarding their sociodemographic characteristics, our sample consists of 21 participants, 2 non-binary, 11 female, 8 male, from different age groups. The **CY** members and followers were younger, the majority between 18-30, with only two of the followers between 30-40+ since they are representatives of a youth organisation/movement. On the other hand, in the case of the **AM**, its members and followers were middle-aged and older since, from what they told us, younger people do not willingly participate in their

actions. Most participants were eager, and the initial hesitations were about the duration of the focus meetings and the time they had to devote. Another difficulty we faced in recruitment, especially in the case of the **AM**, was the composition of the group. Every person we contacted had reservations about participating unless they knew the other members of the group. The explanation lies in the tension and polarisation that has developed between members of the movement, and comes as a result of the failed expectations they had from SYRIZA (the left-wing party that was in government from 2015 to 2019). Finally, since the **AM** is a very active movement, many of its members had participated in several studies the previous years and, as a result, they expressed a cynical attitude towards research, wondering about the impact and/or utility of social science studies.

In total, three researchers were involved in interviews and focus group moderation, and three were used for coding. The length of the interviews varied from 30 to 50 minutes, and the duration of the focus groups ran from 150 to 180 minutes. The interviews and focus groups were conducted in the period from February to July 2021, a period in which Greece, like most countries worldwide, was in lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For that reason, all interviews were conducted either by telephone or via online platform, while focus groups were via online platforms solely. Fifty-nine memos were written, mostly in order to clarify the selection of the code. In general, there was agreement between coders and our only problem with the assignment of codes had to do with the organisational structure of the movements that, especially in the case of the **AM**, was not very clear and changed over time because of the circumstances.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

A very prominent and active environmental organisation is the local anti-gold mining movement in Skouries Forest **(AM)**. In the area of Chalkidiki, there have been several gold-mining operations since the late 1980s. The mines operate under the control of private companies, and have caused a cleavage in local communities that on the one hand, accept the employment possibilities for local residents, and on the other hand, recognise the environmental risks. The aspect of environment protection led to the foundation of a compact environmental movement that keeps pressing, not only the mining companies, but the government as well on issues like the protection of the ecosystem and a more sustainable development prospect. The anti-gold mining movement in Chalkidiki started as a single-issue movement, namely the protection of the environment from the mining processes, that is extracting beyond the holding capacity of the ecosystem. But soon they developed broader demands regarding economic aspects like the “increased social dependency on multinational corporations” (Hatzisavvidou 2017), and public property sales to these corporations.

Engagement practices, as well, run the gamut from collections of signatures and petitions, to lobbying of members of national and local government, to petitions, calls for boycotts, media campaigns, street protests, occupations of public buildings and violent clashes not only with the police, but also with the miners and the gold mining investment. Members of the movement have also organised several artistic events and live concerts in Chalkidiki and Thessaloniki. In 2013, they organised a more interactive action, a 10-day camp-out (in the vicinity of the mining site), which included discussions, concerts and other cultural events. This camping action has become an annual event for the movement since then.

Most of the protest events are organised around the field, that is, the mines at several areas in Greece. Most of them have taken place in Skouries, Stratoni, Olympiada (Chalkidiki), and some of them in Thrace/Evros (Perama Hill) and Kilkis (Krousia-Paiko). Mostly local residents participate at these events, alongside organisations that provided solidarity with the anti-gold mining movement[28]. The largest mobilisations demonstrations have taken place in Thessaloniki (the biggest city in Northern Greece which is very close to Chalkidiki), while fewer demonstrations have occurred in Athens, with the participation of thousands of protesters and followers of the movement. The mobilisation reached its peak in 2012-2013 when the company that owns the mine in Skouries started using a new method of mining, the open-pit method that destroys the ecosystem, and causes problems to the staticity of the ground in the area. There were several demonstrations in front of the mine, organised by the abovementioned local committees, and there was also an arson attack at the construction site with 40-50 masked demonstrators causing damage to the company's equipment and vehicles.

Environmental groups are characterised by democratic values and norms, and deliberation is embedded in their organisational pattern. In Skouries, there are some leading personalities within the broader movement that operate as opinion leaders; they do not have any official authority over the movement, but feel more attached to movement's interests and have influence capability to mobilise members of the movement. However, this does not imply an informal hierarchy, since the fragmentation in local groups was rather high and it was difficult to maintain any type of hierarchy. Apart from the leading personalities, the movement follows a deliberating decision-making process with weekly local meetings.

The anti-gold movement in Skouries has developed contacts with similar environmental movements not only in Greece, but in Europe, South America and Canada, as well. They have organised or participated in mobilisations in Evros and Kilkis, where gold-mines operate. They also support other initiatives like the struggle against the privatisation of water, the strike of workers at the BIO.ME. factory, the protest against the deflection of

[28] Mostly left-wing organisations and groups with environmental sensitivities, like groups against wind farms, groups defending the water, anarchists and parties of the radical left, although in some activities, some extreme-right party supporters or alleged members (e.g., of Golden Dawn) have offered to help, too, but were turned away by the inhabitants.

Acheloos river, and many more. They also participate in workshops and meetings worldwide, organised by anti-mining and similar environmental groups. The movement is very active until today, especially on social media due to the restrictions caused by the pandemic. They follow the agreements and contacts of the company with the Greek government, and inform citizens via posts on social media and in local newspapers, while insisting on legal appeals.

The Colour Youth – LGBTQI Youth Community of Athens **(CY)**, is a non-profit LGTBQI association, aimed at forming a strong youth community supporting its members to express themselves and assert their rights. Colour Youth – LGBTQI Youth Community of Athens, was founded in Athens (2011); however, the association's charter allows for the foundation of branches throughout Greece. One of the fundamental goals of Colour Youth is associated with the creation of appropriate conditions for the interaction and mutual support between young LGBTQI people to help achieve their personal development and socialisation, as well as the acceptance of their gender identity and sexual orientation against discrimination.

The murder of Zak Kostopoulos, an LGBTQI activist, antifascist and vocal campaigner for HIV-positive people, accelerated the collective action of the LGBTQI community. More specifically, a range of LGBTQI organisations –CY included– filed a joint statement to the President of the Hellenic Parliament, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Citizen Protection, asking for a thorough investigation and delivery of justice regarding the murder of Zak Kostopoulos, as well as further action of the State towards institutional initiatives against stereotypes, prejudices, violence and racism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has decelerated the socialisation and presence of the LGBTQI community in public space due to the cancellation of its actions and events. According to CY, the enforcement of lockdown, accompanied by the control of the identification cards, signalled the further exposure of LGBTQI people to insecurity and violence, both in the family and in the public environment. CY appealed to the government to reconsider the implications of these measures on vulnerable groups, asking for:

- equal access to a staffed and equipped health care system.
- housing and security for the vulnerable groups of the population regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, financial and asylum status.
- actions for the continuous awareness and training of security authorities on the issues of sexuality and gender identity in collaboration with Civil Society.

CY aims to accomplish its goals by using legal means, such as lectures, studies, publications, the circulation of newsletters and brochures, radio and television shows, publications, club operations, seminar attendance, organisation of events, collaborations with wider associations, entities and other collectivities, contact and collaboration with educational institutions and website operation.

2.2 Structure of the movement

Regarding the **formal structure** of the AM, the common answer from both core members and followers of the movement was that there **is no hierarchical structure, but rather a horizontal one**. As they mentioned, the lack of a strict hierarchical structure is due to AM being a grassroots movement that involves all the inhabitants of the area that were affected by the mining process. Nonetheless, the organisational structure changed or transformed according to the situations and forms of action. The initial mobilisation, thought to be the beginning of the movement, was a result of a spontaneous popular assembly that is described as a casual meeting in a coffee shop which became more frequent. With these meetings, the inhabitants were more informed and active, but could not intervene formally, which is why they formed several coordinating assemblies that had organising committees that could participate on local councils:

> *In a second phase then, we made a struggle committee in Thessaloniki. But basically, there was no specific structure. In the beginning, and because the Municipality was not in favour of the struggle, but was with the company; the movement could not rely on the Municipality. Therefore, in order to overcome this obstacle, we set up a coordinating committee of associations and organisations. In Ierissos, that is, I think in the other villages as well, but mainly in Ierissos, about twenty-three associations were gathered - parents, professionals, fishermen, cultural figures, etc., which had one representative in this coordinating committee, and this coordinating committee, it was in a way the umbrella. The standard body, through which the decisions for the mobilisations, for the actions, for the actions and so on passed. That was the shell, so to speak. In essence, however, decisions were made by all the residents who participated in the coordination* (GR AM F).

As regards structure, the common view of all the participants is that it evolved into a **function-based structure with dynamic elements**. This means that in every village in the area around the mine, an association or struggle committee was founded with the addition of two similar committees in Thessaloniki. So, **the initiation of actions** and the decisions had to be made by several small committees. For that reason, they found a coordinating committee with representatives from all the operating committees. Even though there was a coordinating body, they still did not have a strict hierarchy and structure, and the sessions of this committee were plenary with the participation of all people that were interested in the anti-mining struggle. An explanation that is given by a core member is that this horizontal structure was deliberate on their behalf, in order to avoid blame attribution and legal charges whenever their actions resulted in clashes with the police. Thus, the undetermined leadership protected the members of the movement from these types of consequences:

> *There was an intense attempt by the authorities to give a structure and a hierarchy to the coordinating committee. Why? Because it was wishful thinking for them, and I say it boldly, to be able to say that for such a decision of the protest march of five thousand people, in which incidents were finally created by a group, the X, Y or Z is responsible… The whole movement tried to renounce the hierarchy that the judicial authorities tried to charge us with. And fortunately then, it was one of the issues we cleverly avoided because (meaning having a strict hierarchy and a specific leader that the authorities could hold responsible), you understand, after being charged with moral instigation, if anyone attended a meeting, it was like saying they are all forbidden to go to popular assemblies. And then we gave a rough, I would say, but essential definition of the coordinating committee as popular assemblies that take place indoors because of the weather. And they do not have a president, or a treasurer, officially, at least. They do not have a vice-president and decisions are not taken in a strict way by a three-fifths majority, or something like that* (GR AM C).

In terms of **membershi**p, there was no particular rule, and judging from the circumstances, the movement proved to be **totally inclusionary**. Many of those considered to be the affected communities come from Northern Chalkidiki, but live in Thessaloniki. They believed that the movement had to expand to Thessaloniki, as well.

Regarding the **formal structure** of the **CY** movement, core members described a rather **mixed model, where** the largest decision-making body is the general assembly of the movement members, with voting rights. The general assembly elects a management team. The management team consists of three members: a manager, a secretary and a treasurer, in addition to the three representatives of the working groups. Each representative is responsible for different tasks, the "institutional claims", the "development of the community", which has to do with all the external events, and the "support" working group, which deals with empowerment groups, and anything that is supportive of the community. The 7th member of the management team is elected from another working group, the group of "supporters", but in practice, at least over the last 3-4 years, the "supporters" working group has not elected a representative in the management team. Occasionally, there may be people who work for some project related to the movement, or the LGBTQI community, in general, but they are accountable to the management team. Most of the supporters do not know the exact formal structure of the CY movement, but some of them know that there is not a strict centralised or hierarchical model.

In terms of **action initiating**, they both agree that this is mostly a matter for the management committee and the working groups. They bear the burden, not only of the initiation of an action, but also of its organisation, which is very demanding and requires a great deal of human effort that is not always possible because of the obligations they have in their personal life. Core members also mentioned that the type of actions and the general mobilisation strategy of the movement depends on the people in charge,

and the demands or claims they have to fight for on occasion. If the management committee is in favour of intense mobilisation, and at the same time a very salient issue is at stake, then their action repertoire will be more radical or contentious. But there are also occasions which are more consensual, in which they follow more conventional forms of actions and they cooperate with relevant institutions. For **membership**, there is also agreement that it is rather **easy to become a member, while at the same time there are some formal conditions**: candidate members must not be older than 30 years, which "let's say is a legal axe" (GR CY C), must pay a 20-euro fee, etc. There are members over 30 years old, but without being eligible to vote or be voted.

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

All participants stressed that their **perception of general trust is positive**, and that they consider trust **significant** since it is 'a prerequisite for doing things on a social level' (GR AM C). They underline that 'only trust in our fellow citizens is the medium to move on in life and take serious steps' (GR AM C). They essentially support that trust is a basic precondition for our own evolution, but it is not something that is stable or given. Trust can be easily transformed into distrust depending on the circumstances, and the people representing institutions.

Concerning **the perception of (dis)trust in political or other institutions**, both followers and core members understand trust towards institutions as a long-term problem. As mentioned by the core members of the movement, distrust towards the state constitutes a pathogeny for Greek society. They all agree that they do not trust any of the 'state (i.e., public) institutions', such as justice, political parties, but also media, and refer to particular experiences they had through the movement's mobilisation that justify their distrust.

The main argument of core members regarding the **movement's distrust towards institutions** is that they understand 'state institutions' as the source of the problem that the movement had to resolve. Their main point is that the problem cannot be resolved by those who contributed to its creation. This seems to be the case for followers, too. Furthermore, followers mention that 'we trusted politicians, we were dependent on governments or politicians. This was wrong from the beginning because the problem was created by them, the Greek government' (GR AM F).

They also claim that distrust towards the state authorities (national government and local officials) has a broader effect, as state institutions are linked to special interests. As followers mention:

> *There seemed to be a serious problem, and the state was not trying to deal with it. We have been under the authority of foreign companies for many years. And as far as it goes, it gets even worse because they can legislate.*

Ministers and deputies are just decorative elements in the whole process. Pure decorative elements (GR AM F).

This perception of being dependent on private interests seems to be at the heart of **the diffuse distrust sentiment towards the political system, media and international organisations**. It is for that purpose that all participants underline their perception that in Greece, the **trust of citizens towards the political system and state institutions** is a lost cause, over several years. In order to justify this perception, core members refer to **trust in justice,** and they support that there was no justice towards their problems and that court decisions were against their claims. Those decisions intensified their feelings of distrust, and they claim that 'the movement contributed to the collapse of several beliefs towards which the Greek society showed respect' (GR AM C), meaning the judicial system, the political system and its repression mechanism, private companies and the power they have to force their investing plans in every country and mass media 'which diffuse falsified or false news' (GR AM F).

Moreover, core members of the **AM** note that **functions of trust and distrust** are distinct and directed towards different actors. They argue that **trust was the basic foundation of the movement,** mainly towards its members and followers, and eventually towards political actors. Trust was the motivating factor, at least at the beginning of their mobilisation, that managed to embed the belief in the local community that they can express their opinion and confidence in the people's power to defend public interest. However, trust and confidence in grassroot mobilisation is transformed into **distrust leading to the resignation of citizens**. In this sense, distrust is represented as a sentiment of vanity and inefficacy, resulting in the refutation of their expectations. Their expectations were extremely high with the change of government in 2015. The two new governing parties, mostly the radical left SYRIZA, but also to some extent ANEL as well, had supported their mobilisation and claims while in opposition, and therefore the movement was expecting from same from them, the implementation of an environmentally friendly policy for anti-gold mining in the area. But this new expected policy was never implemented, and after these two parties formed a new government, they followed in general terms the policies of the previous governments, breaking their promises and disappointing the core members of the AM. Core members of the **AM** have underlined this sentiment of vanity as catalytic for distrust towards political parties. They declare their disappointment as they think that their fight did not manage to reach a result because of the political parties. It is very characteristic of what a core member has claimed:

The state and the political forces manage to break the trust of the people and the movements because they created this feeling of inefficacy. So it is, at the moment, more difficult to manage, both individually and collectively, the feeling that no matter what we do and give, we will lose (GR AM C).

If distrust is expressed towards those who created the problem, trust is expressed towards members of the movement who are willing to solve the problem. Trust was a key

notion for the AM itself. Both followers and core members show **trust towards the movement itself**, activists' actions, people who fight for their rights. Both core members and followers of the **AM** essentially separate the trust that can be developed in the in-group from the outgroup. In the former case, trust is the outcome of the act of mobilisation of people for justice and collective interests. Core members claim that trust in the movement is very solid, as there are strong ties between participants in the movement. In the above frame, trust is the outcome of a collective experience of critical moments, where members of the group felt that they had to handle something important concerning people's lives. As they mention:

> *Nothing can break this bond. If you pass through difficulties, then this bond within us cannot break. For anyone who is currently on the road and fighting, yes, I am by his side and in solidarity. I cannot say that I trust anyone other than the movement and the person who fights* (GR AM C).

Trust, then, becomes a concept concerning the ingroup and not institutions or outgroups, except from the experts, as we discuss further. Both solidarity and trust are very strong elements, an indication of identity for people who are part of the **AM**. Even when the movement's mobilisation did not deliver the expected results, and they felt the disappointment of the affected community and their followers, they claim that ingroup trust was what kept them going. Despite the disappointment, people were supportive. Core members underline how citizens have developed a sense of confidence, hope and trust towards the **AM**. They support that:

> *… a sentiment of trust and hope was created, not only in Greece, but also in a wider context, that this movement doesn't address selfish or opportunistic claims except meaningful ones for the whole of society* (GR AM C).

The reasons for this trust can be partly found in the fact that there was consensus in decision-making processes with respect to all opinions. The outcome is that society developed trust in the movement. Followers and core members agree that the trust of citizens is cultivated on the basis of the understanding of common interests. As a core member claims, the '**AM** managed to cultivate trust and hope through its dynamic expansion. The movement managed to generate belief and hope that it can achieve its targets' (GR AM C).

The in-group trust is what moderates the negative function of distrust that leads to resignation. All participants from the AM argue that **in-group trust is the basic foundation of the movement** and what keeps them going. They believe that **generalised distrust is destructive,** and leads to a passive attitude that nothing can be done. For the AM, this is wrong. Every active citizen and every movement must 'take small steps in every fight and count small wins' (GR AM C). The outcome from their experience through the mobilisation is that trust and distrust co-exist, but are addressed to different actors with

contrasting results. Although generalised distrust can lead to citizens' resignations, **distrust in the political system can be the precondition for mobilisation** that combined with trust in social movements, can affect political decisions.

The equilibrium of trust and distrust co-existence can be affected by several factors like **the cooperation of the movement with governmental institutions and/or political parties.** In the case of the AM, core members declare the independence of the movement from political parties or governmental institutions. They clarify that the meetings they had with some politicians had an informative role, and their only goal was to make the situation known to a broader audience. Of course, meetings with politicians from the opposition, and later with ministers of the government, created expectations that the gold-mining operations would stop, and they declared that 'politically, we have invested in SYRIZA… and trusted Tsipras', although 'on the way, we were disappointed…' (GR AM C).

Core members and followers argue that **their cooperation, or contacts with political parties, was instrumental** from both sides. Political parties supported the movement when they were in opposition, in order to have electoral gains but after winning the elections (referring to SYRIZA and ANEL). While in government, they did not implement any of their pre-electoral promises regarding the limitation and/or prohibition of gold-mining in Chalkidiki. The movement's contacts with political parties began in parallel with the increased public interest in the problem in the wider community. Political parties took advantage of the visibility of the movement, and the movement came in touch with all political parties with the hope of institutionalised interventions. As core members agreed:

> *The power of the movement at that time was very important; it could elect deputies. During mobilisations, all political groups were present, such as anarchists, communists…Even the Golden Dawn, the Neo-Nazi party, tried to approach our movement. As for that, we were the first movement to publish a decision not accepting members of Golden Dawn in our movement* (GR AM C).

Moreover, **contacts or cooperation with political parties** was something that the movement also pursued. They considered that their claims could be satisfied only with political decision and law implementation by the government and the parliament. For that reason, they contacted political parties, or agreed to meet with politicians, in order to gain allies in the political field. However, after assessing retrospectively what they had experienced through their contacts with SYRIZA, they declared their disappointment and eventually diffuse distrust in political parties and government.

More specifically, core members and followers argue that the most decisive event for the movement was its close contact with SYRIZA, the radical left-wing party that was in favor of environmental protection and against corporate profits during its time in opposition. In fact, what SYRIZA promised to the AM was that its government would amend

the agreement of the Greek state with the company that runs the mine in order to stop the polluting mining method. However, after SYRIZA won the elections, its government never fulfilled its promises to the AM. Therefore, these contacts or **cooperation contributed to the undermining of trust**, not only to political parties and politicians, but also to the core members of the movement that participated in these meetings. As argued by the core members who participated in the meetings with SYRIZA: 'We got the stamp that we are acting wrongly' (GR AM C). Followers also believe that the movement was deceived by SYRIZA and feel bitterness, disappointment and incapable of trust as a result.

Regarding their **cooperation with NGOs**, core members agreed that the most **positive cooperation** during the movement's mobilisation was with environmental organisations and experts. They report having collaborated with hundreds of movements and NGOs regarding environmental issues (like those opposed to wind generators, for example), but also NGOs such as Engineers Without Borders, WWF. Some collaborations were at a consulting level, but others had organisational and activistic features, as well. These **cooperations** were neither permanent nor continuous, but **benefitted trust** in the sense that more people and organisations supported the movement, increasing its power.

With regard to **what can be done at the local level/at the national level/at the EU level to restore trust, responses** vary from general to more specific propositions. The general belief is that the three levels are interconnected, and that it is practically impossible to discern between different levels of decision-making. This means that the local level cannot implement anything without the approval of the national and the EU levels. However, the **local level** has played a crucial role for the AM since their struggle to stop the mining process in the area of a municipality in Chalkidiki began. Throughout the discussions with both core members and followers, there were references to the former mayor of the municipality of Aristoteles (where the gold mines operate), who was persona non grata for them. They hold him responsible for undermining their struggle, and believe that the local level of decision-making was corrupted by the company that runs the mines. So, despite the perception that the local level is the weakest level of decision-making, it is clear to the core members and followers of the AM that the **local level representatives need to be competent, transparent and keep their promises.**

These criteria also apply at the **national level** as well, for all participants from the AM movement. They expect more **transparency, integrity and honesty** from the political system of the country. They expect the political system to embody the voice of its citizens and for that reason, they suggest the introduction of referendums. But they also expect **better education for citizens**; education plays a key role in society since, with the appropriate instruments, it can form critically-thinking citizens, well informed and with adequate knowledge to make assessments. For the **EU level**, apart from the aforementioned characteristics of the representatives, core members suggest a change of paradigm at the economic level, as well as transformations in all economic sectors, from the industrial economy to agriculture, including farm economics and agro-tourism. Apart

from those at the economic level, they also suggest the reintroduction and protection of basic human liberties and rights, like the protection of public health and working conditions.

Finally, **the role of social movements in enhancing trust in society**, according to followers and core members, has doubled. They agree that a social movement is structurally linked to the sense of collectivity that fights for collective rights. Core members agree that the movement is linked to friendship and selflessness. Furthermore, movements are inspiring hope. Core members argue that the movement 'is the hope of the ordinary citizen and has to continue to exist, to breathe despite its defeats. Movements are the purest ideas that humanity has to demonstrate' (GR AM C). They also suggest that **movements can help in trust building by repairing institutions**. Social movements fight for social issues, and their claims and actions prove to people that there is hope for change. If social movements manage to expose the corruptness and malfunctioning of institutions and the political system, then they can repair them, as well.

From CY's perspective, both core members and followers agree that **general trust has a significant role** to play in societies, especially for the empowerment of people and mobilisation dynamics. But, as core members note, it is difficult for general trust to succeed in society because 'people do not trust other people, and that's not really helpful' (GR CY C). This generalised social distrust they observe encompasses the political context, as well, and results in the lack of diffuse support in the political system. They report that before joining the movement, they trusted more in general, but also that in the context of their action and participation within the movement, they developed more trust between the members of the group. Essentially, they differentiate trust that can be developed in the ingroup from the outgroup trust, as a result of common life experiences: 'We thus develop a sense of unity that we are against the whole world' (GR CY C), they say. Moreover, ingroup trust unveils **distrust in others in general, and highlights its negative effects**. High levels of ingroup trust, combined with distrust vis-à-vis outsiders, hinders interaction with others and limits their engagement in joining protest and ingroup political activities. As mentioned by the core members of the **CY** movement, the reasons for this distrust towards outsiders can be found in the experiences they have had as a group, in cases where they had to:

> *…constantly meet people with good intentions who are uninformed, people with bad intentions who are uninformed and want to remain uninformed, and you have to work with these people, and you have to explain to them that things that they consider luxuries are not luxuries, but rights. This thing makes you suspicious* (GR CY C).

For the core members of CY, distrust is a starting point in their communication with outgroups. For them, distrust is a 'defense stance' vis-à-vis outsiders who do not share the same view, as well as common experiences with the CY community. However, distrust can be developed and eventually expressed in other relevant groups of the LGBTQI

community, where despite common goals there is no trust in the “politics” (GR CY C) that they use in order to achieve these common goals. In other words, distrust exists mainly vis-à-vis outsiders, but also towards members of the broad LGBTQI community.

In regards to the manifestation of **trust towards political or other institutions** we must first mention that in Greece over the last decade, we have had several changes regarding the rights of social minorities such as the LGBTQI community, both institutionally and socially. Movements like **CY** have managed to achieve greater visibility in the public sphere, and to exchange ideas and arguments with political parties and institutions at the local, national and supranational levels in the context of forthcoming changes. We were told that this process further highlighted their feelings of distrust mainly through the fault of the institutions themselves, as the changes made in the direction of the rights of the specific community were either not the ones they had initially announced, were moving in the wrong direction, or were just a waste of time. As they say:

> *That is, really when we talk about institutions and such meetings, I feel that I have had the same meeting a hundred times. Exactly the same, you can take the first one, record it on a video, and that was it. And you do not see anything. So, I think, yes there is definitely a huge amount of distrust, as (name of a participant) said before, a fair amount of mistrust. They have won it with their sword* (GR CY C).

Therefore, most of the core members mentioned that **they do not trust any of the state institutions,** such as the police, justice, the health system, the media and, of course, political parties. The only exception is the institution of the "ombudsman", as they say:

> *I think the ombudsman was the only body we trusted somewhat firmly. Even with changes of governments, there was a trust and an interaction. Let's say even on a personal level. Too often, especially with gender advocates, let's say, we had a very good, stable relationship (GR CY C).*

Of course, as they say, they trust the only state institution that does not have real power, as it is of an advisory nature, and this in their opinion says much about the state itself, and its institutions. **Trust has also negative aspects** since it can be proven wrong. During their collaboration with some other institutions, for example, the Secretariat General for Human Rights, they initially trusted the promises made by the Heads of this unit, which institutionally belongs to the Ministry of Justice. However, the policies developed and implemented concerning the civil partnership, and the legal recognition of gender identity bill were much lower than expected and promised. As they say: ‘So, in general, when there was trust, very often it was broken’ (GR CY C). Refutation of expectations produces disenchantment and gives rise to feelings of distrust. They define this trend as an initial level of distrust towards all their institutional and political interlocutors, starting with a so-called ‘fair distrust, a type of distrust that is deserved fairly and squarely’ (GR CY C). ‘I think, almost always, we start with a level of distrust’ (GR CY C), ‘…or with a

higher level of distrust' (GR CY C). These **negative aspects of distrust** result in a distrusting attitude that leads them to question every single initiative, even if it is moving in the right direction.

