

# **“We are the resistance” Fridays for Future Italy and the fight for climate justice**

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## Abstract

This dissertation is on the climate justice movement Fridays for Future Italy (FFF Italy) and its essential battle for the future of human rights, democracy and life on Earth, all threatened by the worsening climate crisis. FFF Italy is the most important Italian social movement of the last years, and it has contributed to politicising and re-socialising a new generation of young activists frustrated by the lack of representation and ambitious climate policies. Through a participatory and movement-relevant approach, this study explores the history, structure, identity and strategy of FFF Italy under the powerful influence played by the COVID-19 pandemic on them. The combination of favourable factors of mobilisation is analysed as well as the limited political impact of FFF Italy so far, which is opening the door for the radicalization of part of the climate justice movement. Even though the future of FFF is unknown, it is quite clear that climate activism has become an essential component of our societies.

Keywords: Fridays for Future, Social Movement, Climate Movement, Climate Change, Climate Justice

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# Introduction: an era of systemic crises and global resistance to fossil capitalism

This dissertation is on Fridays for Future Italy (FFF Italy), the Italian section of the global movement Fridays for Future (FFF). In many countries, including Italy, Germany, Austria and Belgium, FFF represents the vanguard of the climate justice movement, a network of social centres, movements, non-governmental organizations, and individuals that are challenging neo-liberal fossil capitalism at an unprecedented level. FFF Italy is probably the most important Italian social movement of the last years, together with the transfeminist network Non Una Di Meno<sup>1</sup> (literally "Not one [woman] less").

Fridays for Future has risen in a global scenario that the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) named "Risk Society" (*Risikogesellschaft*) thirty years ago. The Risk Society involves a plethora of systemic and interrelated crises that our governments seem unable to effectively deal with. I conducted my research on Fridays for Future Italy between 2020 and 2022, a period in which the world was first hit by a health crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 and a consequent economic and human rights crisis. In February 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine destabilized the international order and provoked an energy crisis and a surge of inflation. In the meanwhile, the climate crisis<sup>2</sup> aggravated the situation by hitting agricultural and hydroelectric production and causing death and destruction, even in the Global North.

All these crises are interrelated and reinforce each other. Pandemics are generally the consequence of the capitalist exploitation of nature, as well as the climate crisis. The dramatic balance of the pandemic was also due to the dramatic levels of pollution in our urban areas and to years of privatization of the health systems. The Russian invasion of Ukraine was probably driven also by natural resources interests, and it is contributing to widespread environmental devastation, a massive boost both in the use and in the investments in coal and liquefied natural gas (powerful contributors to global warming), without forgetting its contribution to the deterioration of the socio-economic situation, just after the pandemic shock. Droughts, floods, wildfires and other disasters contribute to aggravating the socio-economic, physical and psychological conditions of more marginal individuals, making them less

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<sup>1</sup> Non Una Di Meno was born taking inspiration from the movement Ni Una Menos which started in Argentina in 2016 and has spread across several Latin American countries to fight against gender-based violence and discrimination.

<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, I mainly opt for this term which I believe communicates the severity of the situation. In some cases, terms such as global warming and climate change are used to diversify the vocabulary. For a discussion on these terms see Carrington (2019).



resilient in front of other crises. The combination of these crises is a real challenge for governments, which act only to partially mitigate their consequences but appear totally unable to prevent them.

In the following section of this introduction, the works by Ulrich Beck on the “Risk Society” are discussed to help us understand the complexity of our late modernity and two of its contemporary crises: the pandemic and the climate. The second part of the introduction is dedicated to describing the new wave of climate justice activism in the period 2018-2022. The introduction ends with the presentation of the research and the structure of the doctoral dissertation.

## The Risk Society

The concept of Risk Society by Ulrich Beck (1992, 1999) helps us to read and understand our complex age of multiple systemic crises. The essence of Beck’s works is that we are living a late modernity in which risks become invisible, global, universal, complex and with potentially irreversible consequences. Generally speaking, risks are the chance of hazard or, for Beck, the anticipation of disasters. Hazards are the potential sources of harm, such as natural, biological and chemical disasters.

First, late-modern risks cannot be perceived directly. The increase in global mean temperatures, viruses and nuclear radiations are intangible and so they are hard to be accepted before they become hazards. All this creates a psychological distance and, in turn, denialism. However, authorities and enterprises also manufacture the invisibility of risks in the effort to avoid taking unpopular measures, destabilising the status quo and challenging their legitimacy. Chornobyl’s nuclear disaster in 1986 was a paradigmatic case of manufactured invisibility but also the risk of climate change, hidden by a well-orchestrated strategy by Big Oil for decades, and of a global pandemic, as we will see in the next session.

Unlike the industrial hazards of the past, which were basically local, contemporary risks such as the climate crisis, pandemics<sup>3</sup> and the nuclear holocaust are global and universal. They have no spatiotemporal boundaries; they threaten all humans and non-human species even though unequally. In other words, Risk Society is planetary but unfair. COVID-19 determined a disproportionate death rate for Latinos and black people while women were overrepresented in the economic sectors that suffered the hardest hit (Oxfam International, 2022). Climate change is both hierarchical since it

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<sup>3</sup> Pandemics are obviously not new but globalization made them a truly global phenomenon.

exacerbates existing inequalities, and democratic, if the threats will become unmanageable, even the wealthiest will not be able to avoid them (Beck, 2010). Currently, climate change is much more hierarchical than democratic and upper classes can purchase safety and freedom from risk while it is having a disproportionate impact on children, elders, women, people from the Global South and from the lower scale of society. This brings the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), a concept that comes from feminism and that stresses how the axes of privilege and oppression overlap and interact with each other. The term is now also used by climate justice movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future.

Another feature of the Global Risk Society is the temporal and spatial separation between risk production and risk exposure. The USA are responsible for 25% of historical emissions since 1751, the European Union plus the United Kingdom for 22%, and China for 12.7% (Ritchie, 2019). Hence, the emissions are very concentrated in a few areas (almost 60% in the above-mentioned), but they can have climate effects anywhere on the planet and displaced in time. For instance, the emissions concentrated in industrialized countries are causing the melting of the North Pole, which in turn can provoke droughts and consequential migrations in remote locations such as the Sahel (Defrance et al., 2017). The cause-effect relation is delocalised and becomes enormously complex to understand through common sense. The separation between risk production and exposure produces what Beck (2015) calls corporates' and governments' "organized irresponsibility."

Contemporary risks are enormously complex too. Climate change has been named a "hyperobject" (Morton, 2013), a complex object without spatial and temporal boundaries, difficult to grasp and hard to accept for many people. Climatology itself is an extremely complex science and climate deniers and delayers take advantage of this to disinform and misinform. Therefore, scientific divulgation also carried on by social movements is essential to reach the general population and deconstruct discourses of climate denial and delay. However, Ozden (2022) signals the tendency to fall into a trap of giving inaccurate portrays of climate science to foster activism.

Many consequences of the Risk Society are irreversible. The scientific community is especially worried since we have accumulated large amounts of greenhouse gas emissions for decades so even a complete stop would cause a lot of irreversible damage. If emissions continue rising, we risk reaching tipping points, critical thresholds that, when crossed, lead to large and irreversible climate changes with severe impacts. Examples are the melting of West Antarctic, Greenland and mountain glaciers as well as the transformation of the Amazon rainforest into a dry savannah. Still, urgent

climate actions can prevent or mitigate the potential impacts of those events. Therefore, it is essential to deconstruct the doomist discourses (Lamb et al., 2020) that claim that any mitigation action is too little, too late and that we cannot avoid a catastrophe.

