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Climate camps and environmental movements. Impacting the coal industry and practicing 'system change'

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ABSTRACT
'System change not climate change!' has been one of the prominent slogans the climate movement used during its ever growing campaigning against coal mining and the causally linked climate change. This article traces climate camps as a form of protest for a social movement and investigates its concepts. In analysing its intertwinement with particular sites of pollution, the environmental and the left movement, it demonstrates that the movement's broader aims of changing the system and reaching a better life for all might not always be reached, not even in the small scale of its own practices. Yet, as the juxtaposition of concurrent protest action and political, cultural and industrial development shows, climate camps in Germany, at least, have been making an impact, even if the impact is not unanimously called a success or recognized by all stakeholders.

KEYWORDS
Climate camps; climate and environmental activism; social movements; impact; coal exit

In January 2021, the mining and energy company LEAG published its new coal field plan, setting the seal on the Welzow-Süd II mine extension. Welzow-Süd II, together with Jänschwalde-Nord and the Reichwalde mine extension, was for more than a decade key for continuing lignite mining and coal combustion: only the mine extensions would have guaranteed the continuation of electricity production from coal in the Lausitz region, in the most Eastern parts of Germany, on the border with Poland. Former planning also included the resettlement of more than 800 people for Welzow-Süd II from the village of Proschim. With the announcement of the new plan in 2021, devastating Proschim and resettling its inhabitants was no longer an issue. In its official statements LEAG justified the planning with the requirements of the novel German 'coal combustion termination law' (Kohleverstromungsbeendigungsgesetz), which regulates the orchestrated shut down of all coal fired power plants and coal mines in Germany by 2038.[1] A few years before, in March 2017, LEAG had announced its intention to discontinue expanding the Jänschwalde and Reichwalde mines. This meant that the 900 inhabitants of Kerkwitz, Atterwasch and Grabko would after a decade of being told differently, now have the certainty that they are off the map of resettlement and demolition. In 2017, LEAG argued that the discontinuation decision was made for purely financial reasons, as it would enable the company to securely plan mining for the next 25–30 years and to expand into other areas of the energy and mining sector.[2]

This article investigates the plausibility of the mining company's argument for discontinuing mining on financial and legal grounds alone. It analyses the activism and protests that took place regarding the mine extensions in the Lausitz for more than a decade and starts in its first

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part with analysing climate camps as a major form. Climate camps have been gaining support as protest strategies in coal dependent regions through continuously bringing climate change on the agenda and combining it with local struggles against relocation. Civil society actors thereby have been influencing energy governance.

This article argues in its second part, that climate movements – also by means of climate camps – have been impacting political decisions as well as socio-cultural notions of coal mining and the environment, and also have an impact on industrial decisions – whether the fossil fuel sector acknowledges this publically or not.

At the same time, climate activists – also drawing on experiences from earlier environmental activism – work not only to succeed in one instance of mitigating climate change but aim at more profound changes of energy, ownership and political systems. With a call for 'system change not climate change', the movement not only demands a reconsideration of political decision making, consumption processes and ownership structures but attempts to put those demands for a better life for all into practice during climate camps. While stretching only over a limited period of time and space, climate camps help to imagine, test and experience these alternative ways of life. However, as this article demonstrates in its third part, the practice of climate camp organization does not always live up to the expectations of system changes but shows the limits of alternative democratic processes.

Climate camps

Climate camps are a comparatively novel phenomenon. While autonomous camps[3] can be traced back for a long time, and camps related to the environmental movement back to the 1960s at least (Feigenbaum et al., 2013), a novel and quickly accelerating climate camp trend developed after the G8 summit in 2005. An initial spark was the climate camp initiated in 2006 next to the Drax coal fired power plant in the UK.[4] It was followed by several camps for climate action in the next few years, taking place often near airports or power stations in the UK as well as in Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland and other countries of predominantly the Global North.

The first climate camp in the Lausitz took place in 2011, 10 years before LEAG announced its new coal field plans. The Lusatian Climate and Energy Camp (short: *Lausitzcamp*) kicked-off as a novel protest form against the continuous expansion of mining, causing the resettlement of people and severe damage to the climate and environment. The *Lausitzcamp* had been set up by people both from within the area – many of them facing resettlement – and by people from larger cities like Berlin or Leipzig. They started a visible and localized protest in an area characterized by lignite mining for more than a hundred years. The Lausitzcamp in 2011 and in the following years lasted for a few days or a week, providing a space with infrastructure for a number of people to sleep, eat, exchange, learn and voice protest against coal mining for energy production and against climate change. The first years saw a limited number (a few dozen to several hundred people) attending and contribution to the camp programme including workshops, round tables, talks, film screenings, excursions and protest actions. Always finding support in local population – providing camp grounds near Proschim, Kerkwitz or other villages, co-organizing or supporting with infrastructure and set-up – the *Lausitzcamp* was also subject to criticism. The vision of a large circus tent surrounded by numerous smaller tents and self-made infrastructure garnered scepticism from passers-by and lack of comprehension of what the 'green freaks' might want. But returning back year after year to different villages in the Lausitz (Müller, 2018), the campers also experienced growing tolerance and many small instances of acceptance, understanding and approval. The year

