

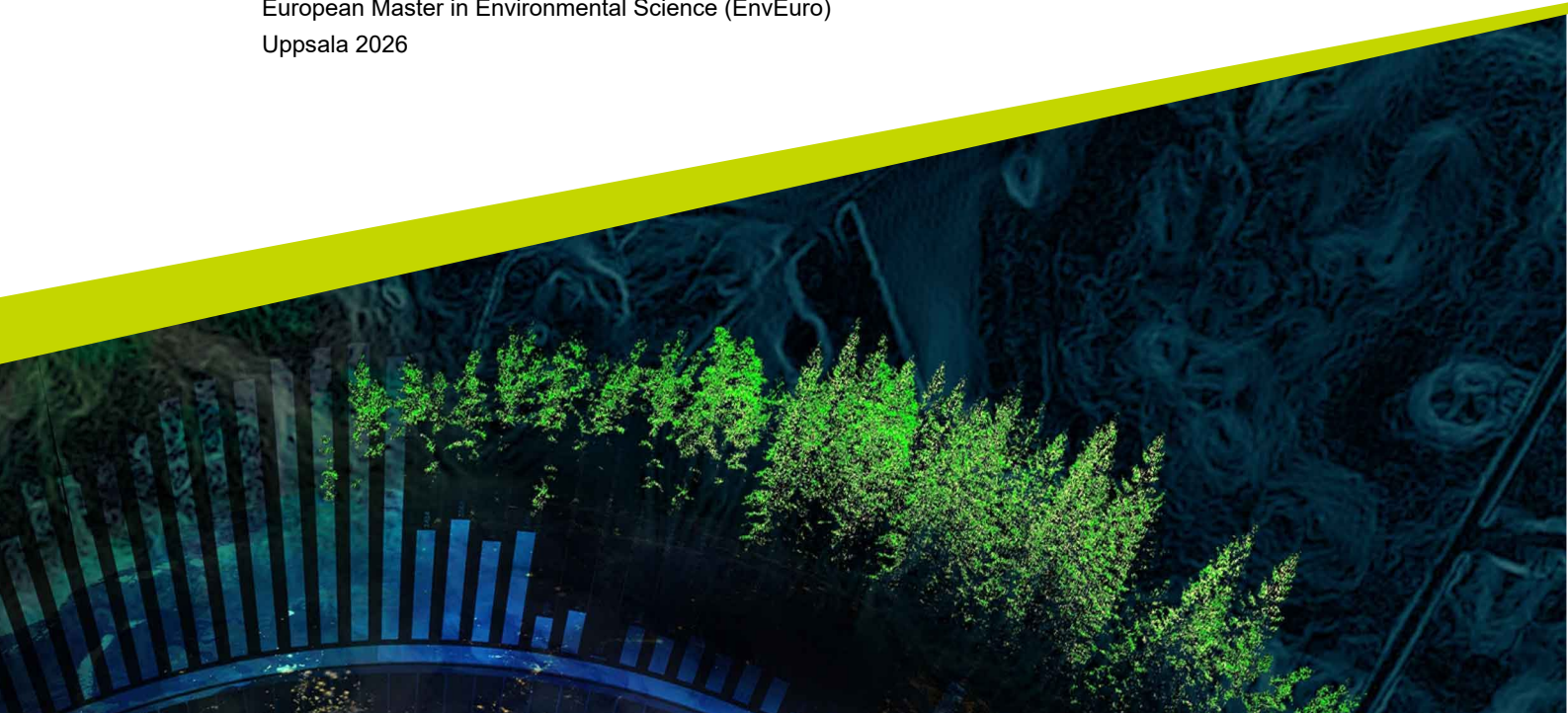


Giving up is not an option.

A frame analysis of climate movement
communication in postapocalyptic times

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Abstract

The climate crisis is escalating, yet political and societal attention is drifting away from it. In this contradictory moment, the aim of this thesis is to examine and compare how three prominent climate movements, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future and Greenpeace, frame the urgency and severity of the climate crisis and how these framings shape their proposed solutions and calls to action. Following frame theory, a document analysis of organisational websites across Austrian, German and international umbrella organisations was conducted. This was supplemented by four semi-structured interviews. The analysis is structured along the three core framing tasks: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing.

The findings show that all three organisations share a broadly convergent diagnostic frame, describing the climate crisis as a present and escalating reality rather than a future threat. Their diagnosis can be described as partly postapocalyptic, where parts of the crisis are seen as irreversible, while future catastrophic outcomes are still considered preventable through urgent action. This shift in their framing, from preventing the climate crisis to mitigating the worst outcomes, reflects a broader transformation within the climate movement and poses challenges to how these organisations communicate, motivate and mobilise. The failure of the 1.5°C-goal is discussed as a key moment of frame transformation that illustrates this shift.

In their prognostic framing, the organisations diverge significantly, reflecting their distinct organisational identities. Greenpeace emphasises concrete sector-specific measures, Fridays for Future focuses on demanding political action and Extinction Rebellion is the most explicit in calling for a system change. Despite these differences, the organisations recognise their mutual dependence within the broader movement. The organisations' motivational framing largely overlaps, grounded in urgency, community, hope and persistence. The framing of persistence is particularly significant given the context of declining movement participation and political drawbacks. How organisations maintain motivated and mobilise under these conditions emerges as a central tension of this thesis.

The thesis contributes to the literature on climate movement communication by demonstrating how framings are adapted to changing scientific and political realities at a moment when the crisis the movement has long warned about is already unfolding.

Keywords: Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, Greenpeace, climate activism, framing analysis, climate movement, postapocalyptic environmentalism

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
FFF	Fridays for Future
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
XR	Extinction Rebellion

1. Introduction

“Dad, what is a snowman?”, “1.5°C or nothing” or “We are racing towards disaster”. The apocalyptic narrative of an approaching future climate catastrophe, combined with the promise of that catastrophe being still avertible if we act now, has been dominating the environmental movement ever since its emergence and has been a strong, if not the strongest mobilising, factor (Cassegård & Thörn 2018; de Moor & Marquardt 2023; Cassegård 2024). Signs and slogans at protests, manifestos and interviews are directed towards what will happen in the future if there is no or too little action against the climate crisis. In recent years, it has become however obvious that the world is already experiencing the effects of the climate crisis and that some processes are pushed beyond reversibility (IPCC 2022). Meanwhile, broad political action and transformation toward a sustainable society are going slowly, are being interrupted, or face backlashes (e.g. weakening of the EU's climate targets; USA under Trump; COP30 failing to set fossil fuels' end). Continuing with more or less “business as usual” does set out a dark future, and the question arises whether or to what extent the climate crisis and its associated processes can still be avoided (IPCC 2022; Cassegård 2024). This therefore provokes the question of whether averting the climate crisis is still a realistic and engaging motive for activists' actions.

While the apocalyptical narrative has been found to remain widespread in climate and environmental movements, Cassegård & Thörn (2018) coined the term “postapocalyptical environmentalism”. Activism described as “postapocalyptic” is defined by a catastrophe that has already happened, is ongoing or unavoidable, instead of being a future threat (Cassegård & Thörn 2018). Whilst this kind of activism often refers to the Global South, where existential, destructive events that can be attributed to the climate crisis are already occurring (Cassegård & Thörn 2018), this thesis sets out to ask how climate and environmental movements in the Global North respond to an ever-deepening crisis.

This is explored by using the concept of frame analysis (see 2.2.), more precisely looking at the core framing tasks of collective action frames (Benford & Snow 2000). Analysing these helps to understand the narratives that exist and are “cultivated” in social movements and thereby how social movements mobilise around certain topics (Benford & Snow 2000; Lindekilde 2014). While frame analysis is often used to compare how different actors in the society (politicians, media, activists) talk about the same topic, highlighting the different understandings of these, looking at collective action frames answers questions of participation and mobilisation of movements (Benford & Snow 2000; Lindekilde 2014). I chose to conduct a two-stage analysis comprising a document analysis and interviews with

three organisations. The power of social movements, in this case, climate movements, to bring about social change (della Porta & Pavan 2017; Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022; Dono et al. 2025) is a key concept underpinning this thesis and is discussed in more detail in section 2.1.

1.1 Problem description

While the past ten years (2015-2024) have been the warmest on record, 2024 was a particularly critical year, not only because it was the warmest year ever recorded, but also because global temperatures have risen by more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time since the start of recording (Copernicus 2025). Exceeding a global warming of 1.5°C is often discussed as a critical point in the climate system, as that could lead to irreversible tipping points, such as the melting of glaciers and polar ice sheets or coral reef die-off, with regional as well as global catastrophic impacts (IPCC 2022). That is also why this target has gained such prominence in politics, business and civil society (IPCC 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). In the meantime, global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise (United Nations Environment Programme 2025).

The fact that climate change is a problem is nothing new, and it has been sparking protests since the 1970s and 1980s, which made it possible for key agreements to be reached in the first place (de Moor et al. 2021; August 2025). In recent years, a mass mobilisation led by Fridays for Future has taken place to campaign for climate action and compliance with international climate agreements (August 2025). This mobilisation meant that the climate crisis became the most important issue of our time and could no longer be simply brushed aside politically (Walzenbach & Meyer 2025). Although agreements and new “climate-friendly” laws indicated that politicians were taking action (August 2025), political setbacks, the recent standstill, and the earlier mentioned figures paint a different picture. There can be many reasons for this: other crises, wars, conflicts of interest or political headwinds, to name but a few. It is however clear that the climate crisis will not just simply vanish. At the same time, the climate movement has undergone a transformation since 2019. A detailed analysis of this, however, will not be part of this thesis, as it would go beyond its scope. August (2025) and de Moor et al. (2021) discuss this transformation in more detail. It can nonetheless be said that the movement underwent phases of exhaustion, losing the capacity to mobilise masses, and on the other hand, groups employing more radical methods (e.g. A22 network; Extinction Rebellion) became more vocal and dominated the media debate (August 2025).

This thesis is written in a situation where, although groups such as Fridays for Future still exist, the impact of protests and demonstrations on the public and in the media is barely noticeable. When newspapers do report on the climate movement,

they describe exhausted, sometimes depressed activists and predict or talk about the movement's collapse (Dorten 2025; Lenthe 2025; Probst 2025). Research on social movements nevertheless hereby often refers to "protest cycles", where high and low phases alternate, including exhaustion, depression and social distraction (August 2025). However, we can certainly not speak of a complete collapse of the movement. This thesis takes this situation, characterised on the one hand by political backlash and an ever-deepening climate crisis and on the other hand by a crisis within the climate movement, as its starting point for an analysis of the situation.

While research often focuses on protest cycles, a media/politics versus activists framing comparison or the development of new organisations, little is known about how established climate organisations are adapting their framing in response to a crisis that is no longer merely anticipated but already underway. As the gap between the urgency of the crisis and the pace of political response widens, understanding how movements construct meaning, motivate action and sustain engagement becomes increasingly important. My thesis addresses this gap by examining how three important organisations in the climate movement in central Europe (Greenpeace, Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion) frame the climate crisis at a moment when the foundational narrative of "preventing the climate crisis" may no longer be sufficient.

1.2 Aim and research question

Based on the research problem, the aim of this thesis is to examine and compare how three prominent climate movements, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future and Greenpeace, frame the urgency and severity of the climate crisis and how these framings shape their proposed solutions and calls to action. The framing analysis (see 2.2.) helps to show whether and if so, how different organisations describe the climate crisis, what solutions and strategies they recommend and implement, and what motivates them to take action. Thereby, this thesis does not set out for a detailed and in-depth description of every organisation, but rather to see how these different organisations cope with the current situation and describe the broader movements' views. A key focus is hereby to analyse whether the organisations under review recognise that the crisis is already unfolding, and if so, how this perception influences their actions and motivation. Previous research on that topic (see 2.3.) showed that some climate movements view the current situation as already inside the catastrophe, but do not adapt their strategies in that regard (de Moor 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). It is therefore of interest whether a postapocalyptic view is now informing their strategies.

Based on that, the central research question of my thesis is:

How do Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future and Greenpeace frame the urgency and severity of the climate crisis, and how does this framing shape their proposed solutions and calls to action?

1.3 Case selection

To investigate this, I have selected three important organisations within the climate movement that have been campaigning for climate protection for several years, or even decades: Greenpeace, Fridays for Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion (XR). Hereby, the goal is to distinguish between institutionalised activism (Greenpeace), youth-led climate movements (FFF) and more direct action (“disruptive”) movements (XR).