These experiences of the core members of CY are the differentiating factor between them and the followers of the movement. Core members allocate functions of **distrust mostly in the negative spectrum**, believing that distrust leads to the resignation of citizens. They say that they are highly suspicious of all of their collaborations and discussions with institutions and political parties, On the other hand, distrust keeps them alert. They are more prepared, more experienced and equipped with better knowledge to deal with every objection against their claims. Followers that do not have the experience of meetings with officials and refutation of expectations consider **distrust as conditionally positive, since it can be a precondition for mobilisation and act as a corrective factor in society**. They consider that distrust of institutions can be constructive since it can challenge malfunctioning institutions and promote change. Being distrustful makes citizens more critical vis-à-vis institutions helping them to improve their effectiveness. But distrust is only negative between people with the same interests, and can only lead to disruption and turmoil.

Regarding **the cooperation of the movement with institutions**, at the very beginning of our conversation with CY, when we were discussing the structure of the movement, they informed us that one of the three main working groups that constitute CY is the "institutional claims" working group. This shows that CY has conversation with the institutions, political parties and NGOs as its fundamental function. This choice resulted in high aspirations for a large number of people that expected the movement to bring about real change for the benefit of the community, and therefore to trust it, but on the other hand, it caused distrust in members of the wider LGBTQI community who could be characterised as more radical, and who by definition are not positive in top-to-bottom institutional changes as they consider them a compromise. A typical example is the experience of their meeting with the leader of the conservative political party, New Democracy who became the current Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who invited them to his office to discuss the legal recognition of the gender identity bill that would soon be approved by the Parliament. In this meeting, where LGBTQI representatives criticised New Democracy for homophobic statements of party officers 'telling him (Mitsotakis) that he let them pass without reacting' (GR CY C), there was a photo taken at the end, in which (they report) Kyriakos Mitsotakis was smiling and they were frowning. As they recall:

> *For this photo, I personally heard how much we'd "rinsed" Mitsotakis, how we'd helped him to rule, to take the Government, I mean. And what we did not hear, I know. For a meeting we went to, and said face-to-face how problematic the New Democracy party is* (GR CY C).

Institutional meetings with other political parties, such as the radical left SYRIZA and the centre-left KINAL, caused similar responses from the radical activists of CY.

In terms of what can be done at the **local, national and EU levels** in order to enhance trust, CY core members agree that if any of the local, national or supranational organisations, such as the EU, want to restore trust, they have to carry out real change that will benefit the community. They recognise that the European level offers better negotiation procedures vis-à-vis open issues related to the LGBTQI community; however, this is not something that could be transformed into trust.:

> *No trust, only a better bargaining card. If you say "this is European or supported by such and such European institutions", … then you are not the gay people who claim for something, but the Europeans* (GR CY C).

During its action, CY has had discussions with all three of the aforementioned levels, so we were told:

> *So, we go to different levels for different things. When it comes to talking about social interventions, where we need support frameworks, we will inevitably go to the local government. If we talk about institutional changes in legislation, we go higher* (GR CY C).

There was a great deal of talk about this issue and they had several pragmatic suggestions to propose that contribute to trust building. **Local government should be more approachable and closer to citizens** in need. They suggest more initiatives in the direction of social services for LGBTQI people, as they are not always recognised as a vulnerable group: 'We need hostels because in our community, children aged seventeen-eighteen who have been chased by their parents or have left on their own, knock our door because they cannot stand the beatings' (GR CY C). Legislative and institutional interventions and changes are needed at a **national level**, while at the same time, one of the constant demands is on the subject of **education, not on the legislatory level, but in the informatory one**. They want to be able to go to schools and organise training seminars, either for the parents or for the teaching staff. At **the European level**, EU procedures in fact have not protected the LGBTQI people from discrimination and this is attributed to the role of the EU that cannot implement law in national states. For all the directives coming from the EU regarding anti-discrimination policies, consensus is required between all member states, which limits the possibility of a European anti-discrimination policy. As they say:

> *In fact, what is happening is the consensus needed by all the Member States of the European Union to pass any directive has stopped anything that may be useful for the LGBTQI community. In other words, there has been an attempt for almost two decades to extend the law - the anti-discrimination directive in other areas, as well. In education, in housing, etc. And it is essentially blocked by specific countries and has not managed to do anything* (GR CY C).

In terms of the **capacity of social movements to enhance trust in society**, core members are less optimistic and more realistic, in the sense that they do not have unlimited resources in order to be able to reach a larger sector of society. They are in favour of focused actions for targeted populations in order to inform them about LGBTQI rights and the discrimination they have suffered. For that reason, they are also in favour of **cooperation with institutions**; this cooperation is helpful, not only for the resources needed, but also for the impact of their information activities. Moreover, the institutional change is what they want to achieve, and cooperation with institutions and trust in them is the necessary step in this direction.

CY followers strongly believe that trust is crucial in the process of approaching the institutions and communicating people's requests to them. In fact, they give the concept of trust a special role in the context of LGBTQI movements, as there is a greater need to create bonds of trust and a sense of security that makes it a reason to participate in LGBTQI collectives, essentially talking about the concept of "safe spaces". As far as trust in the institutions is concerned, most of the followers seem to be quite sceptical of most, such as the police, the judiciary system, the media, the Greek Orthodox Church, the army, or the political parties, which are related to the actions of the specific institutions:

> *Institutions as institutions well exist [...] but in any case, the way the institutions act and their actions on a case-by-case basis, determine who I trust and who I do not. There are some institutions that, in principle, I have a problem with, but we can discuss it with some others* (GR CY F).

They seem to distinguish the lack of trust in the institutions from the lack of trust in the community, or the ingroup trust. Lack of trust or distrust in public/state institutions can be creative and productive; it is described as something that is 'totally normal' (GR CY F) in the sense that it somehow promotes social change, and can help when criticism of the institutions is warranted, or when there is a total rupture/breakdown in relations. On the other hand, lack of trust or mistrust between individuals who have essentially common goals and initiatives, in other words lack of ingroup trust, can only act as a deterrent for the dynamics and demands of the LGBTQI movement.

As for the **cooperation of the movements with governmental institutions/NGOs/political parties** and the effects of such cooperation on the citizens, once again the followers ultimately relate it to the result produced by this cooperation:

> *Whether this relationship is a partnership for various projects that can be accomplished, or it is a financial type for funding, or whatever, it also forms a relationship of citizens' trust in these organisations. How they see them to the extent that there is transparency or not. The types of issues they highlight, the attitude they will take if the respective government takes any measures for or against* (GR CY F).

Followers focus on the importance of the **independency of movements from political parties**, and explain from their own experience as members of social movements why young citizens who are close to these movements express distrust towards any suspicion of parties' involvement in the social movement. However, others consider that the distrust towards the movements that choose to cooperate with the official institutions is a consequence of the wider distrust that historically exists in Greece towards state institutions. This, in turn, undermines trust in civil society organisations, and any type of trust in general:

> *It is not possible to distrust state and political institutions and at the same time be trustful vis-à-vis civil society organisations. In other words, if someone distrusts the first, this creates distrust towards the latter* (GR CY F).

Finally, others place this distrust in the very nature of LGBTQI and feminist claims, in general, which are as they say: 'by definition, deeply and spontaneously anti-authoritarian' (GR CY F). So, this suspicion arises from every form of power in society today, to the extent that it has contributed to the perpetuation of these oppressions. Moreover, the existence of institutional violence could be a reason why distrust might exist towards the state institutions - first and foremost, towards the police that is mostly accused of institutional racism, as it has been mentioned by CY followers.

In relation to what various **local, national and supranational organisations can do to strengthen and restore trust**, most are in general agreement that they should show the ordinary citizen that they can stand up and help them with their problem. This essentially shows that the citizen can turn to them, which in their opinion does not happen in Greece at the moment, especially with local and national institutions such as the police and the judiciary system. In essence, they demand more accountability, more transparency. This is the reason why CY followers express their feelings of trust in the National Health System, Universities and Public Education, as well as in the Greek Ombudsman, which according to our discussants, are the most transparent and productive institutions. Together with NGOs and civil society's organisations, the aforementioned institutions are considered by CY core members and followers to be the most trustworthy institutions in Greece.

2.4 Expertise

Experts in both movements under study are **perceived positively** and what they offer is considered significant. For the AM core members and followers, expert knowledge is seen as an authority, especially after their involvement in environmental politics. As regards environmental policies and the key issues for the AM mobilisation, specialised and expert knowledge was considered really helpful and informative. In general, there is acceptance of **expert knowledge, but with a more pragmatic approach**. That is to say, they believe we must rely on expert knowledge whenever it is needed, as well as on

specific issues, but experts should limit their exposure to media and hold an advisory role.

For the AM core members and followers, experts played a significant role, not only in the information of the affected community about the environmental effects of the mining process, but also in their struggle. Many academics from the field of environmental studies participated in the popular assemblies in order to explain to the inhabitants all the scientific elements of the studies regarding the consequences of the mining process, and they also testified as witnesses in trials that the movement provoked after several appeals to the courts about the legality of the mining process. There is unanimous acceptance of their expertise from all participants, and they expressed their gratitude, as well. Nonetheless, they do not consider experts as the leading personalities of the movement, but as specialists in **advisory roles** who have contributed to the argumentation of the movement and its fight against misinformation and data manipulation:

> *They have conducted serious studies, which have been presented to the pertinent services, before judicial authorities, etc. However, the system of both the judiciary and the political power is so corrupted that anything essential is hidden, distorted and eventually silenced. Well in our case, the contribution of experts was huge to break this propaganda that said that some graphic pseudo-ecologists are reacting in Chalkidiki* (GR AM C).

Despite the acknowledgment of their expertise and its significance for the movement, we also traced **negative perceptions of expert knowledge** that are associated with the acceptance of expertise in general. In this case, the members of the movement accept only the experts that argued in favour of the movement's claims, and not the others. They do not consider the health and medical experts that speak about the pandemic as equals to the experts that helped the movement, and they denounce the academics that had a different view in the case of the mining process:

> *Okay, the experts in our movement, I do not think that those appearing constantly on TV during the pandemic, the so-called infectious disease specialists, can be compared to the role played by environmentalists, hydrologists, seismologists, who have sounded the alarm for the whole region* (GR AM C).

Another form of **negativity that includes disdain towards experts** resulted from the political division that dominated the movement over the past years. A follower considers that several experts might have had political motivation to approach the movement, a stepping stone of sorts to their career, but this opinion was neither dominant nor persistent. Overall, experts were very important in the case of the AM, and many of them became members of the movement, as well. They did not play a leading role, but an essential one for the justification of the arguments and claims of the movement.

From the beginning of the conversations, it was obvious that both supporters and core members of CY as a movement wanted to relate the movements' actions with scientific studies and, in general, to integrate in the movement the views of experts. In this direction, they planned actions such as the publication of scientific and research findings, the organisation of training seminars, research planning, etc. After all, as the core members themselves told us, they also possess some kind of specialisation which derives from their university education (psychologists, social workers, etc.) in combination with their long-term involvement with LGBTQI issues, and consider themselves as **expert in specific issues**. Nevertheless, in their view, they do not lack the element of expertise, but the ability to put more pressure on the various organisations and stakeholders:

> *It is not that this expertise is missing. And we go, let's say, activistically, and we say this or say that. There are roots if one is in the mood to consult them* (GR CY C).

The general feeling is that while they have tried hard to have scientific knowledge on their side, their interlocutors actually expect them to work on subjects that do not fall within their area of responsibility, such as drafting a law. 'That is, in my eyes, an avoidance strategy' (GR CY C), as they say. On the other hand, the views of the supporters were not as experience-based as that of the core members. Some believe that **experts opinion is, of course, very important** and should be taken seriously, but with some limitations, as they **do not recognise universal authority**, but that they have a very specific role to play, more advisory. They consider that the academic-scientific discourse may seem elitist to some, and may divert the focus from the real problems. As they put it:

> *In order to win, say, the experts, who have a right-holder reason in terms of content, the trust of the movement, the LGBTQI individuals, the collectives and so on. They will have to speak with a different language different from the one they are used to. Something that does not happen often enough. That is why they end up identifying with the institutional part, and are treated as actors that contribute to the perpetuation of oppression, instead of trying to change it* (GR CY F).

Everyone seems to recognise, however, that it gives some weight to LGBTQI and feminist demands. It reinforces them in everything that has to do with how public opinion views them from outside the movement.

Overall, expert knowledge is recognised by both movements as crucial for the movement's argumentation and demands. Especially for the AM, experts were an important factor for the movement and came forward with all the scientific grounds necessary for the anti-mining claims. On the other hand, they are not open, or they do not trust all scientific expertise but only those who supported the movement. The CY members also acknowledge scientific expertise, but they also point out the limits of its power; experts provide the knowledge and scientific arguments, but do not have the ability or/and power to pressure the political system for the satisfaction of their claims. So, despite the

general acceptance of the usefulness of scientific knowledge, both movements put limits on scientific expertise and its potential authority.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

In the final segment of the discussion about the core elements of the representative democracy, respondents expressed mixed attitudes regarding different forms of political participation. There is a great deal of criticism for the way democracy works nowadays, and respondents question the power of people and whether the people's voice is heard. Both core members and followers of the AM movement appeared to be divided on the **significance of voting** versus more direct forms of political participation. They consider voting as the cornerstone of democracy, and people's only chance to express their opinion, but they are also in favour of more deliberative processes like referendums, although they understand the limitations of these processes. In core members' minds, referenda advocate radical left-wing claims, and are identified with communist utopia and revolutionary struggles.

When asked about possible reforms that could make the political system more democratic, both core members and followers referred to the possibility of holding referenda – at either the national or local levels – and the empowerment of local communities. It is interesting that there seems to be moderate preference for referendums in comparison to more radical opinions in favour of the change of the representative regime. Most of the respondents prefer deliberation at the local level, but there was also an opinion about the need for radical change and the 'violent overthrow of the current situation' in order to 'rebuild society'. However, the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process via direct-democratic procedures is suggested, in order increase the power of every single vote:

> *I believe that the forms of direct democracy that our movement has employed for decision-making could work. But only locally on a small scale, meaning I don't think this could work more broadly at the level of an entire state within the capitalist system that exists. In small communities, yes, like the Zapatistas or at Marinaleda in Spain. I don't think that it is feasible on a grand scale in the 21st century* (GR AM C).

Followers of the **AM** movement opt for **less institutional forms of participation**, underlining the negative experience of collaborating with a political party only to be let down when this party enters government. **Participation in social movements and civil society organisations** is preferred, since these organisations are understood as more trustworthy agents of mobilisation and actual political change in relation to political parties.

With regard to the **capability of citizens to make political decisions**, there is agreement on the difficulty to process all the available and complicated information, but the reasoning for this inability differs. Apart from the hypocrisy and duplicity of conventional

party politics, the lack of education and knowledge among citizens is considered as another major problem of Greek democracy. Both core members and followers of the **AM** agree that the majority of Greek people lacks the necessary capabilities to make proper decisions, and suggest that more knowledge and better education is the solution for politically aware citizens:

> *Citizens' quality determines the quality of democracy. Where there are sheep, you get shepherd's democracy. When citizens are informed and knowledgeable, the quality of democracy improves [..] The key is education, this is my conclusion. Education is necessary in a society in order for citizens to develop their critical faculties, to have knowledge and be able to draw their own conclusions, to not behave like football fans. It is a difficult task, not something that can be done in a day* (GR AM F).

Moreover, when they talk about education, they do not only refer to conventional educational methods, but stress the benefits derived from politicisation and political **participation in social movements**. Apart from mobilisation, social movements are important in the sense that they can also perform the vital task of educating and informing citizens in a way that mainstream institutions (the educational system, political parties, mass media) fail to do, not only on environmental issues, but on general social and political issues, as well:

> *I believe that growing political awareness can be a solution to societal problems. Inside the movement, individuals were politicised down to the last person. People sought democracy and justice [...] In order for individuals to make the right decisions, they need to grow political awareness […] Politicisation was expressed as the act of the simple people, the grandfather, the grandmother, the forest worker, saying no to this corporation* (GR AM C).

At the same time, the optimism about the potential of social movements to educate citizens and effect real change is often contradicted by a diffuse pessimism regarding the entrenchment of "the system" and its ability to block real political change. This pessimistic attitude is amplified by the negative opinion on political parties and trade unions that, in their eyes, represent the corrupted and depreciated institutional actors of the political system. The antidote in this diffuse pessimism is **participation in social movements and voluntary groups**. This is the only **empowerment path** that both social movements and citizens must follow in order to bring change in society.

These empowerment paths can be accompanied with **institutional changes towards citizens participation**. Deliberative methods, like referendums or discussions in local councils, are constant demands for the AM movement that also stresses the need for institutional decentralisation. As core members explain, local communities should have the right to decide about issues that affect only their community. They argue that the members of the local community know the issues they are facing better, and are in a position to propose solutions, taking into consideration the inhabitants' interests.

In the focus group with core members of **CY**, the discussion was focused on possible **institutional-level reforms** that could stimulate the participation of the citizens in the political process, but also improve the quality of democracy. General issues were raised, such as the need to establish better institutional mechanisms of accountability at all levels of government, the need for better journalism which can have a pedagogical role, particularly on issues related to the LGBTQI community, and even the need to move from single-party to coalition governments - so that there can be consensus at the governmental level.

As the group of **CY** followers consisted of several young(er) people with intense political activity, an intimate knowledge of issues and experience such as participation in the movements' activities, they were generally engaged on the topic of **democratic participation**. Initially, especially among the younger ones, there seemed to be a distinction between wider involvement in politics and the **voting** process. In essence, this distinction relates to the contradictory fact that many politicised young people, who participate in democratic processes in various self-organised groups and movements, often do not go to the polls in national and other official elections. The reason behind this paradoxical phenomenon, they believe, relates to the degree of their involvement with politics:

> *It is precisely because of the people who have become more involved in politics that they have lost much of their trust in the institutions and the institutional process and the party system. In other words, they have lost the motivation to go to the polls, or choose to vote for parties that they know are not going to enter parliament* (GR CY F).

So, for most, **other forms of participation**, such as political activism, involvement in civil society organisations or in movements, or even digital activism is at least as important as – if not more so – than voting. Of course, there were views that acknowledged the importance of elections and citizen participation in them, but even these views stressed the need for wider political participation, as well as for complementing and correcting representative democracy with instruments of direct democracy. However, the emphasis on the priority of **other forms of political participation**, for a broad range of issues, even outside the narrow scope of deliberate and well organised mobilisation by single-issue social movements, was highlighted through the power of social media to mobilise individuals; a follower referred to a recent incident at a conference regarding fertility that was organised by a medical association with the participation of the Greek Orthodox Church that triggered civic reactions via social media that managed to cancel the conference.

Regarding **citizens capability to make political decisions**, both followers and core members stressed the need for adequate education and information of the citizenry. However, they do not think that political decisions are a matter of capabilities, but of political

interest and participation. They refer to people who vote just out of habit, without examining party manifestos and party positions in particular issues. Another issue related to citizens' capabilities is the amount of information people receive, and how they infiltrate this information; mass media and social media are overwhelmed by systematic misinformation, propaganda and fake news that citizens must filter out, but this is not always possible.

For that reason, both core members and followers of CY are in favour of more atypical forms of political participation, especially through voluntary work and involvement in civil society. They believe in mobilisation or **empowerment paths** through conventional politics and social movements, but they also stress the importance of digital mobilisation via social media. **Information and knowledge are important components for empowerment**; they believe that 'there is no such thing as the perfectly informed citizen' (GR CY F), but everyone can gather information on the issue that she/he considers more salient. Nevertheless, citizens, social movements and civil society must work together for the agenda setting.

On the subject of the necessary **institutional changes towards citizens' participation**, attitudes are rather pessimistic. All participants of the focus groups stressed that in Greece, there are not many deliberative procedures, and public policy does not promote participation. However, in the cases where citizens have the opportunity to participate, they do not, either because they are not informed about these opportunities, or because they lack efficacy. Citizens are convinced that their opinion will not be heard. Followers that had the experience of similar deliberative procedures suggest that local authorities could contribute more to citizens' mobilisation and **better information**. Furthermore, they propose **educational reforms** with the introduction of new courses at school, where children can learn about civic culture and political participation.

Finally, the role of the social movement was generally perceived to be a necessary complement to mainstream democratic institutions and processes, particularly in regard to the contributions of the **CY** movement in community building and member support. Political change is considered as something that is possible, but that comes slowly and incrementally through small actions:

> *In reality, our movement spends more time on legal aid because there is a demand from the community, but also from the formal institutions to do so. And when people nudge you all the time to do this, well, it is difficult not to; your impact is also more measurable this way. Because often in order to change society, you need to contribute things that resemble a drop in the ocean. But I believe that the main role of CY, even though we spent a lot of energy on institutional struggles, is in community building and in its supportive function* (GR CY C).

3. Conclusion

Among core members of social movements, their previous experiences with political institutions and the political elite play a major role in how trust/distrust is perceived. Feelings of distrust have been experienced by the members of both movements we have focused on. Although the lack of trust characterises both movements, especially their core members, they communicate with political parties in order to fulfill their goals, at the same time being aware that parties are trying to exploit their popularity among the local area and/or in different segments of society, as well as social movement's high visibility on (social) media.

The initial perception that radical social movements are suspicious towards experts is not true. Core members engage with and use expert knowledge, although very critically and strategically: They do not accept expertise in general, but they recognise expert knowledge that supports their interests and movement's vision for change.

Social movements' activists and supporters/followers acknowledged the importance of elections and citizen participation in them; at the same time, they stressed the need for wider political participation at all levels of decision-making, as well as for the introduction of tools of direct democracy that are not opposed to but complement and enhance the quality of representative democracy. Within this framework, participation through elections and/or forms of direct participation is acknowledged as an obligation and responsibility of citizens. However, this transformation of representative democracy towards forms of direct participation is a constraint due to the fact that, according to focus groups' participants, the majority of citizens lacks the necessary capabilities to make proper decisions, which is a condition sine qua non for strengthening and improving the quality of democracy.

There are also different attitudes between the two movements that are the result of the composition of the movements and their claims; the AM is a movement that is fighting for the environmental consequences of the mining process in a small rural area where most of its action took place. All participants of the movement either live or come from this area, and inevitably know each other very well. Despite the political division inside the movement, and because of the intimacy between the participants of each focus group, we did not trace any significant differences in their attitudes. On the other hand, CY is a broader movement that operates in the biggest city in Greece, with members and followers having different roles and attachments within the movement. However, the different characteristics of each movement do not have an important impact on their members' attitudes, but rather on behavioural components.

There are differences concerning their means of mobilisation: the AM is a radical protest movement that uses institutional, but also non-institutional, forms of actions which cluster into the repertoire of contentious politics, whilst CY-despite its radical claims- prioritises the use of formal/institutional forms of mobilisation. The AM aims for radical

change of policies of gold-mining operations and an overturn of the environmental policies. CY gives preferences to institutional and legal reforms that may require changes in party positions, and therefore they engage in some lobbying activities and communication with the political elite. Core members and followers of the AM are very close to each other concerning the entire repertoire of the movement's objectives, values and actions, whereas the followers of CY are more critical and emotionally detached from the movement itself.

Mostly the core members were emotionally attached to the movement itself. This was more apparent in the case of the AM; during the focus group with the AM's core members, at least for some of them, it was like reliving the same experiences. They were dominated by emotions and their memories were still vivid, revealing the crucial role the movement played for them. CY's core members were less emotionally attached, but more factual and pragmatic.

Interaction with expert knowledge is a relevant point for both social movements we focus on. Core members interact with experts when they feel supported by the experts' views, but not when they perceive themselves to be under the "guidance" of experts. Especially in the case of the AM movement, expertise is transformed into a 'contentious politics with other means' (Chesta, 2021), meaning that experts actively engaged in the movement, contributing to the fulfillment of the movement's goals. It is exactly that type of expertise that enjoys trust expressed by the movement, but not expertise / scientific and specialist knowledge tout court.

The more the followers are involved in the social movement's activities and share their purposes, the more likely it is that the core members and the followers converge on issues related to trust/distrust: Core members and followers of the AM movement are equally distrustful towards political parties, believing both that social movements are much more trustworthy agents of mobilisation and political change in relation to political parties, whereas followers of CY are more critical vis-à-vis their own movement itself. It might be related to the organisational structure of the social movements; we could hypothesise that movements with a horizontal organisational structure facilitate emotional attachment between core members and followers, whereas movements with some notions of hierarchy are less able to reinforce convergences between ingroup and outgroup.

Social movements are understood as more trustworthy agents of mobilisation and actual political change in relation to political parties. The state and public institutions are the creators of distrust, in other words, they are the ones who are responsible for the erosion of the political trust. All core members and followers value trust very highly, and consider trust as a prerequisite for social life. However, as a result of their own experiences, especially with political institutions and personnel, distrust is a starting point for all core members, as well as for followers, in part: with a few exceptions, they feel

distrust towards any kind of outsiders (state, public institutions, the elite, etc.). However, distrust does not only exist towards outsiders, but also towards members or specific segments of the social movement itself. Trust has to be earned, and can be lost; core members and followers expressed feelings of (dis)trust as a result of their own experiences, which underscores the dynamics of (dis)trust and its ongoing exchanges between all parties involved.

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Social Movements between Local Cooperation and the Call for Democratic Reforms: The Case of Italy

Luca Carrieri and Francesco Marangoni

1. Introduction

1.1 Social movement scene in contemporary Italy

In 2011-2012, the euro crisis and ensuing austerity policies sparked off protests and mobilisations in southern Europe (Della Porta et al., 2017). However, in Italy, anti-austerity protests were primarily led by established actors, such as the trade unions, promoting strikes and national rallies, and occasionally by student organisations, staging sits-in and flash mobs (Mosca 2013; Andreatta and Della Porta, 2015). Nonetheless, the social protests remained fragmented in the Italian context, not resulting in the emergence of an anti-austerity mass movement resembling those developing in other countries (i.e., the Spanish *indignados* or the American 'Occupy Wall Street'). Instead, the protests led to multiple streams of demonstrations that were unsuccessful in establishing any coordinated action or shared identity (Mosca 2013).

According to some studies the crisis catalysed a resurgence of feminist movements in Europe, with the austerity policies affecting the social rights and conditions of female workers (Fraser 2013). Since the mid-2010s, two transnational feminist movements - #MeToo and *Ni Una Menos* – have strongly politicised the issue of male violence in the political debate (Chironi and Portos 2021). In Italy, the *Non Una di Meno* (NUDM) movement was created in 2016, promoting several grassroot mobilisations, such as national rallies, marches and assemblies (Chironi 2019). NUDM displayed a strong degree of openness towards new members, showing a general propensity toward a horizontal (and informal) model (Chironi 2019). This organisational paradigm was achieved through innovative online networking, crucial for promoting national initiatives (such as the first international strike of women on March 8 2017), allowing the participants to engage in horizontal interactions (Pavan and Mainardi 2018). According to Chironi (2019), NUDM activists, especially those belonging to the younger generations, were reluctant to cooperate with the government and national political parties, though some kind of cooperation at the local level was more likely. This movement gained national visibility in the years 2016-2017, promoting the Global Day against Male Violence over Women, which attracted 250,000 participants and received substantial media coverage. In 2019, NUDM

had again gained media attention by organising a March in Verona, to counter the conservative pro-family movements that had organised the World Congress of Families in the city (WCF, Pavan 2020).

In late 2018, new waves of transnational climate movements came into being, coordinating mobilisation on climate change, and involving new generations of activists. Among these, Extinction Rebellion (XR) was founded on 31 October 2018, announcing the '*Declaration of Rebellion against the UK government*' and organising a rally in front of the British Houses of Parliament. Since its inception, Italian activists have also participated in the XR actions abroad and, at the beginning of 2019, they launched the movement on a national level. After the initial stage of organising presentations, small demonstrations and distributing leaflets widely to raise the alarm on climate and ecological crisis, XR activists gathered in Rome for the third International Rebellion in October 2019. According to De Moor et al. (2021), the XR repertoire of action has been very heterogenous, drawing attention to the climate crisis through civil disobedience and (non-violent) direct actions. The movement had rejected forms of cooperation with institutions, while demonstrating a certain willingness to cooperate with pre-established and new pro-environmental movements and associations. XR has set itself out as an inclusionary and horizontal organisation, welcoming all potential participants in the movement, and involving them in the decision-making process.