2014 marked a mile stone by drawing more than 7000 people to the village of Kerkwitz, from where people formed a human chain across the river Neisse to set up a sign against coal mining on both sides of the border. In 2016, the *Lausitzcamp* provided the necessary space and infrastructure for 4000 people near Proschim, allowing the concerted civil disobedience action of entering the Welzow-Süd mine and occupying diggers and railway tracks for more than 48 hours, disturbing the continuous lignite supplies for the adjunct power plant.

Climate camps like the *Lausitzcamp* are a strategy for environmental movements to draw attention to localized, concentrated contributions to climate change. The Lausitz with the three operating coal power plants Jänschwalde, Boxberg and Schwarze Pumpe contributed 54.6 million tons CO_2,[5] equalling 7% of all energy related CO_2 emissions in Germany in 2017, 36% of all lignite-related CO_2 emissions, or 19% of all fossil-energy related CO_2 emissions in Germany in 2017.[6] The Lausitz with its open cut coal mines and power plants hence is a very suitable location for protest: it provides a very tangible, materialized form of climate change appearing as one of its sources. The mines and power plants form a visible stage and precise target for environmental protection and climate change protest. However, being located in a sparsely populated area, protest around open-cut mines or power plants aiming at large participation or a longer term needs a minimum infrastructure of food, shelter and electricity.

Climate camps, as protest camps in general, can provide this infrastructure for large scale protests away from cities and towns. According to Frenzel (2011, p. 164), climate camps are in the first place functional. They are a temporary structure creating a place equipped with the necessities for several day long protests. Yet, this functionality goes hand in hand with advocating more conscious socio-ecological relations, resulting in an ideal of making the camp infrastructure as resource-saving as possible. Put into practice, the Lausitzcamp generated needed electricity from mobile solar panels instead of diesel generators, aimed at saving water, provided sanitary infrastructure in biodegradable form and worked with cooking collectives that prioritized vegan food and rescued groceries. This sustainable take on infrastructure reflects one of the four pillars of contemporary climate camps: to put the vision of a better life into practice. While protesting against larger, systematic exploitation of nature and global warming, climate camps always have the aspiration to demonstrate that a responsible treatment of resources and a severe mitigation of greenhouse gases also comprises sustainable end usage. Beyond socio-ecological relations guaranteeing environmental sustainability, the vision of a better life also encompasses forms of communication and decision making. A better communal life would entail, for instance, nonviolence and consensus-based decision making. The daily plena during climate camps or the ones employed for organizing the camps are two of the spaces where this is put into practice.

A second pillar of protest camps is networking for the movement. While telephone conferences, newsletters or mailing lists are also part of new social movements' networking practices, camps allow for a longer timeframe and face-to-face meetings for networking. Climate camps comprise organizing beforehand – usually in form of plena, in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid19 pandemic primarily through telephone or video conferences – which allow for the establishment of personal relationships as well as alliances for the cause. The camps themselves provide room for making plans, harmonizing time frames and capacities, forming new alliances or deepening existing ones. Furthermore, connections and acquaintanceships can become more profound through actually living together during the camp and through shared experiences. Networks during climate camps in Germany have been formed between experienced activists from the left and young, ecologically motivated people initially less critical of the wider political and economic system (Kössler, 2013, p. 188). The Lausitzcamp, too, saw a diverse range of experienced activists and newcomers.

They find common ground in being no longer satisfied with the way the political mainstream is treating climate issues, and hence mobilize for climate camps as a place where environmental issues as thematic foci combine with camps as a form of protesting for alternative modes of organizing all aspects of society, comprising last but not least large scale (political) decision making structures. With the rise of activism among even younger people through Fridays for Future, climate camps also faced the questions of how to balance networking and the expansion of climate protest movements and the configuration of the third pillar: action.