For Beck (1992, 1999), late modern risks are not external to us as in the pre-modern age when they were entirely attributed to Gods, demons or nature. Nowadays they are the unintended consequence of our techno-economic development, and they are neglected in the effort to increase productivity. Brandt & Wissen (2021) explain how the environmental costs of our imperial way of living are externalised in space (dislocated enterprises which shift pollution to the Global South, waste displacement and worst natural disasters mainly located in the Global South) and time (future destructive consequences of climate change). However, the destructive consequences of industrial production cannot be externalized forever. In other words, late modern society is digging its own grave and this “boomerang effect” is extended to those who produce those risks or profit from them. In Marxist terms, we can frame it as the “second contradiction of capitalism” (O’Connor, 1988). Capitalism tends to destroy the natural conditions of capital accumulation, in other words, to produce a fragile workforce and pollution of the atmosphere, lands and oceans, mass extinctions, global warming, and the over-exploitation of natural resources that all have the potential to produce severe political and economic instability and to bring capitalism to a crisis. The same COVID-19 pandemic was described by Malm (2020) as the first O’Connor crisis in the sense of the first severe capitalist crisis induced by an ecological factor.

Beck (1992, 1999, 2016) also noticed how science is at the same time cause, medium of definition and source of solutions. It is the scientific research that provided us with the technologies to extract fossil fuels on a large scale and deeper below the surface, as with fracking. Similarly, the massive deforestation of Amazon and destructive sectors such as fast-fashion and intensive breeding and agriculture are made possible thanks to technological innovations. At the same time, modern environmentalism in the Global North rose thanks to science. One of the milestones was the book “Silent Spring” in which the American biologist Rachel Carson (1962) warned humanity of the devastating environmental consequences of DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) and other pesticides. Climate science is the main inspiration of movements such as Fridays for Future, the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion, together with the principle of justice. Technologies such as renewable energies are also a necessary condition for the ecological transition from a fossil to a non-fossil system. In short, we can say that science is not neutral. Science is influenced by the

political, economic and cultural context and it can be used for the protection of ecosystems or their destruction.

Finally, Beck (1992, 1999, 2016) also believed that our late-modern society could become increasingly reflexive, in other words, critical of itself, aware of these large-scale risks and able to produce a cosmopolitanism society that could go beyond national interests, develop international cooperation and a civil culture of responsibility that could take care of the planet. In a similar vein, Jonas (1979) argued that humanity's unprecedented power to shape its future and the future of the planet should lead to an ethics of responsibility. Perhaps it is not clear yet if the threat of human collapse could foster international cooperation or competition between States, but it is interesting to notice how a cosmopolitan civil society is on the rise.

### The pandemic crisis

One of the most striking manifestations of the Risk Society is the COVID-19 pandemic, during which this research was conducted. The SARS-CoV-2 was first identified in late 2019 in Wuhan, China. It is the cause of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), at the root of the current COVID-19 pandemic, declared as such on 11 March 2020 by the World Health Organization. Despite the shock in public opinion, this event was not a surprise for the public health scientific community. Just before the discovery of the Coronavirus, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, a joint WHO-World Bank initiative, published its annual report named "A World at Risk". In that report, the two organisations stressed that because of our unpreparedness for health emergencies, "the world is at acute risk for devastating regional or global disease epidemics or pandemics that not only cause loss of life but upend economies and create social chaos" (Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, 2019, p. 11). As we will see, that was not the only report launching an alarm on a possible global pandemic. Beck (2014) and Kuchinskaya (2014) use the term "politics of invisibility" to denote how states and enterprises manufacture "social bads" and make them invisible.

The Coronavirus determined not only a health crisis but also severe socio-economic consequences in countries, such as Italy, that were still recovering from the Great Recession. Alteri et al. (2021) call the COVID-19 pandemic "the first crisis within a crisis". Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has

been described as a “total social fact”<sup>4</sup>, in the sense it deeply impacts all the aspects of our global society (Alteri et al., 2021), from work to mobility, social relations, free time, as well as cognitive and psychological aspects. Italy was the first country in Europe to suffer an exponential rise in cases that led to the saturation of hospitals. After an initial undervaluation, the government reacted with drastic measures that limited freedoms and human rights in unprecedented ways for a non-authoritarian regime (Canestrini, 2020). As in many countries, the virus contention was done by shutting down entire economic and cultural-recreative sectors as well as frontiers for months. Personal liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, freedom to profess one’s religious belief, free enterprise, and the right to education were all impaired. Moreover, in semi-authoritarian or authoritarian regimes the pandemic was the perfect excuse to “quash opposition and fortify their power” (Freedom House, 2021). Moreover, many repressive measures adopted were unrelated to the pandemic crisis.

The unprecedented restrictions saved thousands of lives and avoided the collapse of the health system but still, the number of deaths in Italy was impressive: more than 176,000 between January 2020 and September 2022 (il Sole 24 Ore, 2022). That was a sensational failure of the State to guarantee the right to life of its citizens. Moreover, those measures caused a human rights crisis, exacerbating inequalities, poverty and deprivations (Oxfam International, 2022). In general, the SARS-CoV-2 should be viewed as a syndemic. This biosocial concept stresses the interconnections among the coronavirus disease with other health problems (typical of an ageing population), socio-economic inequalities (e.g. the over-representation of migrants and non-white people in jobs highly exposed to the virus), environmental conditions (e.g. air pollution) and political factors (e.g. neoliberal’s dismantlement of public health services and globalization) (Fronteira et al., 2021). The implication is that we need a holistic approach to health problems, the so-called “one health”.

For progressive social movements, the COVID-19 pandemic was the equivalent of a tsunami. With few exceptions mainly located in the far-right, a new consensus quickly emerged that drastic state intervention was needed to limit the diffusion of the virus. Street mobilizations were temporarily reset, and movements were forced to a deep process of adaption, including Fridays for Future. Even if restrictions were then removed or lightened, the combination of the COVID threat, the delegitimization of protests, the closure of schools and the insufficient gratification produced very

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<sup>4</sup> Émile Durkheim viewed social facts as products of social interaction that exist outside of individuals (institutions, laws, customs, values, traditions...) and exercise coercive power over them. For Marcel Mauss, total social facts are those social facts that have implications on all society’s spheres.

unfavourable conditions for climate mobilization. At the same time, new protests rose against vaccinations and pandemic-related restrictions as well as forms of mutual aid such as in the experience of the *Brigate Volontarie per l'Emergenza* (Voluntary Brigades for the Emergency) in Italy. FFF showed quite impressive resilience and regained strength since September 2021, even if losing several local groups. The burst of the pandemic meant the end of FFF's momentum but also an occasion to stress the connection between anthropogenic activities and the phenomenon of virus spillover.