It is worth noting that several local movements emerged and succeeded in Italy, striving in defence of local land use, often by opposing the construction of big infrastructures. These actors have been defined as movements targeting Locally Unwanted Land Uses (LULUs; Della Porta et al. 2019). Although the LULU movements have been mainly embedded at the local level, they have also shared some objectives, recurrently trying to form a coordinated front (Della Porta and Mattoni 2014). The *No Tav* has epitomised the most important case among these local movements, becoming a model for the struggle of many local activists across the country (Della Porta et al. 2019). It was set up during the 1990s to oppose the construction of a high-speed railway in the area of Val di Susa in Piedmont. This movement had mainly been horizontal, displaying a high degree of openness towards potential members, and remaining active for more than twenty years, engaging in marches, direct actions and civil disobedience (Mosca 2013), including "*clashes with the police, forms of sabotage and occupation of construction sites, picketing and the cutting of fences*" (Della Porta et al. 2019, 505-506). In the 2018-2019 period, as the debate on the building of the high-speed railway was put at the forefront of the government agenda, the *No Tav* had intensified its action at the national level. Firstly, this movement staged a peaceful march on the December 8th 2018 in the city of Turin, countering a previously-held public demonstration in favour of the high-speed railway in the same city (Biancalana 2020). Secondly, it converged with other LULUs' movements on 23 March 2019 in Rome, promoting a massive march to oppose the construction of big infrastructures across the country, emphasising a radical pro-envi-

ronmental position. It is worth noting that the *No Tav* gradually turned into a more radical movement, rejecting any form of cooperation with the institutions and political parties by breaking its former alliance with Five Star Movement (M5S), which, as governing party had become more ambiguous towards the building of the high-speed railway.

In late 2019, at the beginning of the campaign for the regional elections in Emilia-Romagna and Calabria, Italy also witnessed the emergence of the Sardine Movement (Movimento delle Sardine). This movement rapidly profiled itself as the anti-populist reaction to Matteo Salvini's League, which was intent on winning the elections in Emilia-Romagna to usher in the downfall of the M5S-PD government. One of the core objectives of the Sardines was to fill the void left by the Democratic Party (PD) and other centre-left actors in opposing the rise of populism and sovereignism in Italy, embodied by the League, and in its attempts to win the elections in Emilia-Romagna (Hamdaoui 2021). In this region, the Sardines actively supported the re-election of the PD's incumbent governor, Stefano Bonaccini, to halt the electoral breakthrough of the League (Tremulo 2021).

The movement had been initially rooted in the region, with the Sardines responding to the League's campaign events by organising several rallies. However, these local events rapidly gained national visibility, prompting Sardine-led rallies nationwide. This movement adopted a moderate repertoire of actions (rallies, peaceful demonstrations and flash mobs), profiling itself as an anti-populist movement, rejecting hate politics, aggressive language, and the denigrating use of social media by populist politicians (Hamdaoui 2021).

After the re-election of Bonaccini in Emilia-Romagna and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the movement relinquished its grassroots activities, but continued to engage in a dialogue with the PD, presenting candidates in the local elections. The Sardines' project had stood out for a high level of informal or formal cooperation with the major actors of the Italian centre-left, aiming at playing a political role in the Italian context, with the movement's most important spokesperson, Mattia Santori, being elected onto the municipal council of Bologna on the list of PD. Nonetheless, the Sardines have shared the core characteristics of a social grassroot movement (Caruso and De Blasio 2021; Tremulo 2021). Indeed, this movement lacked a strong hierarchical structure, originating locally, and elaborating strategies based on bottom-up decision-making through the use of social media (Caruso and De Blasio 2021). This decision-making structure had allowed people to engage and participate, with the Sardines displaying a high degree of openness towards potential members (Tremulo 2021).

In brief, the Italian context epitomised the weaknesses of the anti-austerity movements, which did not flourish or succeeded in the aftermath of the great recession. However, the Italian context has been characterised by a heterogeneous number of movements, which had channelled a differentiated set of demands and protests spreading at societal

level. Firstly, the crisis had chiefly catalysed the resurgence of feminist movements, resulting in the formation of the NUDM movement. Since the mid-2010s, this movement has been able to promote an innovative participation at the national-level and local-level, contributing to an increase in the mobilisation of young women activists (Chironi 2019). Though these had been less successful than the feminist mobilisation, pro-environmental movements have also been on the rise in Italy. XR has epitomised this pattern, capturing the growing concerns towards climate change. More difficult to categorise than other societal realities (especially since it was still at the ignition stage), this movement expanded rapidly within many Italian municipalities and regions.

Italy had notably mirrored the stable presence of important local movements, the so-called LULUs (Della Porta et al. 2019), such as the *No Tav*. The latter is the epitome of those movements rejecting the "Unwanted Land Uses", and it has constituted a role model for the spread of other organisations rooted in different territories. The No Tav has achieved the most eclectic repertoire of action within the Italian context, engaging in peaceful demonstrations without necessarily rejecting a more radical civic disobedience that sometimes resulted in the use of violence. The movement underwent a process of radicalisation over time, refusing to cooperate with regional and national institutions, but also reshaping its coalition-building. As a matter of fact, it broke its alliance with some party opposition actors, such as the M5S and the radical left parties, embarking on coalition-building with similar movements cross the country (Della Porta et al. 2019; Biancalana 2020).

In this national context, one of the most important and peculiar novelties has been the emergence of the anti-populist movement, the Sardines, which actively collided with the sovereigntist actors and supported centre-left parties/organisations. Its ideological platform was substantially original, with the movement clearly occupying the space vacated by political parties in countering the electoral success of the League. However, the Sardines had clearly profiled themselves as a social movement, adopting a horizontal bottom-up organisation in order to foster an engagement through the use of social media. Another peculiarity of the Sardines has been its cooperative attitude towards the PD, which has recently hosted members of the movement on the party lists throughout the country. By late 2021, the Sardines no longer seem to be a social movement, with some of its members active in other organisations or parties.

In brief, the Italian context has mirrored a favourable environment for social unrest in the last decade, though displaying some peculiar movements vis-a-vis other countries, epitomised by the LULs' movements and the Sardines. On the contrary, NUDM and XR have belonged to the family of transnational movements, emphasising issues which are contested and politicised in the rest of the word, such as gender issues and pro-environmental ones.

1.2 Case studies and organisation of the research

In the previous section, we outlined the main characteristics of the movements operating in the Italian context, identifying how those movements have deviated from the international landscape (the Sardines and No Tav), and those in keeping with transnational feminist and environmentalist mobilisations (NUDM and XR). Though our initial choice was to investigate the No Tav movement, conducting interviews among its core members, ultimately, it came down to a matter of feasibility. Indeed, it was extremely difficult to contact and reach the No Tav core members, who rejected every form of cooperation. Their rejection was based on their willingness to avoid every form of instrumentalisation, revealing a strong distrust towards researchers, which may relate to their past experiences. Thus, we choose to analyse the NUDM movement, which constitute the most important feminist movement on the Italian landscape, jointly with Extinction Rebellion. It is worth noting that this case selection may improve the cross-country comparability of our work, including transnational movements, operating in other European contexts. This is particularly relevant when justifying the inclusion of XR, which allows us to analyse the rise of pro-environmental unrest against climate change in Italy, seemingly consistent with the world-wide trend. The core members and followers of both movements were easy to recruit through official websites and social media.

As mentioned in the previous section, Italian feminist activists established the *Non Una di Meno* movement (NUDM) in 2016, following the outbreak of the *Ni Una de Menos* against male violence in South America. According to Chironi (2019), NUDM embarked on the process of coalition-building, involving different generations of feminists, and creating organisational ties with social centres (anti-violence centres) and LGBTQI movements, which had previously acted separately. The movement gained visibility in November 2016, with 250,000 people rallying during the Global Day against Male Violence over Women. In 2017, NUDM presented its political manifesto (*We have a plan: a feminist plan against male violence against women and against gender violence*), proposing labour, education and health care system reforms, and advocating for the necessary cultural changes to enhance gender equality. In the following years, the movement continued to promote political initiatives, such as assemblies and marches, establishing local networks and organising assemblies in major Italian cities (Chironi and Portos 2021). Meantime, XR was founded at the beginning of 2019 in Italy, organising presentations and demonstrations to emphasise the climate change issue. After gathering in Rome for the third International Rebellion (October 2019), the movement appears committed to creating informal structures at the local level.

We recruited the core members of both movements in our research by directly contacting local activists (the members of the NUDM Siena assembly and of the XR regional branch in Tuscany). The core members then became involved in helping us to recruit followers of their respective movements, that is, those demonstrating a willingness to participate in the research. Regarding socio-demographic aspects, the NUDM core

members (five participants) and followers (four participants) were all female, but belonging to different generational clusters. The core member average age was 50+ years, also including several retired women, while the followers were much younger, averaging 35 years, all being employed (both in the private and public sectors). Four core members have a university degree, and one has a high-school licence. In the followers' group, one participant has a PhD, two have university degrees and one has a high-school certificate.

The XR participants were more homogenous in terms of age and gender, with no great differences between the core members and followers. The followers (four participants) were older, including a few retired people, and less gender-balanced (1 woman out of 4 participants) than the core members (four participants), who were equally represented in terms of gender, with three employed people and one student. The level of education was substantially high within both core members and the followers. In the core members' group, three participants hold a university degree, while one participant was still attending school. In the followers' group, one participant had earned a PhD, two have university degrees and one has a high-school certificate.

Two researchers were involved in the focus groups, while the coding was carried out by a single researcher. Due to the lockdown, all the interviews and focus groups were held online, providing all the participants with some degree of flexibility and, thus, ensuring a greater degree of cooperation with the research groups. The focus groups lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes for the core members of NUDM, and 1 hour and 26 minutes for movement followers. The groups ran longer for the XR core members (1 hour and 42 minutes) and for its followers (2 hours and 20 minutes). As the research group was quite small, including 2 interviewers and 1 coder, no misunderstandings arose in conducting/coding/interpreting the research and research findings.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

The core members have defined Extinction Rebellion as an international, "bottom-up", non-violent movement in response to the ecological devastation caused by human activities, relying on science. They have called for non-violent civil disobedience, asking the government to reverse the course of human action that is leading to climate and ecological disaster. As a group of activists, they have strongly underlined the effectiveness of non-violence, which is key to inspiring everyday movement actions, and also to communicating XR movements to ordinary citizens. They argue that non-violent civil disobedience is necessary to alert citizens to the emergency, which has been clearly identified by the scientific community. Through these actions, they want to encourage more and more people to take part in the movement, and to actively get involved in becoming an integral part of change. These direct actions of civil disobedience have included road

blocks, sit-ins, planting trees in public spaces so as to influence government policy-making. The aim is to cause economic disruption to shake up the current political system, and civil disruption to raise awareness of the XR campaign.

They call for the creation of citizen assemblies that are suitable for a regime change. They are, in fact, questioning the current decision-making processes, criticising the shortcomings and failures of representative democracy. Even if they admit there is not much time to directly replace the governments and parliaments of the current system, they suggest drawing representatives from among the members of the city assemblies. In their view, they will have to deliberate on the basis of the best scientific evidence, and jointly establish the strategies and paths to be implemented to transform society in terms of emission neutrality and respect for ecological systems, in harmony with all living beings.

NUDM core activists have underlined that the movement was created as a transnational response to the spread of sexist male violence. They do not accept that women should be murdered simply because they are women, aiming at mobilising people against sexist violence and against social narratives that are rooted in society. However, they have also addressed the wage gap, unrecognised and unpaid care work, and unemployment that more heavily affects women. As stated in the NUDM manifesto, violence is interwoven with social inequality, the logic of wealth accumulation, working conditions, institutions and the state. They blame the cultural dominance of the patriarchy, endorsed by many institutions and politicians. These activists also claim the need for a shared mutual care between us and a society of care, with no room for any lack of responsibility. Their new way of life is based on caring and not on competition, typical of patriarchy and capitalism. As for their repertoire of actions, they have called for civil disobedience and direct actions, as well as networking with local associations (especially with LGBTQIs), thus, creating an effective coalition to influence decision-making.

2.2 Structure of the movement

The NUDM core members are fundamentally in agreement when describing the **formal structure** of the movement as being **horizontal/decentralised**, openly **rejecting a hierarchical/centralised organisation**. According to the participants, this organisational form is mirrored in a certain degree of autonomy for all local groups, even if national coordination does exist. All core members refer to a **fully inclusive membership** - no procedures are required to be admitted – with **everyone** being welcomed to participate. They claim that **everyone is involved in the movement's decision-making**, and this is clearly illustrated by several statements from IT NM C1, who claims:

> *Here, these hierarchies do not exist as they do in the parties… (here) a formal membership and an organisational structure do not exist … We do not do want to reach a decision through a vote, but by means of taking into account*

all our different views, managing to reach a higher mediation…our practice is that, on decisions, we avoid voting… (IT NM C1).

These statements were not contradicted by the other participants, revealing a clear-cut **attitude against formal decision-making**, with the core members rejecting voting procedures within the movement. Therefore, it appears that core members are strongly committed to **involving everybody in** (non-formalised) **decision-making**, as confirmed by IT NM C2, who contends that the best practice to resolve any disagreement within the group is a deliberative one: *"We discuss, we talk about it… until we reach a vision that satisfies everyone" (*IT NM C2)*.*

In brief, the NUDM core members aim to involve **everybody** in their non-formalised decision-making processes, by rejecting the **formal decision-making procedures**, and adopting deliberative practices. However, the participants admitted that the movement has often struggled to implement these principles. For instance, they try not to be perceived as the leaders of the movement, but there are some internal disparities potentially decoupling this horizontal structure. As mentioned by IT NU C1:

We tend to be a horizontal group that would like to remain so, but it is not always possible… as there are disparities, disparities in terms of skills and studying capacity (IT NU C1).

IT NU C1 also recognised that the level of individual expertise may determine some shifts in the decision-making level, with **functional (thematic) working groups** sometimes assuming prominence in steering the movement's choices. Participants also identify the **dynamic structure of the movement**, based on both **practice and merit**. Finally, they mainly agree on their **own role as action initiators**, with the core members playing a key role in promoting the different initiatives, especially at the local level. The NUDM followers perceive the movement as being **decentralised/horizontal**, encouraging a **fully inclusive membership**, although one participant admitted to having some difficulties in fully understanding the dynamics of the movement. However, no evident tensions or disagreements appear to have emerged between the core members and supporters concerning the organisation of the movement, assessing both its **decentralised/horizontal structure** as appropriate.

The XR core members described their movement as being **horizontal/decentralised**; no participants questioned this structure. IT XR C1 outlined the core features of XR as follows:

…precisely, the horizontality of power and non-predominance over the other…. and inclusiveness, the inclusiveness is one of those very important values (of the movement) because it creates a feeling of well-being among the people making the movement … (this) is crucial and different from my previous political experiences (IT XR C1).

As well, other participants stressed the inclusiveness of the membership, also suggesting that **everyone is involved in the movement's decision-making.** According to IT XR C2:

> *…one of the core things that makes us particularly united is attentive listening…every time we hold a meeting to outline the objectives of the movement… all together, we try to reach conscious decisions...without anyone dominating and speaking over the others…. that is basically something that differentiates us and it is really important in my opinion* (IT XR C2).

Again, XR's core members seem to favour the openness of their organisation, advocating for a deliberative practice of **decision-making, which has to involve everyone**.

According to the core members, the two movements fundamentally share the same **organisational structure**, **decentralised/horizontal**, actively encouraging an inclusive membership. Moreover, these movements both aim to **involve everyone in the decision-making process**, calling for deliberative practices. Nevertheless, the XR activists are more confident than the NUDM activists regarding the efficacy and feasibility of the structure, with no participant advancing any objections to the organisational features. On the contrary, NUDM core members identified some difficulties embodying these principles, with hierarchy and competence sometimes affecting the decision-making processes within the movement.

2.3. Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

2.3.1 Perception of general (dis)trust, perception of (dis)trust in institutions and the function of (dis)trust

When asked about their **perception of general dis(trust) and (dis)trust in institutions**, the XR core members maintained the **importance of distrust rather than trust**, though some participants expressed some reservations. IT XR C2 and IT XR C1 recognised the **conditional positive role of general distrust**. IT XR C1 repeatedly expressed concerns related to the potential shifts towards authoritarianism due to the role of both kinds of distrust. In his own words:

> *All our distrust and the distrust expressed by the people around us is going to go somewhere, and I would not like it to come out as a reaction against democracy…I would like this to move exactly towards the opposite side, which is more democracy* (IT XR C1).

They recurrently relate the positive role of both types of distrust (general and institutional) to a more proactive role of citizens, who need more information. Instead, followers were unanimously more cautious concerning the role of general distrust than the activists, who are conditionally positive.

On the contrary, the other XR core members were more optimistic about the role of general distrust, perceiving it as positive and significant. IT XR C3 considered the role of general distrust as important because it could foster a more active role of citizens within society, referring to a generic form of activism. Finally, though evaluating the role of general distrust as significant, which may bring about institutional reform and more democratic accountability, IT XR C4 softened its stance on the role of distrust towards the institutions, which is conditionally positive:

> *I realised that there is too much distrust towards the institutions… this distrust, which I considered to be well-founded, can also be dangerous from a certain point of view because it may be channelled towards something that scares me. I believe it may hold a strong power … and I believe it is legitimate (the distrust) because the institutions did not fulfil their job. Thus, on the one hand, (distrust) scares me; on the other, it gives me hope* (IT XR C4).

All the core members unanimously recognised **the function of distrust as a corrective factor in contemporary societies** that can also improve the quality of democracy. The latter point has been particularly important for the XR activists, who recurrently perceived **the role of distrust as a device to correct society** (also referring to the institutions).

NUDM core members mainly disagreed on the function of distrust within society. On the one hand, IT NM C1 maintained that the perception of **general distrust and distrust towards the institutions is important, functioning as corrective factor in societies,** claiming:

> *They (the institutions) have absolutely not reformed, revitalised; they follow old patterns. They seem to be unable and unwilling to learn from what is happening around them, even if they risk their own death. Fortunately for them, something alternative for which this distrust of the institutions (is emerging) and this is also the result of our work ... for example, the mistrust in patriarchal society leads us to try placing trust in those places and those groups, in those relationships that we actually want in a society, so it is true that mistrust is often not negative, per se* (IT NM C1).

On the other hand, IT NM C2 expressed concerns about this **general distrust within society, which can be negative**:

> *I would say that this is a very difficult phase because, at this moment, those who channel the distrust of citizens are all movements and parties of the right, if not of the extreme right, and therefore, it is a very difficult moment to channel trust. Moreover, we start from premises that are completely opposed to the party logic* (IT NM C2).

Some divisions in the perception of distrust towards institutions and its function were also present among the NUDM followers. IT NM F1 argued that **distrust towards the**

institutions is negative, potentially leading to feelings of **resignation among citizens**. Instead, IT NM F2 identified the **positive conditional effects** of this kind of **distrust**, while maintaining that a **generalised distrust is destructive for society**.

The two movements have held different attitudes on **dis(trust) and its function**. XR activists and followers all assessed some **conditional positive effects of distrust**. Even if some core members maintained its **unconditional and significant impact**, others expressed a major degree of caution towards mistrust. Nonetheless, they all concurred on its **corrective functions within society**, acknowledging its potential to achieve social transformation. On the contrary, the NUDM activists and followers were sharply divided on this topic. Several participants identified its **negative role**, which may lead to **citizen resignation,** or be **destructive for society**.

2.3.2 Trust and distrust of the movement, and trust and distrust of the citizens

The XR core activists held a set of differentiated positions regarding the actors that they currently trust or distrust. IT XR C4 expressed a level of relative **trust towards other institutions** (the judicial and the Italian Constitutional Court). Instead, the other participants recognised local institutions as their most trusted actor, as this level of government is perceived as being closer to the citizens. Interestingly, the majority of XR followers also expressed their personal trust towards local institutions, though some disagreements emerged among them. In the words of one core member, IT XR C1, local institutions are different from other levels of government:

> *[I trust] some local administrations closer to the citizens, and therefore (fostering) greater citizen control. I absolutely do not trust those administrations that are far from citizen control, such as the national, regional, provincial ones, which are excessively hierarchical places* (IT XR C1).

These statements indicate a significant level of **distrust towards governmental institutions**, endorsed by another participant, and shared by some followers.

XR core members showed disagreement over the issue of **trust towards international organisations**, particularly concerning European institutions. Indeed, the majority of activists expressed **distrust** towards the European institutions, perceiving them as poorly accountable and calling for reforms at the European level, though one participant has been more trusting towards this level of governance. However, all the core members (instrumentally) **trusted other international organisations**, such as the United Nations, to improve the odds in the fight against global warming.

As for the **trust and distrust of the citizens**, XR activists were unanimous in identifying the rise of **popular distrust towards governmental institutions** and **political parties**, with nobody raising any disagreement over this issue. Though they specifically identified **parties** and **governmental institutions** as being currently unpopular, IT XR C1 further

underscored **citizen distrust as encompassing everybody**: "*The word trust doesn't even exist anymore; there is a total intolerance towards everything…".* The other participants were less radical on the latter issue, identifying other actors as being trusted by the citizens (national health system, law enforcement authorities, President of the Republic, etc.).

Similar to the core members, XR followers maintained their personal **trust towards other actors**, such as local institutions, again perceived as the most responsive. However, another participant (IT XR F1) took a more critical standpoint towards the local institutions, **political parties, governmental institutions** and **the media**, while defending **individual figures** and **civil society**. Finally, IT XR F2 expressed personal **trust towards national institutions**, sparking off a controversy among the followers. Indeed, others expressed **trust towards civil society organisations** and **social movements**. Concerning the citizens, XR followers mainly regarded local institutions as the most trusted actors among the citizens, again with the exception of IT XR F1, who believed that **people distrust everybody**. Furthermore, as core members, they agreed on assessing a widespread level of **citizen distrust towards governmental institutions** and, to a lesser extent, **political parties**.

NUDM core members maintained their personal **distrust towards other actors**, such as the local institutions, without mentioning national institutions. Instead, they all expressed **trust towards other actors**, such as the Local Health Authority (LHA). The latter was recurrently identified by the activists as a trusted actor, providing room for fruitful **cooperation with the movement** (see: below). As for **citizen trust**, they (indirectly) referred to the **social movements** (sometimes referring to themselves) as trusted actors in the population. On the contrary, NUDM followers offered a more comprehensive set of views on the shifts in trust and distrust, moving beyond the local level. They expressed a substantial degree of **trust towards the social movements**, with no participant making objections to this. In the words of IT NM C3:

> *I think that the movements that also act in antagonistic terms towards the institutions are certainly a bulwark to protect us from what is happening in the institutions at this historical moment* (IT NM C3).

These words were endorsed by other participants. They held a widespread **distrust towards the governmental institutions**, with some participants also expressing particular concern on the role of the **media**. However, they also advanced a level of **trust towards other actors** (the Italian President of the Republic, the Constitutional Court, international organisations, etc.).

As for the citizens, NUDM followers contended that the left-right ideological division may sway the **level of trust and distrust among the population**. On the one hand, right-wing citizens have more **trust towards the political parties and individual figures** (populist leaders) compared to **social movements**. On the other hand, left-oriented citizens

tend to **trust social movements more**, greatly **distrusting parties**. IT NM F2 summed up this distinction as follows:

> *I believe that there is a great distinction between right and left. My feeling is that the more right-wing people trust more single people, like populist leaders, … they can still potentially trust parties, instead, left-wing people mostly trust extra-institutional realities, therefore, organisations and movements ….in my opinion, this is one of the great differences between the right and left in Italy today* (IT NM F2).

The other participants accepted this position, which did not spark off disagreements among NUDM followers.

In brief, the focus group has drawn a complex picture of the **movements' levels of trust and distrust**. The core members of both movements have expressed a greater level of **trust towards other institutions**, with the local institutions topping their preferences. In particular, NUDM activists are strongly entrenched at the local level, never mentioning national actors. On the contrary, XR activists have expressively distanced themselves from **governmental institutions**, while **advancing a mixed level of trust/distrust towards international organisations** (unanimously endorsing international cooperation, but not the EU institutions). It is worth noting that XR followers have substantially shared this **trust** in local institutions and **distrust in governmental institutions**, though several disputes emerged during the debate. As for **citizen trust and distrust**, the XR core activists unanimously perceived **political parties and governmental institutions as being the most distrusted among citizens**. This position has indirectly revealed XR's negative evaluations on the institutions of representative democracy, reflected by the **widespread citizen distrust of these actors**. Although NUDM's core members were silent on this topic, the followers have provided us with interesting insights into the topic of **citizen trust and mistrust**. They have not treated public opinion as a monolith, but, instead, recognised the importance of the left/right division in Italian society, which has filtered the levels of **trust/distrust towards the political parties** (trusted by right-oriented, but not by left-oriented citizens), and **social movements** (trusted by left-oriented citizens and distrusted by right-oriented ones).

2.3.3 Cooperation of the movement with governmental institutions/ NGOs/ political parties

According to XR's core members, the movement has cooperated only with the regional institution in Tuscany. Although they have not held a **principled opposition to institutional cooperation**, they have strongly underlined the **instrumental view towards this cooperation**. IT XR C4 expressed this as follows:

In my opinion, this institutional contact was merely instrumental to a strategy… we had this contact and the institutions also gave us their word of approval… and when they break their word... we will have something to reproach them for ... (this contact) is very instrumental and (it is) not a real hope for collaborating with the institutions unless it really does something to implement our proposals, (it is) partially symbolic and above all, strategic (IT XR C4).

This strategic, and fundamentally disenchanted, stance towards **institutional cooperation** has been shared by other activists, who have also called for **the need for more exchange and dialogue with the citizens at the national level**. Furthermore, IT XR C1 somehow suggested that **cooperation** may be **beneficial for restoring trust**:

This attempt… is the only possibility of having some listening space and that (it is) difficult when politicians realise that it is not their office at risk, but it is the concept of democracy itself… I would like to (achieve) a better democracy, and the only hope is in being heard… to make clear (to politicians) that it is an opportunity (IT XR C1).

Nonetheless, the other participants maintained a pessimistic view of the institution's ability to cooperate and respond to the movement's requests. Finally, one participant mentioned **cooperation with NGOs based on shared goals**, with XR aiming to break its insulated position, and build a network.

NUDM core members have identified two kinds of **cooperation**. On the one hand, they have **cooperated with other NGOs based on shared goals** and, on the other, they have **instrumentally cooperated with some institutions**, particularly the LHA. The former **cooperation** has involved other movements that have held similar positions to those of NUDM (the trans-feminist network, other feminist associations, LGBT movements, etc.). Even though they have momentarily ceased contact with the municipalities, claiming an issue of political incompatibility with the mayors, the core members are still supportive of **instrumental forms of cooperation with the institutions**. This approach has been epitomised by the NUDM's cooperation with a local institution, the LHA. Several activists stressed the importance of this experience, which has fulfilled the desired goals of the movement. According to IT NM C4:

[We] had contacts with the LHA for the counselling clinics…we have had an excellent relationship with the LHA and we participated… like all associations of the territory in the drafting of a document in which we outlined a new plan for the local counselling services…, expressing our needs (IT NM C4).