Action, as the third pillar, makes climate camps attractive for activists in the more narrow sense of the word. Rather than petitioning, lobbying or campaigning, climate camps have been set up initially to allow for protest action at key locations of environmental pollution, greenhouse gas emissions or climate change impact. Action in the Lausitzcamp, for example, took shape in registered protest marches, human chain, die-ins, occupation of offices, or human-formed pictures. In recent years, groups such as Ende Gelände, ausgeCO2hlt, Sand im Getriebe, Robin Wood or other alliances also conducted civil disobedience action in the context of climate camps. Next to banner dropping and blockades, occupations of open cut mines, coal railways and power plants have gained importance since 2015. These large scale actions are concerted and well-organized. Informing participants about options and (legal) consequences, discussing and formulating consensus about what is appropriate and what is not, forming small and medium sized reference groups, physical training in overcoming potential obstacles, as well as strategically planning routes, timings and logistics have in the past few years led to day long mass occupations of coal infrastructure. Large scale civil disobedience in coal mining areas is a form of action that has not only effectively disrupted coal mining and drawn media attention to the climate crisis coproduced in Germany and Europe, but has required mining companies and police to pay attention and adjust their strategies and handling of protesters. In sum, the mass occupations have resulted in comparatively little civilly and criminal prosecution, given that up to 4000 people entered the private property of coal mining companies.

The fourth and final pillar of protest camps is education. Climate camps are important for educating participants and visitors on environmental and climate related issues through workshops, talks and presentations. Thematically, they can cover everything from upcycling to climbing, from electricity production basics to discussions between activists and mining companies, from kids space to film screenings. Between 2015 and 2019, education at German climate camps also found expression in the degrowth summer school, hosted by the Rhineland and Leipziger Land climate camps.[7]

Climate camps making an impact

The assessments of climate camps' impact on mitigating climate change, and of the Lausitzcamp on abandoning the mine extensions Welzow-Süd II, Jänschwalde-Nord and Reichwalde differ significantly. While the mining company was quick to resort to the claim that economic and legal reasons were alone responsible,[8] the announcement was celebrated as a success by the local activists and the climate movement. In autumn 2017, the local initiatives invited all supporters, especially those from the climate camp, to celebrate and thank them for their engagement that led to this success.

It is nearly impossible to measure the precise impact of environmental movements on a particular political policy or industry's decision, because decision making (in this case for an overall operation plan) is a process, and hence influenced by numerous factors and actors, which are closely intertwined and numerically not graspable. It is clear, however, that the Lausitzcamps drew strong

media attention, even making it to the Sunday evening news of national TV.[9] The Lausitzcamps were visited by an ever increasing number of local people, interregional and international activists, and state and national politicians. The activists' continuous efforts were noted by opponents and proponents alike. They drew attention and resources from the mining company, who erected fencing, developed its press and media responses, assigned security guards, mobilized parts of its staff, and filed complaints and brought charges. The mining company had to engage with the movement and its protest forms.

Furthermore, political authorities increasingly paid attention to voiced climate concerns, indicating that the continuous engagement of the activists in the Lausitz has co-produced political change. While it cannot be clearly defined *how much* the climate camps and the climate movement in general contributed to political change, the concurrent strengthening of the German climate movement and the development of fossil fuel critical national politics is striking. The number of people participating in climate camps – as only one indicator of the movement – grew steadily from a few hundred in 2011 to several thousand in the second half of the decade. The rise of Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion in 2019 further contributed to climate change becoming a relevant topic in the public sphere and of public engagement, drawing 300,000 people in April 2019 to the streets in Germany alone.[10] At the same time, developments in industry and politics heralded the decline of coal mining: In 2014, the Swedish state company Vattenfall announced its decision to sell the mines and power plants in the Lausitz in the aftermath of the elections of a new parliament. One year later, the German minister for economics announced plans for a *Klimaabgabe* (a climate fee) but substituted this with a *Kapazitätsreserve* (capacity reserve) being a compensation the government pays for shutting down parts of Jänschwalde and other power plants. In 2016, the Czech company EPH bought the mines and power plants, calling the new company LEAG. This year also saw the large Ende Gelände protests at the Lausitzcamp.