During the pandemic, the State re-legitimated itself after years of neo-liberalism and especially after 2019, when both autocracies and democracies were heavily contested for their incapacity to reduce inequalities and guarantee fundamental rights. The first new *raison d'être* of the State was the bio-political vocation to protect the lives of its citizens threatened by the virus (Hannah et al., 2020). The second *raison d'être* was the necessity to deal with the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, which was done through massive social expenditure and public investments, even in countries governed by conservatives or neo-liberals. The unprecedented State interventionism during the pandemic severely challenged neo-liberalism. However, while the neo-liberal hegemony seems crumbling, it is not clear what comes next. In Italy, the President of the Council of Ministers Giuseppe Conte took the key political decisions by decree with a marginal role of the Parliament, resulting in the aggravation of an ongoing process of presidentialization active for years (Fittipaldi, 2021). Despite the severity of the measures, the “Rally ‘Round the Flag’ Effect” pushed the popularity of President Conte to a peak of 71% during the first lockdown (Tosi, 2021). That effect continued with the new Draghi government, despite internal divisions.

Another effect of the pandemic is that while the public went behind the curtain, scientists suddenly conquered the centre stage, as the main advisor of governments and public communicators but also led rise to the phenomena of spectacularisation, polarization and citizens mobilising against science itself (Alteri et al., 2021). This has implications for the management of the climate crisis, which also needs a stronger role of scientists as advisors and public speakers but with the above-mentioned risks.

If the State has gained a new legitimacy during the pandemic, some transnational corporations have enormously increased their power. With forced restrictions on mobility, smart-working and online didactics, we have become dependent on Big Tech corporations such as Zoom, Meta, Google, Amazon and Netflix to work, learn, communicate, eat, and spend our free time. At the same time, Big Pharma corporations such as Pfizer and Moderna have gained unprecedented power with their

monopoly on vaccines, dictating the conditions of distribution on governments and conditioning the lives of millions. All these corporations and their CEOs have accumulated an impressive amount of wealth thanks to the pandemic. The wealth of the world's ten richest men has doubled since the burst of the pandemic, and they now own more than the bottom 3.1 billion people while over 160 million people have been pushed into poverty (Oxfam International, 2022). All this seems a strengthening of post-democratic tendencies that are discussed in the next section.

Pandemics and climate change, which is discussed in the next section, are interconnected not only by the “politics of invisibility” but also in other ways. In fact, they are the two faces of the same coin. Global warming is sprawling already existing viruses such as dengue, malaria, and cholera could lead to the spread of new viruses trapped in the permafrost, or through the spillover from one species to another (Liotta & Clementi, 2020). Here, the concept of spillover, the ability of a virus to jump from one species to a new host species, is crucial. There is a scientific consensus that this phenomenon is facilitated by global warming, deforestation, intensive breeding and farming, wild animal traffics and wet markets (Quammen, 2014; Shah, 2020). Regarding COVID-19, a study from the University of Cambridge found evidence that the spillover from bats was facilitated by the increasing global temperatures (Beyer et al., 2021) but there is no scientific consensus yet (Tandon, 2021). Malm (2020) binds all the potential causes of spillover to the Western modern view of nature as something passive, external and separated from our society, a resource that can be exploited for capitalist accumulation. In this sense, he and other authors (Iacovone & Valz Gris, 2020) see the COVID-19 crisis as an endogenous product of capitalism. In specific, Malm stresses the role of deforestation, which is functional for the export to the West of cheap products such as meat, soy, palm oil, and wood that sustain our imperial mode of living. Deforestation favours climate change, reduces biodiversity and facilitates the migration of stressed and pathogenic animals such as bats, increasing the likelihood of spillovers (Malm, 2020). The appropriation of space (the aggression of nature) and time (fast rhythms of extraction and production) by the capital is tied with the compression of time and space (fast global transports) which together bring high risks of zoonotic pandemics.

## The climate crisis

The second sensational manifestation of the Risk Society is the climate crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic detonated in the middle of a phase of aggravation of climate disasters and rising grassroots

activism. “Our house is on fire” proclaimed Greta Thunberg in 2019 at the Davos Forum, the meeting of the global elite which resists adopting radical measures to extinguish the fire which has triggered and that threatens the quality of life of millions of beings and the same existence of others. The words of Greta Thunberg were not only a slogan. The overwhelming reports of the scientific community signal that human-induced climate change is having an unprecedented and widespread impact on human and natural systems and is threatening to cause further severe, pervasive and irreversible damages, especially for disadvantaged people and communities (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014, 2021, 2022). Most of the climate research is focused on the effects of a global temperature rise between 1.5°C and 2°C, the two goals of the Paris Agreement<sup>5</sup>, but there are also more alarming scenarios with low probability and huge impact in which even higher temperatures trigger a waterfall effect of environmental disasters, pandemics, mass migrations, conflicts and, lastly, to a global catastrophe (Kemp et al., 2022).

The climate crisis is part of a broader ecological crisis that includes the depletion of natural resources, soil, air and water pollution, deforestation, ocean acidification, global waste crisis, and biodiversity extinction. All these problems interact with each other, and they are attributable, directly or indirectly, to human actions. Environmental conditions have always contributed to shaping the rise and fall of civilizations (Diamond, 2005). This warning should lead us to a more responsible attitude toward nature.

The manifestations of the climate crisis are more severe and frequent droughts, floods, heat waves, wildfires, and storms together with the ocean risings, glaciers melting and changing ocean currents. Shaped by the violence of global warming, nature suddenly becomes uncanny: something familiar but also extraneous, threatening and non-understandable (van Aken, 2020). The climate crisis can be seen as a rising total social fact, to use again the concept by Marcel Mauss, in the sense it is already affecting and will further shape all the aspects of our societies, from work to mobility, social relations, free time, as well as cognitive and psychological aspects. In the words of the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood (2015): “It’s not climate change, it’s everything change”. Another way to express this situation is by seeing climate change as an agent of metamorphosis, as Beck (2016) argues:

We live in a world that is not just changing, it is metamorphosing. Change implies that some things change but other things remain the same – capitalism changes, but some aspects of capitalism remain as they have always been.

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<sup>5</sup> Signed in 2015, it is the universally-ratified treaty that set long-term goals to fight global warming.



Metamorphosis implies a much more radical transformation in which the old certainties of modern society are falling away and something quite new is emerging (Beck, 2016)<sup>6</sup>.

In the vision by Beck, a metamorphosis of the world is not a programmatic political change but it “is something that happens” or something unthinkable that becomes real and possible. It is “a mode of changing the nature of human existence” that “challenges our way of being in the world, thinking about the world, and imagining and doing politics”.

In its widespread effects, climate change turns into a human rights crisis. It affects, directly and indirectly, almost all internationally guaranteed human rights, including the right to life, self-determination, development, health, housing, water, sanitation, education, and food (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015). Moreover, it is already amplifying inequalities and poverty and it could exacerbate and create new conflicts, wars and massive migrations (Mastrojeni & Pasini, 2017). For instance, there is evidence that a drought probably determined by climate change contributed to massive rural migration to cities in Syria, causing a conflict over scarce resources and, together with other causes, to the uprising and atrocious civil war which burst in 2011. The economic and political instability could also bring a general democratic regress (Lindvall, 2021). In short, the risk is having a negative spiral of environmental degradation, democratic regression, war, instability and human rights violations. Besides this necessity to overcome the technocratic management of the climate crisis and put human rights and equality at the centre, social sciences are a minor component of international and national climate reports (Brulle & Dunlap, 2015).