These statements reveal the NUDM's efforts to (**instrumentally) cooperate with the institutions**, but also to consolidate a network at the local level.

The two movements have shared the same **instrumental attitudes towards cooperation with institutions**, contacting different actors. However, XR activists have shown a

more pessimistic view about this kind of cooperation, which has mainly been on a symbolic level, with no actual results. On the contrary, the NUDM core members have stressed the importance of this kind of strategic cooperation, allowing them to achieve important policy results, and present themselves as leaders in their own local communities. This epitomises a broader strategy of this movement, which has consistently tried to profile itself as a locally based actor, pursuing policy-related objectives. Instead, XR's negative stance on **institutional cooperation** reflects their general disenchantment with the core mechanisms of representative democracy.

2.3.4 What can be done at the local/national/EU level to restore trust

XR core members have referred to what **should be done at the local, national and European levels**. Firstly, **to restore some trust at the societal level**, some participants have called for **more dialogue, an exchange of ideas, and discussion with citizens**, implicitly mentioning the **national level**. According to IT XR C2:

> *[It is necessary] to regain the relationship with the citizens, by restoring a true listening, not a facade, to foster a real participation of citizens in politics* (IT XR C2).

Furthermore, IT XR C3 spoke about her negative experiences with local politicians, confirming the **need for more dialogue and discussion with citizens at this level**, as well **more approachable local institutions**. XR activists also agreed on the many existing drawbacks at the European level, which should be more **approachable and accountable to its citizens**. IT XR C4 specifically underlined the distance of these institutions from the citizens:

> *I perceive these (the EU institutions) as being even more disconnected from the citizens… I also see them as truly structured within certain economic visions that I do not share…. I distrust these (institutions) as being poorly democratic* (IT XR C4).

The XR followers have adopted similar positions towards local institutions, claiming that these should become **more transparent**.

NUDM activists have advanced the call for changes at a national level. They have consistently advanced **requests for a dialogue with the national institutions**, which should be **more sincere (about their successes and failures), and willing to learn**. This demand was recurrently underlined by the participants, with IT NM C5 arguing:

> *Why these people, the government and the parties, those who hold the power… why don't they come to us for an exchange of ideas…I sincerely feel rich in terms of experience. I feel that this movement, these women are full*

of initiatives, proposals… I could have probably Told Draghi[29] *and the Pope some interesting facts about the childbirth rate and kindergartens… why don't they contact us?* (IT NM C5)

These words were recurrently used by NUDM core members, who had also adopted the same narrative towards local institutions. These institutions should be **more approachable and closer to the citizens**, following the role model of the LHA. However, the NUDM followers partially set themselves apart from the core members on these issues. They only dealt with the national institutions, while advancing many more demands for change. As core members, **they all agreed on the need for dialogue, discussion with citizens, closeness to the people, calling for the restoration of representative roles**. Furthermore, they largely called for **coherence and competence among their representatives**, as recalled by IT NM C3:

As far as I am concerned, the institutions should have a vision, but I feel there is a lack of vision and coherence, there is too much differentiation... the functioning mechanisms of the public administration and, therefore, services to the citizens, the resolution of problems, should be predicted (IT NM C3).

NUDM followers also requested that **politicians should also respect all citizens**, instead of being too partisan and only advocating for the interests of their constituents.

Finally, they expressed the need that institutions should tackle the issue of **social media, treating these more carefully Indeed, they conveyed concerns over the role of social media in the political communication and its manipulating effects, biasing the political opinion of citizens.**

The two movements have not expressed any substantial differences on what changes should be made at the local and national levels. They have both expressed the **need for dialogue with citizens**, which is central to both, and to bring the **institutions closer to the citizens**. Again, the NUDM activists have underlined some positive local experiences, while the XR activists have held more critical stances at every level, including the European one, which is currently too distant from the citizens in their view. Nevertheless, the NUDM followers have urged for the need for a more complex set of changes at the national level, calling for **competent representatives and for a more coherent view**, but also expressing the need to be **more careful with the issue of social media**.

[29] The participant is referring to meeting held between the Italian Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, and Pope Francis the first at the Vatican City, discussing the topics of family and education.

2.3.5 Ability of social movements to enhance trust in society, and the role of social movements in trust building

According to the XR activists, the social movements may hold the potential to **enhance trust in society by repairing and correcting the institutions**. IT XR C4 maintained that:

> *In my opinion, social movements are certainly capable of restoring trust in new institutions because they have the aim to reform and re-found the institutions… the social movement… could have the strength to transform those institutions and enhance the trust in new institutions* (IT XR C4).

IT XR C1 also identified the **movement capacity to boost trust building**, conditioning it to a process of institutional change. Nonetheless, a small disagreement has occurred among the activists on this issue, with another member calling for a principle of non-interference, with trust-building not being one of the XR objectives. Instead, the movement followers have mainly indicated an alternative pattern, suggesting that **movements could cooperate with the institutions to improve trust in society.**

Although the NUDM core activists have been silent on the ability of the movement to enhance trust, the followers have offered us different and interesting standpoints on this issue. Indeed, several followers contended that **movements may enhance trust building by cooperating with the institutions**, as IT NM F4 stated:

> *[It is] absolutely [necessary] to bring within the institutions those associations that work; I think it would be one of first steps to reinstall trust* (IT NM F4).

Instead, IT NM F2 underlined some existing risks related to the **movement's ability in trust building**. By relying on her personal experience, she has identified some anti-institutional behaviour that may **nurture distrust**. Even though she contended that, in principle, social **movements could improve institutions**, she maintained that movements **could cooperate with institutions**. In her own words:

> *Associations and movements may certainly have many institutional failures and also solve many problems that the institutions cannot solve by themselves … if the institution recognised them and created a good dialogue, they (movements) would be absolutely decisive in restoring trust. However, in my opinion, this is not always the case. There is also an anti-institutional narrative within the movements and associations, which can instead be destructive to this type of dialogue* (IT NM F2).

The two movements have shown some notable divergence on the **social movements' capacity to enhance trust in society and enhance their general role in trust building**. As for XR, the core members have generally regarded the movements as being **capable of enhancing trust by improving the institution**s. In their view, institutional change is a

cornerstone in the process of trust-building, with the current embodiment of the institutions being detrimental to societal trust. Again, XR activists seem to fundamentally disagree with the actual model of representative democracy (see below), which has triggered widespread **popular distrust**. Instead, NUDM (followers) have expressed a more pragmatic stance on the **movement's role in trust-building**. They highlighted the need for **institutional cooperation** with the **movements as a key mechanism for trust building**. Nonetheless, they have not neglected to address some concerns relating to the role of the movements, which can **nurture a societal distrust**. They have apparently differentiated themselves from the XR activists, being more grounded in the traditional model of representative democracy (see below).

2.4 Expertise

The XR core members have generally ascribed great importance to the **experts**, though with different evaluations of their **role within the movement**. Several participants maintained that the **experts should play an advisory role in the movements**. According to IT XR C4:

> *The role of experts is an added value within XR because they have provided a scientific production within the movement… I have always appreciated their role within the movement, and I believe it is important to have a close reference point for debate. If somebody does not understand (something), and looks for information, they will know where to go* (IT XR C4).

IT XR C4 subscribed to this view, praising the **role of experts** that hold an **important advisory role**. However, another core member of GM argued that **everyone is an expert in something** in XR. However, though several XR activists stressed the **advisory role of the experts,** the movement is not unanimous on this stance, showing some differences of opinions.

NUDM core members are more sceptical of the **role of experts** within the movement, though they admit that competence is important and useful in principle. They tend to advocate that they each have a technical competence, claiming **that everybody is an expert in something** in the movements, as IT NM C1 states:

> *Everyone's competence [is important]. We are horizontal also about this; I believe that competence … is fundamental, so using competence is fine, but we are never subordinate. When we talk about economics and we are taught by an economist. We study enough so as to engage with the economist who comes to visit us… we study so as to ask questions because we have a very different vision from experts in society. In our opinion, (sciences and technology) are not neutral; they are biased and they are gendered* (IT NM C1).

The latter statements have also revealed some negative perceptions on the **role of experts**, who are also evaluated for their political views, which are often far from NUDM's positions.

Some major differences have occurred between the two movements pertaining to the **role of experts within the movement**. The majority of XR core members identified an **important advisory role of expert**s, which provides useful information for the movement. XR has actually mainly dealt with the topic of climate change, cueing the citizens with information shortcuts on this issue. The activists have probably needed a certain degree of training on environmental issues, relying on the experts to simplify complex ideas and policies for them. Nonetheless, the core members have not necessarily agreed on the **role of experts** within the movement, claiming their own expertise. It is worth noting that several activists have background experience and affiliations with other environmental associations and movements, developing an extensive knowledge on these issues.

On the contrary, the NUDM core members have been less prone to acknowledge the **advisory role of experts within their movement**. As has already emerged in the previous section of this report, the activists were strongly oriented towards a **horizontal-decentralised organisational** paradigm, with the **role of experts** potentially undermining such a structure. Furthermore, these members are relatively well-educated people, claiming their own competences on many issues, while also advocating for different political views than those of the experts. NUDM's core members may have struggled with some expert views on the gender issues, distancing themselves from some of these technical evaluations. This has led to some negative perceptions on expert knowledge, which may be incompatible with NUDM's political objectives. This represents an important difference between the two movements. On the one hand, XR seems to be more aligned with expert knowledge, which may provide the movement with an important basis of information and education, while, on the other hand, NUDM has more concerns on the role of experts, specifically those with conflicting political views, and aims to develop a more original ideological platform.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

The XR core members have strongly highlighted the need for institutional change, largely calling for a **more participatory and direct model of democracy**, identifying a series of paths to empower citizens. They have indicated two fundamental patterns to reform the institutions - **changing the legal framework to encourage participation, and establishing tools for more direct citizen involvement**. The activists have repeatedly agreed on this route for institutional change, which should clearly lead to a more direct democracy. According to IT XR C1:

> *In my opinion, they (institutions) must be reformed organisationally, and also in a more participatory sense. The question of efficiency is related to participation because decision-making without participation leads to democratically inefficient consequences* (IT XR C1).

This activist further insisted on this, referring to the **need for establishing tools for more direct citizen involvement**:

> *In my opinion, a culture of participation is very important… Then institutions should be able to channel it (participation), to set up a deliberative democracy, as proposed by XR at national level, because the most important decisions are taken there; but it is very important (to set up a deliberative democracy) at the local level… for the decision-making and creating communities and, therefore, creating a culture of participation* (IT XR C1).

These statements also entail a call for a clear-cut empowerment **path for citizens,** demanding that the **institutions should do more to involve them**.

Although both agreed on these fundamental aspects of institutional change, they have proposed different **paths to empower citizens**. The core members maintain that **citizens are only partially successful in making political decisions**, and a process of empowerment is crucial to increase their capabilities. In the words of IT XR C3:

> *Obviously, I agree that participation (is required) at every (institutional) level. However, education (is also required) to actually participate, in a prepared and empowered way… If there are no basic tools, we cannot ask institutions to deal with ideas that do not have solid foundations* (IT XR C3).

This participant suggests that **citizens need more information and knowledge to achieve a major empowerment.** This view was also supported by IT XR C1, who called for the same **empowerment path**. IT XR C3 repeatedly stated that **citizens needed to become more proactive themselves**, demanding a greater individual responsibility from the population. On the contrary, other core members highlighted the **role of movements, which should do more to empower citizens.**

Nonetheless, they all admitted that the **social movement impact on citizen participation remains partially successful**, with people only moderately reacting to their activities. In the words of IT XR F4:

> *In my opinion, there has not been a great impact on citizens. I believe that it does not depend on our radical objectives, but rather on the matter of our strategy…". Again, as IL stated: "It is not easy, let's say there is a curiosity…I see curiosity as when we organise meetings to talk about the movement and current affairs… We have grown, but not as we had desired* (IT XR F4).

However, the actual difficulty in achieving a major impact has not led to a pessimistic assessment of the movements' potential at the societal level. Indeed, XR core members

have largely perceived **social movements** as being a democratic device for **citizen empowerment**.

Several XR followers have markedly advocated for the same kind of institutional changes desired by the activists, **demanding a change in the legal framework to encourage participation and to establish the tools for more direct citizen involvement**. In the words of IT XR C4:

> *I am convinced that if the institutions want to change and become more credible, they must give decision-making power to citizens… We wish to bind them (the politicians) with the instrument of direct democracy, which is participative… those who represent us must give decision-making power and participatory space (to the citizens) … following the model of Switzerland… which is also not perfect, but is already a credible example* (IT XR C4).

Though they agreed on this path towards institutional changes, they also indicated some complementary reforms. RM particularly suggested that **institutions should inform citizens more and better**, also indirectly identifying an empowerment path for citizens who require **more information and knowledge**. This has not constituted a source of dispute among the followers, who consider this information agency role of the institutions as a complementary device to encourage participation. On the contrary, some major disagreements occurred concerning the **capacity of the citizens to make well-informed political decisions**. On the one hand, some followers considered **citizens as only being partially capable of making decisions**, which is one of the major obstacles to achieving an alternative (but desired) model of democracy. On the other hand, others suggested that **citizens are capable** and their alleged inability is often used by politicians as a pretext not to involve people in the decision-making processes.

NUDM core members have not supported a set of radical institutional changes other than suggesting that **institutions should cooperate more with CSO and the social movements**. This lack of reference reveals a minor interest of this movement in the preferred model of democracy. Nonetheless, they have often identified alternative forms of political participation and their importance for democracy, such as **non-institutional forms of participation, and participation through voluntary ad hoc actions**. In the words of IT NM F5:

> *We are leading actions of civil disobedience, quick actions against provincialism, actions in favour of abortion day. We have distributed leaflets on abortion or organised a flash mob. All these actions were quick actions* (IT NM F5).

NUDM's core members have unanimously agreed on the **importance of participation in social movements**. Although some participants had experienced involvement in political parties, they have positively assessed the important function of **participation in social movements, a possible path for empowering citizens**. According to IT NM C5:

> *It (the movement) represents dissent that is not given a voice… I could not find the channels to voice who I was and how I felt. I had to express myself. This movement gave me the opportunity to express my dissent and my being in public life in a different way from that of the traditional parties or traditional associations, and basically being there as a woman… We know the contradictions and women's problems* (IT NM C5).

NUDM has been relatively optimistic on the **movement's impact on citizen participation**, which has been **successful**. Participants regarded their action repertoire as being appealing at the local level, involving many people, especially among the younger generations (students):

> *We have managed to gradually bring more people together by undertaking some actions… for example, when we organised the latest flash mobs… some people… believe that it is actually an action of civil disobedience that can be useful…My opinion is that we have experienced the trust in our reality given by the students who have chosen us as interlocutors separate from other realities that have involved us… We are requested, we did a course with the 'Erasmus' students… They have involved us in university self-management... we are considered worthy interlocutors, anyway* (IT NM C3).

These statements clearly reflect a positive evaluation of the **movement's impact on citizen participation**, with NUDM seeking interaction with other organisations at the local level. Instead, they expressed a **negative perception regarding people's ability to make political decisions, considering them to be incapable**. In the words of IT NM C2:

> *Democratic participation is very important and would be very important if there was a base of preparation, as, perhaps, there had been up to 40 years, 30 years ago, when there was the Italian Communist Party (PCI)… but also the Christian Democrats (DC). The parties were structured… there were branches where we could discuss, where we studied, the citizens were prepared. Nowadays, the citizens are only deceived; they are only led by their stomachs and by their immediate and superficial emotions. Therefore, I cannot rely on citizens at the moment; I do not trust them* (IT NM C2).

The other core members did not disagree with this opinion, with the movement being likely to perceive **citizens as being incapable of taking sound political decisions**.

The NUDM followers have shown a major degree of attachment to the representative institutions, without demanding any radical change in the model of democracy. Nonetheless, they have asked for some institutional changes, which revolve around closer **cooperation with CSO and social movements**. According to IT NM F3:

> *The movement has the force to change the narrative, the language. At a certain point, the institutions, politics, must take it into account. I occupy a public space that did not exist before, and now exists, and therefore, (the institutions) must necessarily deal with it* (IT NM F3).

They mainly agreed on this change, also linking the **role of social movements to an empowerment path for citizens**. In fact, the NUDM followers principally evaluated the citizens as being **partially capable of taking political decisions**, often blaming the (social) media for a lack of information. They have all adopted similar positions on the **citizens' ability,** underlining the **need for empowering them**. They have proposed a series of paths for achieving this empowerment. Firstly, some participants suggested a generalised **need for more information and knowledge for citizens**. Secondly, they agreed on the emancipatory power of the social movements, which represent a key mechanism for **citizen empowerment**. They claim that **social movements may empower citizens** by creating new narratives within society, achieving cultural transformation. IT NM F2 expressed its position on this:

> *I think that, in part, they (the movements) create a voice. I think that their strength, rather than providing a voice, is to create a new one… They are able to create and not only to organise something that already exists, as well as creating other narratives about things. They have a power for this … I cannot fail to recognise that the language that they use is also spoken by many people…I really think that (movements) have the strength to give them those words somehow* (IT NM F2).

3. Conclusion

The two movements have shown a strong similarity in their organisational paradigms. NUDM and XR have defined their organisations as being decentralised/horizontal, with inclusive membership. They seem to have encouraged more deliberative practices, actively involving everyone in decision-making, rejecting formal procedures. This is not surprising, as social movements have traditionally based their actions on informal organisational networks (Diani and Bison 2004), with both NUDM and XR fitting into this pattern.

Instead, the two movements have revealed major differences in their attitudes to trust and distrust. XR core members and followers have identified the conditional positive effect of mistrust, which may play a corrective role in society. Furthermore, they have linked the widespread mistrust towards institutions to the ability to set in motion a process of institutional reform, potentially leading to a more participatory model of democracy. However, they are aware of the risks of authoritarian shifts associated with the spread of societal distrust, thus identifying the capacity of movements to develop trust building. They perceive the social movements as fundamental devices to enhance trust

among citizens, by amending and correcting the institutions. It is worth noting that their attitudes to (dis)trust have been constantly mediated by their critical orientations towards the existing institutional format, which constrain citizen participation and, therefore, bring about societal distrust. On the contrary, NUDM activists and followers have a mixed attitude towards the role and functions of (dis)trust. In many cases, core members and followers identified the negative role of distrust, which can spur citizen resignation and, in more extreme cases, destroy society. In fact, they have underlined the need of movements to cooperate with the institutions as a mechanism of trust-building. This represents an underlying divergence from XR, revealing more pragmatic attitudes among the NUDM core members and followers. On the one hand, the activists have called for (instrumental) institutional cooperation to enhance trust, referring to their experience and achievements at the local level. On the other hand, the followers fear that movements may nurture distrust, demanding institutional cooperation to reinforce the representative institutions.

The two movements have shared some important features concerning their trusted and mistrusted actors. For example, XR and NUDM have especially trusted local actors and institutions. Again, NUDM has confirmed its local orientation, a constant among the core members, who completely ignored national actors during their discussion. Their endorsement of the local institutions and organisations is not a principled one, but instead is conditioned by shared policy objectives, as in the case of LHA, which provided wide room for cooperation. This institutional cooperation has been a cornerstone in the movement's strategy, allowing them to gain visibility and lead collective actions at the local level. The NUDM activists and followers have also expressed trust in the social movements, with the XR core members not directly mentioning this kind of actor. However, the NUDM followers have shown a different orientation to the activists, overriding the local actors, but trusting in some national actors, such as the Constitutional Court and the President of the Republic.

More surprisingly, XR has also shown a greater level of trust towards local actors, with both activists and followers mainly agreeing on this latter point. However, this level of trust has not reflected a strong willingness to cooperate with such institutions, as in the NUDM's case. Indeed, XR expressed a sceptical attitude to institutional cooperation, which is rejected in principle, but mainly operates at a symbolic level. Instead, the trust in local actors has probably mirrored XR's normative view of democracy, with local institutions being the closest to the citizens and, potentially, allowing for a greater popular involvement and participation. This movement has specifically distrusted national actors, such as governmental institutions, but has displayed mixed feelings concerning international actors. In particular, trust involving the EU has sparked disagreements among the core members, with the majority expressing a marked distrust. This is partially inconsistent with the cosmopolitan nature of XR, profiling itself as a transnational

movement. Nevertheless, all the activists have expressed principled support for international cooperation by trusting international actors, such as the United Nations (UN), but not the EU.

Even if the two movements have shared a general perception on the trust and distrust of citizens, it is worth underlining some important distinctions between the two. XR activists and followers have mainly indicated political parties and governmental institutions as core objects of distrust among citizens. This movement has expressed its rejection of representative democracy, warranted by the widespread citizen distrust of these intermediary institutions. They have not shown any major disagreement on this, perceiving public opinion as being unanimous in distrusting these actors, which have failed to carry out their representative functions. NUDM followers have shared a similar attitude on trust/distrust, but draw a dichotomous distinction. In their view, citizens have aligned themselves along the left-right dimension, with right-wing citizens trusting political parties and distrusting social movements, and with left-wing citizens distrusting political parties and trusting social movements.

As for the changes to be implemented at the different levels of government, XR and NUDM have shown an unexpected degree of convergence. They have both made strong calls for much-needed dialogue with citizens and, generally, for getting closer to the citizens. XR activists have been more critical of each governmental level, showing their more systemic protest, while NUDM have taken more moderate positions. However, NUDM followers were not lacking in strong references to national institutions, which require changes to restore the trust, especially by improving the level of representativeness and coherence among politicians, who should be more transparent, less partisan and more careful with their social media usage.

The two movements have displayed some remarkable differences in their preferred models of democracy, and have demanded different changes to guarantee greater citizen participation. Furthermore, they diverge somewhat with respect to their perception of the citizens' ability to make political decisions, offering different solutions for their empowerment. XR activists and followers have clearly leaned towards a more direct model of democracy, with citizen participation and decision-making powers deemed crucial to democracy. Invariably, they have all proposed changes in the legal framework to encourage participation, and establishing the tools for more direct citizen participation. XR wishes to bring about a radical institutional shift, relaxing the typical constraints of representative democracy towards citizen participation. Nonetheless, most of the followers and activists have perceived citizens as being partially capable of making political decisions. According to some of them, these citizens' limitations may hamper being able to implement these institutional changes for an alternative model of democracy. Moreover, core members have acknowledged the limited impact that their movement has had on the citizens, failing to spread its messages to the general populace. Nonetheless, they mainly believe that the movements are strongly instrumental in empowering citizens, who also need to be more proactive themselves. XR followers have shown greater

internal divisions regarding citizens' ability to make political decisions, with one participant advocating for people to be made ready for involvement in the political decision-making process. Indeed, the followers have been more radical than the core members to call for institutional change, being in favour of a participatory and direct model of democracy.

NUDM activists are less concerned with the models of democracy, are not aiming for radical institutional changes, but rather emphasising their alternative repertoire of actions and their positive impact on citizen participation. They have underlined the importance of non-institutional forms of participation, and participation through voluntary ad hoc actions. In their view, this set of actions are conducive for the movement to successfully impact citizen participation at the local level. Again, this movement has shown a notable propensity to establish a locally based network, creating synergies with the community and associations. In some domains, NUDM seems to share some characteristics with the LULU movement, pursuing the (policy) objectives of their local community. They have displayed a negative assessment of citizens' ability to take well-informed political decisions, identifying the social movements as being more apt to empower citizens. The followers have shared some positions of the core activists, though they have insisted more on the institutions cooperating more with the social movements. Indeed, they have been less troubled by the structural changes in the democratic model, endorsing the representative institutions.

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Trust and Distrust as the Assets of New Social movements in Poland

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Poland

About 43 percent of Polish citizens are members of civil society organisations or a social movement (Bożewicz, 2020). The most common form of civic engagement is broadly understood charity work - in particular for children and adults struggling with life difficulties such as poverty, illnesses and disabilities, or participation in educational organisations and self-governing bodies (ibid.). Accordingly, in 2016 only about 6 percent of Poles reported they had taken part in protest activity over a 12-month period (Grasso and Giugni, 2016), and this number remained at the same level in 2018 (ESS). However, general engagement in work in the CSOs among Poles has been constantly increasing since 2000 (Bożewicz, 2020). Moreover, current studies challenge the notion of Poles' low levels of civic engagement, pointing to widespread participation in low-key and informal practices (Jacobsson and Korolczuk, 2017).

The social movements' scene in Poland is characterised by the presence of some organisations with a long-standing tradition, mostly from the communist time, such as children's and youth-oriented associations (*Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci*[30], *Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego*[31]), or welfare organisations (*Polski Komitet Pomocy Społecznej*[32], *Polski Związek Emerytów Rencistów i Inwalidów*[33], *Związek Sybiraków*[34]) and the organisations which were established in the late '80s, during the collapse of the communist system (*labour union "Solidarność", Helsińska Fundacja Praw Człowieka*[35], *Fundacja Pogranicze*[36], etc.). There are also numerous large civil society welfare, pro-democracy and anti-discriminatory organisations, established in the '90s, which shaped the social

[30] Children's Friends Association

[31] Polish Scouting and Guiding Association

[32] Polish Committee of Social Assistance

[33] Polish Association of Pensioners and Disabled People

[34] "Sybiraks'" Association

[35] Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

[36] Borderland Foundation

movement scene in Poland (*Polska Akcja Humanitarna*[37]*, Centrum Praw Kobiet*[38]*, Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy*[39]*,* etc).

This scene has been undergoing significant changes since 2015, when Law and Justice (PiS) came into power. Far-reaching reforms, introduced by a right-wing populist government, sparked massive protests. Women's rights and natural environment problems have become triggers of political activism (Piotrowski, 2020). In September 2016, the All-Polish Women Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet, OSK) was founded in response for plans to restrict the abortion law in Poland. On 3 October 2016, over 140 protests were organised throughout Poland with 98,000 participants (Nowosielska-Krassowska, 2016). In 2020, when the Constitutional Tribunal, led by PiS-elected judges, ruled that abortion, due to foetal maldevelopment, violates the constitution, protest outbreaks took place in over 400 Polish cities (Kuźniar, 2020). In autumn 2020, protestors experienced police violence, including tear-gas use and physical abuse (OKO.Press, 2020). Other well-attended protests in Poland after 2015 were aimed at changes in the judicial system in July 2017, and against large-scale tree harvesting in a protected natural park in the Białowieża region (Piotrowski, 2020). Simultaneously, local protests, as well as development of LGBTQI movements against PiS'es homophobic initiatives in Poland took place. In several cities, pride marches were organised, with a record number of pride events in 2019 (*Miłość Nie Wyklucza*, 2019). Activists struggle with homophobic violence from nationalist groups (e.g., attacks on marches in Lublin and Białystok), and local authorities (creating LGBTQI-free zones).

Overall, since 2015, political polarisation has increased and activism has often revolved around 'tribal identities' (Kubicki, 2019), since many social movements place themselves as either supporters or opponents of a governing party and its reforms. On the one hand, radical right-wing organisations and movements with anti-liberal discourse have gained more power. They often follow a nationalist agenda, locating Polish national identity in Catholic dogmas (Cipek, Lacković, 2019). Some of them (incl. 'Opus Dei') turned out to be connected to an international movement of right-wing organisations with its headquarters in Latin America. On the other hand, opposing movements for minority and women's rights, also targeting such judicial and educational institutions, have been developed in response to policy reforms introduced by PiS.