Two years later, in 2018, the German government started convening the 'Coal Commission' to work out a plan for ending coal mining and combustion, with Hannelore Wodtke, who had been fighting for the survival of Proschim, as one of its members, as well as three representatives from environmental NGOs. This Commission on Growth, Structural Change and Employment ('Coal Commission') in its report to the government gave its advice on abandoning all coal mining and combustion for power production by 2038, thus effectively shutting down or converting to another energy resource Germany's 104 fully or partially coal-fired plants. Hannelore Wodtke was the only one to vote against the report, as it did not secure the survival of Proschim, but left this decision to LEAG. She did, however, regard fixing an exit date as a success for the environmental movement.[11]

While a connection between the social movement, political legislation and the mining companies' decisions is evident, the LEAG still decided to claim its decisions were based purely on economics. From the movement's point of view, the question of 'success' can likewise not be answered straightforwardly, at least not from everyone's point of view. When the government transformed the Coal Commission's advice in parts into national law and passed the mining areas structural support law and the coal exit law in 2020, this could be termed a success of the movement. Activists achieved their goal of pushing for an exit from coal mining and combustion as one of the largest emitters of CO_2, and succeeded in the political realm when the government passed a law with a precise timetable for shutting down all lignite mining and coal fired power plants. However, not only was Hannelore Wodtke not completely at ease with terming the report and the law a success, but parts of the environmental and climate movement were soon to criticize the legally manifested coal exit as not fast enough and too costly. Energy market mechanisms might have led to an earlier shut down of the power plants and mines, and would not have required the huge subsidies for the

shut down or capacity reserves. The set timetable, furthermore, did not correspond to the Coal Commission's advice for timely coal plant deactivation, and the legislation also left room for approving the activation of a new coal-fired power plant. The coal exit law was hence criticized for breaking the consensus that the Coal Commission's diverse stakeholder had accomplished. In sum, there is no univocal approval of the coal exit law as a success of the climate movement, albeit not due to doubts on the movements impact, but because perceptions of what is a 'success' differ, also within the climate movement.

If, as Guigni states (1999, p. xxii), what really matters is the collective benefit to the beneficiary group, and this group is defined as the broader population being spared the emissions from 176 tons of coal from the Jänschwalde-Nord mine,[12] as well as the power plants and other mines discontinuing operation until 2038, then we can speak of a success of the Lausitzcamp and other environmental protest. If we consider the structural and cultural level (Guigni 1999, p. xxiii), we also see success of the movement, as the climate camps in the Lausitz contributed to strengthening solidarity among and beyond the movement, and shifts in public attitudes towards coal mining and combustion being without alternative. The Lausitzcamp, through focussing on and implementing the pillars of action, education and networking, impacted not only political decision making but also had an impact in the industrial and socio-cultural realm, within which coal mining in the Lausitz was for a long time most highly regarded, both economically as well as regards identity politics (see Goodman et al., 2020, p. 116ff.). However, if we define the beneficiary group as the villagers of Proschim not having to leave their homes, the climate movement has not succeeded.

Neither is the world's most vulnerable population or humankind saved from climate change. Even if the passing of the coal exit law – or the even 'smaller' preceding success of stopping the Jänschwalde-North mine extension in 2017 – is regarded as a success, it can be read as an example of the climate movement winning the battle but losing the war. It is an instance of tackling climate change and contributing to its mitigation, but not stopping it altogether or even limiting global warming to 1.5°C. The climate movement thus echoes the development of the environmental movement, of which it can be regarded as a part or as emerging from.[13] The environmental movement was, by the end of the 1990s regarded as a successful social movement (Rucht, 1999): it had grown and become consolidated, it had influenced politics, society and culture. The movement had been diversified and by the turn of the millennium had covered almost every aspect of environmental protection (Rucht, 1999, p. 205). This growth and diversification was not only in breadth but also in depth: environmental activism had shown a growing professionalism and expertise. Greenpeace is regarded as a prime example for this professionalization and institutionalization (Zelko, 2014), although institutionalization and structuring activism also comes at a cost (Mildner, 2002). For the environmental movement's impact on society and politics, it can be stated that

> environmentalism is highly valued. Hardly any relevant social group, hardly any important political party, can afford to reject the goal of environmental protection. Even those industrial branches and corporations which, on concrete issues, act as opponents of environmental groups rhetorically embrace environmentalism and try to gain a 'green and clean' image. (Rucht, 1999, p. 206)

In Germany, this had seen not only the introduction of environmental issues into policy making and legislation, or the Green party's participation in governing the country from 1998 to 2005, but the introduction of multiple environmental agencies, state departments and advisory boards, educational programmes, climate protection plans and rules and regulations. At the same time, environmental movements had been impacting the behaviour and attitudes of people. Making environmental issues heard and becoming a relevant voice had also resulted in a striking level of

attitudinal support for environmental protection (Rucht, 1999). This comparatively swift gain in popularity and take up by the population is another clear indicator of the movement's success.