The climate crisis is also a child and youth rights crisis. Children and youths are more vulnerable to climate and environmental shocks for their specific physiological, psychological and physical vulnerabilities (UNICEF, 2015) and the simple fact that they have a whole life ahead so negative impact could have long-term consequences. The climate crisis is already affecting and will affect furthermore almost all the rights outlined in the Convention on the Right of the Child<sup>7</sup>, from water to health, nutrition, social and child protection, education and participation. Nearly half of the world’s children, approximately 1 billion, live in countries classified by UNICEF (2021) as “extremely high-risk.” At the same time, children and youths are the groups that would also benefit more from an ecological transition and they count on high levels of awareness (UNICEF, 2015). A recent study

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<sup>6</sup> Whenever an in-text quote does not include the number of pages is because it has been used in an ebook or other digital versions.

<sup>7</sup> Signed in 1989 and almost universally ratified, it represents the main international instrument for the protection of children's rights together with its three additional protocols.

conducted in 10 countries found that 59% of youths were very or extremely worried about climate change and 84% were at least moderately worried (Hickman et al., 2021). The same study found alarming levels of climate anxiety; the distress related to the climate crisis<sup>8</sup>. 45% of the respondents affirmed climate change generated feelings that negatively affected their daily lives and over 50% evoked negative emotions such as being afraid, sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and/or guilty. This is again a demonstration of how the climate crisis is already having dramatic effects on the present of children and youths. The lack of political action is a failure of the ethical responsibility to care and a serious symptom of a lack of representation of their interests by political parties. Children are also the least responsible for greenhouse emissions (UNICEF, 2021). This represents one of the most relevant dimensions of climate injustice. Given this context of threats, injustice and nonrepresentation, it is not a case that children and youths are at the forefront of climate protests.

The climate crisis does not homogeneously hit. In other words, we are in the same storm, but not in the same boat. In the INFORM Climate Change Risk Index developed by the European Commission & Joint Research Centre (2022), disaster risk is the result of three dimensions: hazard&exposure (the probability of physical exposure associated with specific hazards), vulnerability (the intrinsic predispositions of an exposed population to be affected or to be susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard) and lack of coping capacity (the ability of a country to cope with disasters). There is an impressive correlation between the three dimensions. For instance, the countries ranking higher in the index in 2022 are mainly African and Asian (the top five are Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Chad) and they are at the same time extremely exposed to disasters, with vulnerable populations and fragile States. Their contribution to global warming is basically neglectable. On the other hand, those countries with the lowest index, mainly located in Europe, combine low hazard&exposure and population vulnerability with high State capacity. The issue of global climate injustice is inevitably linked with the history of colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Let us see now the issue from the governmental side. At the discursive level, the dominant climate change frame merges green governmentality and ecological modernization (Bäckstrand et al., 2017). The first identifies as the solution to the climate crisis a system of governance of the economy and individual behaviour change informed by natural sciences and developed at the international level. The second focuses on technological development, economic expansion, and environmental

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<sup>8</sup> The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as “a condition in which someone feels frightened or very worried about climate change”. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/climate-anxiety>.

governance, without radical structural changes. These post-political approaches depoliticize the climate crisis by replacing disputes with a technocratic consensus around the inevitability of capitalism and market economy (Swyngedouw, 2010), and in doing so, they reinforce the existing social, political and economic status quo (Brulle & Dunlap, 2015). At their core, there is the belief that negative externalities such as emissions and pollution can be effectively tackled by market-based mechanisms such as cap and trade (CAT) or emissions trading schemes (ETS). This mainstream agenda that combines green governmentality and ecological modernization has been embraced not only by the United Nations, governments and enterprises but also by the moderate wing of the environmental movement (Dal Gobbo, 2021). This latter is an example of Gramscian *trasformismo*, a strategy of the elite to co-opt opponents<sup>9</sup>.

The economic and political elite claims that the system itself is providing the “solutions” to the problems it generated. This is a fundamental strategy of re-legitimation (Dal Gobbo, 2021) that rejects the necessity of system change. In this sense, the overall greening of the economy can be seen as a Gramscian passive revolution (Neusteurer, 2016): a top-down, non-participatory change that does not undermine the status quo (capitalism, inequalities, coloniality and so on) but revives capital accumulation. To use the words of Pellizzoni (2019b, p. 8) “the bet of the elites is rather, it seems to me, to be able once again to get away with by raising the accumulation”.

Moreover, the dominant climate change discourse that claims to mitigate the impact of the climate crisis while maintaining the imperial mode of living is a fundamental mechanism of social stabilisation (Wissen & Brand, 2021). Fossil capitalism allows the perpetuation of the imperial mode by global upper and middle-classes. This is based on high levels of consumption, nature and labour exploitation as well as on the externalisation of social and ecological consequences, in the forms of pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and waste. The hegemonic greening of the economy is a passive revolution that does not undermine this imperial mode of living and, in this way, it externalises in time and space the environmental and health costs of a “green” capitalism based on the imperative of growth. The paradigmatic case is the shift from combustion-engine to electric-engine cars which has the potential to reduce air pollution in Northern cities while the enormous cost of the extraction of natural resources required to produce electric cars is discharged on Southern sacrifice zones. In

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<sup>9</sup> Gramsci discussed how in the second half of the XIX century, democratic Italian opponents such as Francesco Crispi and Agostino Depretis, both radical republicans at the beginning, were co-opted by the establishment, also through corruptive methods. He called the phenomenon “*trasformismo*” and he saw it as a form of “passive revolution”, i.e. a top-down transformative process that in times of crisis was meant to prevent the burst of a popular revolution.

addition, the predominance of private car-centric mobility over public transport and bicycles is perpetuated. According to Wissen & Brand (2021, pp. 158–159), "the <ecologization> of automobility through the market-based and technologically fixed strategies described above is an attempt to perpetuate the imperial mode of living through a selective ecological modernization of one of its central domains." Another example can be made for smart cities, in which widespread sensors and related ICTs technologies massively collect data that is used to optimize the use of resources and reduce local pollution while the environmental cost of the production of those tools is externalised in China, Democratic Republic of Congo and so on.

This mainstream perspective of "greening" the economy is once more a demonstration of the capacity of capitalism to evolve and adapt to the changing context. "Capitalism can only survive in a mode of permanent change" (Wissen & Brand, 2021, p. 170). Taking back the reflections by Cox (1983), *transformismo* is not only the co-optation of opponents but also the strategy through which capitalism appropriates and domesticates ideas such as sustainability and climate justice that could challenge the legitimacy of the establishment. Despite many enterprises being really engaged in reducing their environmental impact, for most polluting ones this appropriation is merely greenwashing. Nevertheless, the example of the "ecologization" of automobility demonstrates that the ecological transition can be a new form of capitalist accumulation, a "green capitalist regime of accumulation" (Wissen & Brand, 2021, p. 169). The ecological limits stop being a limit to enterprises, and they become a new source of accumulation. Another example is the green grabbing oriented to the production of controversial bio-fuels. In short, the massive appropriation of lands in the Global South is partly used to produce crops that become "green" fuels for rich countries, aggravating local problems such as hunger and poverty. Natural disasters can also be a source of profit for "disaster capitalism" (Klein, 2008), the complex of private enterprises which reconstruct after a catastrophe. As Klein (2014) argues, the climate crisis can be the perfect scenario for the application of the "shock doctrine" that exploits an emergency to advance a neo-liberal project of bottom-up redistribution and privatization, as exemplified by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. In pandemic times, Big Tech corporations such as Google, Amazon, Meta, and Netflix have accumulated unprecedented wealth and increased their social, cultural and political influence. Klein (2020) denominates it "the Pandemic Shock Doctrine" which is the extension of "surveillance capitalism"<sup>10</sup> during an emergency. To this,

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<sup>10</sup> Term introduced by Zuboff (2019) to denote the model of business based on the widespread collection and commodification of personal data by Big Tech corporations such as Google, Amazon and Meta.

we could add the unprecedented profits and political influence of Big Pharma generated during the pandemic.

