Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth

Disobedient youth:

Lessons from the youth climate strike movement

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CERI	Children's Environmental Rights Initiative
CSYP	Cross Sectoral Youth Policy
COP	Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
HRC	Human Rights Council of the United Nations
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations

UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
YEYS	Your Europe, Your Say (the European Economic and Social Council's annual youth forum)
YOUNGO	Youth Consultative Constituency of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

'Collective action helps us cope with climate anxiety and worry. Striking together brings us hope, and it really does lead to direct change – we learned this much in the history class you say we should be in.'

- **Fridays for Future (2020).**

1. Introduction

In the middle of the long, hot European summer of 2019, 450 young people travelled from across Europe to the shores of Lake Geneva. They gathered together in the town of Lausanne as representatives of a new youth-led movement for climate justice which had erupted across Europe in the previous months. By the time these activists arrived in Switzerland, they had already co-ordinated a first major wave of strikes which mobilised 1.6 million people in March 2019 (Wahlström *et al.*, 2019: 5) and three quarters of a million in May 2019 (Fridays for Future, 2021). This second school strike action coincided with the European Parliament elections. At their August meeting the strikers made the Lausanne Climate Declaration which articulated three major demands for this nascent movement (Fridays for Future, 2019):

1. *Keep the global temperature rise below 1.5 °C compared to pre-industrial levels.*
2. *Ensure climate justice and equity.*
3. *Listen to the best united science currently available*.

The Lausanne Declaration identified further details on how this might be done, such as calling for the declaration of a 'Europe-wide climate emergency, which includes goals, targets, and mechanisms such as check-ups to ensure transparency and accountability' (Fridays for Future, 2019: 7). However, strikers have generally resisted making or communicating specific policy demands. The Lausanne meeting was followed by a second wave of strikes in September 2019 with an estimated 7.6 million people participating in 6000 protest events across 185 countries (de Moor *et al.*, 2020). The core youth strategy has been to use the strike tactic to collectively raise their voices. Their simple message has been to call on political representatives and states to respond to the climate crisis in a just way with the urgency that science requires.

Indeed, the science of climate change is clear and unequivocal. As we enter the geological age of the Anthropocene, the indelible impact of collective human action on the planet threatens to exceed 'safe operating space' across nine 'planetary boundaries' (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). The effects of industrialisation, industrial agriculture and global trade – activities disproportionately driven by the global North - have pushed us to the edge of these earth system boundaries. Climate change and the 6th mass extinction are complex, multi-layered crises which intersect with (and exacerbate) social, economic and democratic tensions in several ways. Firstly, they have a potentially detrimental impact on the realisation of human rights and social justice globally, with that impact already being experienced by the poorest and most marginalised (IPCC, 2018). Secondly, the crises have considerable negative consequences for young people today as well as for future generations, on whom the burden of today's political inaction will fall (Perera, 2014). Today's youth and future generations are predicted to have a worse quality of life than previous generations, as well as experiencing significant climate related health impacts (The Lancet, 2020). Responding to these challenges, throughout 2021 the World Forum for Democracy is focused on the challenge which climate change poses for democracy. The forum notes that '[m]ore than ever we see the interdependence of our physical and our political worlds', which begs the question: 'On a planet in crisis, does democracy have what it takes to save the environment?' (Council of Europe, 2020: 3).

Responding to the global context outlined above, this paper considers the issues at stake for youth in the climate crisis, analyses the youth climate strikes in Europe and considers their implications for youth policy, youth work and youth research. The paper is divided into several sections:

Section two considers 'youth' as a political identity in climate policy making. The reality of youth as a collective identity and experience makes intergenerational equity an important issue for climate justice. Yet, although young people are recognised in climate governance frameworks, they remain disadvantaged within adultist decision making structures. Additionally, youth as an identity also intersects with other identities requiring an intersectional analysis and response in climate governance.

Section three examines the new wave of youth climate activism from 2019. It explores the demographic characteristics of the climate strikers, noting that this wave of mobilisations has been predominantly driven by young women. It considers the concerns catalysing their mobilisations, illuminating what it is about current climate governance and broader political systems which young people find lacking. Finally, section three offers an analysis of the tactics and forms of participation which youth climate activists have adopted as well as a tentative assessment of their impact to date.

Section four considers emerging policy links between youth and climate and considers the role that each element of the European youth sector (youth policy, youth work and youth research) can play in supporting meaningful youth participation in climate governance.

Finally, the **conclusion** highlights how the youth sector can be allies to and advocates for youth in their efforts for climate justice and makes recommendations for action by the youth sector.

2. Climate governance and the developing political identity of youth

How are young people included in existing structures and frameworks for climate governance at European and global scales? How are their concerns reflected by these structures? These are important questions to consider in order to put the recent wave of youth climate mobilisations into context. 'Youth' is a political identity which has been broadly recognised and incorporated into climate policy making but with varying outcomes for young people. To explore this, section 2.1 considers the issue of intergenerational equity as an essential element of climate justice for youth. Following that, section 2.2 discusses the role of adultism, the systematic disempowerment of youth, in young people's marginalisation in climate governance. It then considers how youth as a political identity also intersects with other identities (e.g. gender, ethnicity, 'dis'-ability), requiring an intersectional analysis of and response to young people's climate justice demands.

2.1 Climate justice for young people as intergenerational equity

2.1.1. Global policy

Efforts to support the collective inclusion of young voices and perspectives on climate change have been advanced in climate governance through the principle of intergenerational equity. The principle is a foundational concept of sustainable development first articulated in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration, and since incorporated into United Nations sustainable development and climate change governance frameworks. The principle of intergenerational equity states that:

> 'every generation holds the Earth in common with members of the present generation and with other generations, past and future. The principle articulates a concept of fairness among generations in the use and conservation of the environment and its natural resources' (Weiss, 2013).

This principle lies at the heart of the definition of sustainable development articulated by the UN's World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) in 1987. *Our Common Future* states that sustainable development is 'development that meets the needs of the

present *without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*' (emphasis added).

Intergenerational equity is a recognised concern in climate governance. The preamble of the 2015 Paris Agreement highlights the vulnerability of children, whose rights should be protected from infringement by climate change. It further calls on parties to the agreement to respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on intergenerational equity. Also in 2015, the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals and stated that 'children and young women and men are critical agents for change and will find in the new Goals [the SDGs] a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world' (quoted in Holmberg and Alvinius, 2019: 82). Building on article 12 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, there is a strong emphasis on youth participation in environmental matters in rights frameworks. Numerous UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolutions have addressed the rights of children and youth with respect to climate change (e.g. HRC resolutions 37/8, 35/20 and 40/11). Yet it was only in 2009 that youth were recognised as a consultative constituency – known as YOUNGO – in negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (almost 20 years after other constituencies were formed). YOUNGO facilitates the participation at the negotiations of youth from the age of 16 upwards (Thew, 2018).

At COP 29 in Madrid, perhaps responding to the global wave of youth mobilising, YOUNGO, UNICEF and the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative co-ordinated a Declaration on Children Youth and Climate Action, sponsored by 12 states (CERI, 2021). The declaration contains seven commitments focused on protecting children's rights, enhancing meaningful youth participation and driving action to address young people's climate related vulnerability. Young people are particularly impacted by environmental harm and vulnerable to the effects of climate change (UNICEF, 2014; United Nations, 2018). It is estimated that 175 million children a year are impacted by natural disasters, and displacement by flooding and famine are major causes of children's mortality in the global South (Perera, 2014). A 2018 World Health Organisation report found that children are 'uniquely vulnerable' to the damaging health effects of air pollution from the burning of fossil fuels for heating and transportation (WHO, 2018: 8). The enormous challenge which climate change poses to the realisation of children's rights has been recognised by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2017).

Intergenerational equity and the specific impacts of climate change on young people point to the reality that 'youth' is an experience and identity which 'yields a number of collectively shared experiences' (Noguera *et al*, 2013: xvii). Supporting this understanding, research by Harriet Thew and colleagues (Thew, 2018; Thew, *et al.*, 2020; Thew, *et al.*, 2021) points to the significance of youth as a political position at UNFCCC climate change negotiations. However, there remains significant challenges for young people to participate with parity in such international spaces of

climate governance (Jonathan and Wall, 2021). Thew *et* al (2021) highlight the UNFCCC as an example of policy orchestration, defined as 'an indirect mode of governance that relies on inducements and incentives rather than mandatory controls' between a broad range of state and non-state actors (Abbot, 2018, quoted in Thew *et al*, 2021: 2). Despite the inclusion of youth actors in the UNFCCC orchestration process, Thew *et al* (2021: 17) found that young people generally 'continue to regard themselves as observers on the side-lines rather than occupying a central role at the heart of the Post-Paris regime'. They further note that 'youth participants face

UK Youth Climate Coalition - United Kingdom

'Societal change is a bottom-up process, not a blueprint implemented from above. However, if we take sustainability, justice and participative-governance as key principles, then we can start to sketch out not only the architecture of a new system, but also which steps we should take to get there' (UKYCC, 2021).

The UK Youth Climate Coalition (UKYCC) was established in 2008 by young people in order to mobilise and empower youth to take positive action for global climate justice. The coalition supports the participation of 18-29 year-olds in climate policy making and governance across local, national, European and Global scales. The coalition supports the engagement of youth in conventional political participation structures through creative campaigning, youth-led policy advocacy and collaboration with other civil society organisations.

UKYCC takes a strong justice perspective which shapes the values of the coalition: amplifying youth voices, systemic change, non-violence, transparency, anti-oppression, inclusivity, diversity and independence. The coalition is run by volunteers and operates by several organisational principles, such as consensus decision making and non-hierarchy. It carries out its work through several thematic working groups. While these working groups change to reflect the needs of the coalition and to external political situation, they currently include:

- A COP Working Group (connecting youth to the international negotiations at the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change).
- A System Change Working Group (addressing root causes of the climate crisis).
- A Communities Working Group (supporting local youth activism and grassroots community campaigns for clean air and against anti-fracking campaign).

The coalition runs many campaigns focused on shifting the public debate and influencing policy-makers and politicians. These have included a 'Letterflood' letter writing campaign and an 'Adopt an MP' campaign, both of which sought to put political pressure from young people on decision makers in the parliament to act for climate justice. UKYCC has also long advocated for a just transition for youth through the creation of green jobs. Yet, as O'Brien *et al* (2018) note, young people engage within conventional political structures while also being clear about their shortcomings, offering a radical critique and seeking to build alternatives. UKYCC has developed a detailed 'Systems Change Statement' setting out how youth activists in the coalition aim to:

- Promote/amplify marginalised voices, particularly from the global South.
- Support capacity of marginalised youth to engage in climate activism.
- Identifying the institutional structures, laws and priorities which lock-in climate change and challenging these through creative campaigning.
- Building alliances and coalitions with other youth groups, social justice movements and trade unions to advance alternative social, environmental and economic models.