This situation is comparable to the climate movement, which – as described above – also found its way into governmental planning and politics, public opinion, and positive attitudes, with the climate camps being but one instance of it. However, the dilemma remains as regards environment and climate: the situation of the environment in total has not improved over the last fifty to sixty years, neither has that of the climate. Quite on the contrary, it has become worse. Extractivism and the exploitation of nature went along with environmental destruction that resulted in a degree of pollution that no longer affects only immediate surroundings but climatic conditions, which again negatively affect the environment. The climate movement, and the environmental movement in more general, has hence not been succeeding in its larger aim of mitigating climate change or effectively protecting the environment overall; it has been influencing single sites, but not making enough impact. Instances of halting or changing pollution at particular sites cannot outweigh the overall destruction still being done.

Climate camps can be seen as acknowledging this problem and working towards its solution. Rather than tackling only one issue, they demand 'system change not climate change', and try to put this into practice in small scale during the camps. Climate camps also developed in close relation to the political left scene (Kössler, 2013, p. 188), with activist from attac, Antifa and other left groups undermining the notion of an effective protection of environment and climate needing more than fighting single power plants or airports – albeit acknowledging such sites as very suitable instances for manifesting protest. Before and after the G8 protests in Heiligendamm in 2007, left groups' coordination meetings put climate as an issue on their protest agenda, with camps being perceived as a suitable form for this work. The precise disentanglement of originators of the climate camps – starting in the UK in 2006 and in Germany in 2010 – within a movement as loosely organized as the climate movement and overlapping in parts with the left scene, is hardly possible. In practice, climate camps draw on experiences, values and agendas generated previously in both the left and environmental movements. As Woodsworth (2008, p. 22), focussing on the UK, states,

> From the 1960s new Left and student movements come the roots of counterculture and alternative notions of community [to climate camps]. From second-wave feminism, at its height in the 1970s, comes cultures of political organising that seek to avoid hierarchy and oppression. The 1980s brought the peace/anti-nuclear movement and its use of non-violent direct action and protest camps as well as encounters with new countercultural currents in the form of New-Age travellers and anarcho-punks, and the more militant tactics of animal rights activists. The 1990s saw the consolidation of a specifically environmental direct action movement resisting road-building and later genetic modification, and the rise of anti-capitalist/alter-globalisation/global justice (ACAG) movements […]

The intertwinement with leftist groups and justice movements brought the long standing tradition and profound analyses of current and desirable socio-ecological relations to climate camps, which see reasons for the current climate crisis in capitalism, technology or culture (Bebbington, 2017, p. 3), which need to be changed.

To bring about these changes needed for effectively protecting the climate is a mammoth task. It is not clear if the movement will succeed or fail, and what means are the best to make the necessary impact. During organizing or discussing climate camps and other forms of activism, moments arise where the effectiveness, impact and sense of environmental action is questioned. Activists discuss and scrutinize the means applied – whether disruptive or moderate forms are more successful, if applying disruptive tactics like Ende Gelände's blockades of mining infrastructure on the occasion of

climate camps are more productive than participating in the Coal Commission. It has been argued academically that 'disruption is the most powerful resource that movements have at their disposal to reach their goals, since they lack the institutional resources possessed by other actors, such as political parties and interest groups' (Guigni, 1999, p. xvii), and that a movement's political context, the available political opportunities and the repressiveness of the rulers, as well as the cultural climate and the movement's ability to create innovative and disruptive tactics are essential for disruption to be more or less effective (Guigni, 1999). To put (disruptive) activism into practice and exercise it within a given socio-cultural and political context is, however, over and over again subject to trial.

Changing the system – not even within climate camp organization?

This also goes for small scale systematic changes, which are put into practice during climate camps as a way to establish a communication and decision making processes that are free from violence and hierarchies. Of central importance is consensus, meaning that decisions are not based on majority votes, but that agreements are reached among a broad proportion of people involved (Bressen, 2007, p. 213). Practicing basic democratic and consensus oriented processes is an essential part of the movement's conception (Burkhart et al., 2017, p. 110), as it is a more democratic decision making for real political participation. Proposals can be discussed and amended several times, concerns heard and options pondered, while the discussion rules aspire equal shares of contribution by diverse individuals (for example through rearranging the speakers' list, favouring those who until then spoke less). Voting eventually comprises articulation of compliance, small or large concern, 'stepping aside' or a veto – with the latter being the only form of blocking a proposal, and the former being various forms of acceptance. These modes and rules guarantee that the largest possible numbers rather than a simple majority supports a decision, contributing to the levelling of hierarchies and the application of grass-roots democracy. Working as decentralized, periodically reorganizing networks of people becoming active for climate change mitigation, climate activists put these modes of decision making into practice when bringing together individuals, local initiatives, branches or groups. All of them have equal rights and become part of what is envisioned as horizontal decision making.