Over recent years, there has also been a period of alternative urban movements' development. Their focus is mainly on infrastructure, tenancy rights or the natural environment. They neither have a mass character, nor the ability to organise big protests. Rather, urban activists work through shaping public debate in the media and on the Internet (Kubicki, 2019), and by taking direct actions in local communities.

[37] Polish Humanitarian Action

[38] Women's Rights Centre

[39] The Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity

1.2 Case studies and organisation of research

The two social movements selected as case studies for this analysis are: All-Polish Women Strike (OSK) and Polish Smog Alert (PAS).

OSK was created in 2016 to oppose the government's attempt to ban abortion. Since then, it has developed into an umbrella organisation working alongside local activists from different locations in Poland. OSK has actively organised massive protests every time issues surrounding banning abortion have resurfaced. The movement's leading unit is a Strategic Group (*Grupa Strategiczna*) that coordinates the work of local activists, and provides them with financial, psychological and legal support. In November 2020, OSK also established the Consultative Council with the purpose of creating legal proposals to improve social situations in Poland.

Polish Smog Alert (PAS) is also an umbrella organisation associating with almost 50 local branches of Smog Alerts (LAS). Its first local units were established in 2015, followed by collective endeavours to coordinate local actions. Local Smog Alerts are active foremostly in big cities where they pursue solutions to provide better air quality and implement air quality protection standards. PAS's activists work mainly through direct informational actions aimed at local citizens, with use of their own Internet websites and social media, but they also cooperate with local authorities in order to provide legal changes.

For this research, two individual interviews and four focus-group interviews were conducted. Both movements' spokespersons took part in individual interviews, ca. 45 mins long, conducted by phone in April 2021. In both cases, interviewees were contacted thanks to personal contacts.

Two focus-group interviews were conducted with each social movement. In both cases, we can speak of only a slight differentiation between the 'leaders' and 'followers' among interviewees. This is due to both movements having a similar geographical structure: they consist of numerous local groups of activists who act highly independently, whereas major actions are proposed by a coordinating group. However, the local activists can hardly be called "followers", as they proactively organise local actions targeting local issues. Thus, in the case of OSK, the first focus group consisted of people working in the Strategic Group, and the second one was made up of local activists from a few cities and towns in Poland. As to PAS, the first group consisted of activists from a city where the movement's actions are very salient, whereas participants in the second group interview were activists of local Smog Alert branches from diverse locations in Poland. We used various methods of contacting our interviewees. Personal contacts and social media were the most efficient ones. Invitations to participate in the research were sent to activists via private messages to their movements' profiles. The biggest issue in the recruitment process was activists' time availability, as many of them work in movements in their free time.

In total, 20 interviewees participated in the research. Twelve of them identify as women, eight as men. Most of them were between 30 and 50 years old, with higher education degrees. Only a few of them were employed in their movements. Others were combining their paid work (sometimes in more than one workplace) with activism. Focus group interviews were conducted online in May and June 2021, each lasting approximately 2 hours.

All three researchers have been involved in interviews and the coding process. Coded files were shared with other team members in order to compare. Differences in coding were discussed during team meetings, which led to reaching the common interpretation and intercoder agreement. Preliminary results were discussed among Polish team members.

2. Analysis of the focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

OSK identifies itself as a social movement without an official legal entity. Activists of the movement only established a foundation in 2019 to operate their bank account. The role of the foundation is to organise crowdfunding, collect donations and provide other social movements with grants and financial support.

OSK organised and coordinated protests on 3rd October 2016, when two draft **laws on abortion** were discussed in Polish parliament. In the individual interview, the core activist of the movement highlighted that most importantly for the movement's formation was the **backlash of conservative groups and communities** which led to further waves of protests in October 2016. Since then, OSK has worked in the field of **women's rights** through protests, demonstrations, but also training programmes for activists.

The structure of the movement can be described as two-tier. The aforementioned Strategic Group consists of nine women. Their role is to coordinate and support local groups, run the movement's social media accounts, and contact media or other social movements. On a local level, there are groups of activists in different localities, also abroad. Between 2016 and 2020, the number of those groups rose from 150 to almost 500. However, in some localities, there are just single activists working with OSK.

Local groups have great autonomy in their actions. They are free to take up their own actions if they meet the movement's postulates. Activists can also cooperate on the local level with other social movements, organisations, or political parties and politicians. At the level of the Strategic Group, such cooperation is perceived as rather impossible.

OSK focuses on four postulates: **reproductive rights, violence prevention, state secularism and women's economic rights.** Our interviewee described OSK as anti-establishment and mass movement. After the wave of protests in 2020, the Consultative Council

was established, with the purpose of creating a programme for social change in Poland in areas such as women's and minority rights, education, work and climate.

PAS was established in 2015 as a cooperation platform of three 'smog alerts' – groups from southern Poland. In 2020, almost 50 local groups were active under the umbrella of PAS. Neither organisation has formal legal status.

The structure of the movement is also two-tiered. Countrywide, PAS monitors draft laws, **proposes its own solutions, and evaluates government's decisions in the field of smog prevention**. Moreover, it coordinates countrywide actions. Local smog alerts work through direct actions, such as petitions and demonstrations. They are open to participating in decision-making processes, and to cooperate with local authority agencies. Social media are used as an informational tool - to communicate with citizens and other smog alerts.

PAS highlights the importance of public visibility of local activists in their communities. New local groups are required to avoid activity in political parties and business in those industries affecting air quality. Cooperation with local movements and organisations with similar aims is possible.

Our interviewee described PAS as **a movement with one aim, which is to reduce polluted air in Poland**. In his opinion, this goal could be achieved e.g., by introducing stricter fuel quality standards, limiting vehicular traffic in the cities, and decommissioning low-quality wood and coal stoves.

The target group of the movement is broadly described by our interviewee as "all people living in Poland" because everyone should be concerned about the problem of low air quality. Actions of the movement are also target authorities, both at the local and central levels.

2.2 Structure of the movements

As mentioned above, both movements have a **decentralised formal structure**. In both cases, the structure is two-tiered, with local groups enjoying great autonomy. The OSK is divided into: a central unit, a Strategic Group and local units.

Similarly, in the case of the anti-smog movement PAS, there is a central body which i.a. checks if new local initiatives calling themselves 'smog alerts' meet the criteria of being apolitical and having no connection with businesses affecting air quality. On the central level, PAS also serves as a platform for sharing experiences and exchanging support with local activists. Thus, in terms of the **functional structure** of both movements, it is partly predetermined, as it is clearly divided into two tiers. Moreover, central bodies have a **predetermined structure**, though are partly also **merit-based structures.** For instance, in the case of OSK, our interviewees emphasised that Strategic Group members' tasks are clearly divided and depend on their abilities and availability.

In case of both movements at the local level (lower tier of organisation), their functional structure is dynamic and both **practice-based and merit-based.** During FGIs, local OSK leaders pointed out that the movement's modus operandi was based on flexibility, and free choice grants them autonomy. Specific factors which were pointed out within practice-and merit-related issues that impact movements' structures were first, the size of the municipality, and consequently - the local, social and political environment. In the larger municipalities, local activist groups consisted of ca. 20 people, resulting in tasks being shared by group members. In smaller localities, there are fewer group members, which results in the need to run more comprehensive tasks, greater activist flexibility, as well as the need to adjust to time availability. However, since the number of group members in a given locality may vary over time, task division may change, accordingly. Second, interviewees from both movements agreed that time availability is a crucial factor for their engagement. Also, in this regard, interviewees highlighted changes over time, as some of those whose work at the local level revealed having experience burnout, which in turn can lead to changes in their engagement with the movement. Third, interviewees explained that citizens' high expectations also influence the organisation of tasks at the local level. For instance, interviewees argue that citizens insist that it should be them, local activists, organising actions:

> *For sure, there is social pressure on us to organise these protests. In our town, after we stopped doing that because few people were coming, others were texting us regarding when the next protest would be. And it's like that: every single month with some new people wanting to keep on going out and expecting us to do something. They won't do anything on their own; they just expect us to do it for them, to organise everything* (PL OSK FG1P4).

In terms of decision making, in both researched movements, a mix of **decisions taken by core members** and **affected community** decision style was present. In the case of OSK, it is the Strategic Group which decides on dates of its nationwide protests. When making these choices, they take into account the general political situation in their country. OSK FGI interviewees emphasised that their similar ways of thinking and worldviews help them reach common decisions in the Strategic Group, through discussion. However, decisions on whether to organise the protest at the local level, and what specific form it will have, are up to local activists. Moreover, local activists also organise local actions independently from the Strategic Group's decisions, as they run local information campaigns, local protest actions and/or educational events.

In the case of OSK, some of the interviewees expressed **negative attitudes towards formal decision making** by the Strategic Group. An example was given of a situation with the European recovery fund. The Strategic Group of OSK, collaborating with the Left party, supported PiS, the governing party, by issuing a negative statement on an EU fund. However, some local group leaders were unsupportive of this stance, and openly expressed a different opinion. In a similar fashion, some interviewees also stated that they are criticised by their supporters because of establishing a Consultative Council

within OSK. The council's work on problems other than abortion rights was interpreted in citizens' opinions as conflicting with what the OSK stood and fought for in the beginning. This is how our discussion partner expressed it:

> *After what happened in my town, I think that leaders [the Strategic Group] antagonised many people. For instance, it was too fast that they made many new postulates, instead of fighting with the abortion ban and continuing only with that (...) People resented the Strike and said they don't agree with some of the new postulates, and if we continue this way, they won't come to the protests. It's hard to say why, but perhaps it was because of LGBTQI and church [conflicts]. It is really hard to do anything on that topic in my town* (PL OSK FG1P1).

Membership in both movements can be described as ranging from **fully inclusive** to **conditionally inclusive**. In particular, interviewees from PAS expressed their openness to new members, but underlined obstacles for political activism in their municipalities. PAS demands that members not be engaged in political party activities.

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

Our FGI interviewees underlined that both personal and social **trust is positive,** as it gives people a sense of security. Our discussion partners pointed out that they feel safe and well taken care of with reliable institutions that fully honour their duties. Consequently, since activists do not feel trusted by authorities and institutions, they seek to provide a trusting and trustworthy tight-knit environment within social movements.

Yet, it was argued that both trust and **distrust may be positive** in many ways. Interviewees highlighted numerous functions of trust and distrust in their working context. Firstly, it was argued that **distrust can mobilise or unite citizens** to take up actions, especially in relation to authorities and politicians. This is how an OSK member explained it:

> *I find it obvious that I trust neither the system, nor the institutions that represent the system. That's the reason why we are in the Strike. And it's obvious that my trust in public institutions has melted with time. As a little girl, if I were in trouble, I would go to the police officer directly. Now I would give them a wide berth* (PL OSK FG2P1).

Thus, secondly, as a consequence of distrust in political institutions, the trust of its members is the **basic foundation of the movement**, and enables activists to act and expand their activity. That facet of trust is also important for inner relations in social movements. Trustful activists are more open to networking with other civil society groups with similar aims:

> *While we talk about people we work with or who take up activism, I can say from my field - they trust us. People often come to me (...), those who started*

in autumn, who have just started to act, they have their asylum here in the Strike and they often come, ask for help, ask for some workshops and other things. I think they trust us, otherwise they wouldn't come (PL OSK FG2P4).

However, thirdly, it was underlined that **distrust may be destructive** for society in general, as well as for activists. Interviewees pointed to a sort of distrust spill over in which low trust levels in society may translate to a distrust in the activists themselves, ultimately leading to their disillusionment:

If we take our free time for such activity, social engagement for the common good, after all, and we hear questions about how much we get paid, who pays us and so on, other accusations, it definitely burns out our will to act for people; it takes away our energy (PL PAS FG4PM).

Speaking of **trust addresses**, interviewees expressed different opinions. On the one hand, PAS's members expressed trust in local **government institutions** such as libraries, schools or the municipal police that help them to organise informational meetings about smog problems. On the other hand, the (national) police, prosecutor's office or some parts of the judiciary system (central institution) are seen as completely untrustworthy by OSK activists because of their politicisation. Interviewees expressed the idea of a reciprocal mistrust: they were convinced that citizens do not trust mentioned institutions because these institutions do not trust them.

Both movements' members shared concerns about **trusting political parties.** Interviewees mentioned only particular politicians (especially those known personally or with whom they have worked) as trustworthy, and assumed it is justified to be distrustful towards parties as a whole. They declare being open to work with politicians if their aims and worldviews are similar to their own. However, due to limited trust and a need to continue being perceived as trustworthy, PAS prefers to leave party politics out of the equation:

If we consider that we (society) are divided fifty-fifty [according to the interviewee app. 50% of Poles are pro-government and app. 50% is anti-government], then being apolitical is simple math - we have more society on our side than if we were focused on one political alternative, one party or the other, doesn't matter which (PL PAS FG4P5).

Similarly, an ambiguous relation with a tendency to distrust was presented in regard to **other institutions**, foremostly – the police. One of interviewees described this attitude as "coercion to trust" - activists cooperate with the police in order to guarantee safety during protests, especially from violent far-right groups, but are also a target of police repression, including identification, interrogations and lawsuits, and they thus find the police rather untrustworthy:

So, it's simply a paradox – we have to trust the police in terms that they will protect us from Nazis. And there is the other side – we can't trust them because we don't know if they will chase us after. It is a coercion to trust (PL OSK FG1P3).

This relation was also described as dynamic, as presented in the following expression:

I mean, I miss the trust I once had; I really trusted our town police. Whatever happened, they always tried to help and support women who were going out protesting. As I said, till last October. I had different situations; for example, some groups with radically different views had come [to a march] or nationalists who ran into the crowd and started to beat us up. And the police used to help us in such situations. Nowadays, I am afraid they would stand in line with those people, or not react at all (PL OSK FG2P4).

Speaking of **citizens' trust** in public institutions, activists of both movements perceive the primarily **social movements** – in particular members of their own organisations or social movements as (rare examples of) trustworthy actors in Poland. That trust results in mutual help or taking actions together:

I know many people from different NGOs (...). I see them and most of them, or even almost all of them are people with an authentic urge to act, and they do it for something. (...) I fully trust them because those people are honest, caring about the case they fight for, just as it is in Polish Smog Alert or local activists (PL PAS FG3P3).

However, speaking about **citizens' distrust,** our interviewees were unanimous that in Poland, distrust is predominant in society:

In my opinion, trust of one Pole to other Poles is on a very low level. I would describe it as (...) one of the lowest in the European Union, at least. And I deem people having trust only in themselves or their closest groups: such as family, possibly friends. But when speaking more generally, about people living in the same city, or in Poland, there is actually a lack of trust. And that might be the reason why there are many social problems in Poland, for example many people don't believe that others will obey the rules (PL PAS FG4P2).

Accordingly, Polish citizens were presented as not trusting public institutions in general, and as **distrustful to political parties** in particular. This was expressed in a following way:

We have a very low levels of trust in parties in general, thinking that all parties are crooked, full of cronyism, nothing but pure evil, and everyone is up to getting to the trough. If people continue to perceive parties like that, nothing will change (PL OSK FG1P3).

Although, as mentioned, both social movements have found themselves trustworthy and have given examples of citizens trusting them, interviewees also pointed out that there are various situations in which citizens express **distrust in social movements**, including their movements. For instance, PAS activists described their informational actions supported by scientific arguments and focusing on one aim as evidence-based and effective, yet they were saying that some people oppose them, and regard PAS as a radical leftist ecological organisation. A similar issue was raised by OSK members. They pointed out that becoming a large, internally diverse organisation, extending their aims by the Consultative Council, might be one of the reasons why some citizens distrust them.

Asked about **cooperation with governmental institutions**, interviewees mostly pointed to their work with local government agents. OSK activists mentioned "coercive" cooperation with the police which they treat **instrumentally,** as they need the police's help to guarantee safety during protests. Some of OSK's local members also cooperated with local governing bodies, e.g., town council. Moreover, PAS's activists, as mentioned above, explained that they cooperate with local institutions (schools, libraries, municipal police) in organising educational events, or installing air-quality monitoring sensors. Their target groups are also local authorities; hence, they meet with local authorities and other interested actors, participate on commissions and panels, and work on solutions for air-quality issues. This is how they explained the rationale of this cooperation:

> *We are able to come to the politicians, other activists or just people and say: "Listen up, let's work some solutions together, let's think what the best way is". We neither come with a ready formula, nor tell people how to live and what to do. (...) if we say that we need to change the heat source, we say what the technical alternatives are. And we don't prefer any of them. We just show pros and cons. That's all* (PL PAS FG3P3).

Yet, our discussion partners from PAS argued that cooperation with local governments **does not affect trust** in a straightforward manner. Namely, issues arise when activists criticise decisions taken by local authorities. Interviewees pointed out that they cannot fully trust municipalities, so consequently they function also as a watchdog - monitoring published information and verifying it. Some of them accused local authorities of opportunism, taking actions for self-serving reasons, and openly express negative opinions about them in the public sphere:

> *Repeatedly, we had situations where it seemed we had reached the common ground, that they would start to work with us. And then, it turns out they are very sensitive to the criticism - clerks and authorities. And unfortunately, as we are sincere in what we say and think about changes or lack of changes, despite authorities claiming there are some changes, something is being done - when there is a need, we criticise them. And then it turns out we have no one to talk with because authorities feel offended* (PL PAS FG3P2).

Moreover, as mentioned above, both movements **cooperate with NGOs** that have similar aims. Such cooperation is mostly based on personal contacts, such as people working in similar fields who know each other, or who establish contacts while cooperating:

> *In my city, there are a few activists who work in the human rights field, and everyone does everything. We tackle all things. But strictly to identify with the Women's Strike – it is only me because others are from the 'Razem' party, or KOD (Committee for the Defence of Democracy). We make actions together and I haven't created a solid group* (PL OSK FG1P3).

PAS activists also pointed out that they cooperate with pro-ecology groups in the Polish Catholic church. Their joint action "God gives life, smog takes it away" consisted of poster campaigns in numerous parishes, countrywide. Our interviewees highlighted that the Catholic church is a closed organisation, rarely cooperating with secular groups. Yet, what helped them to establish such cooperation was: constant work on one aim, avoiding politicisation of their agenda and, most importantly, personal contacts inside Catholic organisations. Interviewees mentioned that such cooperation on the local level is effective. Once again, it is based mostly on personal contacts. This derives from personal trust on the local level, and results in systematic trust-building to social movements:

> *But the easiest way was through local activists. (…) They are Catholics; they are active people, and parish priests trust them. So, they can put the table outside the church and collect signatures on anti-smog petitions. One leader on Sundays gives sermons, he literally steps up to the pulpit and gives smog-related sermon; the priest allowed him. (…) Such things slowly allow the church to trust us and through that we can reach the groups which we would never have reached in any way, unless we had started to dance to disco polo with Jacek Kurski, then we could have made it* (PL PAS FG3P3).

That cooperation is treated mostly instrumentally, yet it is **trust beneficial** – it increases the trust of religious people, trust which they would not be able to gain in any other way:

> *And why the Catholic church? The answer is prosaic. The Catholic church has a big base of believers, and those believers are not people in the cities. Those are people from smaller towns, villages, those are people who have old furnaces and who are interested in liquidating. So that's our target group, speaking like a marketing agent. We were looking for a megaphone to communicate with that target group. (…) So, it is a whole social sector which was, and still is, omitted by NGOs, either those climate-oriented ones, or others, for obvious reasons* (PL PAS FG3P3).

Interviewees from PAS state that cooperating with authorities on both local and central levels is crucial for them. They are not prejudiced regarding working with PiS govern-

ment or politicians, who are unpopular among the activists of Polish civil society organisations. Such cooperation with government institutions sometimes helps them to put pressure on local authorities:

> *This cooperation is a must. And until now, if we managed to acquire some contacts, then we use them when it is possible to gain something because it is impossible any other way* (PL PAS FG3P5).

When speaking about their **cooperation with political parties,** PAS's interviewees were also often addressing the municipal level. Activists from bigger cities pointed out that local governmental bodies are staffed by active politicians, therefore working with authorities translates to enforced cooperation with them. Thus, it is important to clearly state openness to any interested actors with shared goals, although, as mentioned, PAS declares non-partisanship. In turn, OSK's local activists mentioned being supported by some members of the parliament during protests in autumn, 2020. Some interviewees allowed local politicians to bring their accessories of visual identity (flags, banners, etc.); others decided to ban them. OSK is rather distrustful of politicians, perceiving only a few to be trustworthy. Both movements mentioned that **cooperation with parties does not really affect trust**, mostly because activists perceive politicians' involvement as instrumental – they argued that in fact, politicians somehow 'use' social movements to image-build:

> *I am afraid that on the central level, nationwide, there is a hard hat. I can count on my fingers how many representatives on the central level, members of the parliament really listen to people, do something and come out in support of the people* (PL OSK FG2P4).

Our interviewees in both movements were unanimous about **what can be done** by public institutions in order to enhance social trust. The most frequent answer was **education of the citizens** on issues important to social movements and citizens' rights in democratic society. Activists also expected **institutions to be more approachable** and **transparent** by decentralising institutions, and providing clear separation of powers on the central level. One of the biggest concerns was the politicisation of the police influencing freedom of social movements to take up actions. Social movements expect politicians to be **honest, reliable** and competent, especially in decision-making and keeping promises. In doing so, it is important to keep in contact with citizens, and to be open to their initiatives. As for **European institutions'** role in trust building, activists expect them to be **closer to citizens** – by supporting grassroots' movements and initiatives, as well as to be independent from authorities. EU support was perceived as very important due to its being much more stable and predictable than a single country's politics, and as a means of guaranteeing more democratic independence.

When speaking about their own **capacities to enhance trust in society,** both movements see a real potential for trust building in being as close to citizens as possible. However,

as shown in a subsequent part of the report, although researched activists are unanimous that social movements can bring about more trust in society, in particular, OSK's leaders showed important **limitations to enhancing citizens' trust.** What they perceived as problematic was the rapid growth of their movement. On the one hand, they perceived this process as a chance to build a network of local groups to stay close to citizens, not only in big Polish cities, and thus to be more efficient at building trust. On the other hand, they were afraid that the bigger the movement, the more internal tensions would arise that, in turn, would undermine trust and trust-building processes. This was described in the following manner:

> *The Strike is splitting a little. I have a concept that one can trust people, but if something starts to be an oversized organisation, it is going to happen because of the number of people. The bigger the organisation, the harder it is to keep trust because it is harder to keep everything clear and transparent* (PL OSK FG1P3).

Although both movements witnessed capacity to enhance trust in **repairing institutions**, it needs to be underlined that repairing institutions does not mean changing existing institutions, but providing models of alternative citizens-led organisations which are non-partisan, close to citizens and develop evidence-based policy. For instance, PAS's activists highlight the importance of being focused on one aim in their relations with citizens, namely avoiding involvement in political discourse. As said, although they come from different backgrounds, they try to remain nonpartisan. Doing so enables them to gain the trust of different social groups, cooperate with heterogeneous organisations and raise awareness of the smog issue, as they perceive Polish society highly polarised:

> *So, we were and still are a rare example of an organisation where there are people ranging from religious Catholics and pro-lifers, to leftist feminists who go to marches. And those people are able to sit down at one table and talk. I greatly appreciate that. I personally have certain views, I vote for a certain party, but I appreciate that. Because nothing pisses me off in Poland more than those divisions* (PL PAS FG1P3).

Accordingly, grounding their actions in scientific evidence and expert knowledge is a crucial factor to being trustworthy. It helps to present a consistent narrative about the issue of air pollution in Poland. Activists noticed a change in social attitude towards the smog problem. At the time when PAS started its actions, air quality was perceived in the public sphere as something strongly related with a left-wing worldview. That approach has changed over time, yet interviewees recall being called 'eco-terrorists':

> *Just about every normal person knows now what Smog Alerts is about. Nobody says: 'They are lefties, right-wing or God knows what else' anymore. No. 'They are those people dealing with the smog; they want to do the job'. That's how we are perceived now. And I can see it through the media. We have*

strongly polarised the media in Poland. However, the media of all colours talk with the Alert or local Alerts (PL PAS FG3P3).

When speaking of the **role of social movements in trust building,** PAS's activists highlighted the importance of **cooperating with public institutions in** trust building. Such cooperation, though, cannot be contradictory to close relations with citizens. PAS's members expressed the need for freedom to criticise institutions without harming established cooperation ties. This concept does not always work in practice, as institutions often decide to end relations with activists because of negative opinions on their decisions. Being an independent organisation and cooperating with institutions is their way of building citizens' and institutional trust in the movement:

At the beginning, we were treated (...) as an organisation which is going to be quickly an election committee or some party, something like this. It took a long time for local politicians to figure out all we want is clear air. (...) And when they got it, and some time went by, then more trust on their side appeared. Because they understood we are not political competition; we just want something particular, to improve it. And then the trust appeared (PL PAS FG1P4).

A factor which OSK activists mentioned as a key to trust building was **direct action**, in which determination, engagement and great autonomy of the activists, especially at the local level, are at stake. Local leaders said that their persistent work is noticed by people in their communities, and is a reason to gain trust:

Actually, it seems citizens trust us more due to being equal to them, being their voice, not being politicians in suits who just stay still and pretend to be doing something, saying something. We are simply action-reaction; we do what people think, we are close to them and listen to them. I think people trust us, yet because of what is happening in Poland, people are divided. So, one side trusts us, the other criticises us hard and attacks us (PL OSK FG2P3).

Secondly, OSK's activists showed the relation between building citizens' trust in civil society organisations and **nurturing distrust** in politicised institutions. Once again, the role of local groups is highly important in that process, as they are bonding agents between citizens and leaders of OSK. Strategic Groups perceive their role as mostly being vocal about citizens' expectations for political and social change in Poland:

It seems to me that we teach distrust in government, public institutions. But on the other side, I hope that we teach people to trust each other. For instance, women can trust other women. (...) if we can't count on the government, the police, nor the party, then women should trust other women (PL OSK FG1P3).

To consolidate the dynamic structure of the movement, OSK organises social programmes about women's rights aimed at local communities. As they emphasise, they

do not want to be perceived only as a protest movement, but also as a key social movement that cooperates with other civil society groups and supports them in implementing social change:

> *I mean, trust in us will grow, if people see us doing other things - some social programmes that we started from scratch and are a type of work at a grass root level - not only going out to protest and going back home, after some shouting. The more we do programmes to support people on the ground level, the more trust we get. It seems to me people want to see that we are with them on the ground level and don't go out just to shout out* (PL OSK FG2P2).

Both movements mentioned **other activities**, in particular educational and informational activities, as very important in building trust. That activity has two directions. Their main purpose is to inform citizens about important issues through direct actions and social media activity. PAS focuses on educational campaigns about the influence of smog on the environment and health. They also inform about possible ways to obtain subsidies to eliminate old furnaces in households. OSK informs citizens about women's rights and legal effect of banning abortion. In order to do so, both movements need to observe the situation in their fields of interest. By doing so, they play a role they describe as being a "watchdog of public discourse".

2.4 Expertise

Speaking of model **experts' roles in decision** making in society, both researched social movements had somewhat divergent stances. PAS's activists unanimously regard **experts as authorities** and, as specified, further scientific expertise is essential to the movement's functioning.

On the contrary, the representatives of the Women's Strike are generally more wary of expert knowledge and its role in society. Their approach to expertise may be described as partly **pragmatic** and partly based on **other,** specific views. Namely, the followers' group members see expertise as something useful but, ultimately, not paramount. According to one of the interviewees, the contemporary struggle for women's rights in Poland is something unprecedented, hence established knowledge cannot serve as an absolute authority for the movement; the expertise is contextual:

> *Now, when I think about it (…), about (…) trusting experts and why I have a problem with it. I have a problem because lots of things we have been doing are new. Our area of action does not have an established history and experience… that could have produced experts in the field who would have been our guides (…). I do not trust anyone, only the [Women's] Strike* (PL WS-L).