Greenpeace is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) which has evolved from a group of environmental activists into one of the most prominent, institutionalised campaigners against environmental destruction and the climate crisis (Greenpeace Austria n.d.b). Fridays for Future grew in 2018/19 out of the school strikes of Greta Thunberg and brought millions of people to the streets, fundamentally carried and managed by the youth (FFF Austria n.d.). Meanwhile, Extinction Rebellion was formed around the same time as FFF and is particularly notable for its creative protests and acts of civil disobedience (XR Germany n.d.).

This selection is based on several factors. The selected organisations demonstrate diversity in their approaches, tactics, size and structure, and therefore potentially employ different framings. Consequently, they also reflect the complexity of the environmental movement. Furthermore, all of them have been sustaining while other movements have come and gone. In addition, all three organisations can be labelled as “prominent” in terms of public perception and are considered important organisations in the broader movement. While the three chosen organisations are well comparable, as they all operate within the broader climate justice movement in the Global North and share a general commitment to climate action, the difference between them, “per se”, could pose an analytically productive problem. This means my findings must always be viewed from the perspective of the organisation in question and its “position” within the broader movement. However, given that the entire movement is facing the challenge of an escalating climate crisis and declining political support, the comparison reveals meaningful insights into how the climate movement as a whole is responding.

A special focus of my thesis is on the Austrian and German branches of the organisations. This focus was chosen to limit the scope of the material and to make it easier to secure interviewees. As this thesis seeks to identify overarching themes,

material from umbrella organisations was drawn upon, including principles, rules, and manifestos that apply to all organisations operating under that name. The choice of material nevertheless creates Austrian and German-centred results.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

In this section, I provide an overview of the organisation of this thesis. Chapter 2 situates the thesis within its field of study, discusses relevant theories and provides a theoretical background. In chapter 3, I describe which data was used and how the data was analysed, giving the basis of chapter 4, where I present the results of this analysis. Chapter 4 is structured around the core framing tasks, ensuring a solid basis for comparing the organisations. In the discussion (chapter 5), the results are compared and discussed based on the literature. Furthermore, the results of the three chosen organisations are related to the broader climate movement. Additionally, the limitations of this thesis and directions for further research are discussed. Chapter 6 concludes the findings.

2. Field of study

In this section, I will first describe the importance of activism and protest in society, then present my main theoretical concept for this thesis, and finally discuss the discourse and state of research of climate activism in times of an unfolding climate catastrophe.

2.1 Climate movements as social movements

This thesis is, in essence, based on a social constructivist worldview. This means that people construct meanings as they interact with the world they observe, based on the historical and social perspectives into which they were born (Creswell 2023). Through social interaction in a community, knowledge, perceptions and meanings are constantly being co-constructed (Creswell 2023). In this context, the importance of social movements as central actors in actively producing and establishing meaning in society, should be emphasised (Benford & Snow 2000). Historically, social change has often been achieved through collective action, such as protesting, demonstrating and acts of civil disobedience led by social movements (della Porta & Pavan 2017; Dono et al. 2025). Dono et al. (2025) refer to the achievements of social movements, stating:

“It is hard to imagine that the advancements made in matters of race and gender equality, decolonization, LGBTQI+ rights, or even the strides made so far in climate change mitigation would have existed without sustained pressure from collective action.”(Dono et al. 2025:1)

Through challenging power structures, performing or enacting “real life utopias”, social movements are important in changing or transforming societal discourse (Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022). In a review of 50 studies on the impacts of climate activism, Thomas-Walters et al. (2025) describe that it is evident that climate activism can shift the public perception and the media representation towards supporting climate action, depending nevertheless on the tactics used by the activists. In that sense, transformation and development processes are bound to public opinion and social movements, both in a “positive” or “negative” way (Hess 2015; 2018). As climate justice became a central component in climate movements, the social component became prominent alongside the ecological and economic ones (Jafry 2020; Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022). Beyond the roles of the media and politics, how climate movements see or frame the climate crisis has an impact on how society perceives the climate crisis and its challenges (Chen et al. 2023; Thomas-Walters et al. 2025). Nevertheless, despite the significant efforts of climate movements in the past, government action has not reached the level necessary to prevent an irreversible climate catastrophe (Dono et al. 2025).

2.2 Framing theory

The main theoretical approach to this thesis is based on frame analysis following social movement framing developed by Snow & Benford (1988). In frame analysis, social movements are seen from a social constructivist and interpretive perspective, in which activists contribute to the construction of meaning (Lindekilde 2014; Creswell 2023). As a central term the word “frame” describes “how actors (un)consciously draw on more or less coherent sets of ideas (frames) to interpret the world.” (Joose et al. 2024:1911) As Snow & Benford (1988) describe it, framing in the context of social movements means the process of interpreting or assigning meaning to certain circumstances or events in a way that mobilizes proponents or bystanders and delineates opponents. Lindekilde (2014) defines framing as a strategic effort to activate certain ways of understanding things, with the goal of mobilising consensus. This action-oriented approach to creating meaning in order to legitimise and inspire activism is referred to as “collective action frames” (Benford & Snow 2000).

According to Benford & Snow (2000), collective action frames are composed of two central features: one being the social movements’ “core framing tasks” and the other the interactive processes that contribute to these core framing tasks, thereby generating collective action frames. Three core framing tasks are defined and discussed by Snow & Benford (1988): diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. Diagnostic framing refers to the identification of a problem and the search for its cause, or for who is to blame, while prognostic framing indicates solutions, strategies, or tactics (Snow & Benford 1988). At last, motivational framing functions as a call to action, referring to the agency of collective action frames (Snow & Benford 1988). While the first and second framing tasks aim to establish consensus on problems and solutions, motivational framing is strategically important for activating collective action based on a mutual perspective (Lindekilde 2014). As collective action is not just happening out of a shared perception of problems and solutions, it is important for social movements to address all three tasks together (Lindekilde 2014). If a framing is “successful” therefore depends on how integrated, sophisticated and developed the core elements are (Lindekilde 2014).

2.3 Climate activism in the apocalypse

The climate movement has long been described as acting on an apocalyptic narrative, imagining the climate crisis with its disastrous events unfolding as a future threat (Cassegård & Thörn 2018; de Moor & Marquardt 2023; Cassegård 2024). Central to this narrative is the idea that the catastrophe is seen as preventable if action is taken now (Cassegård & Thörn 2018; de Moor & Marquardt 2023).

Looking at recent research on reaching irreversible tipping points (e.g. IPCC, 2022) and political in- or counteraction, a debate has arisen, questioning if it is still possible to avert or prevent dangerous climate change or if it is already too late (Hulme 2020; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). “Time is running out” became a popular statement in social movements and the political discourse in the years of 2018/19, as Hulme (2020) describes. Numerous speeches, protest signs, statements, social media posts and interviews emphasised the urgency of action, often accompanied by a deadline by which it is still possible to act to prevent certain scenarios. These were often connected with the 1.5-degree-goal, a critical point of global warming, the crossing of which triggers irreversible processes (IPCC 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023).

Emphasis was furthermore often put on the statement of being “the last generation that can stop climate change” (e.g. UN climate change summit 2018) (Carrington 2018). Governments such as the Austrian government used that phrase “the last generation that can counteract the climate crisis” in their governmental program (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich 2020), and the activist network “A22” (named after the month of formation in April 2022) formed, with its German and Austrian branches named “Letzte Generation” (“Last Generation”) (A22 Network n.d.). While the A22 network is still active (A22 Network n.d.), the German and Austrian “Letzte Generation” stopped their actions after around two and a half years of actions (Letzte Generation Österreich 2024; Neue Generation n.d.). They thereby argued that there is no prospect of success anymore (Letzte Generation Österreich 2024) and that, because of the time passing, the statement of being “the last generation before the tipping points” might not be true anymore (Neue Generation n.d.). These statements are thereby significant, as through their acts of civil disobedience, the “Letzte Generation” received extensive media coverage at that time, clearly drawing attention to the urgent need for climate action (August 2025; Walzenbach & Meyer 2025). Meanwhile, projects such as the “Climate Clock” show how much time is left to still achieve 1.5 degrees – currently, these are around 3 years (Climate Clock n.d.). The Emissions Gap Report 2025 nevertheless constitutes, considering the big cuts needed, the closing time window to implement the solutions and political differences, 1.5°C is not achievable, and higher warmings are expected to happen within the next decade (United Nations Environment Programme 2025). Reflecting the temporal component that the climate movement faces, it differs significantly from other social movements, as de Moor (2025) notes:

“Unlike social justice or women’s rights campaigners, who rarely contemplate whether it might be “too late” to advance their causes, climate activists are uniquely burdened by the temporal dynamics of the crisis they seek to avert. Specifically, we have seen that it has a particular impact on the goals the movement sets for itself.” (de Moor 2025:19)

Considering the closing or closed window to mitigate the climate crisis, the concept of “postapocalyptic environmentalism” was coined by some researchers (Hall 2016; Cassegård & Thörn 2018; de Moor et al. 2021; Friberg 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023; Cassegård 2024). It is described as activism grounded on a catastrophe that has already happened, is ongoing or unavoidable, instead of being a future threat (Cassegård & Thörn 2018). Cassegård & Thörn (2018) analysed the “Dark Mountain project” and the “International Tribunal for the Rights of Nature” as forms of postapocalyptic environmentalism, whose activism is based on viewing the arrival of the catastrophe as unavoidable and accepting the loss that accompanies it. While this analysis focused more on forms of cultural and less instrumental activism (Cassegård & Thörn 2018), other research discusses postapocalyptic activism in relation to FFF, XR, and other more instrumental forms of activism. De Moor (2022) describes that apocalyptic and postapocalyptic narratives coexist and are used by these movements. Buzogány & Scherhauser (2022) analyse that FFF mainly describe the climate crisis as an apocalyptic scenario, whereas XR frames the crisis as already happening.

While a “too-late-rhetoric” is visible, the postapocalyptic narrative is not considered to have a significant influence on the movement’s goals and strategies (de Moor 2022). On the one hand, this is because activists view some disasters as already having occurred or being unavoidable, whilst others are still regarded as possible to prevent, on the other hand, postapocalyptic narratives are not used strategically because they could have a demotivating effect (de Moor 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). Insisting on mitigation measures, however, only to avoid the most catastrophic outcomes and the extent of the crisis, seems to be a way many activists follow (de Moor 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). Through leaving the postapocalyptic narrative out of their strategies, these movements can empower climate action, they risk losing support in the future through suppressing the idea that it might be “too late” (de Moor 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). How a strategic shift could look like, focusing more on unavoidable climate crisis effects, without slipping into fatalism or “doomism”, at the same time, seems to be unanswered, as well as the consequences of such a shift for the movement (de Moor 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023; Stuart 2025). The emotional weight of acknowledging that it is “too late” might as well play a role here (Kleres & Wettergren 2017).

In this environment, characterised by time pressure, emotions, and in particular, hope, play a central role in motivating activists to keep going (Stuart 2020; Cassegård 2024). Emotions such as fear, despair or anger have been assigned importance in motivating activism, but hope is often seen as a necessity to channel these emotions into engagement (Cassegård 2024). Research on XR shows that while most of the involved activists saw no hope for a future without a climate and

ecological catastrophe, another form of hope, “radical hope”, emerged (Stuart 2020). This kind of hope detaches actions from a desired outcome and connects to the notion of “doing what is right in the moment” and a rhetoric of “not giving up, regardless of what is coming” (Stuart 2020). Highly institutionalised actors in the environmental movement, like Greenpeace, utilise messages of hope for a better future (Cassegård & Thörn 2018), and one of FFF’s key messages is “another world is possible”(Pavenstädt 2024).

3. Methods

The qualitative design of this thesis is split into two phases. At first, a document analysis was conducted to work out different frame elements in the communication of the organisations. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews (with activists or spokespeople) were carried out to deepen, further discuss and validate the frames. The selection of organisations (institutional, youth-led and direct action) with a range of different approaches highlights the diverse landscape of the climate movement.