Two instances from climate camp organizing, however illustrate the limits in practice of this grass-roots democracy. In 2018, after holding the Lausitzcamp for seven consecutive years and the announcement of the mining company to discontinue the mine-extension plans for Jänschwalde-Nord and Welzow Süd II, organizers of the Lausitzcamp in consultation with other climate movement groups decided for a change of locations and a shift towards the so called Central German mining area (Mitteldeutsches Revier – after the Rhineland and Lusatia the third lignite mining area in Germany). In February 2018, the first organizational plenum took place in a former factory complex in Leipzig.

Half a dozen of the Lausitzcamp organizers were present, as were organizers of the degrowth summer school and about 30–40 people who had not previously been involved in organizing but followed the call to organize a camp in 2018 somewhere around Leipzig and the Central German mining area. After warm-ups and first introductions, someone from the Lausitzcamp introduced the camp's history, its development, guidelines and present with a slideshow. Everyone got a visual impression of the Lausitzcamp and a rough idea about its trajectory and the climate camp's central ideas. After the person organizing the Lausitzcamp for the last year had finished, a person previously organizing the summer school rose to speak, saying that the Lausitzcamp had been cancelled for 2018 and that the group is instead liaising with the summer school. The

Lausitzcamp people immediately objected, stating that the Lausitzcamp had by no means been cancelled, but was going afield, carrying the anti-coal protest to another mining area but keeping its distinct name and drawing on gathered experience and support. They also declared that while the Lausitzcamp was to go afield in 2018, its return to the Lausitz in 2019 is important, because the mining company scheduled its decision about the village Proschim for 2020.

This different understanding of who supports whom, of who becomes an ally or part of another group turned out to be an issue of importance over the next two days. Such questions of structure – where does one movement end and another one start, who is a partner, who is an ally? – have long been a characteristic of climate change movements (Bebbington, 2017). In this particular case, the question was answered through a combination of planning and moderating the two and a half plenary days with discussions and decision making of the whole group – less so through discussing the issue of cooperation and eventually reaching an agreement among the largest possible number of people. People eventually opted for a new climate camp with a completely new name – Klimacamp Leipziger Land – in consequence of which a few of the Lausitzcamp organizers withdrew and dropped out from organizing the climate camp. Others, however, stayed on, setting up a week-long climate camp located next to the open cut mine Vereinigtes Schleenhain in the village of Pödelwitz, drawing more than 1000 campers to the workshops, protests actions, performances and summer school.

Two years later, at the beginning of 2020, that year's kick-off organizational plenum for the Klimacamp Leipziger Land showed again how organizing a meeting and moderating it can undermine the ideal of discussion based agreement and consensus. This plenum took place in an open office of a member of parliament, and about two dozen people gathered. The inhabitants of Pödelwitz had announced that after hosting the climate camp for two consecutive years with a very positive reception and feedback within the village and beyond, they would prefer the 2020 edition of the climate camp to take place elsewhere.[14] Hence, the plenum's main task was to decide where, when and with what thematic subheading the 2020 climate camp would take place. The plenum started with the by now familiar warm-ups and rounds of introduction, followed by the task to discuss in small groups what grass-roots democracy comprises – a result of criticism in its fragmentary implementation in previous years. Afterwards, ideas for locations and topics were collected, groups formed to think through these ideas and posters drawn for each one of them, which the respective small groups later explained to the whole group. The ideas ranged from a camp to rejuvenate a rundown riding centre in the woods slightly outside of Leipzig, to tying up with the airport protest in a nearby small town, to gathering all over the city on the occasion of the transport summit scheduled for May 2020, to carrying the protest to a small town in the hinterlands known for right-wing and climate change denial tendencies. Pros and cons were exchanged on the different scenarios, ranging from logistics to early dates, from missing camp character to expected engagement from visitors vs. their 'service attitudes'. On the second day, the moderator dismissed two of the seven suggestions from the start, saying that she spoke with the larger climate change network and that dates would collide with other protest action. In the course of the day, it showed again and again that moderation is key to the decision making process – and that despite the initial discussion of what grass-root democracy comprises, it is not put into effective practice. This became most obvious when out of the remaining three ideas, only two were discussed in detail while one was put aside by the moderator without reason beyond making room for an opinion poll on the other two. The moderator met the slight objections to this procedure by pointing out that this was only to get an idea of the opinion but not a decision making. When everyone was asked to get up and position themselves physically on an imagined line of support of idea one – the traffic summit in May – wording made clear that when you stand at the very end, you'd be out of the process more or less, signalling 'that you can't

support this idea'. While there was one abstention, the majority – being bodily also subject to group dynamics – positioned themselves towards being supportive of the idea. Slightly less people supported the second idea, and the third one still in the running was 'now that there is a clear poll' neither discussed not balloted.