Figure 1: Case study of conventional youth participation in climate governance

several constraints including lack of institutional memory, high turnover and power asymmetries' (Thew *et al*, 2021: 18). As such, they suggest that youth 'need additional support to engage […] on a level playing field' (p. 18). In order to achieve such inclusive involvement of young people in climate governance, the authors propose a model of 'inclusive orchestration' (p. 16) which:

- 'Engages a wide range of diverse actors.
- Facilitates pursuit of a broad range of solutions.
- Strives for equity.
- Proactively balances power dynamics.
- Builds capacity.
- Delegates authority to marginalised actors to perform governance tasks.'

Thew *et al* (2021) provide important recommendations on how to adult actors within structures of conventional political participation should engage with youth who are organised within those structures. It is also important to consider how conventional structures of political participation can bridge out to unconventional youth participation in social movements. This will be considered further in section three below.

2.1.2 Council of Europe

At the level of the European Court of Human Rights, it is recognised that there is no abstract right to nature preservation in the European Convention on Human Rights. As a result:

> 'in order to fall within the scope of private and family life, complaints relating to environmental issues have to show that there was an actual interference with the applicant's private sphere, and that a level of severity was attained. (Spano, 2020).'

Currently (April 2021) an important youth-led climate case is progressing through the European Court of Human Rights. The case is being taken by six young people from communities in Portugal which have been affected by severe and unprecedented forest fires. The young people's case is that climate change interferes with three specific human rights: their right to life, their right to respect for their private and family lives and their right not to be discriminated against. Thus the youth argue that there is actual interference with their private sphere due to climate change. They are seeking a binding decision by the court which will compel the parties to the convention to resolve the uncertainty around how "fair shares" of emissions reductions are calculated and enforced. In October 2020, Court granted the case priority status on the basis of the 'importance and urgency of the issues raised' and required national governments to submit their defences against the case of the youth (Youth for Climate Justice, 2021).

"Youth 4 Climate Justice" European Court of Human Rights Case – Portugal

In the Youth 4 Climate Justice case, six children and young people from Portugal are taking the Council of Europe member states to court to require European governments to take urgent and enhanced action to address climate change. The case is being brought by Cláudia Agostinho (21), Catarina Mota (20), Martim Agostinho (17), Sofia Oliveira (15), André Oliveira (12) and Mariana Agostinho (8). The youth come from the Leiria region which has suffered drought and forest fires which claimed the lives of over 120 people in 2017.

In their case, the young people argue that climate change impacts on several rights which are protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right to life, their right to respect for their private and family lives and their right not to be discriminated against. They argue that the heatwaves have posed a risk to their lives as well as their ability to exercise, spend time outdoors and sleep properly. Additionally, the youth argue that state's climate inaction is discriminating against future generations. This is an important intergenerational equity claim:

> *Climate change interferes with the youth-applicants' right not to be discriminated against. As young people, they stand to experience the worst effects of climate change simply because they will live longer. Because there is no justification for forcing them and other young people to bear this burden, European governments are wrongly discriminating against the youth-applicants through their failures to properly and urgently fight climate change* (Youth for Climate Justice, 2021)

The goal of the youth case is to seek a legally binding decision from the ECHR requiring governments in Europe ratchet up their greenhouse gas emissions reduction efforts. In particular, the young people want the court to resolve uncertainty about what amounts to a state's "fair share" of climate action and to ensure that governments' commitments are collectively consistent with the Paris Agreement's aim of keep global temperature rise below 1.5°C.

In addition, the young people are calling on European states to recognise and respond to the transboundary effects of climate change and 'tackle their contributions to emissions released overseas, for example through their exports of fossil fuels' (Youth for Climate Justice, 2021). This would be an important step towards addressing a gap in current human rights law which makes it effectively impossible for transboundary human rights violations caused by climate change to be judiciable (The ETO Consortium, 2021).

Figure 2: Case study of the *Youth 4 Climate Justice* European Court of Human Rights Case

2.1.3 European Union

In line with its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, intergenerational equity is a stated policy concern for the European Union. First Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans has noted that:

> '[c]itizens are worried about their future, and that of their children. We are running up an ecological debt that affects everything. Future generations will have to pay back this debt with heavy interest if we don't step up our action' (European Commission, 2019).

The EU is incorporating a concern for climate change into policies affecting young people in several ways. The European Child Guarantee notes how '[t]he sight of young people lining the streets around the world to call for climate action or as child human rights defenders show us that children are active citizens and agents of change.' (European Commission, 2021a: 3). The pact commits to consultations with children as a part of the European Climate Pact and Green Deal. In the European Climate Pact, the European Commission commits support youth action on climate through 'regular dialogues with young people and offer them a prominent space in the Pact' (European Commission, 2020: 8). In 2021, the European Economic and Social Committee's annual youth forum for 16-18 year-olds, Your Europe, Your Say (YEYS) was organised as a model COP.

While it is too early to evaluate the impact of these proposals and efforts, it is clear that they reflect the concerns of young Europeans who have noted that:

> 'too often there is a lack of clarity over what is done with the demands of young people. We are tired of just being 'spoken to' and our demands being disregarded in blatant 'youth washing'. The EU needs to commit to its desire to involve the views of young people by creating structured channels of communication where young people are listened to as active discussants' (Generation Climate Europe, 2020: 2)

In addition to these evolving institutional structures of youth participation, the EU is responding to youth climate concerns with supports for youth learning, volunteering and mobility through the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps[1] programmes (2021-2027). Both programmes incorporate concerns for environmental protection, sustainable development and climate action as key priorities for funded actions.

2.2 Addressing adultism and intersectionality for climate justice

2.2.1 Adultism

There are many factors which limit young people's power in climate governance. Many of these factors are not unique to YOUNGO but affect other stakeholder groups such as indigenous peoples

[1] Formerly known as European Voluntary Service.

(Thew, 2018). However there are power hierarchies and imbalances which are particular to young people and which limit youth participation in spaces of climate governance. These particular constraints can be illuminated through the concept of adultism, understood as 'attitudes and behaviours of adults that are based on the assumption that adults know what is in the best interests of youth and are thus entitled to act upon them without their agreement' (Ceasar: 2014: 169). Adultism is a largely overlooked phenomena which renders children and youth amongst the most disempowered groups in society. The power and privilege of adults over young people limits children's self-determination and transforms them from political subjects into objects of adult decisions and policies.

Adultism is often enacted through microaggressions, which may be understood as a statement, action, or incident which indirectly, subtly or unintentionally privileges adults and discriminates against youth (Freechild Institute, 2021). Adultism has also shaped socio-cultural understandings of youth and their ability to participate in political life. Holmberg and Alvinius (2019) find that there is little research on children's agency and protest in relation to major structural change, such as abolishing apartheid. They suggest that this reflects a general understanding of children as lacking political agency. Yet it is clear that the climate strikes reflect a dramatic challenge to adultist assumptions. Several studies have examined the strikes from a childist standpoint, a critical lens which emphasises young people's subjective agency and autonomy (Biswas and Matheis, 2020; Jonathan and Wall, 2021; Matheis, 2019). Piispa *et al* (2020) carried out ethnographic research in the Finnish youth climate movement which was supplemented by activist interviews. They found that:

> Young people feel they have the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate [in political dialogue on the climate crisis] despite the fact that, in societal discussions, young people who talk about the climate are often belittled or ignored in various ways.

A childist standpoint on the youth mobilisations points to the constraints and power imbalances which youth face in spaces of global climate governance. Young people exist in subordinate relationship to dominant managerialist, technocratic and scientific climate governance frameworks. As such, Bowman (2020) suggest that young people may be seen as 'subaltern environmentalists'. Josefsson and Wall (2020: 1049) similarly argue that youth exist in a subaltern position within global governance frameworks:

> 'As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously asks, "Can the subaltern speak?": that is, how can global norms of power be challenged by the very subaltern groups that they silence? Children and young people similarly face a problem of legitimacy to speak on the global stage to begin with, since they tend to be constructed as dependent on adults for global political expression.'

The inability of young people to "speak" within adultist governance arrangements may be a significant factor which has driven the current wave of mobilisations to adopt the strike tactic, a

form of unconventional participation and civil disobedience. This will be discussed further in section 3.

2.2.2. Intersectionality

Intergenerational equity is an important concept in climate governance and all young people are in a subordinate position within an adultist society. Yet there are also many other identities which shape young people's experience of the world and their environment. These include gender, nationality, 'dis'-ability, 'race'/ethnicity, class and rurality /peripheral geographical location. For example, a recent report from the UN Special Rapporteur on racism (United Nations, 2019) highlights that the impact of mining and other environmentally destructive practices is disproportionately felt by indigenous and minority groups. The environmental justice movement calls attention to the fact that pollution and environmental degradation is experienced disproportionately by already disadvantaged communities and poorer states (Bullard, 1994; Martinez-Alier, 2001; Schlosberg, 2007). As such, being from a community or group which is already marginalised or disadvantaged will increase a young person's risk of and vulnerability to environmental degradation and climate change. Such identities can be more significant factors than simply being young in shaping a person's experience of the environment. "Youth" is therefore not always the primary identity which determines vulnerability to environmental risk and injustice.

This points to the importance of employing an intersectional analysis which calls attention to overlapping or intersecting social identities and how these relate to systems of oppression, domination or discrimination in society. Taking an intersectional approach to youth, Noguera *et al.* (2013: xvi) suggest that 'young people should be conceptualised in relationship to the specific economic, political and social conditions which shape them'. Drawing a similar conclusion, Bowman's (2020) study of young climate strikers in Manchester, UK, demonstrates that young activists are negotiating complex positionalities through their involvement in the strikes. An intersectional analysis contextualises youth as one category within a broader matrix of identity, marginalization and oppression. It therefore highlights the importance of *intra*-generational justice (the full realisation of human rights and justice for all alive today) in addition to intergenerational equity (the realisation of rights and justice for future generations). This is something which the youth climate strikers have addressed by their demands for climate justice rather than simply climate action (Fridays for Future 2019). The prominence of justice and equity claims in the climate mobilisations is important to note given the generally privileged position of young climate strikers 'who -while clearly concerned about their own future – leveraged their privileges of formal schooling for others who are already hit harder' (Biswas and Matthes, 2021: 3).

The SYSTEM:RESET Project - Pan-European

System:Reset is engaging young people from across Europe to support the inclusion of marginalised youth in environmental campaigning and policy-making. The project recognises that *'we live at a time of multi-layered environmental and social injustices, with the ongoing climate and ecological crisis disproportionately affecting the most marginalised communities. Yet these communities tend to be excluded from political decision-making, cut out of discussions about what the future of our societies will look like* (Young Friends of the Earth Europe, 2021).