3.1 Data collection and analysis

The data sources for this research are documents such as manifestos, press releases and other content that could be found on the webpages of the organisations. I chose to analyse documents generated solely by the organisations themselves, as these accurately represent the position and rationale of the organisation (Fernandes-Jesus et al. 2020). In comparison to, for example, analysing news articles, this avoids biases in the communication (Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022). Tables listing the documents analysed for each organisation can be found in Appendix 1-3. The data was thereby collected and analysed employing the three core framing tasks described by Snow & Benford (1988) as a “heuristic device”. One sub-question in this process related to one of the three core framing tasks: Diagnostic (How is the current state of the climate crisis described by the organisation?), prognostic (What are potential pathways and solutions to the climate crisis and what are the organisation’s strategies?) and motivational (What drives action? Why should we act?). In a first step, the Austrian and German webpages, as well as the webpages of the umbrella organisations were manually searched. Any document provided by the organisations, that corresponded to the heuristic device was copied into a separate Word document for each organisation and prepared for further analysis. In total, 42 documents were selected for the analysis.

Following that, the analysis was carried out in accordance with the procedures of qualitative content analysis (Bengtsson 2016; Creswell 2023). First, the documents were read with the heuristic device in mind, and sentences or passages were assigned to one of the three categories, using a colour-coding for diagnostic, prognostic or motivational core framing tasks. Doing this allowed me to get an overview of the data, prepare it for an in-depth analysis and identify problems such as overlaps of framing tasks in one sentence. This latter issue was mainly visible in motivational framing that often occurred intertwined with a diagnosis or a solution.

From the Word document, “sense units” were transferred to an Excel sheet and coded there. Transferring sense units meant to take one or several sentences or even paragraphs that are understandable on their own and/or connect to each other (Schneijderberg et al. 2022). Each sense unit was then labelled with a code that paraphrases and compromises the sense unit – a process described as “open coding” (Bengtsson 2016; Creswell 2023). Summarising the sense units and creating codes makes the dataset easier to work with and assists in identifying concepts and patterns (Bengtsson 2016). The codes were created inductively, and a codebook was kept to list the codes used (Bengtsson 2016). As a next step, categories had to be found based on the initial coding. Working with the Excel sheet allowed me to filter the sense units into the three core framing tasks and identify recurring themes in these. This gave the basis to describe the framing of the different organisations. Moving from these open codes, broader overarching categories had to be created that made the framing of the organisations comparable. This was a process of trial and error, assigning the open codes to inductively created categories that should function to summarise, but on the other hand not to simplify the content. This can be exemplified in the category of “climate justice”, which was seen as a broad category and then split into elements of “generational injustice” and “unjust distribution of consequences”. In some cases, open codes from the first phase had to be reclassified or split. If it turned out that a previously defined category contained only one sense unit, that category was dissolved, and the sense unit was reassigned. In this way, all three organisations were coded individually, taking care to ensure that both the differences and the similarities were evident in the codes. Table 1 gives an example of how the different framing tasks were coded into categories for FFF. Appendix 5-7 furthermore contains tables providing an overview of the assigned categories.

Table 1: Coding example of assigned categories for Fridays for Future.

Core framing task	Example quote	Category	Sub-category
Diagnostic	We can see how the Paris Climate Agreement seems increasingly out of reach due to decades of deliberate political delay.	Limitation possibility and climate targets	1.5 is unreachable or failed
Prognostic	This is why Fridays For Future’s mission is to unite behind the science and make those in power take the facts seriously, and act accordingly.	Type of solutions	Listen to the science

Motivational	We know that a better world is possible.	-	Hope and possibility of a better world
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3.2 Interviews

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, focusing on the three core framing tasks. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 4. The objective was, on the one hand, to deepen and validate the frame elements and, on the other hand, to question why a certain narrative or strategy was chosen by the organisation. Additionally, the interviews should help identify blind spots in the document analysis or highlight new aspects or changes in narratives compared to the documents provided by the organisations.

The interviews were carried out in March and April 2026, depending on the availability of the participants. All those interviewed were beforehand informed about the use, storage and rights concerning their data and consent was given via email. The name of the interviewee and that of the organisation were collected, although it was pointed out that only the name of the organisation would be mentioned in the thesis, meaning that the interviewee would remain anonymous. The interviews were held and recorded on Zoom and lasted around 40 minutes. To find interviewees, I first contacted the organisations via their official press email addresses. This enabled me to arrange interviews with Greenpeace Austria and XR Germany. Through my personal networks, I was able to organise interviews with FFF Austria and XR Austria. Unfortunately, Greenpeace Germany declined my request for an interview, and I did not receive a response from Greenpeace International, which is why Greenpeace is only represented by one interview. After I had already received confirmation of an interview with an activist from FFF Germany, my subsequent emails went unanswered, which is why the interview never took place. Due to the time constraints of this project, it was not possible to find a new interviewee at short notice. Consequently, the analysis consists of two interviews with XR, one with FFF and one with Greenpeace. Whilst this number of interviews does not imply representativeness or “saturation”, the role of the interviews as supplementary material should be emphasised, and the quotes drawn from them should be seen as contextualising the findings of the document analysis (Mason 2010). All interviews were held in German and then transcribed using the transcription tool in Word. Afterwards, the transcription output was manually checked. To make further use of the interviews, they were translated into English.

The analysis of the interview data is based on “thematic analysis”, whereby the themes are derived from the framing analysis of the documents carried out beforehand (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun 2017). Therefore, the

interviews were not coded separately but were instead analysed in relation to the themes identified in the framing analysis and relevant quotations were selected to support the results.

3.3 Methodological discussion

This thesis is grounded in a social constructivist epistemological position (Creswell 2023), which means that it does not claim to identify one objective or correct truth about the communication of XR, FFF and Greenpeace towards the climate crisis. Rather, it offers one theoretically informed interpretation of their framings, which recognises that the organisational communication itself is a product of changing political and social contexts. Since framings are understood here as socially constructed, analysing the discursive outputs of these organisations is a legitimate and appropriate way to understand how they make sense of and communicate the crisis. This also means that the findings should be read as one possible interpretation, shaped both by the theoretical framework applied and by me as a researcher conducting the analysis.

Furthermore, frame analysis was chosen as the methodological approach, because it is well-suited to analyse organisational communication and is broadly used in the analysis of social movements (Lindekilde 2014). Frame analysis allowed for the systematic examination of what organisations communicate and how they package their messages rhetorically, identifying patterns of meaning-making across organisations. While the analysis of collective action frames following Benford & Snow (2000) highlights how movements try to mobilise and which strategies and motivational registers they use to call for support (Lindekilde 2014), questions of how their framings are received or whether they resonate with audiences or influence behaviour remain unanswered through this method. Answering these questions would require different methods, such as surveys, and is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The analytical categories of this thesis were partly deductively derived from the theoretical framework of core framing tasks (diagnostic, prognostic and motivational) following Benford & Snow (2000) and partly inductively constructed from the material itself. The inductive construction of categories and sub-categories inevitably involves subjective judgment (Bengtsson 2016). Different researchers working with the same material might arrive at distinct categories or label them another way. However, keeping the process transparent with e.g. keeping a codebook and providing examples to illustrate how interpretations were made, supports methodological reliability (Bengtsson 2016).

The empirical data for this study were exclusively drawn from the organisations' websites, which should represent relatively well the organisational positions. This

was a deliberate scope decision as website content reflects the major framings an organisation chooses to present officially, without the distortions that can arise from media coverage or third-party representations (see 3.1.). However, social media is an increasingly dominant channel that organisations use to communicate, mobilise and frame their messages, which I did not analyse in my thesis. A social media analysis could complement the foundation laid by my analysis and capture more dynamic framings that website content might not fully reflect. Unfortunately, given the scope of this thesis, I could not take this into account, yet it could be of interest for future research. Further, some of the documents analysed date back to 2019, which raises the question of whether they still reflect the current organisational positions. Where older material was used, its continued relevance was cross-checked with the interviewees, in which activists confirmed or contextualised these positions. Whilst outdated statements, such as the 1.5°C-target, were put into context, I was able to adopt “timeless” demands, such as the call for climate justice.

Finally, my position as the researcher calls for a brief reflection. As a student of environmental studies, I am personally concerned about the climate crisis and believe that climate movements play a significant role in responding to it. Prior to this thesis, I have supported climate activism in various ways and been actively involved in it. However, I have no direct connection to any of the analysed organisations. At the same time, I approached this thesis from a researcher’s perspective, with the aim of understanding and comparing how these organisations frame the crisis. I particularly paid attention not to advocate for any of them or present them in a particular light, rather I tried to examine their positions and contextualise them from a scientific perspective. Acknowledging this personal connection does not disqualify me from studying this topic, but rather making it transparent is a sign of reflexivity that allows the reader to evaluate the interpretations offered in this thesis with my social position towards the topic in mind (Creswell 2023).

4. Results

The results correspond to the three sub-questions that are derived from the core framing tasks: How is the current state of the climate crisis described by the organisation? What are potential pathways and solutions to the climate crisis? What drives action, and why should we act? In answer to the first question, emphasis is placed on describing the crisis (severity, temporality, possibilities for action) and the attribution of blame. The second question highlights what solutions the organisations propose, as well as their actions and strategies to emphasise these solutions. The final question asks what is worth fighting for and why one should act.

Strong connections and overlaps were found between the motivational core framing tasks and the prognostic and diagnostic ones. The results are presented according to the three core framing tasks, which is intended to facilitate comparison between the organisations. To avoid a “flooding” of the reference list with the documents analysed, these are listed in Appendix 1-3, to which the citations in the result section refer.

4.1 Diagnostic framing

Examining the three organisations’ diagnostic framing, I found that their statements on severity, the potential for influence, and the attribution of blame for the crisis strongly overlap. XR nevertheless uses the “strongest” language of collapse and catastrophe. Blame is put onto people in power, the system and those profiting from the system. Table 2 offers an overview of the diagnostic framings of XR, FFF and Greenpeace.

Table 2: Comparison of diagnostic framings of XR, FFF and Greenpeace.

	XR	FFF	Greenpeace
Crisis description	Crisis as existential threat; crisis as collapse	Crisis as existential threat; crisis as escalating reality	Crisis as existential threat; crisis as escalating reality
Limitation possibility	Only worst case preventable	Severity can be influenced	Big catastrophe avertible
Role of 1.5°C	Failed; new paths open	From unrealistic to failed; every 10 th of degree matters	Long time goal; every 10 th of degree matters
Climate justice	Global north; billionaires	Global north; generational	Global north; fossil industry
Blame Attribution	System; politics; people profiting from system	System; politics; people profiting from system	System; politics; fossil industry/ corporations

4.1.1 Crisis description and temporal framing

For all three organisations, the climate crisis is the biggest threat of our time. All three share the logic of the crisis as a present reality and of existential threat, but with different intensities. XR’s description is based more on a description of the crisis as “collapse” while FFF and Greenpeace frame it more towards an “escalating reality”. XR therefore states that we are already “midst of a climate and ecological breakdown” (XR Global, n.d.), that is of existential threat. FFF also analyses the crisis as already happening, with “heat waves, droughts, wildfires, floods and 200 species disappearing every day” (FFF International, n.d.). There is no doubt that the “already experienced crisis will worsen in the future” (FFF Germany, 2025) and that “it is clear that the very basis of our existence is under threat” (FFF Austria, 2025). Also, Greenpeace emphasises that “the climate crisis threatens humanity’s livelihoods” (Greenpeace Germany, n.d. - a) and that “we already arrived midst of the crisis” (Greenpeace Austria, n.d. - c).

4.1.2 Limitation possibilities and climate targets

All three organisations agree that some processes and scenarios of the climate crisis can be described as unavoidable, “locked in” or already happening. Nevertheless, none of the organisations views the climate crisis as inevitable, and they state that there is still time to mitigate its severity. Greenpeace emphasises that “there are still a few years left to prevent a major catastrophe” (Greenpeace Germany, n.d. - a), for FFF “how bad it will get is still within our power” (FFF Germany, 2025), and XR

states that “worst case scenarios are (...) avoidable” (XR Global, 2020). In the interview with XR Austria, this positioning linked to science and the motivation to persist (see 4.3.1) is well summarised:

“I think it’s definitely too late for us to come out of this completely unharmed. The science is quite clear on that, but it’s never too late to do something, and I haven’t really heard of any good alternatives yet. Doing nothing isn’t an option either – at least not for me.” (Interview XR Austria)

However, the window of opportunity to react is described as small to almost closed by all the organisations.