These two instances illustrate a slight discrepancy between ideal and practice of alternative democratic processes. Climate camps feed upon the

> uptake of the complex normative ideas that underpin contemporary environmentalism – about how decisions should be made and by whom, about holism and systems thinking, about the nature of progress and its relationship to economic growth, and about the relationships between nature and culture, local and global, present and future generations. (Woodsworth, 2008, p. 18)

A socio-ecological transition for climate change mitigation and social and ecological justice must comprise overcoming the growth paradigm and destructive economics. Better economic systems and societies will rest on values like attentiveness, solidarity and cooperation (Burkhart et al., 2017, p. 14), which are to be demanded as general principles on multiple action scales as well as to be put into practice in one's own acting. For climate camps as part of the climate movements, this implies that decisions should be made in a nonviolent and consensus-based form. Small-group discussions, delegate systems, plenary decisions with the abovementioned voting options and a speaking order attentive to shares in discussions and marginalized speakers are to provide for non-hierarchical and grass-roots decision making.

However, the two organizational plena illustrate that the implementation of these values poses challenges. While people comply with the rules of voting, and display attentiveness and solidarity, the basis democratic ideals can be undermined by moderation and agenda setting. The organizers and moderators of a plenum are necessary as facilitators, but they also have the advantage of setting up the agenda and driving or directing things. Setting up plena requires thinking things through in advance, making suggestions about forms and topics that will make sense to successfully set up a climate camp (or reach any other envisioned outcome). It requires a careful framing that allows the process to advance, but at the same time needs to be very open to the ideas and needs of the whole group. The group usually entrusts the 'processors' and moderators with facilitating the process. In their role as moderators or 'processors' they are to intervene from an intersubjective point of view only, without being biased. Yet, given that objectivity is not possible and that in many cases the moderators and processors are not external, their action can – and should in some instances, as for example when they give so far marginalized people more room – privilege some participants and disadvantage others. What is legitimate in a process aiming at levelling pre-existing inequalities, becomes problematic when the moderator's interference becomes an acting for her own interests and turns into bending the established rules and overstepping previously set lines. The unconscious or skilled setting of the agenda, of assigning topics and tasks, of scheduling opinion polls or votes or delaying the same allows both moderators and processor to steer the process. It becomes impossible to draw clear-cut lines between facilitating, operating, regulating and controlling the discussions and decision making process.

It also needs to be acknowledged that in the particular cases of organizing the climate camp Leipziger Land some participants were professionally engaged in degrowth or environmental activism, while others were contributing to setting up the camp in their free-time. It goes without saying that the former had a clear advantage in resource allocation, resulting in investing more time in planning and controlling and having more information at their disposal. Having the resources to be a delegate and/or keep oneself constantly informed about other groups' or the larger movement's strategies and plans, enlarges not only the capacity to use and integrate this information and to

contribute to a more fruitful and informed planning, but also increases symbolic capital and can raise the status within the group. In some cases, information can be used to achieve one's own aims and in the process might undermine the larger values of solidarity, attentiveness and cooperation that the movement wants to rest upon.

Conclusion

'System change not climate change!' has been one of the prominent slogans the German climate movement has used during its ongoing campaigning against coal mining and the causally linked climate change. The idea that the current extractive capitalism is the wrong political context for an economy that takes environment into account and that a general rethinking of politico-economic conditions feeding on growth and maximizing profit derives in parts from the intertwinement with left activism, and in parts from experiences of 'failure' in protecting the environment at large. This notion is interrelated with grass-roots democratic practices and protest forms targeting tangible manifestations of extractivism, for which climate camps form both a functional setting and a small scale space where ideals of a 'better life for all' are put into practice. This article has shown that organizing and moderating decision making processes for climate camps does not always live up to the grass-roots democratic standards set for and by themselves and that internal decision making processes are not as non-hierarchical as imagined or proclaimed, but continue to comprise imbalances. However, social movements are often faced with the questions of 'success' or 'failure' of set goal, targets and ambitions, without being able to give an ultimate answer. Because what someone within a movement as loosely organized as the climate one terms a failure, can be read by another person as a step forward or success. What this article has shown, however, is that the climate movement with camps as one of its most prominent forms has had an impact on coal mining in Germany, not only as regards the mine extensions in the Lausitz, but also as regards the socio-cultural framing, policy making and industrial decision making – which is but one step towards keeping global warming below 1.5°C.