The “greening” of the economy is not only dominated by the “green” faction of the capital. There are also actors such as small enterprises, co-operatives, farmers, indigenous communities, ecovillages, fair trade networks, ethical purchasing groups, energy communities and so on with very different business models and worldviews compared to the dominant. The crucial issue remains the political influence played by those actors. If we look at the climate policies adopted in Italy, the indicators of greenhouse gas emissions and the energy mix (chapter 8) as well as specific studies on the issue (ReCommon, 2021) it is evident that the fossil faction of the capital dominates the political agenda and systematically obstructs the ecological transition.

The issue of private interests in the policy agenda brings us to the technocratic management of the climate crisis organized through post-democratic institutions of governance (Swyngedouw, 2010). “Post-democracy” denotes a State that formally maintains elections, separation of powers, and State of Law but in which a politico-economic elite have de facto control over the political agenda (Crouch, 2004). According to Colin Crouch (2020), we are transitioning toward a post-democratic regime due to three main causes: economic globalization, neoliberalism, and the decline of traditional political identities. The Great Recession (2007-2009) seemed a confirmation of this thesis, especially in the so-called PIIGS (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Greece, and Spain). In the paradigmatic case of Greece, the imposition of hard austerity measures by the Troika and the Institute of International Finance to save “too big to fail” banks was done notwithstanding wide popular opposition. Italy is also a paradigmatic case of post-democratic tendencies since the affirmation of the tycoon and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in the 1990s, hence even before the Great Recession. Moreover, ex-Prime Ministers Mario Monti and Mario Draghi were both former employees of Goldman Sachs, one of the biggest banks in the world. Other historical post-democratic tendencies are the influence of the car lobby (especially FIAT) and the concentration of media into three big conglomerates (GEDI, RCS, and Mediaset). Finally, the elaboration of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which was supposed to be the trigger of the Italian green recovery, was heavily influenced by fossil-fuels

companies such as Eni<sup>11</sup> (ReCommon, 2021) and supported by the private giant of consultancy McKinsey (Barbacetto & di Foggia, 2021).

Let us go back to the climate post-political consensus. When we look at the concrete policies implemented so far, we can see they have completely failed to guarantee a safe path for all of us. Fossil capitalism still dominates and the transition to green capitalism is only at the beginning. The total greenhouse gas emissions (mostly produced by the combustion of fossil fuels) continue to rise (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2021) and determine the growing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the most important greenhouse gas and hence the main driver of global warming. Greenhouse gases absorb heat radiating from the Earth's surface and re-release it in all directions, including the oceans. Within certain limits, they are extremely beneficial for life on earth. In excessive quantities, they cause global warming. Before the Industrial Revolution, the global average atmospheric carbon dioxide never exceeded 300 ppm (parts per million)<sup>12</sup>. According to the first modern observations made at Mauna Loa Volcanic Observatory (Hawaii) in 1958, the quantity was already 315 ppm. The first treaty to tackle climate change, the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was signed in 1992. That year the concentration of carbon dioxide reached 356 ppm. When the Kyoto Protocol was approved in 1997, the quantity was 363. The Paris Treaty set more ambitious targets to limit global warming and it was universally signed in 2015 when the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> reached 401. The Paris Treaty bonded the international community to limit global warming to below 2 degrees, if possible even 1.5 degrees but the high expectations of rapid decarbonisation of our economies were deluded. In 2018, with the first protests by Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future, the concentration of carbon dioxide reached 409, then it increased to 411 (2019), 414 (2020), and 416 (2021) until the historical record of 418 in 2022 (Ritchie & Roser, 2022). Not even a global pandemic was able to stop the rising accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. The severe lockdowns adopted since 2020 saved thousands of lives, also thanks to the reduction of atmospheric pollution, but had an insignificant impact in terms of climate change. According to the Climate Action Tracker (2022)<sup>13</sup>, no country is on track to respecting the Paris Agreement. Nine countries are close, but the efforts of the greatest emitters (China, the United States and the European Union) are insufficient.

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<sup>11</sup> The name "ENI" was initially the acronym of "Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi" (National Hydrocarbons Board). It was founded as a public enterprise and privatised in 1992. Since 1995, the acronym meaning ceased to be relevant but the enterprise maintained its name.

<sup>12</sup> All data on carbon dioxide come from Ritchie & Roser (2022).

<sup>13</sup> A joint initiative by non-profit institutes: Climate Analytics and the NewClimate Institute.

Beyond the undisputed existence of global warming as the consequence of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, the attribution of responsibility is a battlefield. From the mainstream perspective, scientific and technological progress turned the *Homo sapiens* into a geological force, able to produce massive, long-term, and even irreversible (in some cases) changes on the land surface, oceans, atmosphere, and life on Earth. The concept of “Anthropocene” (Crutzen, 2002) denotes the geological epoch that started with the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century. This term is widely popular and used in science, philosophy, literature, art and mass media. The logical reasoning of the anthropocenic perspective is that if we are all responsible, we should all join a common humanitarian fight against climate change. This generally combines with the post-political perspective adopted in official reports and climate summits, which depoliticizes the climate crisis and proposes technocratic, managerial, consensual solutions (Brulle & Dunlap, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2010) in which Big Oil and other polluting industries play a very relevant role. For instance, the fossil fuel industry had the largest delegation at the 2021’s climate summit of Glasgow (503 people and over 100 companies) (Global Witness, 2021).

Plenty of climate activists and scientists reject this “all together” narrative and point their finger at the responsibilities of Big Oil. The starting point is to stress the strict relationship between modernity and fossil fuels. Modern and post-modern societies are founded on cheap and abundant fossil fuels that helped create the utopic/dystopic project of development based on an endless spiral of extraction, production, consumption and satisfaction of material desires. Fossil fuels created an imaginary of contemporary man as omnipotent, illusionary freed from incompleteness, dependence, interdependence and limits (van Aken, 2020). In modern societies, the *Homo consumens* seeks remedies for zir<sup>14</sup> insecurity and fear of exclusion by forging a social life centred on obsessive-compulsive instant consumption that, however, never satisfies all desires (Bauman, 2007). Fossil fuels are also the base for the construction of the imperial mode of living, which is a social compromise between the state and the population: greater opportunities for consumption in exchange for the acceptance of the status quo (Brand & Wissen, 2021). Similarly, David Harvey (2021) uses the expression of “compensatory consumerism” to denote how capitalism provides workers with cheap goods from which they are supposed to derive all their happiness. The postwar period was surely a turning point in this sense since the introduction of marketing and consumerism let the West release its creative and destructive power (Latouche, 2012) that deeply shaped the world. The rise of

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<sup>14</sup> Gender-neutral pronoun.

the Global South and especially China has meant an unprecedented deepening and globalisation of the imperial way of living that enhances their social stability but with an enormous environmental cost that is externalised in time and space (Brand & Wissen, 2021).