To address this environmental and climate injustice, System:Reset brings together Young Friends of the Earth Europe with ten national partners. It focuses on ensuring youth have a say in the design and delivery of a just and ambitious European Green Deal and seeks to encourage the European Union and national policy makers to act on the demands and solutions proposed by young people in order to bring about a just, intersectional transformation of society. For Young Friends of the Earth, intersectionality means recognising overlapping social identities and intersecting systems of oppression. The organisation highlights two reasons why they consider it to be important:

> *'Firstly, it helps us to analyse how systemic oppression affects groups differently, so that we can better understand its mechanisms. Secondly, intersectionality can help us to see how many different struggles for justice are interconnected and require solidarity between movements. Building an intersectional environmental movement means understanding the climate crisis and other environmental battles in relation to other social struggles, against racism, sexism, neoliberalism and neocolonialism'* (Young Friends of the Earth Europe, 2017: 6).

System:Reset is working towards the realisation of a just and intersectional climate movement in several ways:

- Building platforms for collective visioning and planning by youth.
- Supporting young people to engage in multi-level policy discussions and decision making at national, regional and European scales.
- Contributing to a just an intersectional transition at a European scale through training, skill sharing and tailored support for European youth activists.

Along with Young Friends of the Earth Europe, there are partner organisations in ten countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Malta, North Macedonia and Spain. The project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union and the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. Young Friends of the Earth Europe produced several useful resources for youth policy makers and youth workers, including:

- A short video explaining the System:Reset project.
- An analysis of how Roma may be included in the European Green Deal and climate policy making.
- An analysis of what a European Green Deal should look like from a youth perspective

Figure 3: Case study of intersectionality in youth climate activism

3. Climate strike activists and youth political participation in Europe

This section explores the new wave of youth climate activism from 2019 from several perspectives. In section 3.1, research on the demographic characteristics of the young strikers is considered. Following this, the factors catalysing youth climate mobilisations and the key concerns of young people regarding climate change are explored in section 3.2. Finally, in section 3.3, the tactics and forms of participation which youth climate activists have adopted are considered and the impact of their efforts to date is tentatively assessed.

At the outset of this discussion, it must be recognised that youth climate activism across Europe takes place in a wide variety of places and in a diversity of forms. This is coherent with evidence of the diversity of form and content of European youth political participation generally (Forkby and Batsleer, 2020). While the case studies which accompany this paper illustrate some of this diversity, the discussion here will focus on the unprecedented wave of youth climate strike mobilisations across Europe since 2019. This is for two reasons. Firstly, the strikes attracted extraordinary numbers of young people and became the most high-profile youth climate mobilisations in history. Secondly, the strikes have attained an unprecedented geographical spread across Europe and the globe. Co-ordinated, decentralised strike actions have taken place in every country which is a member of the Council of Europe (Fridays for Future, 2021). The scale and spread of the youth climate strikes across Europe is all the more striking given the reality of shrinking democratic civic space for youth across the continent (Deželan and Yurttaguler, 2020) as well as challenges to young people's right to peacefully assemble (Pantea, 2021). Furthermore, Potočnik (2021) calls attention to the reality that young people's access to rights across Europe have not yet been realised and that European institutions and frameworks must do more to implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 on youth access to rights.

3.1 Timeline of the movement

Since 2019 there have been six peak moments of major public mobilisation by young people in Europe *(figure 1)*. Catalysed by Greta Thunberg's School Strike for Climate, this new wave of youth climate activism built on and expanded already existing youth activism and civil society participation for climate justice (Della Porta, 2020: 150, Harte, 2014; O'Brien *et al* 2018). Youth have used the traditional workers' tactic of the strike, a 'paradigmatic form of civil disobedience' (Mattheis, 2020: 3) in novel ways which (i) call attention to the need for fair and fast climate action by states (ii) express their agency and political subjectivity. In 2020, Covid-19 public health measures meant that mass public strikes were not generally possible. Although this has restricted young people's climate activism, the school strikes movement has continued with online actions throughout 2020 and 2021 (Kuebler, 2021).

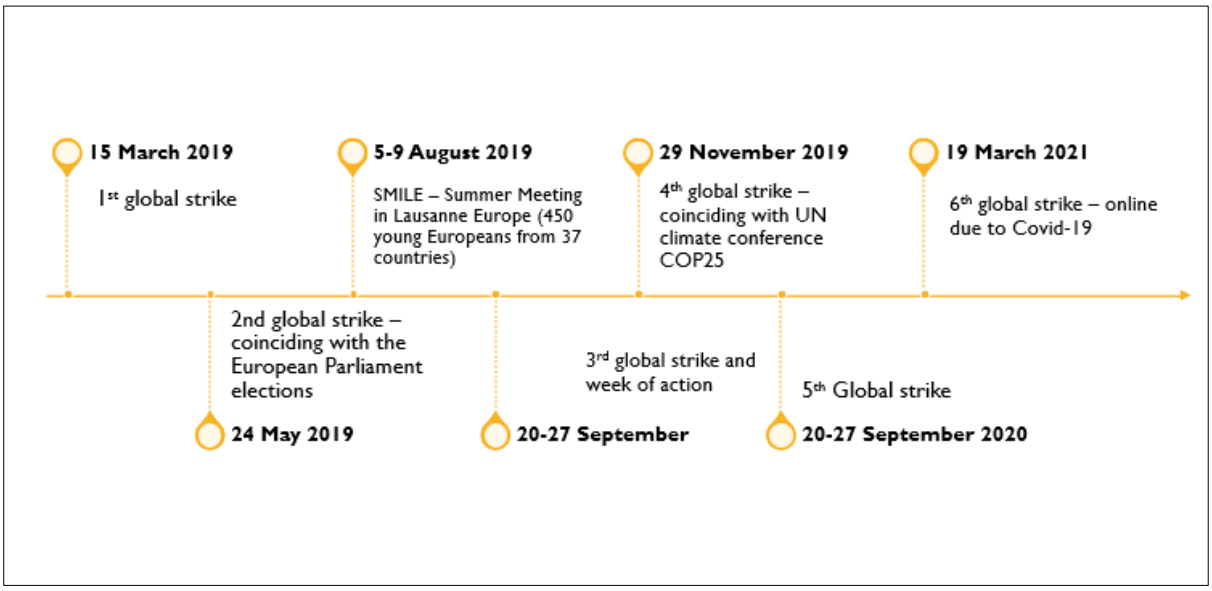

Figure 4: Timeline of global youth strikes 2019-2021

3.2 Characteristics of young climate strike activists in Europe

Who are the youth climate strikers? The scale and geographic spread of the school strikes make it challenging to identify with certainty the characteristics of all young climate activists. With the Protest for the Future studies, Wahlström *et al.* (2019) and de Moor *et al.* (2020) offer some indicative demographic trends from protest mobilisations across Europe. These studies used the established protest event survey methodology "Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualizing Contestation" (Walgrave et al, 2016) to present a snapshot of youth activism in 13 European cities during the March 2019 strike and 16 European cities during the September 2019 mobilisations.

3.2.1 Youth perceptions and attitudes on climate change

Before turning to an analysis of these studies, it is useful to examine Lee *et al's* (2020) narrative synthesis of 51 international studies on youth perceptions on climate change from 1993 – 2018. This study offers a baseline indication of youth perceptions and attitudes relating to the environment at the outset of the current wave of youth climate mobilisations beginning in 2018. The study reports that young people's understandings of the causes of climate change 'tended to be vague and general' (Lee *et al*, 2020: 7), with some appreciation of the role of greenhouse gas emissions but little capacity to correctly identify specific causal factors. They record that youth often conflated climate change with ozone layer depletion and reported perceived connections between littering, river pollution and climate change. Lee *et al* (2020: 8) note that young people have shown high levels of awareness of the most evident and globally reported impacts of climate change, such as temperature rises, melting ice-caps and ecosystem change. However the socio-economic impacts of climate change were less well understood, including its impact on the food

system and its potential to catalyse migration. The studies further reported a generally superficial understanding of climate solutions which featured misconceptions, such as believing unleaded petrol addresses climate change.

Youth misconceptions reported around climate change 'mirror common […] adult misconceptions' (Lee *et al*, 2020: 10) and the authors suggest that there are several factors which affect misinformation about climate change. Firstly, that young people rely on adults for information on the complex science of climate change and its socio-economic impacts and so their understandings will reflect those of the adults around them. Young people may also be more vulnerable to misinformation and so enhancing their ability to assess the credibility of information they receive is an important consideration. Secondly, the authors note that 'misconceptions, once established, can be difficult to overwrite' and 'often become more intractable with age' (Lee et al, 2020: 10). They record a notable 'adolescent dip' in environmental attitudes and behaviours (p. 11). Several studies indicate a greater willingness for strong climate action amongst younger teenagers, with an increasing unwillingness with age for youth to take actions which meant a sacrifice to their personal priorities (such as taking public transport rather than travelling by car). Several factors are proposed in the literature for this reported adolescent dip, including youthful hedonism and ignoring climate change as a coping strategy by youth who may feel powerless (Ojala, 2012). However this recorded adolescent dip must be contextualised by acknowledging that many youth have been active in the environmental movement since the 1970s and play important roles in environmental campaigning and management in their communities (Hart et al, 2014).

3.2.2 Demographic profile of climate justice activists

The significant aged-based downward trend reported in studies from 1993 – 2018 is particularly interesting given the current trends in youth climate activism which indicate a significant adolescent *peak* rather than a dip. Current mobilisations counter empirically reported historical trends. What can then be said about the demographic profile of young Europeans taking part in the climate strikes? Regarding age, Wahlström *et al.* (2019: 9) found that in the March strikes 45% of participants were between the ages of 14-19, while there was an overall median age of 21. In September, 31% of participants were in the 14-19 years age range (de Moor *et al.*, 2020: 11). For this second action, youth strikers specifically called for solidarity from adults, including trade unions and environmental organisations and this perhaps accounts for the declining proportion of 14-19 year-olds. However there was significant differences reported across the cities studied in September. For example, in Warsaw 73% were under 19 years old, while in Stolkholm 50% were over the age of 46. Given the ethical and legal constraints around carrying out research with minors it is difficult to establish with accuracy the age profile of younger strikers (Fisher, 2019) and this limitation is recognised by de Moor et al (2020:11).

The Protest for the Future research project found that the mobilisations were largely made up of young women. Across Europe, 66.4% of school students at the demonstrations were female in March 2019 - rising to 70% in Amsterdam and Warsaw (Wahlström *et al.*, 2019: 9). In September, 59% of demonstrators were female, rising to 72% amongst 14-19 year-olds (de Moor et al, 2020: 12). This strong participation of young women is noteworthy because of the long understood gendered divisions in youth cultures (McRobbie, 1991). Yet as Nayak (2016) notes, it does not necessarily mean that young women are participating in protest for the first time. Rather, he suggests, young women's modes of participation have tended to 'evade the male gaze' of researchers and political commentators, who have invisibilised girls within 'the public spectacle of subculture' including activist culture and protest movements (Nayak, 2016). While acknowledging that further research is needed to understand the notably high participation of women in the school strike mobilisations, Wahlström *et al* (2019: 11) speculate that the strong presence of female leadership in the movement has had a galvanising effect on young women. The prominence of young women in the climate strikers must also be contextualised by wider trends towards women's participation in protest, their visibility in public space and the inclusion of their voices in political discourse. These trends can be seen with the Global Women's March, Global Women's Strike, movements to end street harassment such as Hollaback! and massive mobilisations to extend and defend women's reproductive rights across Europe from Ireland to Poland.