Notes

1. https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-01/14/leag-legt-plan-vor-welzow-ii-ist-raus-und-proschim-bleibt.
2. http://www.niederlausitz-aktuell.de/niederlausitz/66170/leag-gibt-plaene-fuer-lausitzer-tagebaue-weitgehend-auf.html.
3. See Feigenbaum et al. (2013) on the division of camps.
4. https://web.archive.org/web/20070301045057/http://news.independent.co.uk/environment/article1223134.ece.
5. https://www.thru.de/daten/.
6. Totalling 735.1 million tons in 2017: https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten/klima/treibhausgas-emissionen-in-deutschland#treibhausgas-emissionen-nach-kategorien; 149 million tons CO_2 emissions due to lignite, 283 million tons due to fossil energy production: https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/384/bilder/dateien/6_datentabelle-zur-abb_entw-co2-emi_2020-03-11.pdf.
7. In 2010, the first official German climate camp took place in the Rhineland mining area in Western Germany, about 40 km from Cologne and Dusseldorf. It focussed on the large scale open cut mines and the adjunct power plants as a tangible and visible target for climate action. The Lausitzcamp followed one year later. The Lausitzcamp has been taking a break since 2017, but saw a single day actions in late 2019. The latest climate camp to be formed was the Klimacamp Leipziger Land (Climate Camp Leipzig hinterland), taking place in 2018 for the first time. In 2020, due to the Covid19 pandemic, the Klimacamp Leipziger Land was conducted online, and the Rhineland camp did not take place. Instead, a large scale Ende Gelände protest weekend took place in the Rhineland in September, which drew on

existing personnel and material infrastructure, but relied on decentralized, smaller spaces for spending the nights as but one aspect of a Covid19-related safety concept.

8. https://www.lr-online.de/leag-aendert-tagebauplaene-39724043.html.
9. https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/sendung/ts-14035.html.
10. https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/strike-statistics/list-of-countries/.
11. https://www.maz-online.de/Brandenburg/Hannelore-Wodtke-stimmte-als-einzige-gegen-den-Abschlussbericht-der-Kohlekommission.
12. According to Tudeshki et al. (2007, p. 14).
13. Environmental and climate movements are sometimes seen as one and the same thing or the latter an advancement of the further. It took a while for climate change and global ecology to be a prominent issue of protest, while modern environmentalism in the Global North took off in the 1970s already, often along lines of nature conservation and political ecology (see Giugni & Grasso, 2015). Precise cases of species or places of nature being threatened were on the agenda of environmental movements as well as broader issues of biodiversity loss, deforestation or acid rain. In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), the environmental movement turned in the mid-1970s to nuclear power, making anti-nuclear protests the major line of protest for the coming decades. While environmentalism in the FRG is said to have been quite radical in its beginnings and becoming to some extent institutionalized or turned mainstream during the 1980s (Rucht & Roose, 2003), other countries in the Global North experienced an up and down in the 1980s (Woodsworth, 2008, p. 18). There has been constant academic debate about whether the environmental movement has been declining or rising since the 1970s (see Russell, 2015; Woodsworth, 2008, p. 18), especially since it is difficult to grasp a rather loosely organized movement, defined only by having an agenda with some relationship to a politicized conception of nature and some sustained forms of collective action (Bebbington, 2017, p. 1). However, what can be noted is that global ecology and climate change became stronger issues for the environmental movements only in the 1990s, arguably after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (Giugni & Grasso, 2015, p. 340f.) and in relation to CFCs in the atmosphere (Roose 2012). The strategies to draw attention to environmental issues, to increase pressure on political decision makers and polluters, and to change the conditions for the better, reach from situational protest and demonstrations to petitions, lobbying and campaigning. Protest camps, too, have been part and parcel of some protests, yet emerged anew for climate change mitigation and climate direct action in the late 2000s.
14. The two climate camps in Pödelwitz raised attention to the village's fate and contributed to all three partners of the newly elected government of the state of Saxony to agree on the preservation of the village. In late 2019, this preservation found its way into the coalition contract. The so called Coal Exit Law passed in 2020 underlined this agreement, and in January 2021 the mining company, after discussions with the ministry of economics, drafted a renewed mining plan, providing the needed legal ground for Pödelwitz to be off the devastation map.

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