For a long time, the awareness of the consequences of burning fossil fuels was restricted to local pollution. In London, the phenomenon of “killer fogs” caused thousands of deaths in the 19th century and then again in 1952 (Environmental History Timeline, n.d.). In the 1950s-1960s, fossil fuels companies were already aware of the relationship between the combustion of fossil fuels and the global increase in temperatures also because they funded a bunch of studies on it (Mann, 2021). Oil and gas companies publicly denied the problem and delegitimated climate science for decades also by financing sceptical think tanks, media and pseudoscientific studies. With time, they were forced to recognise the problem but they orchestrated a campaign of greenwashing and deflection of the responsibility on citizens. Big Oil is still a crucial player in a crucial role in "causing, shaping, advancing, and defending the current unsustainable fossil fuel-dependent global economy. By continuing to provide fossil fuels to feed the demand, they have been dictating the rules of the game to the global economic system" (Grasso, 2018, p. 252). In fact, the 60 biggest oil and gas companies contributed to more than 40% of global cumulative industrial emissions between 1988 and 2015 while the top ten ones accounted for almost 21.9% (Grasso, 2018). Big Oil companies are not alone in this. Huge corporations belonging engaged in intensive breeding and agriculture, construction, transport, and fast fashion have also their responsibilities. Brulle (2014) uses the term “climate change counter-movement” to denote the networks of conservative think tanks, advocacy groups, trade associations, polluting enterprises and conservative foundations supported by sympathetic media and conservative politicians that actively delegitimize climate science and mislead the public. Kramer (2013) conceptualizes the political failure of the United States government to act and the socially organized denial of climate change as state-corporate crimes.

Other authors go beyond the dismissal of fossil fuels, and they propose a wider re-politicization of the climate crisis. In short, the problem is not only Big Oil, fossil fuels or polluting enterprises but capitalism. The highly influential Marxist sociologist Jason Moore (2017) criticized the term Anthropocene since most humans have no responsibility for the increase of greenhouse gases. According to Moore, the real responsible is the Capital, so the new age should be called “Capitalocene”, tracing its roots from the global rise of Western capitalism in the XV century. In specific, the essential problem is the capitalistic organization of labour that privileges infinite accumulation and growth so not only neoliberal capitalism but also left-wing developmentalism and



Keynesianism are responsible. Other authors (Mastini, 2021; Morosini, 2015; Ulvila & Wilén, 2018) use the term “Plutocene” to stress the responsibility of wealthier individuals for the accumulation of greenhouse gas emissions while Kenner (2019) uses the term “polluter elite” and puts the emphasis on its consumption carbon footprint, emissions associated with investments, and political influence.

The British environmentalist Jonathon Porritt (1984) pointed to the fact that both communist and capitalist governments promoted unconstrained economic growth at the expense of the environment under the "super-ideology" of industrialism. Similarly, the theorists of the treadmill of production theory (TOP) (Schnaiberg, 1980) argue that the economic elite expands production and consumption as fast as possible to increase profits, but this generates environmental problems. Governments support growth because it generates tax revenues that allow them to implement policies and programs to legitimize their rule, many times aimed at fixing the problems generated by growth, such as pollution and unemployment. Workers too, both in capitalist and socialist states, are committed to this “ideology of growth” that states that economic development is the only path to social progress. In a similar vein, the economist Serge Latouche (2008) and the anthropologist Jason Hickel (2021)<sup>15</sup> argue that greenhouse gas emissions are only a part of the problems: the root cause of the climate crisis is the ideology of growth.

Following a culturalist perspective, the problem is not only our economic system, but also our culture based on the exploitation of nature, compulsive consumption, animal-based diets, car-centrism, and frequent air travel; in short how we live in the world, our view of the world and our relationship with nature. Pre-capitalist animistic societies tended to have an intimate, interdependent relationship with ecosystems, as in many indigenous people today. The French philosopher René Descartes took inspiration from Francis Bacon to theorize a dualism between humans, the only beings with a mind, and nature, constituted only by matter. The consequence is that man has the right to be the "lord and master" of Nature, depicted as external, passive, and at disposal. This ideology was adopted by capitalism, and it colonized Western minds with the support of the Church and the State (Hickel, 2021), breaking the previous culture of control of hybris<sup>16</sup> to favour a culture of masculinist "limitlessness" (Latouche, 2012). From this modern culture emerged the concept of development which became a founding myth of Western societies and then a "global faith" in the post-war period

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<sup>15</sup> Both part of the de-growth movement.

<sup>16</sup> Excess of confidence or arrogance in ancient Greece.

(Rist, 2002). This Euro-American naturalism<sup>17</sup> is globally hegemonic, but it is increasingly questioned, even in the Global North, by farmers (van Aken, 2020), Global South's ontologies (totemism, animism, and analogism) (Descola, 2014), scientists and climate activists. Interestingly, scientific research converges with non-naturalist ontologies on the fact that human and non-human beings as well as eco-systems are inter-connected and interdependent (Descola, 2014; Hickel, 2021; van Aken, 2020).

Decolonial authors such as Malcolm Ferdinand (2020) trace the origin of the ecological crisis to the “colonial habitation” that started with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in Abya Yala or America and that was then aggravated by the industrial revolution. Colonial habitation is the violent and racist way of inhabiting the Earth founded on the belief that some people (white, affluent and male) are entitled to exploit other humans, non-humans and lands for their benefit. In 2022, the IPCC recognized for the first time that colonialism contributed to the current vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change. Moreover, the ecological transition as currently conceptualized by governments risks being unjust with marginal Southern communities. Solar panels, wind farms and electric vehicles are generally more material-intensive than their fossil fuel-based counterparts (International Energy Agency, 2022). For instance, an electric car requires on average six times the mineral of a conventional car while an onshore wind plant requires nine times more mineral resources than a gas-fired plant (*ibid.*). Critical minerals for the ecological transition are lithium, graphite, cobalt, nickel and rare earths. If the final products (solar panels, wind farms, electric farms and cars) do not pollute, the same is not true for extraction and processing. A transition that does not drop the ideology of growth would require an enormous demand for natural resources with relevant socio-environmental costs (pollution, water consumption, labour exploitation...) discharged on Southern communities while other ecological problems such as deforestation, soil depletion, and mass extinctions risk aggravating (Hickel, 2021). This is why decolonial climate activists and authors such as Hickel and Latouche believe that a just transition is such only if it is based on de-growth and decolonialisation, in the sense it requires reducing the volumes of production/consumption and undermining the relations of domination based on racial hierarchization and labour division.

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<sup>17</sup> The ontology of the Western world according to Descola (2014) in which humans and non-humans share the same physicality but they differentiate by virtue of their interiority (reflexive thinking, morality, a soul...).

## The rise of a new generation of global climate activists

The era of multiple and systemic crises that have been described represents a formidable challenge to the duo that has hegemonized most societies in the last forty years: neo-liberalism and the neo-liberal State. This is the starting point to introduce, further on, the meteoritic rise of a new generation of climate movements and activists that has wiped out the cliché of the passivity of Generation Z.