A temperature rise of 1.5°C was seen as an important milestone in reducing the risk of an uncontrollable climate catastrophe. Staying below this threshold has long been a central demand of climate movements and can still be found on the organisation’s websites. As scientific evidence that the 1.5°C-target can still be met crumbles, organisations are no longer communicating this as a demand but are instead highlighting the fact that this target has been exceeded, and they emphasise the consequences of it in their diagnosis of the crisis. XR states that “1.5° is dead” but that “won’t mean the world will end tomorrow” (XR United Kingdom, 2025). Looking at the failure of the 1.5°C-target and talking about future degree-related targets, the interviewed person at XR Germany states:

“Personally, I get the feeling that because the 1.5-degree target was communicated so very, very strongly and so forcefully, and now it’s been run over, people have lost a bit of interest in talking about that kind of threshold, I think.” (Interview XR Germany)

While 1.5°C was central in the initial demands of FFF in 2019, they already stated back then that “we are on the best way to fail the 1.5°C-goal” (FFF Germany, 2019). Now it is not of central importance in their framing anymore. Greenpeace emphasises two points towards the 1.5°C-goal: first, that 1.5°C is seen as a long-term goal and therefore “it does not necessarily mean that the Paris Agreement is already obsolete” (Greenpeace Germany, n.d. - a) and (as well as FFF) that still “every 10th of a degree matters” (Greenpeace Germany, n.d. a; FFF Austria, n.d. - a). These points also found strong emphasis in the interviews with FFF Austria and Greenpeace Austria, where they point out that 1.5°C is not achievable anymore, but they still see the reason to fight for every tenth of a degree, as this could make a difference:

“I don’t think most people [in FFF] still have this naive optimism about 1.5. (...) But it really is a matter of a tenth of a degree. So yes, well, as I said before, that difference between a disaster and an even worse disaster and an even, even worse disaster makes a huge difference.” (Interview FFF Austria)

“(…) something that’s particularly strong and prominent within our organisation is the narrative that every tenth of a degree counts. So even right now, I mean, 1.5 is kind of the dominant figure and 1.5 is dead, and well, let’s look at 2 degrees now. But for us it’s more like, well, 1.7 versus 1.8 is a difference, and even if it goes up to 2.1 or 2.2, that’s still a difference (…).” (Interview Greenpeace Austria)

These two quotes demonstrate a shift in the framing of the organisations, in which the 1.5°C-goal had to be dropped, but it is underlined that this is not the end of the story. They argue that it is better to limit warming as much as possible without setting a strict target. While looking at the 1.5°C-target more or less clearly connected to the tipping points, it is now emphasised that any reduction in global warming will spare us from an even greater disaster.

4.1.3 Climate justice

All three organisations describe the climate crisis as a deeply unjust crisis, which is becoming even more unjust as the crisis deepens or escalates. Thereby, all of them describe a global injustice between the cause and the victims, for example, by stating that “climate change is hitting those countries particularly hard that have contributed the least to global warming” (Greenpeace Germany, n.d. - b) or “those who can least afford it will suffer the most” (XR Global, 2020 - b). While all three organisations’ motivation to act is, among other things, to ensure a good life for future generations, FFF puts specific focus on generational injustice as they see themselves representing a generation whose “future (...) is being destroyed in front of our eyes” (FFF International, n.d.). The interviewed person at Greenpeace emphasised however, that they, as an organisation, draw distinctions between climate justice being a driving factor in their motivation and what they communicate to the outside, in stating:

“I think that, internally, global justice is definitely a really important issue for us, precisely because we can see that the Global Majority countries are going to suffer even more as a result. But I must also say that in our external communications here in Austria, we’re communicating this very little at the moment, because we’ve noticed that people are currently concerned about so many other issues, and they tend to tune out when it comes to, “OK, you have to do this now because other people are even worse off or will be even worse off”.” (Interview Greenpeace)

This statement reflects that while climate justice is a core value internally at Greenpeace, communicating it to their audience is currently not considered to be as effective as communicating about more local problems. This can also be explained by the fact that the climate crisis is now being felt more and more in Europe, too. Heatwaves and droughts, for example, are now also a problem in Austria.

4.1.4 Blame attribution

In the description of responsibility for the current crisis, I found strong coherence in the communication of the three organisations. The blame is largely placed on “the system” and the way of living in the Global North. “The system” thereby means a fossil-intensive, capitalism-driven one, that is supported by politics, decision makers and other influential actors, who have strong interests in keeping the situation as it is. Governments, politicians and political institutions that would have the power to act and change are condemned for not acting, acting too little or too late and supporting a fossil fuelled way of living. While Greenpeace communicates that they seek change within the current political system, FFF stresses that “if these demands cannot be met under the current system, a system change is needed” (FFF Austria, n.d. – b) and it is central to XR that “our current political systems are not capable of delivering the necessary solutions (...)” (XR Global, 2020 – c). In this respect, XR’s communication differs significantly from the other two organisations in that they openly state that politicians are actively lying (“too many lies have been told for too long”) (XR Global, 2020 - a) and that “governments bury difficult, controversial, or long-term issues (...)” (XR Global, 2020 - c).

While the lifestyle of humans in general is made responsible for the climate crisis, especially those who profit from the system, are criticised. Greenpeace focuses on the fossil industry and global corporations, stating that “the responsibility for the climate crisis lies primarily with large global corporations” (Greenpeace Austria, n.d. – c), FFF emphasise the role of “super-rich” and the fossil industry and XR holds billionaires accountable while they have the money and power for change, “every day, they choose to keep setting the world on fire” (XR Germany, n.d. – c).

4.2 Prognostic framing

In their prognostic framing, the three organisations differ in terms of the nature of the solutions, how these are to be implemented, and the strategies they employ to highlight or advocate for these approaches. While Greenpeace offers the most concrete and sector-specific measures, FFF underlines concrete political demands, XR chooses to focus on the process rather than the content of solutions and emphasises Citizens Assemblies as a central mechanism. Political action, combined with the call for science to be listened to, is central for all of the examined organisations. Table 3 gives an overview of the prognostic framings of XR, FFF and Greenpeace.

Table 3: Comparison of prognostic framings of XR, FFF and Greenpeace.

	XR	FFF	Greenpeace
Type of solutions	System change; vague solutions	Concrete political demands	Concrete measures and political demands
Role of politics/state	Tell the truth; act now; citizens assemblies	Commitment to goals; climate protection legislation; listen to the science	Commitment to goals; change subsidies
Main strategy	Civil disobedience; protest	Demonstrations; strike	Institutional diverse

4.2.1 Political goal commitment and legal anchoring

“Political goal commitment” means referring to political goals such as the 1.5°C-target or emissions reductions or simply ensuring that politicians comply with the agreements they have entered into. While Greenpeace and FFF clearly emphasise specific goals, XR is more focused on demanding “act now”, with only occasional references to specific objectives. FFF and Greenpeace call for more concrete solutions, like a ban of oil and gas heating, expansion of renewable energies or a transformation in agriculture. These solutions, in turn, are linked to targets that Greenpeace and FFF demand to be met by the governments, such as fossil fuel fadeout, climate neutrality or net zero carbon emissions. XR meanwhile has an ambivalent relationship to the concept of climate neutrality/net zero: The Austrian branch demanded that Austria should be climate neutral in 2025 and state that “this can be seen as a memorial that it is clearly past 12” (XR Austria, n.d. – a), the German branch withdrew from viewing this goal as something achievable, as “the concept (...) is not compatible with the goals of a climate justice movement” (XR Germany, n.d. – b). They justify this from several perspectives, which can be summarised as the concept of net zero being based on a capitalist logic and a “lack of respect” for nature and the conditions necessary for our life on Earth (XR Germany, n.d. – b).

Central to the prognostic framing of FFF and Greenpeace is a “legal anchoring” of climate protection. Demands like “the immediate incorporation of climate protection into the constitution” (FFF Austria, n.d. – b) or “a strong climate act with clear sectoral targets” (Greenpeace AT, 2025 – b) can be found in both organisations. Meanwhile, XR does not specifically call for a legal anchoring of climate protection.

4.2.2 Sector-specific and individual measures

Building on their “political goal commitment” demands, Greenpeace and FFF propose concrete sector-specific measures on how these goals could be achieved. These include solutions towards limiting emissions through bans, renewable energy development and transformations in the mobility and agricultural sectors. Bans are emphasised through statements like “stopping climate-damaging subsidies and establishing a fair and binding phase-out of gas heating systems” (Greenpeace AT, 2025 – b) and “an end to large-scale fossil fuel projects, such as the construction and expansion of airports and motorways” (FFF Austria, n.d. – b). The importance of renewable energies is highlighted by both organisations here, stating, e.g. “renewables are a real game-changer” (Greenpeace AT, 2023). With regard to the agriculture and transport sectors, the interconnection between sectoral objectives is also evident in statements such as “it will take a massive collective effort: the energy and transport sectors must switch to renewable energy sources, agriculture must become more sustainable, and our consumption habits must change” (Greenpeace DE, n.d. – b). This also highlights a prognostic framing used primarily by Greenpeace, which emphasises individual responsibility and individual measures to be taken. Greenpeace points out in several places that, in addition to the measures discussed above, individual actions such as reducing meat consumption are essential (Greenpeace Germany, n.d. – a; Greenpeace International, n.d.).

The interview with Greenpeace Austria highlighted a part of the discussion that has not been emphasised here and could not be supported with the material. The question regarding whether their proposed solutions take a mitigation or adaptation approach, links to their temporal understanding of the crisis and therefore to the limitation possibilities:

“I’d say we’re looking for the sweet spot between adaptation and mitigation. (...) So, what that means is that we communicate a lot about the adaptation side of things, but we do so deliberately in an area where, if we are successful, we will also achieve CO₂ reductions.” (Interview Greenpeace Austria)

This is a notable strategic communication choice. By communicating about adaptation measures that simultaneously achieve emissions reductions, such as urban green spaces or heat reduction through insulation measures, Greenpeace can speak to audiences that are concerned about immediate, tangible impacts that affect their daily lives.

4.2.3 System change and process-oriented solutions

While FFF and Greenpeace focus more on sector-specific measures and political goal commitment, XR states that they are not proposing any concrete solutions to

the climate and environmental crisis, because these do already exist (XR Austria, n.d. – a). They rather emphasise in their three core demands that governments need to tell the truth about the crisis, act now, and install citizens’ assemblies to guide the needed change. The central logic of their solutions can thereby be described as “system change” and a focus on the process rather than on specific technical solutions and concrete policy measures, which sets it apart from the other two organisations. XR calls for a system change as “the old ways of relying solely on economic growth as an indicator of societal health are no longer an option” (XR Global, n.d.) and “our institutions are not taking this crisis seriously, and therefore we must shift the power back to the people (...)” (XR Global, n.d.). The citizens assemblies thereby play an important role in “steering and monitoring the fair implementation of measures to save life on Earth” (XR Austria, n.d. – a) and in achieving change: “If the pressure of a citizens assembly is higher than the pressure of a government’s supporters and funders, action on climate change might be possible” (XR Global, 2020 – c).

While this clear articulation of a system change is XR-specific, the call for systemic change can also be found, although in a less pronounced form, within FFF and Greenpeace. However, it cannot be said that this is a central, explicitly articulated demand by them. FFF states in regard to their demands that, “if these demands cannot be met under the current system, a systemic change is needed” (FFF Austria, n.d. – b), using system change as a “fallback”.

4.2.4 Science as a solution

Science serves as the basis for all the demands and proposed solutions put forward by the organisations, but it can also be viewed as a solution in itself. “Listen to the science” reoccurs in all three organisations, emphasising, firstly, that scientists have the solutions to the climate crisis, secondly, that decision-makers should listen to the science, and thirdly, that the science has been there for a long time. FFF underlines the existence of solutions and the simultaneous political delay in implementing them by stating that “scientists have been demanding this [specific solutions to the crisis] for 50 years and haven’t been listened to, and that is why we are taking to the streets” (FFF International, n.d.). In doing so, they also justify their actions and their protest (see 4.2.5.) by referring to political delays and inaction. Simultaneously, XR states that “for decades, there have been plenty of solutions and approaches for dealing with the ever-present crises” (XR Austria, n.d. – a), which is intended to highlight both the demand to “tell the truth” and the solution offered by citizens’ assemblies. Greenpeace also emphasises that their “approach is always science-based” (Greenpeace AT, n.d. – b) and that “we already have all the technical solutions we need to tackle the climate crisis” (Greenpeace DE, n.d. – a) and “just need to put them into practice” (Greenpeace DE, n.d. – a).