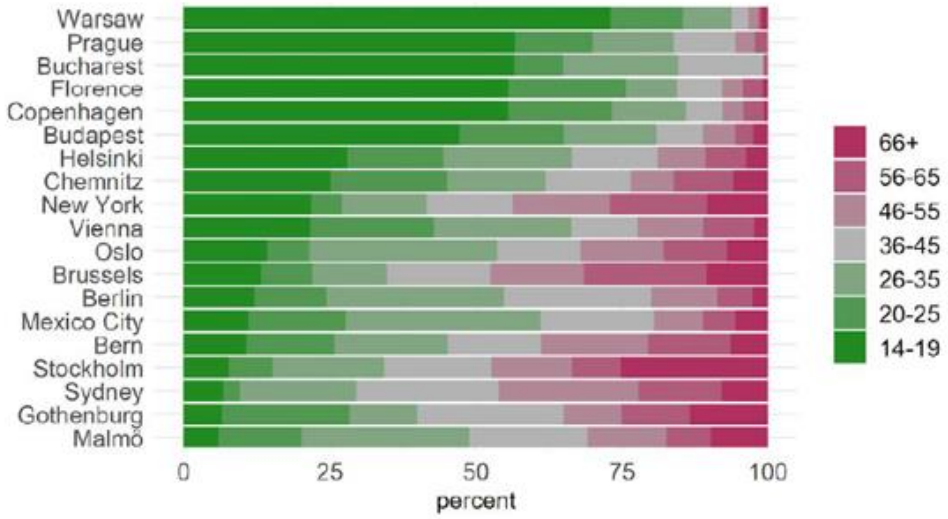

Figure 5: The age profile of the September 2019 strikes (de Moor *et al* 2020)

A further significant demographic trend noted by the Protest for the Future studies relates to educational attainments of the families of the strikers. At the March strikes, 71.3% of 14-19 year-olds reported that at least one of their parents had a university degree and similarly de Moor et al (2020: 14) report 'a very large number' of youths had parents with university education. Taking educational attainment as an approximate indicator of social class, these reports suggest a

discernible class division in the youth environmental movement, with predominantly middle-class youth participating in the mobilisations. This class-based division is well recognised when it comes to engagement in protest activities (Olcese et al, 2014, Wahlström et al, 2013). While further research is required to understand this issue, the initial trends suggest that the climate strike mobilisations are coherent with 'environmental classism' (Bell, 2020) whereby working-class people are alienated by traditional forms of environmentalism despite tending to carry greater environmental burdens for society. This has important implications for how climate policies are designed and implemented, calling attention to the need for measures to address inequality and ensure a just transition to a decarbonised future. Figure 11 below presents a case study of a youth council and youth work NGOs seeking to address this issue.

3.3 Catalysing concerns of the youth strikers

What are the concerns which have catalysed the historically unprecedented youth climate mobilisations of recent years? What is it about the current climate governance and broader political system which young people find lacking? This section offers a tentative analysis of the issues which have catalysed youth climate strikers in Europe. At the outset, it is important to stress the complexity of young people's motivations and recall that a simplified narrative of the climate strikes risks obscuring 'the complex positionalities negotiated by young activists who, in their activism remain bound up in webs of intersecting structural inequalities – not least racialised inequalities' (Bowman, 2020: 10). Several studies have explored the motivations of young climate activists. Wahlström *et al.* (2019) and de Moor *et al.* (2020) capture general motivations at protests across Europe. Further qualitative research by Bowman (2020) offers a detailed analysis of the motivations and framings of young people's climate justice claims at the September 2019 climate strike in Manchester, UK. Additionally, Holmberg and Alvinuis (2020) present a thematic analysis of Greta Thunberg's speeches which, given her leadership role in the strikes, offers an indication of the movement's concerns.

3.3.1 Instrumental and expressive goals

Wahlström *et al.* (2019) and de Moor *et al.* (2020) suggest that in the March and September mobilisations, protestors were mostly driven by feelings of frustration, anger and anxiety. The literature indicates that strikers identified both instrumental and expressive motivations for their participation. An instrumental political motivation seeks a particular course of action (e.g. addressing particular political institutions or advocating for a particular policy change). Striker's aims included raising public awareness and pressuring politicians, which are clearly instrumental goals. However, strikers also had expressive motivations for their actions. Wahlström *et al.* (2019: 15) define an expressive political motivation as 'acting to express one's ideology, values and/or

emotions, regardless of the expected outcome of the protest.' Expressively motivated political participation is concerned with acts of conscience and with cultivating relationships of belonging and solidarity. The literature on the climate strikers presents strong evidence that expressive goals, such as simply making a stand for what they felt to be right, were important to young people.

This is crucial for how we might assess the efficacy of these mobilisations. Expressive motivations indicate that youth participation in the strikes lies somewhat outside of conventional political participation's emphasis on institutional engagement for policy change. The methods and approaches of the strikers will be discussed further in section 3.3. At this point in the discussion though, it is important to resist categorising the strikes in a purely instrumental way and attempting to measure their effect solely in terms of engagement with institutions or policy-change outcomes. To do so would ignore the deeper motivations and implications of young people's climate activism. Holmberg and Alvinius (2019: 85) note that while the climate crisis is complex and abstract to world leaders today, it is a real and existential threat for today's youth. Through a thematic analysis of the speeches of Greta Thunberg, they offer important insights into the deeper motivations behind climate strike movement. They suggest the essence of children's resistance in relation to climate change centres on two themes – the need for social and political action on climate and resistance to the domination of children by both adultism and capitalist ideologies. The themes of social and political action and resistance to the domination of children map closely to the instrumental and expressive motivations documented by empirical studies of the strike mobilisations (Wahlström *et al.*, 2019; Bowman, 2020; de Moor *et al.*, 2020).

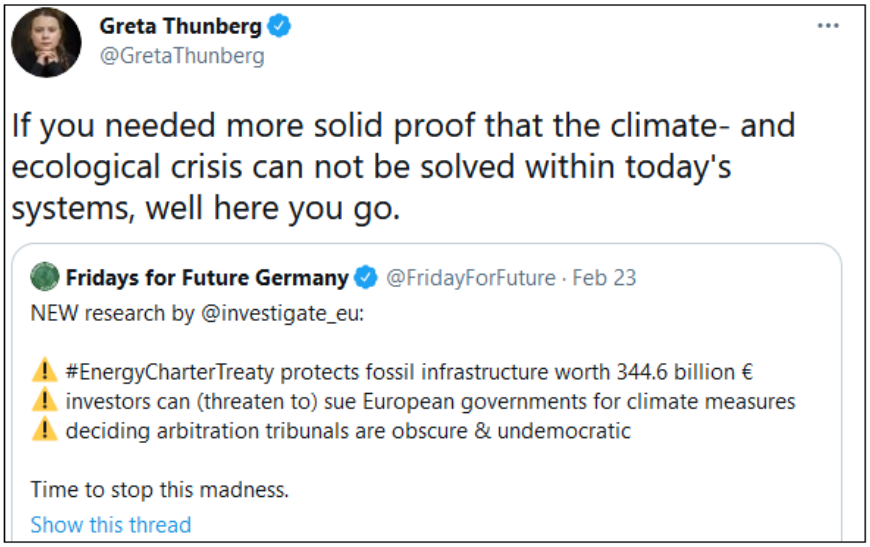

Figure 6: Tweet by Greta Thunburg (2020)

Holmberg and Alvinius (2019: 86) identify three 'resistance targets' for the climate strike movement in Thunberg's speeches. Firstly, she articulates a distrust in the current political system and points to the inactions and failures of climate governance:

> *'We are facing an existential crisis. The biggest mankind have ever faced! Yet, it has been ignored for decades by those who knew about it. You know who you are, you have ignored it, you are the most guilty! And it aint us who stands here. We are young. We have not contributed to the crisis'* (Greta Thunberg, quoted in Holmberg and Alvinius, 2019: 86).

This distrust of the political system's ability to resolve the climate crisis was found to be widely shared by strikers in March and September 2019. De Moor *et al.* (2020) report that few September respondents agreed with the statement that 'governments can be relied on to solve our environmental problems' (see figure 4). Yet despite this distrust, youth strikers believe that states remain an important locus for climate action. Indeed across all 16 European cities surveyed in September 2019, roughly 75% of respondents believed that 'the government must act on what climate scientists say even if the majority of people are opposed' (De Moor *et al.,* 2020: 26). The authors suggest that this sentiment 'should arguably be interpreted as a sign of desperation, rather than as a genuinely anti-democratic sentiment' (p. 26). Indeed, they note that belief in democracy as the best form of government - despite its flaws – remains high amongst strikers.

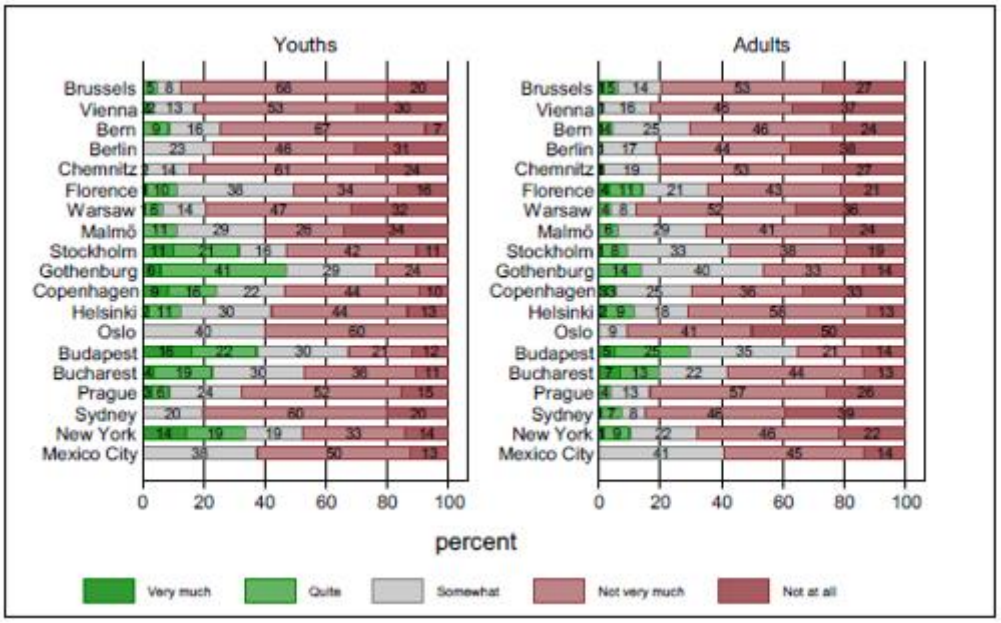

Figure 7: Agreement with statement: "Governments can be relied on to solve our environmental problems" (De Moor et al., 2020: 27)

The second resistance target identified by Holmberg and Alvinius (2019) is the capitalist economic system and the domination of capitalist ideologies in society. They note (p. 87) that Thunberg implores political actors to look beyond self-interest:

> *Some people – some companies and some decision-makers in particular has known exactly what priceless values they are sacrificing to continue making unimaginable amounts of money. [. . .] I want to challenge those companies and those decision*

> *makers into real and bold climate action. To set their economic goals aside and to safeguard the future living conditions for human kind* (Greta Thunberg, quoted in Holmberg and Alvinius, 2019: 87).