> *It is not about (…) formal education; it is about the experience* (PL WS-L).

In terms of the **role of experts in the movement**, the local Smog Alerts' activists – in both focus groups – express a shared belief that scientific knowledge is a source of the movement's legitimacy in the eyes of the wider public, and thus **experts are the movement's authorities** but above all, they are members of the movement themselves. The interviewees claim that the Polish Smog Alert bases its actions (such as trust-building) on experts' knowledge:

> *We can speak about… the scientific studies proving the detrimental effects of smog on human life (…) Truth be told, the trust, what we are doing, our activities have been built on those studies* (PL PAS2).

Owing to the evidence base (or the support of scientific authorities), the movement remains 'something bigger', and raises awareness of the issue among the public (LSA2). The European Union is seen as an especially reliable institution when it comes to the research it provides:

> *[About] the European Union reports concerning air pollution in the EU… I do trust them. I am sure there are some [outside of the movement] who do not, and say it is all a big conspiracy and everything is made up, because I know some of them (…) But I trust it* (PL PAS2).

The Polish Smog Alert's adherence to the scientific consensus is strengthened by its relationship with experts, both internally and externally. Participants of the Warsaw-based focus indicate that not everyone qualifies as the former; an outside expert is generally a well-established scientist who serves as the movement's mentor, thus having both authority and an **advisory role**. Experts influence the PAS's message by providing scientific feedback and comments:

> *What we communicate is (…) commented, made more moderate and more scientific by him [an expert]. He straightens us out. (…) We just listen. When they [experts] tell us that the problem is more severe in one place, and less prominent in another – we focus on the bigger one first. (…) Without them, we would have been like babes in the woods* (PL PAS1).

At the same time, experts are an important part of the movement (including professors, technical specialists, and so on). The most prominent opinion among members of local branches of the PAS who are not specialists is that becoming an expert in the field is necessary to become an activist. The lack of knowledge is an entrance barrier; to overcome it, members must become experts themselves (PL PAS2):

> *All these years we have been learning. About the smog, its influence on health, the emissions, the stoves, all the topics… And we had to, more or less, learn about it (…)* (PL PAS2).

The Women's Strike structure is similar in that experts can serve both in leadership positions and as followers of the movement. However, rather than having a strong authority, they play a more **advisory role** as part of the Consultative Council (*Rada Konsultacyjna*). Among the group leaders, the most prevalent opinion is that they are completely sovereign in their decision-making:

> *They [experts] tell us (…) how are we perceived (…) what can we do to gather support and we treat it (…) as important information, a useful hint, but it is not a directive of any kind* (PL WS-L).

> *The Consultative Council as a body is not a grass-roots movement but (…) is dealing with creating ways to implement [our] demands [in the long term]* (PL WS-L).

For the Women's Strike activists, the relationship with other movements – such as Greenpeace – is also a source of expert knowledge. In this context, experts are the people who have organisational experience. In this vein, experience-sharing is vital for building the movement's capabilities.

2.5 Democracy and engagement

As such, no prominent differences of opinion can be observed between the focus groups on the issue of **the importance of voting**. It is perceived as **the most important form of political participation** by default. Thus, interviewees from Women's Strike refer to it in the following manner:

> *Q: Is it an important form of engagement?*
>
> *A1: Obviously yes.*
>
> *A2: We all vote. In my opinion, if you do not participate in elections, you have no right to complain or talk about politics.*
>
> *A3: It is so obvious to me that [I think] it should not even be mentioned* (PL WS-S).

Similarly Polish Smog Alarm activists express their belief that elections are an essential part of political action:

> *I think (…), it would be hard for you (the interviewer) to make any of our activists admit that they do not vote, that elections are stupid because the essence of our work as activists is civil society* (PL PAS1).

> *I guess we all vote, and we are all politically active as citizens* (PL PAS1).

Although voting is seen as indispensable, in the eyes of the interviewees it should not be the sole form of democratic engagement – its **other forms of political participation are also important**.

Speaking of **other forms of political participation**, the Women's Strike presents divergent opinions about direct involvement in existing **political parties**. Some interviewees (especially the local activists) argue that it is the only way to change things; others – those constituting the strategic group – wish to remain independent. Activists of the Polish Smog Alert, on the other hand, disagree over the precise strategy the movement should have to better influence the political process. Some participants prefer a more confrontational approach, while others would like it to be more conciliatory. In the latter scenario, politicians listening to the citizens' voices would help to increase public participation (PL PAS1).

Given the disappointment with traditional democratic procedures, especially the ones involving political parties, many interviewees expressed acceptance of direct actions **within social movements.** The interviewees, especially those representing the PAS, put a great deal of emphasis on making the people's voices heard through their activism, e.g., using petitions, election monitoring and educational activities:

> *We, as activists, can only be the voice of the people, make petitions and be active in various fields* (PL WS-S).

> *We also employ the instrument of petition, that is, we engage with the community to make them support our demands. We use the media extensively, trying to use it to publicise the issues (…)* (PL PAS1).

Using alternative tools, such as referenda, are discussed as well. According to one of the local Smog Alarm interviewees, employing referenda more frequently in Poland may create conditions for greater democratic participation:

> *In Switzerland, for example, referenda take place, I don't know, once a year. There, the citizens decide about various things, here the party which received support of 15% of society (…) decides about everything (…). Is this democracy? No, but it is what it is. I would support [more] referenda. Nowadays, you can do them via the Internet* (PL PAS2).

It was also emphasised that citizens can participate more through petitions, public consultations or referenda. Interviewees perceive tools of direct democracy to be useful in putting pressure on institutions. Also, attending protests is important to shape public opinion.

Overall, interviewees argued that citizens are **capable of making political decisions**, especially at the local level. However, both movements agreed that **citizens should be more proactive themselves**, especially in direct actions. Activists underline that both for

society in general and for their movements to be more effective, a greater political involvement of citizens is needed. As both movements identify as grass-root, citizens' participation is important to them to influence political discourse:

> *I think that the most desirable form of engagement is citizens' engagement. I don't mean NGOs, activists, people like us, but more like society in general. And putting pressure through protests, marches, just raising public opinion, talking about such issues. Why do I think like that? I noticed that, despite our actions, (...) we can't get through that political wall. (...) And that wall falls down only under social pressure* (PL PAS FG3P3).

Activists pointed out that lack of actions from citizens and institutions is also a reason for their burnout. On the one hand, citizens demand that social movements take up actions. Interviewees from OSK described high expectations of their local communities regarding taking up protest actions, despite low attendance or increased workload during the wave of protests in 2020. On the other hand, PAS's activists pointed out that lack of cooperation between them and public institutions is tiring and leads to withdrawal from activism. Some interviewees emphasised that poor cooperation is a result of the historical legacy of Poland. They argue that since Polish people had no influence on political and social reality for decades, low political efficacy and low political participation is still widespread in society nowadays. However, in recent months, our interviewees have noticed higher youth engagement, especially in actions addressing the climate crisis:

> *I see a problem in our homes, I mean that in Poland we barely talk about having an impact, to change something because the majority of the older generations say nothing's going to change, it was always like that, and now young people don't want to be involved. However, there is a group of young people acting very rapidly. (...) We have no narrative of having an impact on politicians because older generations, our parents, had no impact on politics so they are not used to it* (PL PAS FG3P1).

Our interviewees pointed out three ways of **institutional change towards citizens' participation**. First, **changing the legal framework to be more encouraging for participation** was emphasised. According to interviewees, institutions should simplify tools for better citizen and activist participation. That solution is strongly connected to difficulties in the cooperation of activists with institutions. Additionally, that participation ought to be used to include citizens' voices in governing. An important role of institutions is to include voices of the people who feel unheard, and respond to their needs:

> *It seems to me that (...) the answer is simple and trivial. (...) Authorities should listen to their voters, listen to what we have to say, and react to what we want. (...) Pay attention to what happened with the current ruling party, no*

matter who they are. They noticed and listened to that part of society, which felt unheard. And that is the measure of their success. Not my success, still it is a lesson we all need to learn as civil society (PL PAS FG3P3).

Secondly, institutions **should inform citizens more and better.** Information has to be clear and approachable to citizens in order to help them understand legal changes and how they influence their everyday lives. In the opinion of interviewees, change in the education system is important. They perceive the existing system as teaching useless information, and not the crucial skills necessary to become aware citizens. Easy access to information would also be productive for activists, as they would be able to spend less time on data and information gathering. Currently, access to information is extremely bureaucratic:

P5: And no wonder many people, who do not engage, have an 'it's impossible' approach. Indeed, if we look at ourselves, it's actually impossible. One truly needs tonnes of determination and time.

P2: But eventually it's possible.

P5: Okay, that's an exception that proves the rule. If sometimes something has been done locally, but it takes a lot of time and hundreds of letters, a crazy number of letters sent to the office just to make someone lift a finger and get to work, this is extremely discouraging, and for many new people who take some actions, it is really discouraging (PL PAS FG3).

Also, according to PAS, citizens need to be informed and interested in issues important to their communities to fully participate in governance. Some interviewees pointed out that the media are responsible for informing citizens about such matters:

I think we should get more approachable information about bills, about what such an act really means for average Kowalski. And such information campaigns should be intensified but, as I said, in simple terms. Not everyone is aware what some politician speaking means for them. I was a person like that before, not really interested in politics. I just didn't get it, I wasn't interested. And then it turns out that everything that happens up there, unfortunately influences us down here (PL PAS FG4P1).

Third, **other empowerment paths** were mentioned, mostly based on gradual change of political culture. Interviewees emphasised that once politicians are held more responsible for their actions, keep promises and develop a 'stronger moral compass', democracy will improve. In their opinion, unfulfilled promises are the main reason for citizens' disappointment and distrust in politicians, thus their low civic engagement:

I think our democracy is still immature. We are still learning about it. People are terribly disappointed. They vote and then are let down; they give up. The solution could be that the politicians follow some rules, have a strong moral

compass, to minimise the distrust which undermines civil society (PL OSK FG3P1).

PAS's activists also highlighted other empowerment paths, based on the need to have more ability to change policies more effectively. They argued that what discourages people from participation is the futility of the action to change institutions. They emphasised that on the one hand, they were relatively successful in changing social reception of the smog issue, i.a., by using social media to bring citizens' voices to authorities, and by giving a platform to express their opinions. On the other hand, activists feel that institutional resistance to cooperate in providing change is a reason for their dissatisfaction, and an obstacle to broader participation.

Strategic Group, OSK points out that nation-wide reach through local groups and the significance of women's rights topics are the reason for their successful impact on citizens' participation in civic society. Their postulates are the expression of citizens' expectations towards authorities. Local group leaders are critical of that approach, since they perceive extended postulates as dividing local communities.

3. Conclusions

Conducted interviews have shown that trust plays an important role in the action of both researched social movements. All-Poland Women's Strike (OSK) and Polish Smog Alarm (PAS) promote far-reaching environmental and social change in a context which they perceive as characterised by a high level of citizens' distrust in politics, and citizens' distrust in any kind of politicised action.

Overall, trust and distrust transpired to be assets for the researched movements, optimising the efficacy of action. First, citizens' distrust in parties and politics at national level, and distrust in many public institutions, are triggers to movements' bottom-up action. Their action is both the result of the state's absent policies or wrongdoings, and activists' lack of hope that the state would be able to implement desired change. The lack of trust is the state's good will, and its political and administrative capacity to promote desired change encourages activists to act. Simultaneously, what is particularly relevant in the case of OSK, whose action is openly anti-governmental, is for social movements to deliberately nurture their current and potential members not to trust the state and its institutions, and to engage in a bottom-up action organised independently.

Second, trust is the 'glue' that binds members and supporters of social movements together. Our interviewees were unanimous in their belief that, although (and because) they cannot trust the government and its institutions, they do trust other members of their movement. This direct interpersonal trust, and trust in their own group members, is vital in organising collective action by the movements. Third, establishing trust and

distrust relations is subject to movements' strategic action. Deliberate networking – creating relations with people and institutions at the local level with whom some trust is possible, and then developing 'even more trusting' relations, was acknowledged as a part of asset building. It was clearly present in the action of both social movements, although more relevant in PAS's case. Similarly, deliberate choices about not trusting some institutions were functional for both movements. These choices aimed at maintaining movements' anti-political image and their reliability, but were also meant to protect movements from getting involved in local political conflicts. Such an approach was present in both researched movements, albeit more typically for OSK.

There are several far-reaching similarities between OSK and PAS. Among the most salient are following features:

Both movements have similar organisational structures. Their structure is two-tiered, with a core group at the country level and numerous local groups acting at municipal level with very high levels of autonomy. Thus, the distinction between leaders and followers can be made in both cases only roughly. In smaller municipalities, a handful of people can be engaged in the movements' actions, while also proactively deciding about local context-relevant activities.

Our interviewees from both movements were unanimous in their assessment of political trust as exceptionally low in Poland. They underscored that Poles do not trust politics and politicians, which contributes to low levels of civic participation. General low trust in public sphere, and people's assumption that collective action rarely contributes to change was seen as an obstacle to the movements' actions. Thus, general distrust results in activists' low sense of security, and burnout.

When discussing possible solutions and means to trust building, activists in both movements underscored the role of precise information campaigns, scientific knowledge, as well as citizens' civic education. In both cases, they assumed that trust is something which people individually and collectively can learn and develop.

OSK and PAS differ, in particular, in regard to their goals and how far these goals contradict government's rationale and narratives. In contrast to OSK, PAS's focus combines more easily with governmental narratives about health care and protecting the natural environment, since their main aim is restoring unpolluted air and introducing policies and measures which protect air quality. However, as our interviewees emphasised, there is a tendency in public debate to relate the goals of air-quality protection to the goals of radically leftist environmental groups, which the Polish government clearly refrains from. OSK's goals, on the contrary, are explicitly anti-government and more anti-system oriented. Women's reproductive rights, and women's rights in general, as well as a more secular state and country's culture are ostensibly opposite to the government's narrative to protect the traditional family. Accordingly, although both movements' activists experience both trust and distrust form outside, the level of distrust, or even hostility, is higher in the case of OSK.

Consequently, both movements differ in terms of their networking strategies and strategic choices about maintaining trust and distrust in specific institutions, also at the local level. As aforementioned, a part of PAS's strategy is to establish trust-based cooperation with the Catholic church at the local level, and to ensure priests and church-goers that PAS's members are not left-wing extremists, but people who take public health seriously. On the contrary, OSK refrains from cooperating with the church, and tends to maintain the image of political institutions, including the Catholic church, as untrustworthy. However, as discussed, there were divergent opinions in OSK about how far antagonisation with parishes and other local institutions should go. Thus, OSK's activists are also more likely to establish cooperation with anti-government parties, such as the Left.

A significant difference between both movements refers to the use of scientific data in building the image of a trustworthy social movement. OSK members underlined that it is difficult to use 'typical' scientific data in their case, as their goal is a far-reaching societal change. Nevertheless, they emphasised close cooperation with social scientists and lawyers specialised in human rights, and the use of this expertise in their campaigns. On the contrary, in the case of PAS, the use of scientific data about air quality and measures to protect clean air is a cornerstone of building their own brand of reliability and trustworthiness. The use of scientific data is thus helpful for convincing potential supporters that the government's policy is insufficient, and that immediate broad societal action is necessary.

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Social movements as Vehicles of Change? Citizens' Distrust as a Potential Asset for Greater Bottom-up Mobilisation. The Case of Serbia

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1. Introduction

1.1 Social movements' scene in contemporary Serbia

The civil society sphere in Serbia, including social movements and civic protests, has to be understood against the country's socio-political background and its recent history. The first decade of post-socialist Serbia was marked by the authoritarian rule of the Milošević regime and regional war conflicts, leading civil society actors to predominantly advocate antiauthoritarian, anti-war, and pro-European agendas (Fiket and Pudar Drasko, 2021). That period saw some of the largest anti-regime civic protests ever held in the region in recent history. After the so-called democratic revolution of 5 October 2000, when the Milošević regime was toppled, civil society became the main partner of the new regime in realising socio-institutional transformations set by the agendas of democratisation, Europeanisation and peace-building. However, towards the end of the first decade of 2000, many sectors of the society expressed disappointment at what they experienced as the never-ending process of transition and EU accession (Erdei 2007; Horvat and Štiks 2012). Further challenges came with the economic crisis after 2008, followed by austerity measures and deepening inequality gaps. In 2012, a new government was formed, now led by the former allies of the Milošević regime, and the country began sliding into a regime which is now increasingly being described in terms of state-capture and competitive authoritarianism (Bieber 2018; Castaldo 2020), coupled with growing and worrying trend of citizens' mistrust in political institutions (Fiket and Pudar Drasko, 2021).

It is within this setting that new social movements in contemporary Serbia began to emerge, mostly challenging and protesting the government's economic and social policies, and usurpation of power. On the one hand, we had several waves of anti-government citizens' demonstrations, protesting the electoral results and treatment of opposition ("Protest against dictatorship" in 2017 and #1of5Million protest in 2018/2019), as well as the government's handling of the pandemic (violent protests from July 2020, met with harsh police brutality). They were seemingly spontaneous, at times attracting a large number of citizens (though never as massive as protests from the 1990s), but they

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were short-lived. On the other hand, we can speak of social movements stricto sensu, as organised, yet non-institutional actors engaging in contentious politics, and their most visible spheres of action in today's Serbia are: **urban commons**, **environmental concerns** and **socio-economic struggles** (Bieber and Brentin 2019; Pudar Draško, Fiket and Vasiljević 2020).

Urban commons: Privatisation and usurpation of public spaces in the guise of urban rejuvenation have affected all former Yugoslav state capitals. Legally the most dubious and financially the most lucrative of such projects is the *Belgrade Waterfront*, a multi-billion-dollar investment project of the Serbian government and private investor funds from the United Arab Emirates (Fiket et al. 2019). A local social movement, born out of the legal and protest struggles against this project, came to be known as the Initiative *Don't let Belgrade d(r)own* (*Ne davimo Beograd* or *NDMBGD*). In April 2016, after the illegal demolition of smaller private buildings, executed to clear space for the Belgrade Waterfront, the initiative organised the single biggest protest in Serbia after 5 October 2000. In 2018, NDMBGD participated in city elections, but did not manage to pass the threshold. It thus transformed into a party-movement (Schwartz 2020), simultaneously preserving characteristics of the social movement, and entering the electoral arena. Struggle for urban commons became a prominent field of contentious actions for many smaller social movements in Serbia, which act to raise consciousness about the importance of public spaces like squares, parks and places of urban heritage, and struggle against their usurpation and privatisation. Their modes of action include: protests, petitions, participation in public hearings, and organisation of public events like debates, seminars, etc. They cooperate with each other and with NGOs with similar goals and missions.

Environmental concerns: The whole region of the Western Balkans is under major environmental threats. Cities in the region are among the most polluted in the world when it comes to air quality, the capital city of Serbia, Belgrade, included. Local governments make use of the fact that EU environmental regulations do not apply, and many foreign investments in energy resources, most notably from China, are creating considerable pollution risks. High numbers of fast mountainous rivers in the region are attracting a growing number of investments in the small hydro-power plants, which seemingly produce clean energy, but in actual fact cause extreme damage to the rivers' ecosystems. This last issue has provoked a chain reaction in social movements' struggles in the region, initiated by the many local environmental initiatives protecting their local rivers (Vasiljević 2020). In Serbia, environmental initiatives have become numerous and very active. *Odbranimo reke Stare Planine* (ORSP; *Defend the rivers of Mt. Stara Planina*) has grown into the biggest environmental social movement in the country, with a high public presence. Environmental movements closely cooperate with each other, and with environmental NGOs, and have so far jointly organised two major public protests in Belgrade, in April and September 2021, gathering several thousand protestors. They act in

public through protests, gatherings, petitions, legal actions, and they are very active on social media.

Socio-economic struggles: Worsening socio-economic indicators in the country, including the growing number of citizens at risk of absolute poverty, have incited some social movements to organise and act in public with a two-fold aim: to provide ad hoc help to the disadvantaged citizens, and to advocate for more just policies and laws. Two such prominent movements are *Združena akcija za krov nad glavom* (*ZA*; *Joint Action Roof over your head*) and *Solidarna kuhinja* (*Solidary kitchen*). The former opposes the forced home evictions – both through physical prevention of evictions and through legal and political advocacy, while the latter redistributes food daily and actively promotes solidaristic practices and institutional solutions. They are both characterised by direct action, ad hoc organisation when help is needed, but also through a systematic, advocacy approach to the respective problems they are addressing. They are active on social media, but in comparison to the other two types of social movements described above, their network of cooperation is narrower, and their public actions are focused on concrete problem-solving measures.

All of the aforementioned social movements are inclusive and, in principle, are open to all interested citizens who share the same concerns, but their organisational structures vary: some have more stable structures (sometimes resembling formal NGOs), with predetermined positions and core actors, while others are more fluid.

1.2 Case studies and organisation of research

Our sample consists of core members and followers of *Odbranimo reke Stare planine* (ORSP) and *Združena akcija za krov nad glavom* (ZA). Thus, they represent social movements focused on environmental and socio-economic issues. They were chosen because they are publicly the most visible and recognisable movements representing the described struggles. ORSP has national visibility, while ZA is mostly visible and active in Belgrade (although it has some presence in other municipalities in Serbia, as well).

Participants were recruited following the agreed upon protocol. They were willing to participate, but members of ZA had to reach the collective decision on whether to participate or not. A helpful factor was the pre-existing contacts between some researchers and participants – enabling more trusting relations. The only obstacle was finding a date and time that suited everyone.

In total, 22 activists participated in focus groups: five core members and five followers of ZA, and six core members and six followers of ORSP. Basic socio-demographic characteristics of our participants are shown in the table. We have slightly higher male participation than female. The majority of them are between 31 and 45 years of age, with high school degrees, and with full-time jobs.

Table 1: Sample characteristics of Serbian case study

	ZA – core	ZA - followers	ORSP - core	ORSP - followers
Females / Males	2/3	2/3	2/4	3/3
Age 18-30 / 31-45 / 45+	2/1/2	3/2/0	0/3/3	1/3/2
Elementary school/ high school/ Bachelor/ Master/ PhD	0/2/1/1/1	0/3/2/0/0	0/2/2/2/0	0/3/2/1/0
full-time/ self-employed/ part-time or precarious/ student/ unemployed	2/1/1/0/1	0/1/1/1/2	4/0/0/0/2	4/0/0/1/1

All focus groups were conducted online. Three researchers conducted focus groups, while four researchers were involved in coding. The average length of focus groups was 115 minutes, while interviews lasted around 30 minutes. The total number of memos was 97, most of which clarified participants' positions, but also signalled (for each segment of the focus groups) whether the debate led to a consensus or to a divergence of opinions. All members of the research team were in contact with each other throughout the research process; consultations were regular and often, so no major obstacles appeared during the process of collecting and coding of the data.

2. Analysis of focus groups

2.1 Introductory note

Združena akcija za krov nad glavom (**ZA**) (in English: ***Joint action Roof over your Head***) was founded in 2017 as an informal citizens' initiative whose aim was to physically prevent forced home evictions. At the beginning, it gathered individuals from other, pre-existing smaller initiatives (hence the name *Joint Action*), but over time, it transformed into a separate initiative (which still collaborates with others) with its own membership. Apart from the prevention of evictions, ZA's mission is to advocate for the legal right to a home. They want to raise awareness about the effects of recent legal changes which undermine home security and give greater authority to private executors.

Thus, despite their concrete actions on the ground – which is how they mobilise attention and support – they are more concerned with systemic changes than with isolated solutions, though they are aware how difficult the former is to reach. They believe that their struggle is a class struggle, and claim to represent and stand for all those who are "on the losing side" of the capitalist transformation of the country. They also insist that people who are under threat of losing their home are blameless, but instead hold the system accountable, a system which is positioned in such a way that everyone lacking

financial or social capital could potentially become homeless. Many of the people whose homes were defended by ZA later joined the movement themselves.

ZA is principally active in Belgrade, the capital city where most of the evictions have taken place. They have around 20 active members and a wide network of supporters. But they also have units in other cities in Serbia, and they operate autonomously.

Apart from physical gatherings during the evictions, ZA's members try to be as present as possible in the media, as they find it important to inform the public about the forced home evictions. They also intend to engage in legal battles and to launch a constitutional review of the current Law on Enforcement and Security Interest.

Recently they have been very active and report to have witnessed and engaged in at least one home eviction per week. Citizens can contact them directly, upon which activists look at all the received information and documentation, and if they find it valid, they decide to participate in preventing the eviction. Non-members often join them – as they learn about the events through social media – but the gatherings rarely exceed more than a couple of dozen citizens. Other smaller citizen initiatives also sometimes join them. ZA cooperates with The European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City. They are mostly financed through numerous, generous donations, most of which are made by individual citizens.

Odbranimo reke Stare Planine (**ORSP**; in English: ***Defend the rivers of Mt. Stara Planina***) was founded in 2018 out of a need to widen and coordinate the activities of smaller municipal environmental initiatives in the southeast (mountainous) part of Serbia which were fighting against the construction of small hydro power plants (SHP) on their rivers. They primarily sought to increase their visibility on social media. The initial actions taken by the newly-founded ORSP were: a national petition against SHP, communication with international environmental organisations and EU institutions. After a sizeable protest in the Serbian city of Pirot, the movement gained greater visibility.

The main goals of ORSP are: to highlight environmental issues in the country and to be present on the ground; to prevent ecologically damaging deals between the government and private investors. Although the movement initially grew out of struggles to prevent the construction of SHPs on the rivers in southeast Serbia, ORSP now tackles environmental issues all over the country. They are still informal (not registered), but are widely recognised as a social movement that enjoys not only wide, popular support, but also support from a part of the scientific and academic community (especially environmental academic experts).

A group of core members (who also administrate social media accounts, admittedly very important for the functioning of the movement) meet regularly and coordinate their activities. They are aware that the problems they face are systemic in nature, but do not consider themselves anti-systemic or focused on larger social and/or political issues;

they focus on concrete problems and struggles and want to "keep away from politicians". They claim to represent all those citizens troubled by alarmingly high air and water pollution, and are concerned about major investment plans targeting natural habitats. They attract both urban and rural populations, claiming that urban dwellers are more active on social media and in participating in protests, while citizens from rural areas are essential for the work on the ground – and for defending concrete areas, designated for investment plans. They do not have a formal membership; numbers of their supporters on social media exceed 100,000, active media followers are around 20-30,000, but people who are active on the ground are a couple of dozen.

Among their most important activities, they state protests, local gatherings in areas where constructions (of SHP) are planned, but also media appearances. Just like the members of ZA, ORSP activists highlight how media presence is important to raise public awareness. In the beginning, ORSP organised protests in areas of Mt. Stara Planina. But as the movement grew, they decided to organise and participate in protests in Belgrade, as well. In April 2020, they were part of a joint regional ecological proclamation – signed by over 70 organisations – and soon after, ORSP co-organised, together with 45 other local environmental organisations, one of the biggest ecological protests in Belgrade. It attracted a couple of thousand people.