4.2.5 Strategies and tactics

When it comes to strategies and tactics, a clear distinction can be seen between Greenpeace's institutional approach as an NGO and the two grassroots organisations XR and FFF. Greenpeace relies on an institutional diverse mix of strategies, including expertise, political talks, conducting studies, media work, as well as activism (Greenpeace AT, n.d. – b). Due to Greenpeace's expertise across a range of fields and its broad-based approach, climate action can be addressed in other areas when the issue proves difficult to tackle as a standalone topic. Meanwhile, FFF's primary strategy lies in organising strikes and large demonstrations and thereby putting pressure on politicians (FFF Austria, n.d. – a). The interview with FFF Austria reflects on the fact that the demonstrations no longer reach large numbers of people in this way, as well as a shift in tactics towards more media-focused protest:

“Essentially, the idea is that, at the level of the media landscape and political opinion, we somehow reach a certain critical mass, so that it becomes unattractive for political parties, for example, who want to push through something that makes no sense, to continue doing so. So, in principle, you take away their support for it, because you simply communicate and argue your case, and have enough actions that are creative enough to get media coverage, which in turn helps shape public opinion more effectively and raise awareness.” (Interview FFF Austria)

This quote reflects that while FFF achieved that millions of people went on the streets to strike for climate justice, signalling that “the people” want action, the political and media narrative did not shift or not significantly. By building broader alliances and not only focusing on demonstrations, FFF also tries to achieve a critical mass within these. Looking to achieve huge numbers of protesters again, the interviewee refers to potential critical points that could lead to a critical mass being reached:

“If something comes up again where people say, ‘This is really bad,’ and it's something where the public understands just how serious it is in terms of climate policy, then if that comes back into the spotlight, we can use that opportunity to try once more to build up that critical mass.” (Interview FFF Austria)

XR also calls for demonstrations, but with the element of non-violent civil disobedience, a form of protest that actively goes beyond the limits of legality, risking being imprisoned for their actions. They emphasise that this “is the best chance that we have” (XR Austria, n.d. – b) and that “conventional resistance - voting, petitions, lobbying - is failing to do the job” (XR Global, 2020 – b). While civil disobedience has the advantage of working with just a few people, in comparison to a “regular” demonstration (Interview XR Austria), XR emphasises that a critical mass of 3.5% of the population may be needed to achieve change, as demonstrated by historical movements (XR Global, 2020 – b). The interview with

XR Austria showed that civil disobedience is further on an important tool in their organisation, but also highlighted the repressive side of this form of resistance:

“Civil disobedience is definitely still an option. I also believe it remains a great way to raise awareness of issues and put pressure on politicians. Yes, but it’s becoming increasingly difficult in Austria and other countries too, due to repression and the way the state is cracking down on it. Which is frustrating to deal with, but also a sign that it’s having an effect.” (Interview XR Austria)

The interviewee also discussed how varying repressions by the state could lead to more intense protests:

“(…) if we have to expect relatively heavy repression for an action, if we simply stand in front of the Landhaus [seat of the local government] and sing peacefully for a bit, yet face more or less the same level of repression as if we were blocking a motorway, why should we sing peacefully?” (Interview XR Austria)

Both XR and FFF use social media as a crucial tool to mobilise, carry their messages and share images from their protests. In doing so, both organisations, but XR in particular, rely on creative protests that then gain significant traction on social media. The interview with Greenpeace put a spotlight on the importance of diverse forms of activism for the success of the whole movement, especially in challenging times:

“I think that right now, in this situation where the movement as a whole is shrinking significantly, an institutionalised player like Greenpeace is particularly important, because we can still carry out our work and stay focused on the issues without having to worry about fundamental concerns. At the same time, I think it’s important to point out that the chances of success for our campaigns are certainly much lower if there aren’t other actors at the same time applying pressure through different means, including more activist methods.” (Interview Greenpeace Austria)

4.3 Motivational framing

The question of why activists (still) take action or why organisations call for action is addressed in this section on motivational framing. It has become apparent that some reasons for taking action largely overlap across organisations, which is here categorised as “shared motivational logic”, whilst others are organisation-specific, referred to here as “diverging motivational logic”. Table 4 compares the motivational framings of XR, FFF and Greenpeace.

Table 4: Comparison of motivational framings of XR, FFF and Greenpeace

	XR	FFF	Greenpeace
Shared motivational logic	Urgency and duty to act; community; another world is possible; persistence	Urgency and duty to act; community; another world is possible; persistence	Urgency and duty to act; community; another world is possible; persistence
Diverging motivational logic	Rebellion as identity	Generational justice	Active hope; economic and legal arguments

4.3.1 Shared motivational logic – Urgency, Community, Hope and Persistence

All three organisations justify their motivation to act by pointing to the urgency of the crisis and, consequently, their duty or responsibility to act. In this context, the organisations emphasise the temporal component of the climate crisis, which they all share in their diagnosis (see 4.1.1.) and put it into a motivation to act. “The decisive years are now” (Greenpeace AT, n.d. – c), “we need to take action right away” (Greenpeace DE, n.d. – a) or “every month counts” (Greenpeace DE, n.d. – b) are some of Greenpeace’s calls. Also, FFF emphasises this urgency by stating that “we don’t have time to wait for the apocalypse before we finally take action” (FFF Germany, 2025) and that “the sooner we act, the better our shared future will be” (FFF International, n.d.). XR agrees with this, using statements such as “we have no more time to waste” (XR Global, n.d.) and, connecting to their more collapse oriented diagnosis, “the clock is ticking, and if we don’t succeed in uniting to protect our planet, everyone will be impacted – you, your family, everyone and everything you hold dear” (XR Global, n.d.). Connecting to this urgency, a motivational logic grounded on a duty to act can be seen in all three organisations. XR states that “we rebel because it’s our responsibility to act” (XR Global, n.d.), Greenpeace says “we must not keep putting off our responsibility for climate protection” (Greenpeace DE, n.d. – a) and FFF that “we are taking action because we cannot stand by and do nothing (...)” (FFF Austria, n.d. – a). FFF and XR also stress that they strike because they have no (other) choice (FFF International, n.d.; XR Global, n.d.). In the interview with the FFF activist, this moral duty is emphasised:

“The climate crisis affects every aspect of everyone’s lives, every single ecosystem on this planet, and it is, quite simply, the defining issue of this millennium. And I believe it is our moral responsibility to do whatever we can to combat it.” (Interview FFF Austria)

All three organisations are also motivated by a sense of community and through their collective action. They emphasise that only together progress is possible, but also point to the feeling of community that makes it easier to cope with the crisis. This is made clear through statements such as, “as a shared community of hope we support, encourage, inspire, and energise each other” (Greenpeace International, 2024) and “collective action helps us cope with climate anxiety and worry” (FFF International, n.d.). The sense of community was also a key theme in the interviews. Activists pointed to it as a key reason for their commitment to their group. This is, for example, reinforced by the interview with XR Austria:

“I think it’s simply a very positive experience to surround yourself with people who somehow share your own thoughts. Especially on this topic, but also beyond that, people who are simply working on something together. That sense of community is really worth a lot.” (Interview XR Austria)

Another overlap in the motivational framing is what I categorised as “hope and possibility of a better world”, which describes the central motivation of the climate movement to achieve a better future without an escalating climate crisis and the possibility of achieving this. “Another world is possible”, a world that is more just and better, is recurring in all three organisations, accompanied by statements that it can be achieved. This connects as well to the motivational element of “efficacy of action”, which suggests that collective action can be successful. Relating to their strategies (see 4.2.5.), XR encourages civil disobedience based on the historical success of it as a protest strategy, e.g. Women’s Suffrage or the Civil Rights Movement (XR Global, n.d.). They add that their form of protest “(...) can capture government and media attention and change the conversation in ways conventional resistance hasn’t” (XR Global, 2020 – b). Also, FFF points out that “non-violent protesting is an effective way to bring change” (FFF International, n.d.), that history has shown how successful striking is (FFF International, n.d.) and that they have shown in 2019, with huge demonstrations around the world, how many people care about climate protection (FFF Austria, n.d. – c). Greenpeace, on the other hand, does not refer so much to strikes or demonstrations, but generally emphasises the importance of collective action: “We also know that what we do now matters - that our collective actions in this decade will shape the centuries to come” (Greenpeace International, 2024) and “if we act now (...), we have a chance to re-stabilise our delicate climate” (Greenpeace International, n.d.).

A final, key overarching motivational framing element stems from the fact that climate protection is no longer the top priority in politics and society and that progress is being reversed or undermined. We can also observe this in organisations themselves, with falling numbers of participants at demonstrations and the disappearance of local groups of the organisations. This is also where the argument comes in that it might already be too late to solve the climate crisis. All three

organisations oppose this with a logic of “persistence and refusal to give up”. FFF communicates this as “whatever happens, one thing is certain: we’re here and we won’t give up” (FFF Austria, 2025) and “no matter what happens, it is never too late” (FFF International, n.d.). Greenpeace makes a similar point, stating that “we are needed more than ever” (Greenpeace International, 2024) and “we will keep fighting for our planet with all we’ve got” (Greenpeace International, 2024). And finally, XR agrees that giving up is not an option even if there are no guarantees for success (XR Global, n.d.). The interviews with the organisations emphasised this framing of persistence, while pointing to the diagnosis of an escalating crisis (4.1.):

„Yes, it’s going to turn into a catastrophe, and the consequences won’t be anything I can currently imagine in any way, especially not emotionally, but then I also think to myself that it’s somehow extremely cynical to think, ‘OK, it’s too late, let’s just give up’, because there are always things you can do.“ (Interview FFF Austria)

“Generally speaking, I think that when you look at our activists and our volunteers who continue to support us, one of their main motivations is, well, that we simply can’t give up.” (Interview Greenpeace Austria)

4.3.2 Diverging motivational logic

Whilst I have identified broad, cross-organisational motivational frame elements, some motivational elements are organisation-specific or are given particular emphasis within a specific organisation. At FFF, the generational component, of being the voice of the youth and their future, can be seen as such a distinguished element. In doing so, they emphasise that “we have a right to a future – free from the worst effects of the climate crisis” (FFF Germany, 2025) and, reflecting on people arguing they should go back into classes and study instead of strike, they state: “Why should we study so we can do great things later, when the time for greatness, for action, is now?” (FFF International, n.d.). The emphasis on youth as an identity is linked to the diagnosis of generational injustice (see 4.1.3.).

XR, on the other hand, actively uses activism itself as a powerful motivating factor, and rebellion is at the very heart of its identity. The form of protesting is thereby used as an element to onboard and motivate people to join the movement.

Greenpeace, in comparison to the two other organisations, articulates the role of hope more actively in their communication. Hope is a common thread that runs through their communication, describing it “not as an abstract ideal, but a bold and deliberate act” (Greenpeace International, 2025), attributing hope as something you need to actively choose and work on, rather than passively wait for. This is emphasised in several statements, connecting it to action, e.g.: “Together we nurture and grow this hope. Together we turn it into action. Each and every one of us holds a fragment of a better future. Join us!” (Greenpeace International, 2024).

The interviews also highlighted the role of hope within the other organisations, as something the activists certainly possess, but do not centrally state in their external communication:

“I think we need to be a bit cautious about hope, because it can lead people to say things like: “Oh, things will get better anyway.” And I don’t believe that things automatically get better if you don’t take action. So, I think we need that hope and that positive feeling, but we also need to take action.” (Interview XR Austria)

“I don’t think hope is that naive optimism of “oh, it’ll all work out anyway; as long as we keep up our campaigns and stick together, it’ll all work out, and then everything will be sorted and we’ll all be saved and everything will be lovely and cheerful and rainbow-coloured, and we’ll all live happily ever after”. It’s more a case of we have no choice but to keep working on this (...).” (Interview FFF Austria)

Additionally, Greenpeace tries to motivate people to climate action through economic and legal arguments, something that can only be seen as a sidenote in the other two organisations. They repeatedly point out what the failure of climate policy will cost nations and how investments in climate protection would pay off, as the costs of climate change would be avoided (Greenpeace Austria, 2026 – c; Greenpeace Germany, n.d. – a). In the interview, this is also reasoned with addressing people from another direction than just through a “classical” climate protection narrative:

“(…) this narrative about costs is quite clearly just an attempt to say, OK, the effects of the climate crisis in themselves – especially when they aren’t so noticeable – don’t really resonate with people in Austria, but we do, after all, have a very tight budgetary situation in Austria at the moment, and to then say, OK, there are going to be a lot more costs coming our way, might resonate with them more.” (Interview Greenpeace Austria)

5. Discussion

This thesis set out to examine and compare how the climate movement frames the urgency and severity of the climate crisis and how these framings shape their proposed solutions and calls to action. The comparison of XR, FFF and Greenpeace illustrates the overlapping problems and conflicts that the climate activist movement is facing. While the climate crisis is escalating, political and societal support is declining, and the problems associated with the climate crisis are becoming a marginal issue.