Thunberg regularly calls into question the ability of capitalism, the current globally dominant economic model, to respond to the realities of the climate crisis (see figure 6). This wholescale challenging of the hegemonic norms of society mean that the climate strikers have largely engaged in unconventional participation which is disruptive of the status quo (discussed below in section 3.3). Indeed, by actively choosing not to use their right to education and eschewing their 'obligation to go to school to prepare them for future employment' youth climate strikers are challenging 'the profit-orientated priorities of their governments' (Biswas and Matthes, 2021: 2-3). This questioning of norms and values by young climate activists has also been noted by Piispa *et al* (2020) who found that youth are critical of the dominant economic and technological driven paradigms in climate action. The authors find that these paradigms restrict youth participation, lack 'political imagination' and prevent 'a comprehensive discussion about the direction of society' (p. 11).

Finally, report Holmberg and Alvinius (2019), Thunberg challenges the generational domination of adults over youth who are currently powerless within democratic systems. Children are excluded from the franchise in almost all cases and so have no mechanism to hold politicians to account for the decisions they are making today, despite the fact that children will face the sharpest consequences for these decisions (Josefsson and Wall, 2020). Thunberg challenges this adultism by stating that if the adults are unresponsive the youth must act:

> *So we have not come here to beg the world leaders to care for our future. They have ignored us in the past and they will ignore us again. [. . .] We have come here to let them know that change is coming whether they like it or not. The people will rise to the challenge. And since our leaders are behaving like children, we will have to take the responsibility they should have taken long ago* (Greta Thunberg, quoted in Holmberg and Alvinius, 2019: 87).

The effective exclusion of young people from current political decision making around the climate crisis has led to them adopting the strike as a tactic in order to address this 'unjustified exclusion from empowered forms of political participation' (Mattheis, 2020:3). In the next section we turn to the strike as a tactic, explore the approach of youth activists and consider their impact as a movement.

3.4 Youth climate activism: dutiful, disruptive - or dangerous?

3.4.1 O' Brien et al's (2018) typology of youth climate activism

This section explores the tactics and approaches of youth climate strike activists using O' Brien *et al*'s (2018) framework for understanding of youth dissent as expressed through climate activism. O' Brien *et al* (2018) outline a typology of youth climate activism based on the longitudinal Voices of the Future research project undertaken with young activists in Norway between 2011 and 2017. This typology presents three types of climate activism – 'dutiful', 'disruptive' and 'dangerous' - as ideal-types of youthful dissent which are described below and in table one. O'Brien *et al* (2018: 2) suggest that youth climate activists are 'implicitly or explicitly entering into debates that involve dissenting from prevailing norms, beliefs and practices, including economic and social norms like consumption, fossil fuel use, and the unjust use of power in decision making'. Thus, the labels of 'dutiful', 'disruptive' and 'dangerous' refer to how youth activism relates to those prevailing norms.

Dutiful dissent involves conventional political participation in established cultural practices, fora and institutions for civic engagement and participation. These might include youth councils and consultative bodies, structured dialogues and public consultations. Dutiful dissent is so called because it 'seldom disrupts the underlying causes of climate change, including the economic and development paradigms or models that are responsible' for the crisis (O'Brien *et al*, 2018: 5). Yet, significantly, dutiful dissent 'should not be confused with pandering to the status quo. Young people engaged in [it] are committed to change and recognise the importance and power of exploiting windows of opportunity within current structures and systems' (p. 5). *Disruptive dissent* arises with young climate activists questions and challenges existing political and economic structures, norms and power relations which include norms, rules, regulations and institutions' (p. 5). Examples of youthful disruptive dissent include the fossil fuel divestment movement and the youth branches of social movement organisations such as Friends of the Earth and La Via Campesina. Disruptive dissent uses collective action to interrupt "business as usual" narratives and question 'not only the "script" of hegemonic powers and institutions but also the actors who perpetuate them in their own interest' (p. 5). The danger behind *dangerous dissent* is to social norms. This form of activism not only questions business as usual but actively defies it, by 'initiating, developing and actualising alternatives that inspire and sustain long term transformations' (p 6). Such modes of participation as the degrowth movement (Aljets and Ebinger, 2016) or the transition movement actively prefigure alternative norms, systems and structures. Dangerous dissent 'often germinate[s] when young people's values and worldviews diverge from those holding power and they flourish when young activists learn how to sustain these new values and actions' (O'Brein et al, 2018: 42).

3.4.2 Youth climate activism as disruptive

How might the recent waves of youth climate activism be categorised according to O'Brein et al's (2018) typology? Firstly and most clearly, the strikes are strongly orientated towards disruptive dissent. The analysis of Greta Thunberg's speeches by Holmberg and Alvinius (2019: 86) demonstrates that she 'calls for immediate social and political change – humanity's current way of life needs to change right now if the climate emergency is to be halted'. The political demands and actions of the climate strikers are clearly contestatory 'acts of norm defiance' (Biswas and Mattheis, 2021: 4) which easily align with the characteristics of disruptive dissent. Mattheis (2020) suggests that the school strike tactic represents paradigmatic example of civil disobedience which encourages the breaking of laws and norms around children's school attendance. The strikes challenge the 'norms delimiting "proper" social engagement [for youth], e.g. deference to elders or concealment of emotions in public' (p. 6).

Type of Climate Change Activism	Dutiful Dissent	Disruptive Dissent	Dangerous Dissent
Orientation to prevailing power relationships	Works within existing systems and power structures to effect policy change	Contests prevailing social norms and policy practices to redirect policy and change outcomes	Creates and (re-)generates new and alternative systems, subverting existing power structures by mobilizing citizens around new norms and values
Approach	Reformist	Oppositional	Propositional
Example of activism	Helping university to develop an ethical investment policy	Protesting outside a local bank to get them to divest from petroleum industries	Setting up an alternative local currency that does not rely on existing financial institutions
Strengths	Provides insights into how current institutions and systems function Offers direct access to those holding power Builds legitimacy and authority within existing system	Increases awareness and engagement Highlights justice and equity dimensions Focuses on underlying causes of climate change Opens spaces for new actors and voices	Bypasses existing systems and can potentially undermine them Demonstrates viability of alternatives Tends to be "off the radar" from those threatened by alternatives
Risks	Co-optation; enrollment in the reward system of current structures; danger of normalizing the status quo	Polarization; promotion of antagonisms rather than alternatives	Creation of "parallel systems" that are progressive but do not challenge status quo or that risk being co-opted to reproduce business as usual

Table 1: A typology of dissent in youth climate activism

Indeed Mattheis (2020) argues that there is a strong democratic case for the civil disobedience of children because formal political processes are 'adultist political arrangements that subordinate non-adults' (p. 11) and because the marginalisation of children is 'hard-wired into the state's very DNA' (Weinstock, 2015: 720). Children's participation is generally educational or consultative in nature. Furthermore, young people often do not have a say in budgetary decision making. As a result, their interests are at best marginalised and at worst dismissed or ignored. Formal channels for participation only have democratic legitimacy when they enable equitable decision making – which Mattheis (2020) argues convincingly that they fail to do for children. Political decision making on the climate crisis is time sensitive and inclusion in decision making may come too late for children currently excluded (Mattheis, 2020: 14). Thus, the author concludes that 'children

are especially justified in using civil disobedience due to their unjustified exclusion from empowered forms of political participation' (Mattheis, 2020: 9).

On this basis, the school strikes may be understood as a response to the failure of adult institutions and governance structures to (i) respond with urgency to the climate crisis and (ii) effectively include the perspectives of children through equitable decision making. What the school strikers have done, on an unprecedented scale, is express disruptive dissent which contests prevailing social norms and seeks to redirect policy outcomes. The strikes represent a spectacular step outside of the normative democratic discourse in order to problematise what the strikers understand to be the moral bankruptcy of a democratic system which they see as at best unresponsive and myopic and at worst as corporately captured by elite interest (Salaün, 2019). The strikers stepped outside of adult-created and sanctioned structures of participation and called attention to the unequal distribution of power and resources which has led to largely tokenistic forms of youth participation in climate governance to date.

Holmberg and Alvinius (2019) show how 'a sense of distrust in the current system, including political governance' is clear in the speeches of Greta Thunberg and the evidence suggest that disruptive dissent was a core motivation for the majority of strikers in March and September 2019 (Wahlström *et al.*, 2019; de Moor *et al.*, 2020). Strikers also stepped outside of the mainstream media to organise online in order to draw attention to the climate crisis in ways that would have been hard to imagine even five years ago, when the Paris Agreement was signed. Holmberg and Alvinius (2019: 88) illustrate how rapid social media engagement enabled youth climate activists to 'create opinion and equalise hierarchies between decision makers, world leaders and the public worldwide.'

3.4.3 Equalising hierarchies and power redistribution

This points to what may be a core feature of the climate strikes: they are a tactic which enables youth to equalise hierarchies and address power asymmetries when engaging with adultist institutions. The strikers' disruptive dissent is aimed at disrupting this power imbalance. Yet as the findings of the Protest for the Future studies show, the majority of young activists remain committed to democratic values and believe that there is an important role for states and multilateral institutions in driving action for climate justice. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, the mobilisations also incorporate elements of dutiful dissent. As Biswas and Mattheis (2020: 4) point out, 'the strikers' unifying goal is not even to completely overthrow distributions of political agency and responsibilities; but primarily that the system crisis be addressed'. Thus, in pursuit of action for climate justice, strikers have met with politicians and policymakers at local, national and European levels, including First Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans. They have also engaged with existing democratic structures in an attempt to realise their vision, including through a European Citizen's Initiative

calling on the 'European Commission to strengthen action on the climate emergency in line with the 1.5° warming limit.' (Fridays for Future, 2021). As of April 2021, this initiative has over 86,000 signatories of the required 100, 000 to trigger consideration by the European Commission and discussion at a hearing of the European Parliament.

It is clear that the youth strikers have challenged the norms of the status quo and enormously influenced political and popular discourse. The term 'climate strike' became so ubiquitous that Collins English Dictionary declared it the 2019 word of the year[2]. Similarly, Oxford English Dictionary declared 'climate emergency' as their word of the year in 2019. While the direct causal impact on climate policy at multiple scales is very difficult to measure, youth mobilisations have 'aroused a sense of urgency, provided an alternative discourse, and cultivated youth leadership and commitment to civic action' (Han and Ahn, 2020). And as Mattheis (2020: 14) argues, 'regardless of the efficacy of civil disobedience in promoting legal change it seems to be an adequate response to unjustified exclusion'.