2.2 Structure of the movement

In general, interviewees from the ZA movement agree that the **formal structure** of the movement is **horizontal,** although the core members express their concerns about the possibility of achieving horizontality. However, decentralisation and horizontality remain values that all interviewees consider as a goal that should be kept in mind, even when the complexity of the movement begins to increase. In the case of the ORSP, the situation is different. Namely, even though both core members and followers of ORSP perceive the formal structure of the movement as **horizontal,** the majority also describe the structure as **indeterminate**:

> *We don't have a well-established organisational structure, so I'd rather say that the structure may be horizontal, but it actually depends on how broadly we look at the movement; if the issue is about the governance structure, and the people involved in decision-making and planning in a direct or slightly indirect way, I think we have one fairly horizontal structure* (RS ORSP C).

At the same time, the ORSP members are aware that the most publicly exposed and active member is sometimes recognised as a leader. This inconsistency between the perception of the formal structure as horizontal, and at the same time provided by an unofficial leader, is explained by the fact that the movement is in a growth phase, and reorganising in a more **predetermined functional structure**:

I think they have, in the meantime, started the development, and therefore people who took on certain responsibilities in certain spheres have started to be recognised […] they began to form functional teams (RS ORSP F).

ORSP members, both followers and core members, agree that all movement members can participate in the decision-making process (**Levels of decision-making: Plenary**):

It started with an individual idea that was accepted, so we all got involved, organised the cleaning of the Rakita river, or Temšnjica, or whatever it was, and in principle, that's how it comes; someone comes up with an idea. We have that circle of about 20 people who communicate with each other; we decide and it is supported and implemented (RS ORSP C).

In the case of ZA, followers and core members have similar perceptions regarding the **levels of decision-making**: the decisions are made by **core members** because of the urgent need for speedy reactions to imminent evictions, for example, but also, sometimes by the **affected community**:

There is a question of efficiency because despite the fact that we now strive to be as many people as possible […] we need that visibility, and it would be great if hundreds of thousands of people came to evictions, actually when decisions are made, they sometimes have to be made very quickly […] we try to be a reactive organisation […] because of that efficiency, there is the necessity to make decisions in a smaller group (RS ZA C).

The movement's main activity is to defend people who are threatened by evictions, so the **affected community** is not the one that actually makes decisions, but it is the one that initiates the process given that the movement responds to its need. The members of the movement also put a great deal of effort into giving the affected community a sense of agency by involving them in the movement's activities:

The inclusion of the people we are defending in the organisation itself […] has always been an inherent goal […] and there has always been some effort made to get people involved […] in the work of the organisation beyond what is the activity of organising around their case (RS ZA C).

The perception of both movements, and there is also major agreement among the core and followers' groups, is that the **membership** is **conditionally inclusive**.

In the case of ZA, everybody can participate in the prevention of evictions, but participation in the organisation of such events, and other actions, is possible only after a six-week "test period". However, the members of the movement did not mention any clearly defined criteria for membership:

Everyone can come to evictions […] and if they come to the actions actively enough […] and they want to […] participate in structuring the organisation,

then they join after a certain […] number of weeks of action[…] about six weeks, or slightly more (RS ZA C).

The criteria for membership are also not clearly defined in the case of the ORSP movement, although our interviewees most often mention dedication to the same values and trust as the main principles:

I think we are completely open access as far as membership goes, so anyone can be a member of the movement […] but some period has to pass […] people are actually chosen on the basis of sharing some core values and trusting those people (RS ORSP C).

2.3 Attitudes towards and relations of (dis)trust

Most of the respondents consider perception of general (dis)trust and (dis)trust in institutions jointly. Regarding the **perception of general (dis)trust**, the respondents from both movements mostly talk about **distrust,** and perceive it as either **positive and important** or at least **conditionally positive**. They see it as the default relationship in society, especially towards **governmental institutions**, which is the foundation of critical thinking in societies where institutions, as one of the respondents said, "will be corrupted by inertia… that's the way things are" (RS ZA C). Multiple respondents used the adjectives "normal" and "healthy" when referring to distrust in society, but one of them suggested a different term:

Regarding distrust in society and whether it can be useful, I wouldn't use the word distrust, but rather the word skepticism, as a kind of counter-obedience, and, in that sense, it can be healthy, and I think ideas like Robin Hood should even be promoted (RS OR F).

To emphasise the impersonal and default nature of distrust in the government, one of the respondents says:

That has nothing to do with people who are representatives of government, or anything; that is just that government is not to be trusted (…) giving them the benefit of the doubt is not a normal relationship; the position against all public institutions is a healthy distrust, and it is normal to question, that is a normal thing (RS ZA C).

Unlike the members of the ORSP movement, the members of the ZA movement relate both **general distrust** and **distrust in institutions** to several **functions of distrust**, namely with **distrust as a corrective factor in society**, one that **leads to alertness** (see more in the paragraph on the functions of distrust). Thus, they also claim that the **role of social movements** is to **nurture distrust** (see later).

However, the members of both movements consider “complete cynicism” (RS ZA C) in this society as something unproductive because citizens then tend to believe in conspiracy theories and cannot trust anyone:

> *Well, probably like all other things, there is an extent to which it is useful to question things, nothing is a holy cow, the extent to which it [distrust] facilitates questioning and the development of institutions and the like, but it appears to me that, somehow, the ground is moving now, that there is nothing solid for people to hold onto, and that it is very hard for them to find their way in all that* (RS ZA F).

The perception of general distrust as negative can be related to the perception that citizens (of Serbia) **distrust everyone**. For the members of the ZA movement **(generalised) distrust** can **be destructive/divides society**, while the members of the ORSP movement associate it with the **function of distrust as leading to feelings of resignation** among citizens:

> *That is a common place, yes, public institutions, but I think that there is distrust towards “everything that breathes”, that people somehow don`t believe that something can simply be based on helping and social interest, and not only on benefit* (RS ZA F).

> *I am afraid that in Serbia, distrust has taken over, which actually blocks people, and I speak about distrust in institutions and parties, in the first place* (RS OR F).

Overall, respondents from all four focus groups mostly make an issue of distrust rather than trust, and they perceive it to be negative when it is too general and leads to feelings of resignation, and positive when it is put into action, and serves to question the institutions.

In accordance with previous considerations is the fact that both movements and subgroups mostly speak about **functions of distrust**, and rarely about functions of trust. As the most prominent functions of distrust emerge that **(generalised) distrust is destructive/divides society** and that it can **lead to feelings of resignation among citizens**:

> *The only thing I see is general distrust. That is an experience of life, and society, in which it was never good, but now it is even worse. That's about it, general desperation, and I wouldn't say that it's a healthy distrust* (RS ZA C).

Core members and followers of the ORSP movement agree that: “…we are in this situation because citizens are passive, and they are passive because they trust no one” (RS OR C). They claim that the issue of (dis)trust is the most relevant in the context of political apathy, which one of the respondents associates particularly with the younger generation:

The perspective of the younger generation is that the majority has just given up. Literally, they look at that [politics] like: "Ah, that failed," and they don`t think too much, they don`t believe anyone, especially the government, but also the rest of them, and for that reason they don't follow and listen (RS OR F).

However, distrust is perceived as "healthy" when it functions as **a precondition for the mobilisation of citizens**. This is the attitude among core members of both movements. It can be related to another attitude, also shared among the followers of both movements, namely that **distrust in institutions is what has created social movements**:

ZA exists because there is an enormous societal distrust in public institutions because people with a problem will probably ask an institution for help, and yet the institution will redirect those people to us because we give some kind of solution, or at least a deadline postponement in order for that thing to be solved. Somehow, distrust in society in general requires the creation of wider social movements (RS ZA F).

Interestingly, **functions of trust** are only mentioned in the context of the ZA movement, as the **basic foundation of the movement**, and it is perceived that it **fails if the social movement is related with untrustworthy actors**, such as political parties.

Members of the two movements disagree in their view of who is trustworthy in society. ZA members explicate that they **trust** other **social movements**, such as theirs:

I mean, a series of movements have arisen recently which articulate some local interests, or address various kinds of problems, and they seem authentic. For example, The Roof [ZA] is one of them, Defend the rivers [ORSP] is another. Yes, those are grassroots movements which instill trust in me, Don`t let Belgrade d(r)own, as well (RS ZA F).

What is more interesting, core members of the ZA movement express their belief that there are certain **individual figures** in governmental institutions who can be trusted, even though they **distrust institutions** and **political parties**:

That seed of trust is hidden in the feeling that there are people sitting in those institutions who have similar relationships towards things as you do, and they only need to wake up (RS ZA C).

On the other hand, core members of the ORSP movement put their **trust** in several actors in society, such as **civil society**, scientific institutions (code: **experts**) and **others**. By civil society, they mean enlightened parts of society, as one of the respondents explained:

Those literate and enlightened people, such as Ćuta [the founder of the movement] would say: 'Ecology is not for everyone.' And I think stratification has to be made, and people who do not understand, but genuinely do not

understand issues, from climate change and the pollution of nature, to the necessity of getting vaccinated - they have to be encouraged; simply, this layer of the population must be suppressed and not allowed to influence anything in society; I really mean that (RS OR C).

They strongly trust in scientific institutions, **objective, and independent media** because of the way "they describe the (ecological) situation, the details," but because they also trust **others,** like artists, whose causes they support. The only specific scientific institution ORSP mentions as trustworthy is the Institute for nature conservation of Serbia – Niš office.

Similar to the ZA movement, ORSP **distrusts governmental institutions**, and they describe the relationship as something which reproduces itself, without hope for change:

First, our activities are based on distrust and suspicion towards any activity of the state in any way. So, from the beginning, we start with the attitude that they do not wish us well; indeed they don`t because things are stripped down, promises are broken millions of times, we don't have any reason to believe (…) as you say, yes, distrust is a huge impetus. Everything is taken with a grain of salt (…) unfortunately, previous events have always reinforced our distrust, which still remains a constant in the relationship (RS OR C).

However, unlike the ZA movement, which expressed trust in other social movements, the ORSP is suspicious of them. Their **distrust of social movements** is based on previous experience:

Well, there are related organisations, however, it has been shown that many of them are not at all capable of overcoming their own vanity. Maybe Mara will disagree, but there are situations where, at first, we don`t have some huge distrust towards related organisations, but even so, it often happens that some leaders' ambitions arise among them (…) we cannot have trust even towards related organisations because I am not sure what their motives are, and above all, who is holding membership in that (RS OR C).

Overall, both movements are highly distrustful towards governmental institutions, based on their attitude that this should be a normal relationship towards them, or based on previous bad experiences. It seems that the ORSP is more distrustful towards various other actors, with an exclusionary view on who is to be trusted, mostly based on acknowledged expertise and knowledge on the issue of ecology, as well as an experience of support. ZA is slightly more flexible regarding trust because they recognise that even in the most distrustful institutions, there are individuals who can be trusted.

When commenting on the **distrust of citizens**, both movements agree that citizens distrust **everybody**, with a special focus on **governmental institutions** and **political parties**, which is not strange given the socio-political situation in Serbia over the past decades (see: Introduction). Some respondents simply state that "no one trusts anyone" (RS OR

F), and that "general distrust is one of the main features of this society" (RS OR C), while others make a connection between the current state of general distrust and political behaviour of the citizens:

> *I am afraid that in Serbia, the distrust took over which actually blocks people, and I speak about distrust in institutions and parties, in the first place. Therefore, the voting turnout is the way it is; therefore, we by ourselves try to solve the problem instead of letting the institutions do their job* (RS OR F).

The general attitude is pessimistic, but some of the core members of the ZA movement observe that there is also an ambivalence among citizens regarding trust in the government (code: **trust of the citizens > other**) because they think that "the representation of the state is one of sanctity, and immoderate trust in it can result in various disappointments and complete cynicism" (RS ZA C). The ambivalence is further explained as based on mutual distrust in institutions and the expectation of social change through the same institutional channels. This point of view sheds light on the complex interplay between the trust and distrust of the citizens, which, as both core members and followers of the ZA movement state, influences citizens' trust in social movements. On the one hand, they perceive that citizens **trust** their **movement** because they have had "a non-typical approach towards oppositional activities in Serbia in the past 30 years", and because of their direct actions in the field (RS ZA C). On the other hand, they perceive that citizens are suspicious towards the sources of their funding and possible cooperation with political parties (see later).

Regarding **cooperation with governmental institutions**, members of the ZA movement disagree among themselves. Some core members and all of the followers are strict in their attitude towards **principled non-cooperation**. They report on principal antagonism with the government because the very deficiencies in the work of the government have led to a rise in social movements. Other core members think that even though "absolutely no cooperation has ever been achieved," some of the ZA activists "have a softer attitude towards institutions and various organisations because it has helped them in some situations" (RS ZA C). They describe that not as institutional cooperation, but as "ad hoc and by contact" (Code: **cooperation – instrumental**). Also, they perceive their relationship towards GI as "applying pressure." On the other hand, the ORSP members think that "if we don`t want a revolution, everything else is realised via the system of institutions, so we have to cooperate with them in order to achieve our goals" (RS OR F). They perceive that dialogue and negotiation are important and that it "must not affect trust." This cooperation is also coded as **instrumental**. The effects of such cooperation are **not clear**:

> *I don't think that conversation and negotiation with the government decreased trust in the ORSP, even though it didn't bring anything (…) in the last protest, there were many more people than two years ago, so that is a direct*

indicator that it didn't decrease trust, but probably added a flywheel to all that, maybe made the story more serious (RS OR F).

The **cooperation of the movements with NGOs** is most usually **based on shared goals** and values, except when it occurs for the purpose of organising massive protests, as was the case with an ecological protest in Belgrade, where everybody was welcome (code: **cooperation with all interested NGOs**):

Indeed, we have the best cooperation with those who, like us, are an informal organisation, and personally I think that the key to the success of the ecological movement in all Europe is exactly that – informal and dispersed organisation (RS OR C).

The **effects of cooperation with NGOs** are not conclusive, since both movements state that it depends on the organisation in question, their values, and the citizens themselves. However, some ORSP followers think that growing numbers of supporters and collaborators can positively affect citizens` trust in the movement, **cooperation** that indeed **benefits trust** relations.

Regarding the **cooperation of the movements with political parties**, attitudes of both movements are unified in that cooperation is acceptable when it is **based on shared goals** only. They do not have formal cooperation with any political party, and they are decisive in not letting politicians "promote themselves and collect points" (RS OR C) by showing up on the field when actions or protests are organised. Individual figures, however, are allowed to give support to both movements. They also agree that the **effects of cooperation with political parties** would certainly **undermine citizens` trust** because of the general atmosphere of distrust in society, especially towards politicians:

And the contacts at the topmost level of the government, with Ana Brnabić and Aleksandar Vučić, have backfired for a period, and we had put up with horrible critique (…) I am under the impression that present-day politicians in the government find it easy to fight against movements which are critical towards them, and that they easily base their fight on distrust; it is very easy to tell a story via tabloid releases because people are used to that level of reporting about events (RS OR C).

A prominent suggestion for **local level** changes (code: **what can be done**) towards restoring trust, mostly described by ORSP members, is strengthening **representatives` integrity**, as they represent citizens` interests, rather than personal interests or the interests of local investors:

Many institutions clearly support private firms that may be sponsors or direct participants in a way, but in a direct relationship with political parties. Therefore, it is completely recognisable that the interests of the citizens, the state, and the future are only partially met (RS OR C).

Among other pathways, **transparency and openness**, as well as **dialogue, exchange and discussion with citizens** are mentioned by both movements, especially "financial transparency, what is being done with public money, who gets the public jobs" (RS ZA C). In order to represent citizens` interests appropriately, activists think that local government should **involve citizens in decision making**, partake in sincere exchange with citizens, and "accept constructive suggestions in order to gain citizens` trust, since they work for them" (RS OR F). Additionally, keeping promises and starting with small steps, like litter management, are seen as important in restoring trust (code: **committing/taking decisions vs. opportunistic talking**). Finally, as expected, the followers of both movements think that **social movements should try to gain power at the local level**.

On the **national level**, similar pathways are brought up. Members of the ZA movement are more oriented towards **transparency, enhancing understanding, being closer to citizens**, as well as **higher citizen involvement** in decision making (codes: **citizens should be more involved**; **citizens should have more power**). Some of the core members are radical in their thinking that revolution is the only way to restore trust in this society: "Only with a revolution can we finish this conversation" (RS ZA C). ORSP activists are more prone to talking about problems which lead to distrust than to offering solutions; however, based on their statements, it can be inferred that the first step in regaining trust would be **integrity, honesty, reliability**, as well as **education of the citizens**:

> *We need to treat causes, not consequences; each law is only as good as the people who implement it* (RS OR F).

On the EU level, again, **transparency, enhancing understanding, bringing citizens closer** is seen as the best way to gain their trust, as well as **being accountable to the citizens** and **taking a more active role**:

> *Easier rotation and transparency reflected in suppression of corruption and what everybody else said – accountability to people and representing the interests of the same people* (RS ZA F).

> *When the EU clearly shows that they wish us well by public condemnation of what is wrong, we can begin to trust them more* (RS OR F).

There is slight disagreement among respondents regarding the question of the capacity **of social movements to enhance trust in society**. A number of the core members and followers of the ZA movement are focused on **nurturing distrust** by putting pressure on the institutions, and exposing deficiencies in their work ("spreading healthy cynicism towards government" RS ZA C). However, few core members think that, by encouraging citizens to address the institutions when solving their problems, they indirectly repair citizens` overall distrust in institutions (code: **SMs can help in trust building by repairing/correcting inst.**):

Paradoxically, we may be restoring a tiny part of trust in institutions by forcing people to actually deal with that [e.g., their problem with housing] (RS ZA C).

The knowledge and understanding of the housing problems and legal rights of the citizens is how ZA gains citizens` trust in the movement (code: **other**). One of the ZA followers points out that, in the context of general distrust in society, movements can become a source of trust:

In this environment, The Roof is something that fills the hole created by the long-term destruction of Serbian institutions. Not only The Roof, but other social movements, as well (RS ZA F).

On the other hand, ORSP followers consider cooperation with institutions in direct actions as their capacity for restoring citizens` trust (codes: **SMs could make direct actions**; **SMs could cooperate with institutions**), however, only by being treated as equal partners to the institutions:

I will give you an example regarding Eco guerilla[40] from Niš, included in the actions of cleaning the city (…) they are in contact with Medijana, which is not government, but is still a public institution, and they had an action of cleaning Niš last week, and the one before that (…) so, until movements don't become equal partners of the local government in the design and realisation of their actions, there will be no trust in either movement, or their cooperation with the government (RS OR F).

What is most interesting is that both movements state that they enhance trust in society by "keeping away from politicians" (RS OR C), and acting differently from them (code: **other**). Here is an example of what this means:

I think there is respect towards our approach, which is, let's say, more complex if not more mature, and that is this: if in a certain situation breaking the cordon [of police] leads me to the goal – I will break the cordon. If having a conversation with someone leads me to the goal – I will have the conversation. So, no format is close to my heart as much as achieving the goal. There is no one who is a priori not to discuss with; there is no one who is a priori not to be spit at. Simply, we gather around a mission and now, let's see how to get there, including a situation where I can fight with someone today, and negotiate with the same person tomorrow. They are the most normal dynamics of how a political battle should be carried out, and I think we have had a non-typical approach for oppositional activities in Serbia in the past 30

[40] Eco Guerrilla Niš is an association of citizens formed with the aim of preserving and protecting the environment. Their registered activity is: arranging and maintaining the surrounding area.

years, which has provided us with prestige among people we defend: that we are here for them, and for no other reason (RS ZA C).

Closely related to the question of capacity in restoring trust is the question of the **role of social movements in trust building**. Core members of the ZA movement are the loudest in this matter, since they point out what movements should do, and express hope that they are already doing it. Specifically, their primary aim is to **nurture distrust** towards institutions, and they think that restoring trust in institutions, as well as their correction, should not be the role of the movements. The role of the movements, according to them, is to address the problem which the movements are created around, and to put pressure on institutions for as long as they do not do their job. ORSP activists are less specific about the role of the movements because "wounds are too deep, a lot of time is required" (RS OR C), but even so, the role should be to "connect with each other, to empower mutually, and to trust each other" (RS OR C).

2.4 Expertise

There is a strong consensus among members of the ORSP regarding the **role of experts in decision making**. **Expert knowledge** is perceived as an **authority** that should be crucial for formulating political decisions. At the same time, interviewees express the opinion that the role of expert knowledge in decision making in Serbia is currently insufficient:

Unfortunately, they don't have important roles in decision-making, ... if I were the president, the government, I would ask them about the problems we are facing, but obviously they exist only formally (RS ORSP C).

In the ZA movement, the reflection on the role of experts is much more articulated and complex, and the majority of interviewees express a **pragmatic approach to expert knowledge**. They acknowledge its relevance, while they also have **critical perception of expert knowledge**, and question the role that experts have in the reproduction of hegemony of the ruling class:

It would be the task of experts … to educate people about alternative models of social reproduction … in our society, even intellectuals do not know what models of social reproduction exist...people who are in some scientific organisations should be active in educating people about alternative models of social class reproduction…but are instead focused on old models, and in fact know nothing about alternatives (RS ZA C).

Regarding the **role of experts in the movement**, core and followers' groups of both movements perceive experts mainly as relevant members that should be consulted (**advisory role**). Both movements cooperate with experts on one level, and rely on expert knowledge while also trying to build expertise within the movement:

I think it is important that they also exist in social movements because (…) we are quite reactive for now, but as soon as we start some affirmative policy, meaning the formulation of some goals, we need some experts' knowledge (RS ZA F).

They are there on a daily basis, and participate in formulating arguments that again serve as a basis for any activism in the movement itself, and I think that's very good (RS ORSP F).

Still, while the ORSP movement experts are always believed to play an **advisory role**, the ZA movement members underline also that "we learn from each other, and we are all (**everyone is an) expert**(s) **in something**" (RS ZA C).

This vision of experts' knowledge as something that could be learned through practice is also often present in ZA members' narratives:

We saw people in the field who really became experts in the laws that directly affected them. They were also people who are experts in general, who are not lawyers, but who have been struggling with a problem for so long that they have learned those laws by heart, or I don't know, but they can somehow meet their match. It happened to us, for example, at an eviction where there was an hour of discussion between the woman whom the executor was trying to evict; they had a kind of debate, almost like in a law court, because the woman really knew how to provide arguments for many things (RS ZA C).

There seems to be some additional differences between the two movements in understanding the role of experts' knowledge. While the ORSP movement takes expert knowledge as objective scientific knowledge that should be integrated into the movement's decisions, the ZA movement critically approaches the question of production of knowledge within the movement (**Role of experts in the movement- other**):

It's an important thing for the movements themselves to form (…) some counter-knowledge as much as possible. Sometimes the support of professional authorities can help and, of course, it should be used on a tactical level, but I think they [movements] should also be places of knowledge production (RS ZA C).

2.5 Democracy and engagement

There is a general feeling that voting is not so important, as most of the respondents claim that **voting is not important at all** or that **other forms of participation are more important**. Most of their answers show disillusionment with the what-should-be democratic system, and opt for greater engagement of citizens as a pathway towards bringing the voice of citizens to the institutions. The system is seen as corrupt and very detached from its citizens. As some ORSP followers points out:

In principle, voting is an activity that lasts for one day and brings nothing important. Those who have ever been engaged in politics and political marketing know that voting results are known seven days ahead of the elections (RS ORSP F), or:

These parliamentary elections are elections where we vote for a party, and within those parties, there is one person, in fact, in each party there is one, possibly two people, who make all the decisions, and we basically vote for one person again. So those 250 people receive a salary to say "yes" or "no" according to what the person in charge of the party tells them (RS ORSP F).

At the same time, the parliamentary democracy that can be observed in Serbia is "extremely distant from anything we might call [democracy]... those are simply consortia of the privileged of oligarchic type" (RS ZA C), which causes feelings of utmost impotence and political inefficacy among citizens, as is clearly described in the words of this ZA follower:

You vote once in four years, and there is nothing you can do about those people who are in power; nor is there any invocation of responsibility for those people who are already in their four years of power (RS ZA F).

Voting makes sense only when there is a political option that could make a change. This view is shared among both groups of followers and core members of the ZA movement. This implies voting in general, not only in non-democratic regimes:

Voting is not a political action in its substance, but giving the right to someone to act politically instead of you. It's a relinquishment of responsibility […] since you are giving this responsibility to someone; you are giving it up (RS ZA C).

ORSP core members have a slightly different stance, advocating that **voting is important, but other forms are also important**, as they believe that "people need to be persuaded that even their single vote can change something" (RS ORSP C).

There is a general attitude among the participants that widening the scope of citizens' engagement is what is essential, under these circumstances, to pressure politicians into taking citizens' voices into account, and to do what is necessary. **Non-institutional forms of participation**, activism, like "organising and acting on the ground for a specific goal" (RS ZA C), are most frequently mentioned as most important for democracy. This could be done through social movements, but also this does not automatically imply that political engagement stricto sensu is out of the question. Some of the ZA core members believe that engaging within political movements, or cooperating with one, is the most opportune way to achieve their goals:

It is simply impossible to accomplish something fully without the adoption of a fair law, and this is always much more complicated if you're not connected

with parliamentary governance. […] it doesn't matter if we are running for parliament, or have a connection with a parliamentary organisation, it will be closer to what the demands are (RS ZA C).

The majority of respondents believe that **citizens are not capable** of making political decisions, or that they would be capable if the system enabled them to be informed and empowered to act. The educational system is to be blamed for the lack of integrated critical-thinking instruction, coupled with a perceived lack of free public space. Additionally, the burden of managing everyday existence leaves little room for citizens to acquire more information and to improve their own political efficacy:

They simply do not manage to develop that critical thinking or to educate themselves and to unite […] to many of them, it is their bare existence at stake, and they simply do not have the opportunity to think at all about how to change society, and they do not see that potential in themselves, being able to do something, changing society and making a decision (RS ZA F).

Some of the ZA followers and ORSP core members believe that this state of affairs is even purposely created to prevent citizens from participating:

We're completely overwhelmed by propaganda that is very dirty and purposeful, which has been carried out here intensively in the last 10 years. It was here also before, and in fact the only way out of it is to make it clear that we are able to hear the truth, and find out what the truth really is (RS ORSP C).

Unlike ZA core members and followers, who acknowledge that the system hinders some citizens' capabilities, most of the ORSP core members and followers seem to be quite disillusioned with citizens themselves, and their "intellectual capacities" (RS ORSP C). Even though they recognise average citizens' weaknesses, their expectations are somewhat different:

The people who ran today to get vaccinated for 3,000 dinars[41] *are not people capable of making political decisions, no matter how ugly this may sound* (RS ORSP F).

Creating space for dialogue, and being truly able to hear different arguments, is a precondition for making citizens political and capable of making good political decisions. Enabling media freedom is also one of the factors. **Citizens need more information and knowledge,** and **social movements** are one way **to empower citizens**. There is no successful action without joining various forces and displaying solidarity. Especially among ZA core members, this is seen as a crucial step for empowering citizens. Being politically efficient is recognised as a step towards political engagement, since "people need to be

[41] The Serbian government, on certain occasions, incentivized vaccination with vouchers.

motivated to participate", and "they need to believe that their action will bring results" (RS ZA F).

ORSP core members share consensus that social movements, as forms of non-institutional and informal participation, are channels to be encouraged and followed, especially when movements are successful, as they perceive their own to be:

> *At some point, these informal movements will grow into formal movements, so maybe some of them will appear in the elections, then maybe citizens will recognise the ideas that the group advocates in those elections as their own, and maybe that will be the key turning point* (RS ORSP C).