The frame analysis showed that in their diagnosis, all organisations view the climate crisis as ongoing, escalating and unjust. The climate crisis is therefore no longer an apocalyptic future scenario, but a reality to these organisations. This is consistent with academic research on climate activism, which shows that activists describe the situation as having reached an apocalypse or catastrophe (Cassegård & Thörn 2018; de Moor 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). The diagnosis can therefore be characterised as postapocalyptic, as described by Cassegård & Thörn (2018). While previous studies discussed and attributed a postapocalyptic logic in the diagnosis of the crisis to the more radical or direct-action part of the movement (Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022; de Moor 2022), my results suggest that this understanding has now become mainstream within the broader movement. Nevertheless, none of these organisations concludes that we, as a society, are (already) doomed, that there is nothing more we can do and that we should simply prepare for the consequences and/or give up on activism. In comparison to, e.g. the Dark Mountain project, on which Cassegård & Thörn (2018) partly build their postapocalyptic environmentalism, I argue that the “decision” for a postapocalyptic diagnosis does not stem from strategising (e.g. to prepare for what is coming), but rather from accepting the scientific facts about the state of the climate crisis. Instead, they paint a picture of what I would call a “gradual apocalypse”, which means that they see parts of the crisis as already happening and unstoppable, whereas other parts are still dependent on our actions today (de Moor & Marquardt 2023). It can therefore be argued that we are already in a catastrophic or apocalyptic scenario (Friberg 2022), but there is a further, even more catastrophic scenario approaching that needs to be and can be avoided.

This framing shift towards a gradual apocalypse rather than preventing it as a whole is well illustrated and can be connected to the “final fail” of the 1.5°C-goal, from the view of the climate movement. All three organisations were undergoing a frame adaptation from a “fight for 1.5 degrees” to a “every tenth of a degree matters” or “1.5°C is dead” logic. In framing theory, this is described as “frame transformation”, which means that movements actively adjust their framings due to

changing circumstances and is part of the dynamic process of framing (Benford & Snow 2000). While in 2019 the temporality of the 1.5°C-goal as a deadline was a great mobilising factor, already back then it was seen as unrealistic to achieve, both within the movement and from a scientific side, looking at the radical political action needed (Cointe & Guillemot 2023; Pavenstädt 2024). Fighting for it nevertheless “made sense” as the utopia that politics could achieve a shift and stay within this critical target, was still alive (Hadden & Prakash 2024; Pavenstädt 2024). That especially NGOs and, in this sense also, FFF kept this more and more unrealistic goal alive can also be related to 1.5 degrees being the basis for “naming and shaming”, as Hadden & Prakash (2024) describe. Thereby, they refer to this target as a norm that allows the civil society to hold the ones in power accountable and demand its enactment (Hadden & Prakash 2024). Abandoning it could therefore make it easier to justify delays in climate action and additionally undermine the mobilisation around this target (Hadden & Prakash 2024). While an analysis of XR shows that they already lost hope to limit the warming under 1.5 degrees in 2021/2022 (Pavenstädt 2024), my thesis emphasises that also more institutionalised and less direct-action focused parts of the movement had to abandon the 1.5°C-goal. Greenpeace nevertheless shows some ambivalence towards abandoning it totally, displaying it still centrally on their webpages (Greenpeace Germany 2025; Greenpeace Austria n.d.a), which could be a try to still hold politicians accountable to their promises (Hadden & Prakash 2024).

Reflecting on that, not everything is “doomed”, the analysed organisations point out in their prognostic framing that mitigation is still possible and needed. This goes in line with findings that suggest that groups avoid “it might be too late” rhetoric in their strategies, as this is believed to be demotivating and instead call for a “save what is possible” rhetoric (Stuart 2020; Friberg 2022; de Moor & Marquardt 2023). This is reflected in statements, referring to limitation possibilities and worst-case scenarios being still avoidable (see 4.1.2.). In that sense, de Moor & Marquardt (2023) discuss that it can make sense to argue for mitigation as a solution, to reach less catastrophic outcomes, if some window of action is still open. While activism often referred to such a closing window, to which certain action should happen (e.g. “last generation”; “in three years”) to prevent a catastrophic outcome, these messages do not seem to be that present anymore, according to the material I analysed. The temporal component, relating to the timeframe within which action must take place in order to avoid certain outcomes, seems to have disappeared. The logic that action still needs to happen now is nevertheless still omnipresent. As described before, much of that action relates to preventing the worst outcomes, rather than stopping the climate crisis as a whole. Greenpeace and FFF however, often refer to the laws and targets set by governments, as well as the compliance with these laws within the specified timeframes.

Climate justice is thereby a framing that all examined organisations share, and that could be declared as an overarching frame, as Buzogány & Scherhauser (2022) describe it in their analysis of XR and FFF. The consensus that the distribution of responsibility to act against the climate crisis needs to be equal and fair lies in the centre of these kinds of organisations, which is why they are often referred to as the “Climate Justice Movement” (Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022). I nevertheless chose not to analyse this as an overarching frame, but to look more into its components. Other analyses have already shown that the climate activism scene in the Global North has transformed towards a focus on climate justice, highlighting how the climate crisis is a symptom of capitalism, systemic oppression, inequality and colonialism (Allan & Hadden 2017; Mering et al. 2024; Pavenstädt 2024).

Further in their prognostic framing, the diversity of the climate movement as well as its mutual dependence is most evident. The range of solutions extends from concrete, sector-specific measures to systemic change, and strategies ranging from more institutional solutions to civil disobedience. The different organisational types (direct-action, youth-led and institutional) are reflected in the solutions and strategies the organisations favour, also in terms of radicality. The prognostic framing is essentially in line with what has been communicated as the diagnosis of the crisis, emphasising room for mitigation. My findings regarding Greenpeace and FFF mostly emphasise the responsibility of governments to act and implement solutions, and XR was shown to distrust these institutions to achieve change and is therefore calling for a different system (e.g. by suggesting citizens’ assemblies). These findings are also evident in other studies. Svensson & Wahlström (2023) support this towards FFF, with a “top-down system development” being the most pronounced prognostic framing at FFF. Also, Buzogány & Scherhauser (2022) stress that FFF favours advocacy within the current liberal democratic system and using protests as a tool to urge those in power to take responsibility, while XR advocates towards deliberative as well as participatory elements of democracy. Greenpeace’s approach is diverse, highlighting the challenges faced by an NGO as an institutional player, where supporting more radical positions could lead to them losing the influence they have gained in mainstream politics (Berny & Rootes 2018). Nevertheless, as my analysis confirms, system change rhetoric is also present in Greenpeace’s and FFF’s framings, but not in such a prominent way as in XR (Svensson & Wahlström 2023).

Regarding different “levels” of radicalism, the organisations emphasised the importance of the interplay between less radical and more radical demands and methods within the movement as a whole. In theoretical discussions of social movements, this is often explained by the “radical flank hypothesis”, which suggests that disruptive forms of protest increase support for comparatively milder forms of protest (Simpson et al. 2022; Dasch et al. 2024; Walzenbach & Meyer

2025). Environmental NGOs, such as Greenpeace, are therefore often willing to support more radical groups in different ways, as their positions appear more moderate and thus easier to implement than those of other, more disruptive, groups (Berny & Rootes 2018). While a survey experiment recently confirmed that this effect can occur in the context of climate activism (Simpson et al. 2022), it remains controversial because it has not yet been researched extensively (Dasch et al. 2024). Problems concerning the positive impact of a radical flank also arise due to the fast pace and changing nature of movements, as well as the fact that the moderate flank needs to have the capacity and resources to generate support for their position (August 2025).

While the prognostic framing showed the differences of the organisations and diversity of the movement, the motivational framing analysis shows a largely shared logic of action. As Benford & Snow (2000) describe it, motivational framing functions as a “call to arms”, translating the diagnosis of the crisis as well as the proposed solutions into reasons to act. The shared urgency framing across all three organisations follows from their shared diagnostic logic and evokes emotions, articulates anger, anxiety or fear, but also emphasises self-empowerment and consciousness (de Moor et al. 2020; Furlong & Vignoles 2021; Buzogány & Scherhauser 2022). Besides seeing collective action as a necessity or even moral obligation, a feeling of community and social identification is an important motivational factor for activists to take action or join a movement (Furlong & Vignoles 2021; Haugestad et al. 2021). All analysed organisations create this feeling of community and collective identity in their own way, which is both a precondition for and an outcome of sustained collective action (Polletta & Jasper 2001; Flesher Fominaya 2010).

The framing of persistence, messages of “giving up is not an option” or “we will keep fighting”, connect to the diagnosis of “it is not too late” and underline that mitigation is still possible and needed, thereby showing a good example of the three core framing tasks connecting. Meanwhile, this framing comes at a time of political regression and declining participation while the crisis is escalating (August 2025) and can therefore be discussed from different angles. As climate change is not just disappearing, continuing action can simply be motivated by the need to do something against it, even if there is little hope that that action will be influential (Kleres & Wettergren 2017; Cassegård 2024). Further on, this framing could be read as an “appeal to keep going” at a low phase in the protest cycle, encouraging already committed people to stay and maintain the movement, as an upturn comes in sight (de Moor et al. 2021; August 2025; Parks 2025). Movements themselves, but also literature on social movements, discuss the concept of “social tipping points” in this sense (Juhola et al. 2022; Pavenstädt 2024; Hansson et al. 2025). Such tipping points are described as a small change in behaviours or in the core

elements of the socio-environmental system, leading to a substantial non-linear reaction in society that triggers change (Juhola et al. 2022). Such a social tipping point could also be triggered through critical exogenous events (August 2025). A conclusion from that could be that the movement tries to sustain, to be ready for action, if such a tipping point is reached and demanding action then (August 2025). While it is argued that there is a need to actively trigger social tipping points with regard to the urgency of the climate crisis (Hansson et al. 2025), the overuse of the term faces criticism as too many events are labelled as a social tipping point, which might undermine its effectiveness (Milkoreit 2023). The question, if we have already encountered a social tipping point and if we will reach one before facing environmental tipping points, remains open (Milkoreit 2023; Hansson et al. 2025).

This connects to the different framings of hope that all three organisations I analysed use as a motivational element. While Greenpeace frames hope as a deliberate and bold act and therefore views it in the tradition of hope, being essential to inspire action, manage anger and fear and help to believe in the success of action (Kleres & Wettergren 2017; Sköld 2025), FFF and XR are cautious about this role of hope or have lost all hope (Stuart 2020; Cassegård 2024). Research on climate movements hereby suggests that while activists might not hold onto forms of passive or false hope, “radical hope” can still be present among activists (Stuart 2020; Thaler 2024). This form of hope is active, rejects naïve or false hope and helps to channel action on what is left to be saved (Stuart 2020; Thaler 2024). This could be especially observed at my interviews with activists. While Greenpeace’s accentuation of hope clearly speaks of a better future, this could not be observed for FFF and XR, which suggests that their way of hoping is a way to keep them going and “do the right thing” rather than to dream of a better future (Stuart 2020; Cassegård 2024; Thaler 2024).

This thesis is subject to certain limitations. First of all, the document selection is based on what is publicly available from the organisations, which reflects what the organisations choose to present. This shows the view and framings that the organisations present to the outside and avoids alterations that could appear through, for example, viewing the organisations through the lenses of the media. Internal documents, strategy papers or internal communication could reveal different framings. The main focus when selecting material was on Austria and Germany, which could mean that political contexts in these two countries could have a significant impact on the framings. However, as all organisations operate under the same principles as their umbrella organisation, their positions can be assumed to be similar, which means that my findings tend to have a focus on the Global North or Europe and should be read in this way. In addition to the organisations I have selected, there is a wide variety of organisations and movements that are all fundamentally committed to climate justice. The ones I have

chosen are intended merely to illustrate the scene but cannot be regarded as representative of the entire climate movement. The interview sample of four interviews is by no means representative, and it cannot be claimed that the interviewees represent an entire organisation. Nevertheless, that was not the aim of the interviews, which were instead intended to support the findings of the document analysis or to reveal any blind spots (see 3.2.). Further, my position as a researcher should be reflected here, as the construction of themes and their interpretation inevitably involve subjective judgments (see 3.3.). The selection of categories and the naming of these is an inductive process, which can lead to different categories and concepts depending on the study. Furthermore, this thesis is not an in-depth framing analysis of the three portrayed organisations, as it does not explore framings in detail, but rather provides an insight into broad framings within the climate movement. Finally, this thesis was written in a specific and particularly turbulent moment, with the failure of 1.5°C, declining movement participation and political drawbacks, which makes it, on the one hand, interesting, but on the other hand means that the framings identified here may shift significantly as political and environmental conditions change. The findings should therefore be understood as contextually situated rather than as stable organisational positions.