The Friday's for Future European Citizen's Initiative demands that:

1. That the E.U. adjust its goals under the Paris Agreement to an 80% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (to reach net zero by 2035), and that European climate legislation be adjusted accordingly.
2. That an E.U. Border Carbon Adjustment be implemented.
3. That no free trade treaty be signed with partner countries that did not follow a 1.5 degrees Celsius compatible pathway (according to Climate Action Tracker).
4. That the EU create free educational materials for all members about the effects of climate change.

Figure 8: The Fridays for Future European Citizen's Initiative

3.4.4 Youth climate activism as danger to the status quo

In order to challenge societal norms hegemonic discourses, climate strikers actively employ disruptive and dutiful forms of dissent simultaneously. But what can be said about 'dangerous dissent' which initiates, develops and actualises prefigurate alternatives to the status quo norms and institutions? For Biswas and Mattheis (2021: 4), the civil disobedience of the climate strikers

[2] The dictionary defined is as a 'form of protest in which people absent themselves from education or work in order to join demonstrations demanding action to counter climate change'.

is about the renegotiation of political boundaries and belonging. Certainly, the expressive motivations of the strikers, alongside high levels of peer recruitment and mobilisation, suggest that questions of meaning, identity and belonging – a longing for *communitas* - may be crucial affective factors contributing to young people's participation in the strikes. This seems to indicate that 'dangerous dissent' which prefigures alternative ways of being is a significant element of the climate strikes. Although further research is required to substantiate this claim, research in other youth movements has found a direct link between the impact of the need for belonging and political engagement of young people (Renström *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, Forkby and Batsleer (2020) have demonstrated that young people build autonomous communities of participation as 'anti-structures beyond hegemonic power and social order'. Such spaces enable 'boundary work' in which discussion and experimentation question 'what norms and values could and should be imported, excluded and innovated' (Forkby and Batsleer, 2020: 13) This breaking out of the ordinary, they argue, 'suggests a way of re-imaging a democratic practice' (p. 14). Young people's resistance through the climate strikes represents 'a legitimate expression of their autonomy, demanding political and social change now and in the future' (Holmberg and Alvinius, 2019: 79).

Certainly new norms and values of participation are being tested out in the youth created 'laboratories of democracy' (Deželan and Yurttaguler, 2020: 2) that are the climate mobilisations. Strikers emphasise horizontal structures, togetherness and unity in sharing (Bowman, 2020). They articulate demands which are not merely technocratic or scientific but make strong justice and equity claims (Fridays for Future, 2019). The youth climate mobilisations could be seen as the ultimate best practice example of education for sustainable development – an organic mass peer education process through which young people are learning-by-doing and developing essential democratic skills such as co-operation, consensus, research, public engagement and campaigning. Yet youth action is more than simply a dress rehearsal for citizens-in-the-making. Indeed it is more than protest. It is also 'a world building project' (Bowman, 2019: 296) in which young people not only bear witness to the challenge of climate change but are agents in constructing and prefiguring a world beyond the crisis.

Anti-Kohle Kids (Anti-Coal Kids) – Germany

'You burn our future, make coal with the coal - so we pull the plug! Peaceful, colorful and loud we fight for climate justice!'[1]

The Anti-Kohle Kids are an autonomous and decentralised youth climate activist group. They are unfunded, do not have a formal organisational hierarchy and support local groups in cities such as Berlin and Halle to organise under the banner of the Anti-Kohle Kids. As such, they provide a platform for young people's unconventional participation and engagement in climate and energy policy through civil disobedience. Their activities are a bridge between the Fridays For Future mass climate strike actions and ongoing civil disobedience against fossil fuel infrastructure and for climate justice in Germany.

The Anti-Kohle Kids have been particularly engaged with the Ende Gelände mass civil disobedience actions and also aligned with ongoing forest occupations such as at Hambach Forest, which aim to halt the destruction of woodlands by open-cast coal mining (a campaign which has also been supported by Greta Thunberg). The Anti-Kohle Kids joined with disability activists to block coal mine infrastructure at the 2019 Ende Gelände, temporarily shutting down the Jänschwalde power station in Brandenberg. In 2020, they joined Fridays for Future Germany to demonstrate against coal and gas infrastructure in the Rhineland.

The group does not have a website but makes effective use of Twitter to promote its actions, address political actors, comment on climate policy debates and network with other youth and climate groups. They consciously use the Twitter hashtag #AKK, which is more commonly used with reference to former head of the Christian Democratic Union political party, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. By using the hashtag they playfully engage in broader political discourse and provocatively suggest that their actions 'establish a positive connotation for AKK'

One analysis of anti-coal activism in Germany suggests that the activities of the Anti-Kohle Kids and the forest occupiers is 'about more than trying to influence the decisions that politicians make in the halls of power'. This activism creates space where young people can:

> *'[T]ry a totally different way of being, places where it does not matter whether we have an academic degree nor where we were born. Places where we can develop new ways of making decisions. Places where we share rather than ceaselessly competing. Where we dare to live as kinky queers, where we try out being straight edge, where we meet beautiful people and participate in challenging debates. Places where we can at least start to dream about a better future. Places where people can stand an inconvenient and honest answer to the question "How are you?"* (Crimethinc, 2021).

The activism of the Anti-Kohle Kids seeks to address specific issues of climate injustice and to actively shift energy policy in Germany. But from this analysis we can also see that their activism just as much about imagining, testing and promoting new norms and values which envision alternatives to the status quo within capitalist society.

Figure 9: Case Study of direct action civil disobedience in youth climate activism

4. Green deals and just transitions: the youth sector and the climate crisis

How are we to respond to the 'steadily increasing political presence of children [and youth] in the public sphere'? ask Biswas and Mattheis (2021). These authors suggest that we must go beyond the idea that the school strikes should simply be tolerated as democratically legitimate despite their transgression of educational norms (i.e. that good children should go to school). In fact, they suggest that there is an argument to be made for the school strikes on educational grounds. This is not, as so often conceived, because young people may learn valuable democratic skills through participating (although this is undoubtedly the case). Rather the strikes can be seen as educational because they offer *adults* a chance to learn from youth. The strikers are intervening in public space and political discourse to call the attention of adults to their responsibility to act on climate change. Noting this, Biswas and Mattheis (2020: 8) remind us that this is in fact a gift offered by the strikers because this 'gives adults a chance to cultivate their ability to respond, i.e. their response-ability.'

Young people are leading the way in responding to the climate crisis with the urgency and equity that it requires. What is the role for youth workers, youth policy-makers and youth researchers in responding to and supporting young people's climate activism? Section 4.1 addresses the relationship and emerging links between youth policy and climate governance in Europe. Section 4.2 considers the role that each element of the European youth sector (youth policy, youth work and youth research) can play in supporting meaningful youth participation in climate governance.

4.1 Youth policy and climate change: supporting a just transition

Youth policy is concerned with a wide variety of issues relating to young people, including formal and non-formal education, employment and social protection, health and leisure and digitalisation and artificial intelligence. As a result the core themes addressed by youth policy transverse and interact with a variety of other social and economic policy fields (Şerban & Barber, 2018: 12). This is also the case with climate change, which 'undoubtedly endangers social cohesion and diminishes the quality of life [of young people] (presenting, ultimately, an existential threat)' (Third European Youth Work Convention, 2020). Responding to this existential threat requires action across multiple policy fields at multiple scales: global, European, national, regional and local. This underscores the importance of cross-sectoral youth policy frameworks at multiple scales (Nico, 2015) to ensure the effectiveness and integrity of youth policy as states respond to the climate emergency and transition to decarbonised societies. At a

European scale, the Council of Europe youth sector has been mandated and tasked with promoting and protecting young people's access to rights:

> 'with special emphasis on improving institutional responses to emerging issues affecting young people's rights and their transition to adulthood, such as, but not limited to, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation' (Council of Europe, 2020: 3)

The European Union has incorporated climate action into the European Youth Strategy under goal 10 ('Sustainable Green Europe'). The strategy recognises that young people want to see radical change in response to climate change. The strategy confines itself to educational efforts that support individual young people to change their behaviours and patterns of consumption. While this is of course important, it does not reflect the clearly articulated wishes of the youth climate strike movement for wider structural change. At the same time, discussion of structural change in response to climate change has begun to arise in EU policy debates. An online event on systemic change took place at the 2021 European Economic and Social Committee's Your Europe, Your Say (YEYS) youth forum for 16-18 year-olds.

A particularly urgent and essential question for youth policy to address is what a just transition might look like for young people in Europe. The term 'just transition' means an approach to economic transition from fossil fuels to low-carbon economy which emphasises decent work, quality jobs and fair sharing of the burdens and benefits of the transition process. The principles of a just transition have been articulated by the International Labour Organisation (2015) and referenced in the preamble of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015). The European Union began to take steps to address the just transition when it launched the Green Deal for Europe in 2019.

The plan has two main elements: a European Climate Pact and the Just Transition Mechanism. Public outreach around the Climate Pact has begun through an ambassadors programme and the 'Count us in' public engagement campaign. The EC Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy has led work on youth engagement for the just transition in the context of the EU Just Transition Mechanism and its associated fund. They have produced a toolkit for youth engagement in local and regional transition planning as well as collating a large selection of best practice participation approaches (European Commission, 2021b & c). Yet much work remains to be done to ensure EU policy coherence for youth and climate action at a European level. The European Semester process provides a framework for EU-wide coordination of economic policies, the associated National Reform Programmes and in 2021 the Covid-19 related National Recovery and Resilience Plans. However, the European Semester does not engage specifically with youth issues and European youth policy frameworks or measures such as the EU Youth Dialogue are not integrated with the process.

KolectivZ - North Macedonia

'We envision societies thriving on love, solidarity and deep care, home to liberated people who celebrate diversity and live in dignity and in harmony with all living beings.'

Kolektiv Z is a young women-led collective for climate and social justice which is working to build 'collective visions and pathways toward a socially-just and environmentally-sound future, done through organizing and campaigning alongside frontline communities' (Kolektiv-Z, 2021). The collective takes an intersectional analysis and approach which recognises that intertwined crises and overlapping injustices require dialogue, collaboration and alliance building between many groups.

The group use collective visioning and popular education to bring together diverse perspectives and centre voices which have traditionally been marginalised in climate policy making. This includes human rights organisations and LGBTQI+ rights groups, feminist groups, environmental justice and migrant justice groups, farmers' and mining workers unions. The collective are fostering this intersectional approach through a small grant scheme which provides funds to support communities impacted by social and environmental injustice to engage in collective visioning for a Green Deal, with a particular emphasis on including young people from affected and marginalised communities.