Retaking and re-elaborating some reflections of Castells (2008), I argue that neo-liberal capitalism and its political product, the neo-liberal State, are suffering from three interrelated crises: legitimacy, efficiency and equity. The first is the growing distrust of citizens toward politicians, parties and the institutions of representative democracy. Despite a light improvement during the pandemic, only 37% of Italian citizens trust the State, 23% the Parliament and 13% political parties while high values can be found only for institutions less involved in the daily political arena such as the Police, the President of the Republic and the Pope (Demos&Pi, 2021). In the last Italian elections (2022), electoral participation reached its lowest level (64%) in Republican history. The crisis of efficiency is the fact that neo-liberal institutions seem unable to adequately prevent and manage problems such as climate change, pandemics and economic crises, as it has already been analysed in previous sections. Third, the crisis of equity. We are witnessing a rising inequality between social groups as one of the main consequences of neoliberalism. In the last thirty years, Europe and Italy have seen a growth of socio-economic inequalities that reached the levels of the 70s (Forum Disuguaglianze e Diversità, 2019) while the rates of youth unemployment, inactivity and poverty are worrying (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). As we have already seen, the pandemic crisis has exacerbated inequalities, similarly to climate change. I believe the crisis of legitimacy (or representation) is a consequence of the other two crises: public institutions are unable or unwilling to guarantee basic rights and equality and to prevent crises; they only intervene to partially mitigate their destructive effects, the classic “too little too late.” Political parties and public institutions seem more responsive to private economic interests, as Crouch (2004) argues with the notion of post-democracy while the socio-economic elite is increasingly detaching itself from the people (Urbinati, 2020). Moreover, the rising political disaffection is also the consequence of the “critical citizens” phenomenon, which is a growing group of people with democratic ideals but deeply sceptical about how democracy actually works (Norris, 2011).

National-populism claims to be the solution to the dysfunctions of neo-liberalism and the neo-liberal State through an agenda that blames the elite but also scapegoats migrants and other minorities and threatens democratic institutions. On the other hand, progressive social movements criticize neo-

liberalism but with a very different agenda. In 2019, the crises of legitimacy, efficiency and equity turned into a global wave of massive protests in all regions of the world that deeply questioned our economic, cultural and political systems, with dramatic impacts in countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Lebanon, Sudan, Hong Kong, Algeria, France, and Iraq. As Urbinati suggests (2020), the socio-economic elite (or “the many”) has assumed a monopoly on the managerial function that has been maintained with a general consensus for many years. The rising formation of that oligarchy is a failure of democracy whose historical goal is precise to avoid it (Urbinati, 2020). When it became clear that the elite was increasingly detaching itself from the people, a global wave of protests or a rebellion of “the many” burst, similarly to previous mobilizations (the Arab springs, Occupy Wall Street, the *indignados*...), against. As Castells (2015) noted for the protests of the early 2010s, I believe that the common feature of 2019 was the crisis of legitimacy of the political system, regardless of its authoritarian or democratic form. In specific, what was challenged was the incapacity of the neoliberal state to guarantee basic human rights, protection of the environment and equality.

During the “year of protest”, as many commentators named 2019, millions mobilized against the passivity of the political elite facing the existential threat represented by the climate crisis. The universal ratification of 2015’s Paris Agreement raised high expectations that were quickly deluded. The failure of States to guarantee basic human rights is a symptom of a serious crisis of representation and the failure of the ethical responsibility to care for and protect citizens that forms part of the social contract between the State and its citizens. In 2018, Fridays for Future (FFF) rose to criticize the gap between words and facts, the “bla bla bla” as the founder of the movement, Greta Thunberg, famously reprimanded in 2021. FFF quickly assumed a central role in the European Climate Justice Movement (CJM). The CJM emerged twenty years ago to politicize climate change, denouncing the “organized irresponsibility” of States and its socio-political implications.

Since 2018-2019 the youths of Fridays for Future (FFF) represent the vanguard of the climate justice movement in many European countries such as Germany, Italy, Belgium and Sweden. It is children and youths that converted the climate justice movement into a serious counter-power. Since its foundation, FFF quickly grew and spread in the world, showing an impressive capacity to conduct massive, multiple and simultaneous public demonstrations, probably the greatest in the history of environmentalism, with 7.6 million participants mobilized in 185 countries during the third Global

Climate Strike in September 2019<sup>18</sup>. FFF has successfully politicized the “climate precariat”<sup>19</sup> (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020) by bringing disruptive and innovative tactics such as the school strike and a narrative based on a sense of urgency and inter-generational criticism. Its mobilisation partially radicalized old environmentalism, pushed the European Commission to draw the Green Deal (Euronews, 2021), and boosted the electoral success of the Green parties of several European countries. In 2019, the former OPEC's<sup>20</sup> secretary-general Mohammed Barkindo declared that those climate mobilizations were "perhaps the greatest threat to our industry going forward" (Agence France-Presse, 2019) to which Greta Thunberg replied with a "thank you! Our biggest compliment yet!"

The Italian branch of FFF is one of the most vigorous since the beginning and it was able to mobilize more than one million people on the 27th of September 2019<sup>21</sup>. It received vast and transversal support from the Italian public opinion (76%) and especially among youths between 14 and 24 years (87%) (Demos & Pi, 2019). Moreover, despite the pandemic, the large majority of Italian public opinion is quite (45%) or highly (39%) worried by climate change, considers the governmental action insufficient or totally absent (74%) and that none of the parties is doing enough (61%) (ECCO, 2022). Even though specific studies are required, it is quite likely that FFF has contributed to this awareness. Importantly, FFF Italy brought back national environmental protests that had almost disappeared in our country. However, the political impact has been disappointing and the just ecological transition in Italy is not proceeding as required. This point is further discussed in the chapter on strategy.

In the same year (2019), a very different movement also rose: the Italian anti-populist movement "Sardine" (literally sardines) which mobilised against the far-right in Emilia-Romagna, contributing to the victory of the centre-left<sup>22</sup>. Even though it did not share the anti-elitist attitude of the climate justice movement, the Sardine was too a consequence of the deep dissatisfaction with political parties,

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<sup>18</sup> <https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/strike-statistics/>.

<sup>19</sup> The authors use this term to mean that children are a group that shares the consequences of the climate crisis, even though unequally. Climate precarity consists of three elements of vulnerability that are temporality problems, insecurity and identity vacuum. Children's protests can be seen as a form of resistance towards these vulnerabilities.

<sup>20</sup> Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

<sup>21</sup> <https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/strike-statistics/>.

<sup>22</sup> The region Emilia-Romagna has always been administered by left-wing parties (the Italian Communist Party and its successors until the Democratic Party). The 2020 regional elections were the most competitive in the history of the region. The Sardines movement started as a flash mob in November 2019 to contrast the rise of the far-right in the region but then spread to the entire country with massive demonstrations, probably contributing to the victory of the centre-left candidate Stefano Bonaccini.

in specific the incapacity of the centre-left to effectively oppose and carry on an alternative agenda to the national-populism of the League (Hamdaoui, 2021).

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic burst while many governments were challenged by that global wave of protests. The new scenario reset massive climate protests but also rose hopes around the promise of a green recovery. While that promise was mainly betrayed, as we will see at the end of the dissertation, the climate crisis kept on intensifying its destructive effects. The 2021's floods in the North of Europe killed 243 people. In 2022, the same phenomenon in Pakistan killed more than 1700.