Finally, my thesis raises several questions that could serve as a starting point for future research. The continued adherence to the 1.5°C-target, even though it was already unrealistic in the beginning, and its impact on climate movements should be further investigated. Further, the framing of the climate movement remains predominantly one that warns of future catastrophes and the losses that come with it, plus accepting that some losses are already occurring and are irreversible. Utopias or dreams of a better future stay less important according to my findings. Whether this predominantly loss-focused framing is the most effective way to sustain mobilisation, or whether utopian visions could play a stronger motivating role, remains an open and important question for climate communication research.

A further question that remains is whether the movement could become radicalised (once again). As far as my analysis goes, it shows a movement in recovery, where radicalism is seen as counterproductive. On the other hand, it is possible that more radical methods are being considered within these groups, although these are naturally not disclosed to the outside world for tactical reasons. Furthermore, I have only looked at a few groups as examples of the broader movement. However, the diverse movement also includes more radical groups that might seek to become even more radical. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that individual events, such as major motorway or fossil fuel projects, may spark renewed protests and more radical forms of protest. Thereby, it would be interesting to see how other organisations in the broader movement see the potential in more radical protest or if and which other strategies are needed. Similarly, the growing wave of “protect or

save democracy” protests across Europe and their potential connection to climate justice and mobilisation for climate topics remains an area that future research could examine.

Furthermore, all analysed organisations view the crisis as escalating but remain positive towards averting a big catastrophe. Open questions remain if or how active the climate movement works toward a social tipping point, in order to achieve success again or if it more or less “waits” for an exogenous event to happen, like a big environmental catastrophe or eventually, also incredibly high oil prices, that would lead to such a tipping moment in society. The question, of course, is whether the organisations can use such an event to their advantage.

Ultimately, all three organisations I analysed represented a logic of “the government needs to take action”, even if it were just to install citizens assemblies, which has led to moderate success. Consequently, it may be worthwhile to research whether more grassroots and local activism of “taking things into our own hands” is occurring and the framings and messages of these groups. Together, these questions reflect the dynamic and changing nature of the climate movement as well as the continued need for research that keeps pace with it.

6. Conclusion

The climate crisis may not currently be the number one political or societal concern, but it will not simply disappear if it is denied or downplayed. It will not go away just because one does not see thousands of people demonstrating in the streets or activists blocking roads every day. With the crossing of the 1.5°C-goal we may now have reached a new level of crisis. Whilst, unfortunately, primarily as a result of wars, a shift in priorities has taken place, the disappearance of the climate “topic” is also the result of years of political failure, political counteraction and the success of populist “opposition”, mainly from the far right, but also from centre parties. The implications of this suppression for the future of society and all life remain to be seen.

However, my analysis showed which framings parts of the climate movement utilise in these turbulent times, how they describe the crisis, which solutions they seek and what motivates them. The analysis shows that the movement has undergone a significant shift. The climate crisis is no longer communicated as a future threat to be prevented, but as a present and escalating reality. The diagnosis of the climate movement is partly postapocalyptic, but firmly resistant to fatalism. The concept of “gradual apocalypse” captures this logic, where some consequences are irreversible, but further catastrophic outcomes remain within reach of human action. Giving up is therefore not seen as an option. Shifting the communication from a language of prevention to one of mitigation is one of the main communicative challenges the movement is facing. My findings suggest that they navigate this through frame transformation, persistent motivation and cautious but active hope.

Persistent action from civil society remains important, as many transformational processes have historically been initiated and successfully implemented from within society due to sustained pressure. The climate movement nevertheless faces the climate crisis as a “super wicked problem” and the ticking clock as a significant barrier. My findings show how the broad movement maintains, profiting from its interconnection of institutionalised players like Greenpeace, which offer a stable base, to FFF as the important starting point for the youth to understand the climate crisis and take part in their first protests, till XR, which demands more radical action, often supported by acts of civil disobedience. Together, they represent a movement that is adapting to a reality that shows few to no signs of improvement on its own.

Whether this adaptation will be enough and whether the movement is ready to act when a new window of opportunity opens, remains to be seen. What my thesis

demonstrates is that the climate movement has not given up and that understanding how and why it keeps going is a question worth taking seriously. Despite all its challenges, the climate movement remains one of the few forces consistently pushing for the changes that science tells us are necessary and alone, therefore it is worthwhile researching and discussing it.

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Popular science summary

The climate crisis is no longer a distant warning or a future scenario. Wildfires, floods, droughts and rising temperatures are part of everyday life across the globe. Meanwhile, political interest in fighting the climate crisis is declining, climate movements are losing participants, and the target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C has effectively been abandoned. For organisations like Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future and Greenpeace, this raises a fundamental question: how do you communicate urgency, propose solutions and motivate action when the crisis you have long warned about has already begun?

This thesis set out to answer exactly that question, by looking into the communication of these three organisations and comparing it: How do they describe the crisis, what solutions do they propose, and how do they argue why people should (still) act?

What did I find?

First of all, I found that all three organisations now describe the climate crisis not as something that we can entirely stop if we act fast enough, but as something that is already happening. Extreme weather events, rising sea levels and species extinction are no longer future scenarios, but present realities. At the same time, none of these organisations concludes that it is too late to do anything. Instead, their communication has shifted from “we must prevent the climate crisis” to “we must limit how bad it gets”. They describe that some consequences are unavoidable, but further catastrophic outcomes are still within our power to prevent. This is a significant shift in how the climate movement talks about the crisis and shows how the movement is adapting to changing conditions.

The failure of the 1.5°C-goal is a good example of this adaptation. For years, staying below 1.5°C of warming was a central demand of the climate movement. As it became clear that this target would not be met, the organisations had to adjust their communication. Instead of abandoning the goal completely, they shifted their message. Now, the message that “every tenth of a degree matters” is dominant. They underline that the differences in temperature, such as an increase of 1.7°C or 1.8°C, matter because they could mean the difference between a disaster and an even worse disaster. These kinds of messages by the organisations try to keep the motivation to act alive, even when the original goal has been missed.

When it comes to solutions, the three organisations differ quite notably. This reflects their different identities and ways of working. Greenpeace, as an established NGO with access to political institutions, focuses on concrete policy

measures, like banning fossil heating systems, reforms for agriculture or expansions of renewable energy. Fridays for Future, as a youth-led movement, demands the implementation of climate agreements and the legal anchoring of climate protection. Extinction Rebellion, as a direct-action movement, argues that the political system itself is broken and calls for citizens' assemblies to guide the transition. Despite the differences they have here, all three recognise that they need each other. Moderate and radical positions within a movement can actually strengthen one another.

What keeps activists going in difficult times is also an important part of this thesis. A feeling of moral duty, a sense of community and a cautious but persistent hope are all key motivating factors. Hope is nevertheless communicated quite differently across the organisations. Greenpeace communicates hope as something you actively choose and work towards. Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future worry that too much optimism could lead people to think that things will simply sort themselves out. Therefore, their hope is more about refusing to give up.

How did I find that?

I reached these findings through analysing the three chosen organisations' websites. There I was looking onto how they describe the climate crisis, which solutions they offer and how they motivate people to action. I also conducted four interviews with activists or spokespeople from these organisations to get a more personal picture of how the organisations think about these topics. To make sense of my material, I used framing analysis, which is a method that looks into how organisations present their messages.

Why does this research matter?

Understanding how climate movements communicate, adapt and maintain is not only academically interesting. For those working in climate communication and activism, the findings could help to find ways to keep people engaged when the news keep getting worse. For policymakers, they are a reminder that the demands of activists are scientifically grounded and ignoring them might be increasingly difficult to justify.

Finally, this thesis is a study of how people and organisations communicate in the face of an unfolding crisis. Easy answers are running out, and the burden of what might lie ahead is overwhelming. The climate movement is not just fighting for policy change, but also against despair and the creeping sense that it might be too late. This matters, not just for the movement, but for anyone thinking seriously about how societies respond to existential challenges.

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Appendix 1: Analysed documents XR

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
Prinzipien und Werte – Langfassung	Principles and Values – long version	Docum ent	Ten principles the global movement agrees to. Long version from XR Germany	XR Germany (2020) https://extinctionrebellion.de/wer-wir-sind/principles-and-values/ (last accessed 16.02.2026)
3 Forderungen – Drei Schritte ins Handeln	3 demands – 3 steps to action	Webpa ge	The three central demands of XR (Austrian Version)	XR Austria (n.d. - a) https://xrebellion.at/ueber-uns/unsere-forderungen/
Unsere drei Forderungen	Our three demands	Webpa ge	The three central demands of XR (German Version)	XR Germany (n.d. - a) https://extinctionrebellion.de/wer-wir-sind/unsere-forderungen/
Sitzt XR Deutschland im falschen Dampfer? Warum ist die Forderung nach Netto-Null ein Problem?	Is XR Germany on the wrong track? Why is the call for net-zero a problem?	Docum ent	Explanation why „net-zero“ is not anymore included in the central demand “act-now”	XR Germany (n.d. - b) https://public.extinctionrebellion.de/s/PKd2nNWpS6AexJD?dir=/&editing=false&openfile=true
Klimakrise und ökologischer Kollaps	Climate crisis and ecological collapse	Webpa ge	Information about the climate crisis and ecological collapse with a focus on Austria	XR Austria (n.d. - b) https://xrebellion.at/klimakrise-oekologischer-

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
				kollaps/#klimakrise
Why rebel?	/	Webpage	Explaining why it is the time for a rebellion	XR Global (n.d.) https://rebellion.global/why-rebel/
XR Fundamentals. Tell the Truth	/	Webpage	Extended version of the first XR demand “Tell the Truth”	Lowe A. for XR Global (2020 - a) https://rebellion.global/blog/2020/12/11/tell-the-truth/
XR Fundamentals. Act Now	/	Webpage	Extended version of the second XR demand “Act Now”	Lowe A. for XR Global (2020 - b) https://rebellion.global/blog/2020/08/31/act-now-extinction-rebellion-demands/
XR Fundamentals. Go Beyond Politics	/	Webpage	Extended version of the third XR demand “Go Beyond Politics”	Lowe A. for XR Global (2020 - c) https://rebellion.global/blog/2021/01/05/citizens-assembly-climate-change/
Gewaltfreier ziviler Ungehorsam – die erfolgreichste Protestform der Geschichte	Non-violent civil disobedience – the most successful form of protest in history	Webpage	Explaining civil disobedience and why it works	XR Austria (n.d. - c) https://xrebellion.at/ueberuns/gewaltfreier-ziviler-ungehorsam/
Letzte Generation beendet Proteste in	Last Generation ends its protests in	Blogpost	XR Austria explains why they continue with their protest while	XR Austria (2024) https://xrebellion.at/2024/08/07/letz

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
Österreich – wir machen weiter	Austria – we’re carrying on		other groups stop their protest	te-generation-beendet-proteste-in-oesterreich-wir-machen-weiter/
Entmilliardärisieren für Klima, Natur und Demokratie	De-billionaire-ising for the climate, nature and democracy	Webpage	Current campaign of XR Germany, focussing on billionaires	XR Germany (n.d. - c) https://extinctionrebellion.de/aktionen/entmilliardaerisieren/
Extinction Rebellion ‘Closes the Door’ on government inaction over 1.5°C target	/	Press release	Protests action thematising the failure to meet the 1.5-degree goal	XR United Kingdom (2025) https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2025/12/20/extinction-rebellion-closes-the-door-on-government-inaction-over-1-5c-target/

Appendix 2: Analysed documents FFF

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
What do we want? Climate justice!	/	Webpage	FFF Austria describes who they are, what the fight for and how they will do that	FFF Austria (n.d. - a) https://fridaysforfuture.at/ueber-uns
Forderungen	Demands	Webpage	Central demands from FFF Austria, including the 1.5-degree goal	FFF Austria (n.d. - b) https://fridaysforfuture.at/forderungen
Statement zur Letzten Generation	Statement on “Letzte Generation”	Webpage	Statement of FFF Austria, why they are continuing with their protests, while “Letzte Generation” ended theirs	FFF Austria (n.d. - c) https://fridaysforfuture.at/themen/statement-zur-letzten-generation
Klimaschutzgesetz	Climate Protection Act	Webpage	A central demand of FFF Austria is a climate protection law	FFF Austria (n.d. - d) https://fridaysforfuture.at/themen/klimaschutzgesetz
Klimaschutz braucht dich	Climate protection needs you	Blog post	An activist talking about how FFF struggles with losing supporters, but why it is important to join the movement now	Müller V. for FFF Austria (2025) https://fridaysforfuture.at/blog/klimaschutz-braucht-dich-477306
Offener Brief zur EU-	Open letter to the German	Open letter	Open letter addressing the German	FFF Germany (2025) https://fridaysforfuture.at