In the context of Covid-19, Kolektiv-Z has focused on developing a national and Balkans regional vision for a green and just recovery from the pandemic, as well as a regional Green Deal. Nationally this work developed through the creation of the '*Zelen Glas*' (Green Voice) digital participatory platform supporting youth and all citizens to share visions for their communities. Vision collecting will continue until July 2021 when a set of vision-based policies will be developed and presented to politicians and policy makers as part of the campaign for a national Green Deal.

Regionally in the Balkans, the collective has supported a series of Balkans Regional Forum event for youth which led to the formation of the Balkan Green Deal Coalition. These forum events led to the development of a set of 'Principles for Balkan Green & Just Recovery' which youth activists believe 'go way further than the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans that is put forward by the European Commission' (Kolektiv Z, 2021).

Kolektiv Z have produced several resources from their work:

- A short video setting out their vision of people power for system change.
- Principles for a Balkan Just and Green Recovery.

Figure 10: Case study on youth campaigning for a Green Deal and just transition

The climate crisis presents a particularly pressing challenge for cross-sectoral co-operation as states make the urgent transition to decarbonised economies and climate resilient societies. Yet, youth policy tends to play a subordinate and supporting role 'in relation to other more powerful and better resourced policy domains' (Schild and Williamson, 2017: 251). A starting point for cross sectoral youth policy is to ask how do welfare systems need to change in order to be supportive of youth in transition to the new green economy envisaged by the EU's Green Deal and other national plans? But further and more searching questions arise if we truly listen to the voices and perspectives of youth who are mobilising for climate justice. Piispa *et al* (2020) note that young people want to see greater political imagination in climate debates and what discussions to address intrinsic values and questions about what is truly important for our long term well-being. Similarly, Bowman (2019: 296) stresses that 'for young people motivated to protect the foundations of human well-being on the planet, climate action is also about rebuilding the world so that the causes of the crisis are addressed'. Such young people are calling for more radical re-evaluation of the relationship between economy and society. They ask us – as Monika Skadborg of the European Youth Forum did in the EU – CoE Youth Partnership consultative meeting on youth and the climate crisis[3]: 'How do we build a democracy that respects the reality of planetary boundaries?'

4.2 The youth sector and youth participation in climate governance

4.2.1 Youth policy and participation of climate justice activists

Kiilakoski (2020) notes that youth participation is an important goal of youth policy and is both a principle and objective of youth work. In their review of participation regimes across six countries (as part of the Partispace Horizon 2020 project[4]), Walther *et al.* (2020: 192) define formal youth participation 'as more or less distinct attempts of public policy actors to foster […] representation and involvement in decision making' (Walther *et al*., 2020: 192). This definition accords with what the Council of Europe understands to be the 'basic objective' of youth policy: 'to increase the probability of the successful integration of young people in society' (Șerban and Barber, 2018: 23). These definitions point to the reality that participation is not just an analytic concept but has a strong normative element with implicit assumptions about the purpose of participation and what effective participation should do. This has significant implications for how youth workers and policy makers might understand, assess and respond to the youth climate mobilisations. If, as Walther *et al.* (2021: 204) suggest, patterns of youth participation may be said to reflect general structures of social integration and reproduction, then perhaps it may

[3] This virtual consultative meeting took place in February 2021.
[4] For Partispace details and resources see: http://partispace.eu/.

tentatively be said that the strikes represent an unwillingness of the current generation of young people to integrate into and reproduce the status quo. It is important to recognise that the youth climate mobilisations represent broadly unconventional form of political participation which position them somewhat in contrast to conventional participation which is favoured in youth policy (Bárta et al, 2021).

Indeed, youth policy across Europe is strongly shaped by the surrounding welfare and youth transition regimes, and therefore youth participation structures are likewise geared towards conventional participation and integration. In recent work revisiting earlier understandings, Walther *et al.* (2020) reveal a range of national welfare regimes which affect and shape youth policy from strong welfarist approaches to the inclusion of youth in corporatist and decentralized governance. Despite national and regional variances, they note (p. 204) that the employment of the discourse of 'activation' is a common trend across Europe as states seek to increase young people's self-responsibility for social integration. As it is employed within this discourse, youth participation is required to be productive – both in terms of producing a particular kind of youth subjectivity (for example the "apprentice citizen)" and producing particular forms of engagement of youth with existing democratic frameworks. Youth participation policies which have evolved in parallel to the increasing trend towards activation tend to emphasise individual responsibility rather than collective solidarity or structural change (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005).

When it comes to climate governance, structures of youth participation are evolving. Section 2.1 above reviewed emerging trends globally and within the Council of Europe and European Union. At a global scale, Thew *et al* (2021) propose a set of principles for 'inclusive orchestration' of policy negotiation by the UNFCCC (see section 2.1.1). These principles are designed to facilitate meaningful deliberation between various state and non-state actors. The authors stress that this is important in order to ensure the democratic legitimacy of decision making. They note (p. 18) that:

> 'An inclusive approach to UNFCCC orchestration could help to overcome power dynamics between states as well as between [non-state actors] and to establish a fairer, more democratically legitimate climate change regime'.

European youth policy provides a platform for young people to express themselves and participate in decision-making across all other relevant policy spheres. In this way, youth policy may be said to play an orchestrating role mediating between different actors. Youth policy makers could usefully embed Thew *et al*'s (2021) principles of inclusive orchestration into structures of climate governance at the European scale.

Beyond conventional participation, how can youth policy be responsive to young people's 'disruptive' (O' Brien *et al,* 2018) unconventional and non-institutional participation? Kiilakoski

(2020) notes how the participatory turn in governance has led to many innovations such as participatory budgeting/planning and citizens assemblies. Such participatory and deliberative democratic mechanisms offer a range of potential tools for youth policy to enable wider participation of youth as well as engagement with young people's informal spaces of participation. In building more expansive deliberative democratic mechanisms, research with young climate activists in Finland suggests the benefit of policy makers engaging with young people's own forums (Piispa *et al*, 2020: 13):

> 'Young people share information, interpret its meaning and discuss the future in their own arenas of discussion, which often involve social media and digital platforms. Recognising the value of these arenas and linking them to the traditional public forums of the media and politics has an enriching effect on the discussion.'

How should youth policy makers relate to 'dangerous' youthful climate dissent (O' Brien *et al,* 2018) which is organising in unconventional ways? Youth activists like the Anti-Kohle Kids are debating norms, values and assumptions about the nature of capitalist, growth orientated development. They are calling for more rapid and justice-focused climate action than is being considered or implemented by adult politicians and policy-makers. They are experimenting with alternative ways of organising society. Youth policy should make every effort to include the voices of young people who are engaging in climate politics through unconventional participation including 'dangerous' dissent. Indeed, Piispa *et al* (2020: 13) suggest that such young people have much to contribute to political debate because they have 'imagined the future in new and sometimes radically alternative ways. Some are already making these utopias a reality'. These young people include 'those who have found alternatives outside the consumption-driven society and the orientation of economic growth, as they may be able to offer important perspectives and experiences' (p. 13). It must also be recognised that some young people in spaces of unconventional participation do not wish to engage with state structures. In such cases, youth policy should promote the democratic right of all young people to assemble and to peacefully prefigure alternative ways of living (Pantea, 2021; Potočnik 2021).

4.2.2 Youth work and climate governance: a bridging and support role

It is important for youth policy to support and respond to both conventional and unconventional youth activism for climate justice. To support young people's political participation, youth work has long been an important instrument of youth policy (Kiilakoski, 2020) What role can youth work play in supporting young people's dissent, whether it be dutiful, disruptive or dangerous?

The Future Generations - Climate Justice Project (Ireland)

The Future Generations - Climate Justice Project recognises the different layers of discrimination that exist in the climate crisis debate and supports young people to develop the skills they need to be advocates for climate justice.

The Future Generations - Climate Justice Project works to ensure that the voices and perspectives of all young people are included in the climate movement and reflected in climate policy. To achieve this aim it takes a collective approach to building capacity on climate justice in the youth sector. The project brings together a consortium of youth organisations: with the National Youth Council of Ireland as the lead partner. The other members represent a broad range of youth work provision:

- Involve Ltd. (working with young Irish Travellers, an indigenous ethnic minority group)
- Macra na Feirme (the young farmers organisation working with rural youth)
- Sphere17 Regional Youth Facility and Swan Youth Service (urban area-based youth work projects)
- YMCA Ireland (a traditional youth organisation oriented towards uuniversal youth work).

The project is funded jointly by two government departments: the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and, the Department of Foreign Affairs' international development agency, Irish Aid. It aims to embed climate justice approaches within organisations across the youth sector by involving young people, youth workers and management in training, dialogue and action for climate justice. This includes a number of elements:

- Providing training on climate justice, advocacy and other issues to youth, workers and management in each organisation.
- Convening key youth worker groups as a space for peer education and exchange.
- Convening a partners consortium group with heads of organisations.
- Supporting young people to undertake a climate justice action project in their groups.
- Bringing together young people, workers and managers in a steering group for dialogue and reflection at each stage of the project.

This work has produced several useful resources for youth work practice, including:

- Short animated videos on climate justice, the project's origins and the change that project partners hope to make.
- A guide on how to get young people involved in the Climate Justice Movement.
- A webinar recording addressing issues of inequality in climate action, asking the question 'Can everyone afford to be "Green"?'

The project is an innovative example of how youth NGOs can respond to the climate crisis, support the youth climate mobilsations and facilitate youth political participation in the climate policy making. By taking seriously young people's concerns about climate change and bringing an intersectional and justice approach to the work, the Climate Justice – Future Generations project has begun to shift conversations and practice on climate justice in the youth sector in Ireland. It illustrates how a positive of collaboration between youth work organisations, policy makers and funders can begin to address barriers to marginalised youth political participation in climate governance. It offers an insight into how cross-sectoral youth policy can stimulate innovative collaborations to address which address the transversal themes of climate justice and intergenerational equity within youth policy.

Figure 11: Case study of youth work supporting young people's climate activism

As the Partispace research project has shown, there is much innovative and empowering youth work taking place across Europe. Youth workers have significant expertise working with marginalised and disadvantaged groups to support rights-based mechanisms for their collective participation and empowerment. Indeed, debates and discussions about meaningful youth participation have been ongoing in youth work for decades. Youth work has also historically been at the forefront of supporting young people's engagement with environmental issues. For example, International Young Naturefriends was founded in 1895 to facilitate working-class youth's enjoyment of the outdoors. The organisation developed an emancipatory theory of youth work which sought to 'analyse and explain the everyday environment to young people so that relationships and the backgrounds of industrial society become more visible' (Mrkev, 2019: 102). This led the organisation to be active in the anti-nuclear energy and disarmament movements. Similarly, Scouting and Guiding have traditionally engaged young people in non-formal educational activities in the out-of-doors. These movements aim to support young people's 'holistic development as active global citizens' (Vallory, 2019: 65) and have developed a wide range of programmes and initiatives for youth environmental education and action.