Social movements are also incubators of alternative democratic models, where attempts at non-hierarchical functioning are learning mechanisms for democracy, emphasised among the ZA core members. ZA followers add the need for other civil society organisations, important for society like trade unions or local communities, should have a bottom-up approach:

> *When you go to any house council meeting, and you see how people talk, everyone shouts and you can't come to any common goal, or go towards achieving that goal. So, we are completely unequipped for that, and in that sense, participation in a movement; in a self-organising organisation, it is a very important lesson and maybe at this moment, it is really the only way to get out of what these official frameworks offer* (RS ZA C).

Everyone seems to understand the need for better education. Next to a change in the school system, and empowering teachers not to be afraid to teach critical thinking, the practices of the media space need to be altered in order to nurture argumentative dialogue, instead of quarrelsome dialogue. Demonopolisation of media is one of the steps that could lead in this direction. These are all far-fetching objectives that could be achieved only if real institutional change is made. To do so, respondents advocate for **setting the tools for more direct involvement of citizens**, followed by **changing the legal framework to be more encouraging for participation.** ZA core members pointed out that even changes calculated to assist the ruling political elite, like lowering the threshold from 5% to 3% for elections, could open some new avenues for participation (as smaller initiatives could be encouraged to take part in the elections). Similar things could be achieved with the necessary number of signatures for referendums, or making the collection of these signatures cheaper.

On several occasions, some of the ORSP core members and followers, who work outside Belgrade in smaller places, expressed fear - due to poor support networks in those places, and due to greater public exposure. This fear is linked to negative, ad hominem, media targeting, and they even expressed fear for their livelihood, even for their lives.

Social movements are successful in having an impact on citizens' participation, which is a consensus among core members of both movements in Serbia. Mostly, their success

comes from bringing some themes to the public space, and to the institutions. This aspect is also recognised by the followers of both movements, but these respondents question achieving set objectives against being able to voice citizens' concerns and demands:

> "I would say that it has an effect… I don't know if the voice of the people is really heard in the institutions. I think they hear us, that's why they fight against us. […] Well, it has an effect, but it's so hard and slow and it's a disaster. But it has! I guess all things have changed for the better in a similar way" (RS ZA F).

Obviously, direct engagement with the movement brings more political efficacy, which once again proves to be a necessary factor for social engagement.

3. Conclusion

In Serbia, social movements are heavily shaped by a distinct socio-political history and present context (legacy of authoritarian rule from the 1990s, late transition, illiberal turn in recent years). However, they also reflect global trends in bottom-up engagement. The most visible spheres of their actions are urban commons, environmental concerns and socio-economic struggles.

Združena akcija za krov nad glavom (**ZA**) (in English: ***Joint action Roof over your Head***) was founded in 2017 as an informal citizen initiative, whose aim was to physically prevent forced home evictions. They also advocate for the legal right to a home. ***Odbranimo reke Stare Planine*** (**ORSP**; in English: ***Defend the rivers of Mt. Stara Planina***), founded in 2018 out of a need to widen and coordinate the activities of smaller municipal environmental initiatives in the southeast (mountainous) part of Serbia, were fighting against the construction of small hydro power plants (SHP) on their rivers.

Interviewees from the ZA movement agree that the formal structure of their movement is horizontal, although the core members express their concerns about the possibility of achieving horizontality. In the case of the ORSP, the situation is different. Namely, even though both core members and followers of the ORSP perceive the formal structure of the movement as horizontal, the majority describe the structure as indeterminate, mainly due to the prominent role their leader has in the public sphere. Perception of both movements is that membership is conditionally inclusive - some form of loyalty and commitment to core values has to be proven.

Regarding the perception of general (dis)trust, the respondents from both movements mostly talk about *distrust,* perceiving it as either positive and important, or at least conditionally positive. They see it as the default relationship in society, especially towards governmental institutions, the foundation of critical thinking in societies where institutions, as one of the respondents said, "will be corrupted, by inertia… that's the way things are". The perception of general distrust as negative, on the other hand, can be

related to the perception that citizens (of Serbia) distrust everyone. For the members of the ZA movement (generalised), distrust can be destructive as it divides society, while the members of the ORSP movement associate the function of distrust as leading to the resignation of citizens. Overall, respondents from all four focus groups mostly make an issue of distrust, rather than trust, and they perceive it as being negative when it is too general and leads to resignation, and positive when it is put into action, and serves to question the institutions. This is indicative of Serbian society, where trust has almost no place in the narratives of the participants.

However, distrust is perceived as "healthy" when it functions as a precondition for mobilisation of citizens. This is the attitude among core members of both movements. It can be related to another attitude, also shared among the followers of both movements, namely that distrust in institutions is what has created social movements.

In order to represent citizens` interest appropriately, interviewees think that local governments should involve citizens in decision making, and establish opportunities for sincere exchanges with citizens. Additionally, keeping promises and starting with small steps, like litter management, are seen as important in restoring trust. Finally, as expected, the followers of both movements think that social movements should try to gain power at the local level. On the EU level, again, transparency, enhancing understanding, getting closer to citizens is seen as the way to gain their trust, as well as being accountable to the citizens and taking a more active role.

There is a strong consensus among members of the ORSP regarding the role of experts in decision making. Expert knowledge is perceived as an authority that should be crucial for formulating political decisions. At the same time, interviewees express the opinion that the role of expert knowledge in decision making in Serbia is currently insufficient. In the ZA movement, the reflection on the role of experts is much more articulated and complex, and the majority of interviewees express a pragmatic approach to expert knowledge. They acknowledge its relevance, while they perceive expert knowledge critically, and question the role experts play in the reproduction of hegemony, imposed by the ruling class.

All the respondents are generally disillusioned by institutional politics, and see voting as a mostly ineffective mode of political participation, which directs them towards other non-institutional forms of participation. Activism, or "direct action", is seen as a necessary supplement of any other participation, while voting can be meaningful only if a political option emerges that deserves the trust of the citizens. Due to the severe weaknesses of the Serbian political system, but also being mindful of global developments, respondents question the very meaning of democracy. ZA members and followers demand more inclusive and bottom-up democratic models, starting from social and political organising.

Both groups mostly agree that citizens are generally incapable of making political decisions, but ZA respondents find that the roots of such a situation lie in the socio-political

context of previous decades; ORSP respondents, on the other hand, blame the citizens themselves for being easily corrupted and co-opted. However, they all agree that citizens need more information and knowledge, which is a challenge per se with the existing educational system and captured media. Social movements, in their words, could play a great role in empowering citizens. Their small successes build political efficacy, while their true effect is to be evaluated against captured institutions – voicing citizens' demands does not always translate to achieving the sought-after change.

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Conclusion and Summary of Main Findings

Irena Fiket, Gazela Pudar Draško and Jelena Vasiljević

1. Structure of the movements

The majority of the movements are organised in **decentralised structures**. In the case of the larger, national movements, the structure is two-tiered, with an autonomy of local groups. Core members usually refrain from using the term hierarchical, even where there is a registered legal entity, with clear roles behind the movement. Only two movements reported mixed formal structures with function-based structures – MM in Czech Republic and CY in Greece. Many movements also have functional (thematic) working groups that are organised around particular issues or priorities, with different influences on the processes in the movement.

Core groups are merit-based and/or practice-based, and usually with a division of tasks depending on their capabilities, preferences and availability. This means that structure is partially predetermined with defined roles, but it is also fluid, depending on the predefined and pressing needs of the movement in the given circumstances. Those movements that lack structure admit that they have an informal structure, where the length of engagement and knowledge play a role. Also, some movements (e.g., Greece) use their horizontality to avoid legal consequences of the actions organised.

Agency within the movement is usually on any member to propose, while decisions are made on the level of the movement in the core group, or with smaller movements (or local branches) in plenary sessions. This is different in those two movements that are more formalised, with mixed structures. There, action is mostly initiated within the core group. Also, actions may be initiated by affected citizens from outside the movements (Serbia, Poland and Germany). Some of the movements' representatives expressed negative attitudes towards formal decision making (Poland, Czech Republic, Italy), while other representatives pointed out that consensual decision-making is demanding and takes time.

Membership can be described as conditionally inclusive. Those movements that state they are fully open to new members have some preconditions to be fulfilled, which comes down to basic-values sharing, in particular, the rejection of discrimination and social exclusion. Also, there is a filtration process in terms of frequency and time invested – the initial engagement is just a starting point. In formalised movements, members need to fulfil additional criteria and apply for membership.

To conclude, absolutely all movements value decentralisation and horizontality, and prioritise deliberative practices, while at the same time acknowledging the issues of efficacy and feasibility of such structures. They perceive themselves as the protagonist of the new political system, where equality and inclusiveness are very important.

2. Social movements and relations of trust and distrust

2.1 Perceptions of general (dis)trust; trust in institutions; functions of trust

In most countries, the prevalent position of the social movements is that **general trust is important for a functioning society**, although 'blind' or 'naïve' trust are depicted as negative. Similarly, **general distrust** is most often described **as negative and disruptive** for societies, while at the same time, certain levels of distrust are seen as positive, essential to developing a critical perspective. In general, from the social movements' perspective, Denmark is seen as a highly trusting society, Germany as rather trusting, while all other countries are described as distrusting societies. In Serbia and Italy, social movements made very few remarks about trust, as their focus was more heavily on distrust, seen as prevalent in their societies.

Regarding the **perception of trust in institutions**, social movements from Serbia, Italy, Poland and Greece share the view that citizens of their respective countries mainly distrust their political institutions because of the long-standing negative experiences and perceptions that institutions mistrust 'them', as well, or do not regard them as important. In these countries, as well as in Czech Republic, social movements claim that citizens mainly distrust (political) institutions. In Denmark and Germany, the perception is that citizens mainly (conditionally) trust their institutions. Social movements from Czech Republic, Germany and Denmark regard basic trust in state institutions as crucial for functioning democracies. In their view, trust is the basis for any political action in representative democracies. However, unconditional or blind trust in institutions, or its representatives, is deemed negative, as a certain dose of 'healthy' distrust in institutions is important for critical thinking. Many representatives of social movements stress how individual, untrustworthy representatives of political institutions undermine general trust in institutions. There is overall agreement that general distrust in institutions is negative, mainly because it leads to citizen apathy, and reluctance to get involved in the social and political life of their societies.

When discussing the **positive functions of trust**, social movements stress that: trust is a necessary precondition for social cohesion, for joint action and group accomplishment; trust is an indispensable component of representative democracies; trust is a basic foundation for social movements' (and collective) actions - especially ingroup trust and trustful relations with cooperation partners; trust is important for mobilisation – citizens will join social movements only if they trust them, and if they trust that collective action will

bring results (trust as crucial motivating and mobilisational factor). Therefore, trust is at the heart of social movements' mobilisation of citizens and public action.

Complementary to this, a certain level of distrust is also seen as positive (**conditionally positive functions of distrust**): a healthy dose of distrust makes citizens become more critical and attentive, and hence more inclined to be proactive and to join collective actions. Social movements perceive themselves as corrective factors in their societies, and they regard a healthy dose of distrust in the same manner: as something capable of stimulating reflection and inciting a desire for engagement, and for social change. Hence, such distrust also plays an important role in collective mobilisation.

Both unconditional trust and generalised distrust are seen as bearing negative consequences for societies. Unconditional or blind trust undermines citizens' critical awareness and attentiveness to social problems, while categorical distrust erodes cohesive social forces and induces widespread apathy, according to social movements.

2.2 Cooperation of social movements with governmental institutions (GI) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the effects of such co-operation on citizens` trust in social movements

Generally speaking, regarding the **cooperation** of the analysed social movements **with GI**, the following observations can be made: this cooperation takes place only when deemed necessary, and is thus described as **instrumental**; often **causes polarisation** among members; takes place mostly at the **local level** (Germany, Italy and Poland); is perceived to have **unclear or even detrimental effects on citizen trust** (except in Denmark).

On the other hand, **cooperation with non-governmental organisations** is very **common**; **instrumental, but also based on shared values**; usually perceived as **beneficial for the citizen trust**.

Social movements reveal a spectrum of attitudes regarding **cooperation with GI**. Movements MM (Czech Republic) and ZA (Serbia) prefer **no cooperation** at all. Core members of the ZA movement express a degree of belief in certain individual figures in governmental institutions who can be trusted, even though they distrust institutions and political parties, in general, and prefer not to cooperate with them. Most social movements report **instrumental cooperation** with GI, some of them underline the importance of such cooperation on local levels (XR Italy, OSK Poland). Instrumental cooperation means that they cooperate with governmental institutions and political parties only to a very limited extent and, as a matter of principle, only insofar as there is no political influence, but a clear advantage for promoting the movements' goals. Some social movements have cooperated or are cooperating with GI **reluctantly** (describing it as a "necessary evil") (FFF Germany, HM Germany, OSK Poland), or with **expressed regrets** (AM Greece),

as such cooperation has negative effects on citizens' trust and enthusiasm. Also, cooperation with GI is sometimes described as part of the general **strategic orientation** – when social movements' goals are predominantly policy-oriented (CY Greece, NUDM Italy, PAS Poland), and hence need close consultancy and cooperation with (mostly local) authorities.

Effects of social movements' cooperation with GI on citizens' trust are also described in different ways. Only in Denmark is such cooperation evaluated as having a clear **positive impact** on citizens' trust. In all other countries, social movements predominantly perceive this cooperation as bearing **mixed results**, or even as **undermining the trust** of citizens in movements.

Cooperation with NGOs paints a different picture. Most social movements report tight or intermittent cooperation with NGOs, mostly with those who share similar goals or values. They mostly cooperate **on local levels**. And the effects of such cooperation are overwhelmingly described as having a **positive effect on citizens' trust** in social movements.

2.3 Restoring and/or enhancing trust in societies

Parts of our questionnaire were designed to gain insight into the social movements' stances and ideas about **what can be done at the local, national and EU levels to restore citizen trust**. Ideas about what can be done at the local and the national levels largely overlap, but focus was, to some extent, more on local-level politics and institutions, as they are perceived to be more approachable. The main ideas revolve around the need for local and national **institutions to be more open to citizens, transparent in their decision-making processes, more accountable, and to communicate more directly with citizens**. According to the prevalent opinion, in order to enhance trust, the main political institutions (like the government, ministries, but also regional and local councils and governing bodies) should make more effort to explain their work, competencies and responsibilities, and to regularly inform citizens about the results of their work. They should also be more transparent (which includes financial transparency) and approachable, so that ordinary citizens could more easily access all the relevant information about their institutions' work and decision-making processes. Also, many social movements put emphasis on a need for **dialogue, exchange and discussion with citizens**, and for introducing institutional mechanisms to allow direct citizen participation. Additionally, keeping promises and starting with small steps (like litter management) are seen as important in restoring trust. On all these matters, social movements perceive themselves as active participants, as actors capable of helping local and national institutions restore trust, and at the same time, improve the quality of democracy in society.

In general, social movements talked much less about what can be done **at the EU level** to enhance trust, although very similar propositions were made. There is an overwhelming impression that EU institutions are more detached from ordinary citizens, and that the principal step in (re)gaining trust should be to design institutional mechanisms for including citizens in the decision-making processes, and allowing them to assume a more active role.

When discussing the **social movements' role in enhancing citizens' trust**, all focus groups agree that social movements have the capacity to do so, but there are different ideas about how to perform this role. One line of opinion is that it is not the primary role of social movements to enhance citizens' trust. Instead, the movements should enhance critical thinking, interest in state politics, and should mobilise citizens to increase their pressure on state institutions. Some even mention the need for social movements to nurture distrust in institutions (Serbia), that is to put pressure on them and to expose the deficiencies in their work ("spreading [the] healthy cynicism towards government").

Another line of argument is that social movements should be directly involved in repairing and improving institutions. By showing that institutions can indeed be repaired/their functioning improved, they can indirectly help nurture citizen trust in their institutions.

Finally, there is also a perception that social movements are, in contrast to political parties, trustworthy agents of mobilisation, thus the only social actor capable of conducting social and political change. According to this view, the state and public institutions are the creators of distrust, as they are predominantly responsible for the erosion of political trust. Social movements can help restore this trust by acting differently to conventional political actors, and by "staying close" to their citizens' base.

3. Expertise

Representatives of the social movements **mostly express a high level of trust in expertise**. Evidence is necessary for the formulation of the programme and objectives of the movements, especially in the environmental field. Experts are seen as valuable for offering viable and feasible policy proposals that the movement can take further. Scientific knowledge helps movements gain credibility and legitimation in the public sphere. However, the source of expertise is not only in science, but is also built through the practice of the movement members. While some movements rely directly on the (scientific) experts, others emphasise their own expertise as expert-activists who have gained knowledge and skills through everyday engagement with affected communities and institutions. This means that **movements are also a source of the expertise seen as precious for addressing the needs of the citizens**.

The movements perceive experts as not taking part sufficiently in decision-making, meaning that actual politics is not based on accurate data. Among all researched movements, there was agreement that local and/or national expertise is sufficient for their activism; only the Polish environmental movement claimed to trust international and EU expertise more than that of its own country.

In general, environmental movements refer to expertise as objective knowledge that is rarely questioned. They base their actions on science, and hence actively promote trust in science and expert participation in the decision-making processes. Experts are frequently engaged within the movement, or at least play an advisory role. Environmental movements also advocate for the autonomy of research, aware that privatised research requires compromise.

In other areas, where movements fight for women's or minority rights, housing for all, etc., expertise is assessed much more critically – knowledge can be serving domination purposes instead of liberation or equality. While environmental movements see expertise as non-political, these movements are careful when engaging with experts and giving them a leading voice. Some movements emphasise the need for plurality in expertise, if political struggle is to be successful. In these terms, expertise is labelled not only for facts and figures, but also for the practical skills necessary for the efficiency of the movements.

Being critical of experts is important as expertise may be at the service of a specific political party or ideological position. Often, they are too close to political parties, and even pursue (hidden) political agenda. Also, experts can outspeak the movements, and not limit themselves to an advisory role. Finally, experts sometimes tend to be too general and go beyond their own expertise, which devalues their role in the public sphere. To conclude, movements share the attitude that expertise is valuable and necessary, in society and for the movements, but still this authority voice needs to be confronted with the other interested parties in democratic debates.

4. Democracy and engagement

Investigating the preferred models of political participation revealed the divide between the countries of the European Union and Serbia. Voting has been considered as the most important form of political participation in Poland. In Germany, Denmark, Czech Republic, Italy and Greece, it was mentioned as important, but jointly, with other forms of participation that are deemed equally or even more important. Lack of trust in the election process is obvious in Serbia, where one movement's representatives agreed that voting is not important at all, while the other movement shares the sentiment that other forms of participation are more important. The Serbian state is not perceived as a democracy, and they all advocate institutional change towards more direct participation of the citizens, where the act of voting may begin to make sense again.

In general, all participants across Europe agreed that **other forms of participation are very important for democratic life**. Democracy is not the ultimate object, but a process where participation should be more direct. Both institutional and non-institutional forms are essential for good democratic governance. There is general consensus regarding what reinvigorates democracy, namely: a strong and active civil society and citizens' engagement in social movements, participating in petitions, public consultations or referenda, standing in elections on behalf of political parties and taking part in protests and demonstrations. Referenda should be considered very carefully, as their results can be affected by emotions, rather than facts. Also, their impact is more important locally than nationally (Germany).

In Greece and Serbia, few participants felt the need for radical change in order to "rebuild society". At the same time, they feel that this is unrealistic, and opt for engaging in social movements to achieve short-term goals.

Social movements share a demand for a more participatory and direct model of democracy. This can be achieved by changing the legal framework to encourage participation, and setting the tools for a more direct and much easier citizen involvement. Social movements record the lack of willingness of institutions and representatives to engage citizens more directly. They also complain that citizens themselves should be more proactive, although they recognise the lack of internal and external political efficacy as an important barrier towards such engagement. In the hybrid regime (Serbia), there is also a fear of public exposure and the consequences of dissent. Although some claim that citizens are incapable of taking part in political life and decision making, the reasons given clearly speak to the systemic disadvantages that *make* citizens incapable (only one movement in Italy regards them as intrinsically non-capable). Obstacles are many, and they increase apathy and disengagement as citizens feel excluded and detached from politics, and find it difficult to understand its mechanisms. Citizens lack proper information and political (civic) education in general. They may be severely restricted by social inequalities and can also be prone to making decisions based on emotions, which puts additional responsibility on institutions to design decision-making processes that forefront rational deliberation.

This is where expectations from institutions arise – **institutions should do much more to reach out and involve citizens**, according to the social movements. Institutions should engage in improving education for civic and political life in contemporary societies. They should also work much more on improving access to and the quality of information. Institutional systems should be reformed to be more transparent and welcoming for citizens. Forms of direct participation are desired on the local level, bringing societies closer to participatory democracy. Finally, both to inform and involve citizens more, digital tools should be applied. However, this would require gradual changes in the political culture of most countries, resulting in political representatives being held more accountable.

When it comes to the role of the social movement in the political sphere, there is almost unanimous agreement that social movements are valuable actors that are **able to make citizens more visible and powerful in the public and political spheres**. It is generally easier to engage with social movements on the local level, and hence they should act as the entry point to political life. Movements channel concerns and the interests of ordinary citizens to the institutional arena. It is, however, difficult to conclude whether social movements are successful in reaching out to the people, or able to influence decision-making processes – followers are, in general, more sceptical than core members. They might be partially successful in raising awareness and sensitising political actors and the public sphere, in general, especially in environmental issues. However, impact on institutions is deemed lower, or barely existing. The German movement also pointed out limits of representation and inclusiveness, stating that only a privileged segment of the population has the necessary resources to engage with social movements.

Finally, **active participation in the movements could be considered as an empowerment pathway for citizens** to bring change in society and a necessary complement to mainstream democratic institutions and processes. Direct engagement with the movement brings more political efficacy, which once again, proves to be a necessary factor for social engagement.

5. Notes on country-specific contextual factors

In the concluding chapter of this report, we attempt to summarise the most important findings derived from the national reports, in such a manner as to portray the main tendencies and most frequently articulated arguments expressed by social movements' representatives and followers, particularly issues relevant to the question of trust and distrust in various social and political actors and processes. There is no doubt that many peculiarities, pertinent to specific social movements, cannot be generalised, or subsumed under any category or described tendency. Some of the concrete social movements' specificities – including those influencing their attitudes towards trust and distrust – have to do with their proclaimed goals and means of acting in public,, but some, also, bear on the national contexts in which they are immersed. To shed more light on this aspect, we will briefly outline country-specific contextual factors which paint the socio-political landscape in which social movements emerge and make their claims.

Various forms of grassroot organising – voluntary or interest associations, cooperative movements, environmental groups – have played a major role in building democratic and institutional settings in **Denmark**, similar to the rest of Scandinavia. Some social movements, like environmentalism, have undergone early institutionalisation. This, coupled with the fact that Denmark is a high-trusting society, builds a framework in which social movements rather seek dialogue than confrontation to achieve their aims.

Social movements, to a large extent, are part of the mainstream form of citizens organizing, not dissimilar from other forms of voluntary organisations.

Germany shares some similarities with Denmark, insofar as it is also a relatively trusting state with a tradition of social movements shaping society and policy making. In the past decade, specifically in recent years, issues that have sparked social mobilisation were directly related to multiple European and global crises, primarily economic, political, environmental, and refugee crises. Therefore, the main issues social movements have tackled were: effects of austerity policies, workers' and social rights, housing rights, refugee rights, environmental justice, and demands for more citizens' consultation and democratic participation. These issues feature prominently in social movement struggles in other countries as well – as they echo widely-shared global concerns – but they are articulated in accordance with nationally specific problems, too.

For instance, in **Italy**, democratic social movements have a prominent anti-populist note, reacting to the rise of populism in national politics, and relying on established actors in contentious mobilisations, like trade-unions and student organisations. Italy also saw a rise in feminist movement activism, and reactions to the way austerity policies affected social rights and conditions of female workers.

Poland similarly saw a significant rise in movements and protests advocating women's rights, especially after the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that abortion, even in the case of foetal maldevelopment, violates the constitution. The new right-wing-populist government, led by the Law and Justice (PiS) party, introduced far-reaching reforms that sparked massive protests, leading to greater political polarisation, as many social movements place themselves as either supporters or opponents of a governing party and its reforms.

In **the Czech Republic,** overall, social movement activism has rarely been radical and/or militant. Issues articulated by social movements have been predominantly socio-cultural, such as the environment, human rights, or the quality of institutions. On the other hand, economic issues (and austerity) have been much less frequently compared to other central European countries. However, recent years have seen some changes. The largest demonstration, since the 1989 Velvet Revolution, was organised by the social movement Milion chvilek pro demokracii (Million Moments for Democracy, MM) movement in 2019. The focus of the event was on the quality of government institutions, and the conflict of interests of government members.

Not surprisingly, the latest wave of social movement organising in **Greece** came about because of austerity measures and severe economic crisis. The increased contentious anti-austerity mobilisations were followed by alternative forms of resilience, including local grassroots' initiatives, and solidarity groups aiming to help those who were the most disadvantaged and severely hit by the imposed economic policies. Another form of solidarity developed intensively during the past years concerned refugee assistance. Also, the key characteristic of contentious politics in Greece is the interconnection of

parties and social movements, which is perceived by some social movements as detrimental for citizens' trust in their actions.

Serbia is a specific case in the sample, due to its regime having been described as hybrid, even authoritarian, and because it is characterised by significantly low levels of citizens' trust in institutions. Therefore, recent social movements in this country are mostly challenging and protesting the government's policies and usurpation of power on all levels of governance. All other issues inciting protests and citizens mobilisation – environmental, socio-economic, or cultural – are framed as inseparable from the problems of state-capture and the complete usurpation of power.

6. Social movements and the re-building of trust: towards practical recommendations

1. The way civil society is prevalently understood needs to be broadened. General understandings of the term usually connote (more- or less-established) formal organisations of civil society. But grassroots' initiatives, informal citizens' organisations, even ad hoc protest initiatives, are important expressions of citizens' willingness to engage in their societies, and need to be fully taken into account when assessing the state and the potential of civil society in any given country.

2. Decentralisation and non-hierarchical organisation of social movements here explored, suggest the need to reconsider the usual structure of civil society organisations. Our research suggests that citizens feel more empowered and willing to get socially engaged in organisations which nurture openness, inclusiveness and deliberation.

3. Social movements have significant capacities to attract citizens with low levels of trust in state institutions. Democratic social movements' commitment to principles, clear social values, and collective deliberation make them desirable arenas for disenchanted citizens to invest their trust in collective mobilisation. Therefore, all stakeholders wishing to invigorate trust in governance, and to promote active citizenship, should work more closely with democratic social movements, especially those whose base and modes of acting in the public are growing. However, this needs to be done carefully, so as to avoid cooptation, that may compromise the movements.

4. Social movements are especially active and recognised at the local levels – where they also enjoy significant citizens' trust. Also, their cooperation with other, formal and established organisations of civil society, takes place mostly at local levels. Therefore, local governance structures should especially be advised to seek dialogue and consultations with locally-active social movements.

5. Social movements are important articulators of citizens' growing demands for more participation, deliberation, openness and accountability. Their experiences and answers to such citizens' demands should be included in designing a roadmap on how to amend

political institutions towards achieving this goal. Making institutions more participatory, open for deliberation and accountable is a welcome pathway for reinvigorating democracy in times of current crises.

6. Social movements actively promote trust in science and experts' participation in the decision-making processes, and should therefore be used as examples of restoring trust in science and evidence-based expertise. Relying on their experiences of mobilising expert knowledge, and helping to actively build citizens' trust in it, could aid in strengthening the deteriorating levels of lay citizens' trust in science.