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
Klimapolitik an die Bundesregierung	Government on EU climate policy		government to intervene for binding EU climate goals	uture.de/offener-brief-zur-eu-klimapolitik-an-die-bundesregierung/
Weil Aufgeben keine Option ist – Rückblick auf den 20. September 2025	Because giving up is not an option – A look back at 20 September 2025	Blogpost	Activst describing their feelings about a protest	FFF Germany (2025) https://fridaysforfuture.de/weil-aufgeben-keine-option-ist-rueckblick-auf-den-20-september-2025/
Jetzt erst recht – unsere Analyse!	Now more than ever – our analysis!	Blogpost	FFF Germany underlining why it is important to act despite the poor outlook due to the renewed Trump presidency	FFF Germany (2025) https://fridaysforfuture.de/jetzt-erst-recht-unsere-analyse/
Unsere Forderungen an die Politik	Our demands on politicians	Webpage	FFF Germany explains their central demands on German level	FFF Germany (2019) https://fridaysforfuture.de/forderungen/allgemein/
Forderungen 2025	Demands 2025	Webpage	FFF Germany explains their demands for 2025	FFF Germany (2025) https://fridaysforfuture.de/forderungen/forderungen-2025/
Reasons to strike	/	Webpage	FFF International justifies why they are taking action	FFF International (n.d.) https://fridaysforfuture.org/take-action/reasons-to-strike/

Appendix 3: Analysed documents Greenpeace

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
Über Uns: Wer ist Greenpeace?	About us: Who is Greenpeace?	Webpage	Greenpeaces history and principles	Greenpeace AT (n.d. - a) https://greenpeace.at/ueber-uns/
Wie und woran wir arbeiten.	What we do and how we do it.	Webpage	How and what Greenpeace works for	Greenpeace AT (n.d. - b) https://greenpeace.at/ueber-uns/arbeitsweise/
Klimaschutz	Climate protection	Webpage	The organisations standpoint towards the climate crisis	Greenpeace AT (n.d. - c) https://greenpeace.at/themen/klimaschutz/details/
Demokratie	Democracy	Webpage	Democracy as the base of activism; endangered democracy	Greenpeace AT (n.d. - d) https://greenpeace.at/themen/demokratie/details/
Klimagesetz : Was Österreich für wirksamen Klimaschutz machen muss	Climate Act: What Austria needs to do to ensure effective climate protection	Webpage	Information on that Austria needs an effective climate law and what needs to be done	Greenpeace AT (2025 - a) https://greenpeace.at/news/klimagesetz-neu-oesterreich-anforderungen/
10 Fakten zum IPCC Klimareport	10 facts about the IPCC climate report	Webpage	Classification of the IPCC report	Greenpeace AT (2023) https://greenpeace.at/news/10-fakten-zum-ipcc-report/
Greenpeace: Olympische Winterspiele	Greenpeace: The 2026 Winter	Press release	Greenpeace criticises the Olympic games	Greenpeace AT (2026 - a) https://greenpeace

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
2026 als Bühne für Greenwashing	Olympics as a platform for greenwashing		as they are framed “sustainable” while the fossil fuel industry finances them	.at/presse/greenpeace-olympische-winterspiele-2026-als-buehne-fuer-greenwashing/
Greenpeace zu Treibhausgasbilanz: Österreich auf dem Holzweg	Greenpeace on greenhouse gas emissions: Austria is on the wrong track	Press release	Austria is not on path for the greenhouse emission goals	Greenpeace AT (2026 - b) https://greenpeace.at/presse/greenpeace-zu-treibhausgasbilanz-oesterreich-auf-dem-holzweg/
Greenpeace: Umweltbundesamt zeigt Fehlkurs der Regierung beim Klimaziel 2030 auf	Greenpeace: Federal Environment Agency highlights the government’s missteps regarding the 2030 climate target	Press release	Greenpeace criticising the Austrian government for not focussing on climate protection, underlining the economical cost for that	Greenpeace AT (2026 - c) https://greenpeace.at/presse/greenpeace-umweltbundesamt-zeigt-fehlcurs-der-regierung-beim-klimaziel-2030-auf/
Greenpeace zu Klimastreik: Regierung muss endlich starkes Klimagesetz vorlegen	Greenpeace on the climate strike: The government must finally introduce strong climate legislation	Press release	The organisation calls for participation in the climate strike	Greenpeace AT (2025 - b) https://greenpeace.at/presse/greenpeace-zu-klimastreik-regierung-muss-endlich-starkes-klimagesetz-vorlegen/
Klimaschutz jetzt	Climate protection now	Webpage	The German branch of the organisation talks about what is still possible	Greenpeace DE (n.d. - a) https://www.greenpeace.de/klimaschutz

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
			in terms of climate protection	
Wenn der Klimawandel zur Klimakrise wird	When climate change becomes a climate crisis	Webpage	Greenpeace informs about the problems, solutions and effects of the climate crisis	Greenpeace DE (n.d. - b) https://www.greenpeace.de/klimaschutz/klimakrise
Greenpeace-Aktive demonstrieren mit Projektion in 200 Metern Höhe am Berliner Fernsehturm für besseren Klimaschutz	Greenpeace activists are demonstrating with a projection 200 metres above ground at Berlin's TV Tower to call for better climate action	Press release	Activists protest before the start of the climate conference and emphasise "act now"	Greenpeace DE (2025 - a) https://presseportal.greenpeace.de/256714-greenpeace-aktive-demonstrieren-mit-projektion-in-200-metern-hoeh-am-berliner-fernsehturm-fur-besseren-klimaschutz/
Greenpeace zu den beschlossenen EU-Klimazielen	Greenpeace on the EU's agreed climate targets	Press release	Greenpeace positions itself towards the EU climate goals	Greenpeace DE (2025 - b) https://presseportal.greenpeace.de/256650-greenpeace-zu-den-beschlossenen-eu-klimazielen/
Greenpeace zum Bericht über nationale Klimapläne	Greenpeace on the report on national climate plans	Press release	Statement on the national climate targets and the critical 1.5-degree goal	Greenpeace DE (2025 - c) https://presseportal.greenpeace.de/256089-greenpeace-zum-bericht-uber-

Title	Translation	Format	Description	Source
#Climate	/	Webpage	The organisation talks about how we, as humans, still have the power to create a greener world	nationale-klimaplane/ Greenpeace International (n.d.) https://www.greenpeace.org/international/tag/climate/
Greenpeace International Annual Report 2024	/	Report	Annual report of the organisation 2024	Greenpeace International (2025) https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-international-stateless/2025/06/7befca7b-greenpeace-international-annual-report-2024.pdf
Greenpeace International Annual Report 2023	/	Report	Annual report of the organisation 2023	Greenpeace International (2024) https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-international-stateless/2024/07/10b1dd12-greenpeace-international-annual-report-2023.pdf

Appendix 4: Interview guide

Start and Introduction:

- Welcome and thank them for their time.
- Organisational purposes:
 - Information that the meeting is recorded
 - Start recording
 - The data will only be used for the thesis project
 - No mentioning of names
 - Reference to voluntary participation
 - Option to withdraw consent at any time without consequences
 - Short introduction to the thesis project

Introduction: Before we get to the more specific questions, I would like to start with a slightly different question: Imagine you want to convince me/someone else to get involved in your organisation. What would you tell me? How would you describe the crisis, what does your organisation want to do about it – and why should I be involved?

Diagnostic framing:

Question 1: How would you describe the climate crisis from the view of your organisation?

Question 2: Who would you describe to be main responsible for the climate crisis?

Question 3: How do you see the current state of the climate crisis – what has already happened, and what do you think can still be changed?

Question 4 (transition question to prognostic): When you communicate about the climate crisis, do you talk about it as something that can be prevented, or more as something we need to manage and adapt to?

Prognostic framing:

Question 5: Your organisation addresses xy solutions/demands to the climate crisis. Why are you advocating for these especially? Do you think these are realistically achievable?

Question 6:

- XR: To emphasise your demands, you call for and use civil disobedience – why do you choose to do this? How successful do you consider these actions?
- FFF: To emphasise your demands, your main channel is to organise demonstrations – why do you choose to do this? How successful do you consider these actions?
- Greenpeace: To emphasise your demands, you choose a variety of channels (information, activism, political work, work with companies...) – why do you choose to do this? How successful do you consider these actions?

Question 7: Looking onto how you describe the crisis, do you think your proposed solutions are suitable? Do you think your organisation/the climate movements needs to move into another direction? (calling for adaption, hospicing)

Motivational framing:

Question 8: The motivation to act that your organisation advocates goes from x to yz. Do these calls still resonate with the people you want to address or call to act? Why do you think that is?

Question 9: What motivates people to be active in your organisation? What motivates yourself?

Question 10: What role does hope play for you in your actions?

Conclusion:

Question 11: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

- Thank you for your time
- Inform about the analysis of the results

Appendix 5: Overview of the collective action frames of XR

Core framing task	Category	Sub-category
Diagnostic framing	Crisis description	Crisis as existential and civilisational threat
	Temporal framing of the crisis	Crisis as present collapse
		Escalation and acceleration
	Limitation possibility and climate targets	1.5 is failed
		Severity is still mitigable
		Window of opportunity almost closed
	Climate justice	Unjust distribution of the consequences
	Blame attribution	The system and its profiteers
		Way of living in the Global North
		Politicians and political system
Prognostic framing	Type of solutions	Political goal commitment
		System change
		Tell the truth
		Citizens' assemblies
		Justice based measures
		Existing solutions must be implemented
	Strategy	Civil disobedience
Motivational framing		Urgency and duty to act
		Community and collective action
		Hope and possibility of a better world
		Efficacy of action
		Persistence and refusal to give up
		Rebellion as identity

Appendix 6: Overview of the collective action frames of FFF

Core framing task	Category	Sub-category
Diagnostic framing	Crisis description	Crisis as existential threat
	Temporal framing of the crisis	Crisis as present reality
		Escalation and urgency
	Limitation possibility and climate targets	1.5 is unreachable or failed
		Severity is still mitigable
		Action is possible but politically insufficient
	Climate justice	Unjust distribution of the consequences
		Generational injustice
	Blame attribution	Political and economic actors profiting from a destructive system
		Way of living in the Global North
Prognostic framing	Type of solutions	Political goal commitment
		Sector specific measures
		Justice based measures
		Legal anchoring
		System change as fallback
	Listen to the science	
Strategy	Demonstrations	
Motivational framing		Urgency and duty to act
		Community and collective action
		Hope and possibility of a better world
		Efficacy of action
		Persistence and refusal to give up
	Generational justice	

Appendix 7: Overview of the collective action frames of Greenpeace

Core framing task	Category	Sub-category
Diagnostic framing	Crisis description	Crisis as existential threat
	Temporal framing of the crisis	Crisis as present reality
		Escalation and urgency
	Limitation possibility and climate targets	1.5 as critical threshold/every fraction matters
		Severity is still mitigable
		Action is possible but politically insufficient
	Climate justice	Unjust distribution of the consequences
		Socioeconomic injustice
	Blame attribution	Fossil fuel industry and global corporations
		Way of living in the Global North
		Political inaction and insufficient legislation
	Prognostic framing	Type of solutions
Sector specific measures		
Individual measures		
Financial measures		
Legal anchoring		
Listen to the science		
Strategy		Institutional diverse
Motivational framing		Urgency and duty to act
		Community and collective action
		Hope as active choice
		Efficacy of action
		Hope and possibility of a better world
		Persistence and refusal to give up
		Generational responsibility
		Economic and legal arguments

AI disclosure

For this thesis, the language tool “DeepL” was used to check for translations and improve vocabulary and grammar. The outputs, especially those restructuring sentences, were critically assessed and not just blindly adopted, mostly to keep a personal writing style. I wrote all the text in this thesis by myself and did not use AI to generate any of the content. No further tools were used.

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