Building on this history, as well as experience in supporting young people's Education for Sustainable Development (Council of Europe, 2018), the knowledge and skills of youth workers could play a useful role in ensuring meaningful youth participation in the planning and implementation of a just transition to a decarbonised society. For example, youth workers could support the roll-out community-based and deliberative approaches to climate policy makings including participatory problem-solving approaches which build community capacity for deliberation and effective decision making. But while there are undoubtedly exception (see figure 11, for example), right now youth work practitioners are neither widely connected to climate policy debates nor are their unique skills well recognised by policy makers planning the transition. Connecting youth workers with climate policy debates and amplifying the stories of good practice youth work innovations in transition planning is an important task for youth policy.

4.2.3 Youth research and climate justice: an emerging research agenda

Climate justice and just transition are important political concepts which evolved from social movements and are now informing emerging policy debates on the European Green Deal. The concepts are also receiving increasing attention by scholars (Jafry *et al*, 2019; Morena *et al* 2020). Academic attention on climate justice has tended to be focused either on the climate negotiations or on the social movements from whom the concept emerged. When it comes to the climate negotiations, scholars have been concerned with questions such as equity in global governance, fair sharing of climate change mitigation and adequate finance for climate adaptation. Within this,

young people's climate concerns have been addressed to an extent in scholarship on intergenerational equity (Skillington, 2019). However, scholarly consideration of youth has generally been lacking in research on climate justice. For example, the 2019 Routledge Handbook on Climate Justice does not address young people as a distinct category with particular perspectives and concerns (Jafry *et al*, 2019). This reflects wider trends around the exclusion of children and youth from expert research analysis in policy domains. Alderson (2016: 201) notes that children are 'doubly excluded' from scholarly debate on social issues because:

> 'First, childhood researchers seldom have the weighty expertise that informs complex 'adult' social research, such as in political or economic theory or jurisprudence. Instead, there is useful but less theoretical concern with welfare, protection and education. Second, mainstream research ignores children, much as it used to ignore women, and academic texts seldom mention children.'

In responding to this exclusion and supporting youth voices on climate, youth researchers may find allies amongst scholars within childhood studies who adopt a childist standpoint (a critical lens akin to feminism). This scholarship seeks to analyse and address the ongoing adultist domination of youth in society, including in climate governance (Biswas and Mattheis, 2020; Josefsson and Wall, 2020). Youth researchers could support the development of effective policies and practices of youth political participation by engaging with the debates around young people's political subjectivity and agency which have been stimulated by the climate strike mobilisations. Youth workers have long worked with youth in ways which respect and support young people's agency, yet the dominant cultural view of youth is that they are not political subjects (Holmberg and Alvinius, 2019). Youth researchers may have much to offer to this debate drawing on the experience of the European youth sector. Conceretly, several areas require further - and ongoing – research in order to better inform youth policy and practice interventions. These will be outlined in the recommendations below.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has addressed the relationship between young people and the climate crisis through an analysis of the youth climate strikes in Europe and their implications for youth work, youth policy and climate governance. *Section two* considered youth as a political identity in climate governance, noting that although young people are recognised in climate governance frameworks, they nevertheless remain disadvantaged within adultist decision making structures. Furthermore, others markers of identity overlap with youth requiring an intersectional analysis and response to the inclusion of youth in environmental governance. *Section three* highlighted

how 14-19 year olds form the nucleus of the climate strikes and that the mobilisations have been predominantly driven by young women. The essence of their concerns centre on the need for urgent, just and transformative social and political action on climate. Additionally, strikers may be understood as resisting the domination of youth by adultism and capitalist ideologies. They adopt a variety of approaches in expressing their dissent (disruptive, dutiful and dangerous) but crucially young people express faith in democracy as the best way to respond to the climate crisis. *Section four* addressed the relationship between youth policy and climate change and considered the role of youth policy in supporting a just transition to a decarbonised future for young people in Europe. It noted a potential conflict between the aims of conventional youth participation at social integration within the status quo. However it stressed that youth work has considerable experience in supporting and enabling meaningful political participation of youth through both conventional and unconventional means which places the youth sector in an important position to contribute to climate policy.

In the youth climate mobilisations, young people are mobilising on their own terms, outside of traditional adult-created structures of participation. They are inventing spaces of participation where they are creating *communitas* and experimenting and innovating democratic norms. These innovations have given them greater parity with and leverage over interlocuters through the use of novel combinations of tactics (strikes, sit-ins etc…) and social media engagement which address power asymmetries. What the climate mobilisations have shown, albeit muted now as a result of the pandemic, was youth experimenting with radical pluralistic democracy. This wave of youth mobilisations is coherent with the findings of the Partispace research project (2020) which illustrated how young people engage in structures of participation as subjects with agency, experimenting with norms and values and creating novel forms of community. Participation in this vein becomes an innovation incubator for democracy.

The forthcoming 9th World Forum on Democracy[5] invites us to consider an important question: can democracy save the environment? To this question, we might add another: can *young people* save democracy *and* the environment? What youth climate activists are calling for is a fair and fast response to the ecological crisis. By delivering such a just transition, could faith in democracy be restored and civic life renewed? Those of us who are adults - including youth workers, policy makers and researchers - must consider how to be responsive to young people's changing needs and practices of participation as demonstrated by the climate strikes. The young people of Europe have spoken. Now it is up to adults to cultivate our 'response-ability' (Biswas and Mattheis, 2020: 8). Youth sector actors should reflect on how to be allies to and advocates for youth in their efforts for intergenerational and intragenerational climate justice. With adult support and solidarity, there need not be doubt that young people can protect our planet and revitalise our democracies.

[5] The forum will take place on 8-10 November 2021. See: https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy/home.

In this spirit, the following recommendations are offered for the consideration of youth sector actors.

5.1 Recommendations

5.1.1 Strengthening conventional youth participation in climate governance

- Youth policy frameworks and programmes should **strengthen recognition of intergenerational climate justice** and the particular burdens that the climate crisis poses young people. Additionally, policy makers should **ensure a just transition by addressing the unevenly distributed burden of climate change on marginalised young people**. The EU's *Youth for a Just Transition – A toolkit for youth participation in the Just Transition Fund* (European Commission, 2021 b and c) should be expanded and adapted for broader use in the youth sector.

- European mechanisms for youth participation in climate governance should **adopt Thew *et al*'s (2021) principles for inclusive orchestration[6] in order to address the barriers to fully inclusive and meaningful youth political participation**. This includes rebalancing the power asymmetries in climate governance faced by youth within adultist structures of participation. This would ensure that conventional political structures gain greater democracy legitimacy by preventing the instrumentalising of youth simply to validate adult-agreed policy approaches.

- Climate governance structures and mechanisms across all scales should **include young people in climate policy-development and implementation processes.** Participatory and deliberative democratic tools such as youth assemblies and participatory planning should be used to engage young people in visioning and planning for the just transition. Policy-makers should **link and engage with the spaces in which young people are already organising and deliberating**, including social media online platforms (Piispa *et al*, 2020)

[6] Inclusive climate policy orchestration 'engages a wide range of diverse actors; facilitates pursuit of a broad range of solutions; strives for equity; proactively balances power dynamics; builds capacity; delegates authority to marginalised actors to perform governance tasks' (Thew *et a,* 2021: 16).

5.1.2 Supporting unconventional youth political participation in climate governance

- The youth sector should **acknowledge the importance of unconventional participation for young climate activists in Europe**. As a form of 'disruptive dissent' (O'Brein et al, 2018), the climate strikes have enabled youth to equalise hierarchies and address power asymmetries when engaging with adultist institutions. Further **research should be done exploring the question of how the youth sector can support young people's climate activism.**

- The youth sector should **give visibility to and learn from spaces where young people are already deliberating, questioning and building alternative ways of life**. The recent wave of youth mobilisations for climate justice demonstrates how young people engage in structures of participation as subjects with agency, experimenting with norms and values and creating novel forms of community. For Biswas and Mattheis (2021: 4), the civil disobedience of the climate strikers is about the renegotiation of political boundaries and belonging. Recognising the importance of this, the youth sector should **foster and support space for 'anti-structures' of youth participation which do not have direct instrumental outcomes and enable democratic innovation** (Forkby and Batsleer, 2020: 13).

- The youth sector **should continue to promote the democratic right of all young people to assemble, including in strikes and other forms of civil disobedience. The youth sector should advocate for states to respond leniently to youth civil disobedience**. These are healthy civic activities which should be defended and promoted in a democratic society.

5.1.3 Youth Work engaging with the climate justice movement

- The youth sector should **catalogue good practice examples of climate justice focused youth work and these should be promoted and further researched**. Many of the case studies in this paper demonstrate how youth work is already responding to climate injustice experienced by young people. These should be publicised by **an online platform of good practice examples.** Seminars, conferences and exchanges should be used to **network youth workers engaged in climate justice work.**

- Funding and programme structures should **support youth work to deepen its engagement in justice and solidarity issues by resourcing open and non-instrumental processes**. Such funding mechanisms should **allow youth workers to be**

responsive to young people's political concerns and address barriers to engagement through outreach and capacity building work.

- Youth work should **recognise that young people are taking the lead when it comes to addressing the climate crisis.** Youth workers should **amplify the voices of young activists, respect their political agency and find ways to act in solidarity with them**. Young people's climate activism is not simply a dress-rehearsal for citizens-in-the-making but is 'a world building project' (Bowman, 2019: 296) in which young people are agents in constructing and prefiguring a world beyond crisis.

5.1.4 Cross Sectoral Youth Policy for the just transition

- Youth policy makers should be **engaged at the outset in transition planning, including through greater engagement with the European Semester process** and other mechanisms of fiscal and social policy which will drive climate action.

- Youth policy makers should consider how to **enhance cross-sectoral youth policy co-ordination around the around the just transition** – while taking into account young people's critique of a growth orientated economic model.

- Youth policy makers should advocate for **youth workers engagement in climate policy delivery and just transition planning**. The expertise of youth workers in supporting the participation and empowerment of marginalised and disadvantaged groups should be utilised to support inclusive orchestration of climate policy at multiple scales.

5.1.5 Youth research responding to the climate strikes

- Youth researchers should **engage with climate governance scholarship to ensure greater visibility of young people's concerns in debates on equity, mitigation, adaption and finance**

- Youth researchers should **address the ongoing adultist domination of youth in climate governance by aligning youth research to a childist standpoint** (Biswas and Mattheis, 2020; Josefsson and Wall, 2020) that recognises and supports young people's political subjectivity and agency in climate governance.

- Youth researchers should **develop a research agenda that explores the intersection of climate justice and youth and supports effective youth sector solidarity with young climate activists**. Important issues for research include:
    a. The impact of climate change on young people across Europe (with a particular focus on developing an intersectional analysis).
    b. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the youth climate movement and young people's political activism more broadly.
    c. The motivations, goals, tactics and approaches of young climate activists in Europe.
    d. The participation of young people in climate governance and policy making as well as evaluating the outcomes and impacts of climate policies for youth.
    e. Identifying good practice examples of successful youth-led or co-created initiatives between youth and policy-makers for the just transition.

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