Climate activism brought back massive protests since September 2021 and created high expectations regarding November's climate meeting (COP-26) in Glasgow. However, those expectations were quickly deluded. Moreover, on the 24th of February 2022, the Russian invasion of Ukraine tore apart the international order, intensified the competition between great powers, determined the escalation of military expenses and brought back the risk of a nuclear conflict. In addition, it provoked a surge in inflation, an energy crisis, a massive boost of fossil fuels (including new investments) and a likely recession in Europe. The socio-economic consequences of the war were aggravated by 2022's historical drought in Europe, which damaged agriculture production and cut down hydroelectric energy production, contributing to inflation and the energy crisis.

As I have already said, children and youths are the main component of FFF (Moor et al., 2020; Wahlström et al., 2019). These activists mainly come from Generation Z which is not only the "climate crisis generation" but also a "multiple crises generation" or a "permanent crisis generation". They also suffer from a lack of political representation. It is a generation deeply unsatisfied by the current political and economic system (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2020) and affected by the syndrome of the critical citizen: they do not question the value of democracy, but they are unsatisfied with its performance. So, they "reinvent" politics (Alteri et al., 2017) with direct democracy, by using the "school strike" as a tool of consciousness-awareness and pressure on institutions, by infusing institutional dialogue with sarcasm and provocation, by emphasizing that activism should not be separated from pleasure. Overall, they have brought new energies, ideas and people to the environmental and climate movements of many countries. Besides stereotypical representations, youths are confirmed again to be an essential component of social movement, as the literature has suggested for years (Almeida, 2019). This is also because children and youths are the victims of climate injustice but also the main potential beneficiaries of the ecological transition.

Youths live in a time of uncertainty, pessimism, and crisis of the future, all amplified by the pandemic (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2020; Leccardi, 2009) and with new rising phenomena such as climate anxiety (Hickman et al., 2021). Fridays for Future tries to bring hope to new generations by saying that even though the situation seems dramatic, change is coming, and the future is still open. As Greta Thunberg declared at the COP24 of Katowice in 2018:

We have not come here to beg world leaders to care. You have ignored us in the past, and you will ignore us again. We have run out of excuses, and we are running out of time. We have come here to let you know that change is coming, whether you like it or not. The real power belongs to the people (Thunberg et al., 2019).

Together with a youth identity, the other key feature of Fridays for Future is the perception of being a global movement<sup>23</sup>. Their struggle is not only local and national but also global as the climate crisis is. In this sense, we can speak of a Beckian cosmopolitan movement that awakes the world and policymakers on the existential risks we are facing. Nevertheless, the movement can also be seen as part of an anti-systemic global resistance to the environmental destruction provoked by neoliberal fossil capitalism. After the initial period of the exaltation of the *vox scientifica* (Zulianello & Ceccobelli, 2020), FFF re-politicized the climate crisis and rejected technocratic and market-based solutions by putting justice and system change at the core of its demands and by identifying clear antagonists, Big Oil in *primis*. The term “resistance” that is included in the title of the dissertation comes from FFF Italy but is also used by other social movements. The report of the second National Assembly of the movement, held in Naples in 2019, concluded with this sentence: “We are not willing to give up, we are the resistance.” The radicality of this anti-systemic challenge was also expressed by the official hashtag of the Climate Strike of September 2021: #UprootTheSystem (in the sense to go to the roots of the problem and completely change the system). Alternatively, to use a slogan from Chile adopted by FFF: “we don’t want to return to normality because normality was the problem”. As I have already expressed, neoliberal capitalism and the neoliberal State are suffering from a crisis of legitimacy, efficiency and equity which are at the core of the claims of this global resistance.

FFF is not alone in the climate battlefield. Three years before the rise of FFF, the movement Ende Gelände<sup>24</sup> started occupying coal mines in Germany. On the other side of the ocean, the youth-led Sunrise Movement, launched in 2017, led massive mobilization for a Green New Deal and endorsed several radical political candidates such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, contributing in many cases to

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<sup>23</sup> As it is explained in chapter 7, Fridays for Future is a decentralized, grassroots, global network of activists basically organised in three levels: local, national and international.

<sup>24</sup> A German expression meaning “here and no further”.

their electoral victory and the ambitious climate agenda of Joe Biden. Few months before the first strikes by Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion (XR) emerged in the United Kingdom and then spread to other countries with a tactical repertoire centred on civil disobedience. More recently, new climate movements have risen with radical direct tactics such as road blockades and spectacular actions in museums. Examples are Ultima Generazione and Rise Up 4 Climate Justice Italy<sup>25</sup>, Just Stop Oil and Insulate Britain in the United Kingdom, Dernière Rénovation in France, Futuro Vegetal in Spain and Scientist Rebellion which is active in several countries. Another weapon in the hands of activists is climate litigation, with which they have obtained harsh sentences against enterprises and states in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Colombia. In Italy, the campaign “Giudizio Finale” (Final Judgement) is promoting a climate legal action against the Italian State. Old environmental organisations are also engaged in the “climate war” as Mann (2021) calls it, mainly through advocacy but also by joining and supporting climate strikes. Moreover, there is a vast number of co-operatives, social enterprises, and ethical consumer groups that do not try to overthrow capitalism as old Marxists tried but to progressively erode it, to use an expression by Olin Wright (2018), and prefigure a non-capitalist society. In the Global South, this global resistance against neoliberal fossil capitalism includes indigenous people, communities and small farmers defending their lands from extractivist corporations, what Martínez-Alier (2009) calls “the environmentalism of the poor”.

The tactical diversity of the climate movement is beneficial for social movements since it increases effectiveness, attracts attention, reduces vulnerability to repression, and fosters the radical flank effect (Haines, 2013; Pinckney & Rivers, 2020; Schock, 2005). The diversity of tactics is mirrored by ideological diversity. The main aspiration of climate justice activists is to completely replace the current unrepresentative, fossil, profit-centred system with a new truly democratic system, which puts equity, justice, solidarity, commons, and care of others and the planet at the centre. De-growth, post-growth, post-development, eco-socialism, eco-feminism, eco-anarchism, Deep Ecology, Ubuntu and Buen Vivir are some of the ideological alternatives proposed by activists and intellectuals. No one claim to become a *pensée unique* (unique thought) for all countries and nations but to be part of a pluriverse of alternatives (Kothari et al., 2019). As the Mexican Zapatists say: “the world we want is a world in which many worlds fit”. On the other hand, the more moderate wing of environmentalism

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<sup>25</sup> It is a direct-action movement that was born at Venice Climate Camp in 2020, mainly composed of activists from the North-East of Italy.



tends to propose reformist proposals such as ecomodernism, green economy, and sustainable development.

Climate activists perform some essential democratic functions. First, they bring an unattended issue, which is especially relevant for unrepresented generations, to the public attention. This assumes even greater importance when we think that the climate crisis could bring general economic and political instability and, consequently, a general democratic regress (Lindvall, 2021). Second, they ask for more participation, and they embody forms of participatory democracy that perform a democratic pedagogical function. Third, they exercise vigilance upon powerholders; they are the watchdog that monitors and denounce the gap between the words and facts of policymakers and through legal actions they bring to justice those States and enterprises that violate human rights through their destructive environmental decisions. Fourth, many times, they block undesired (in other words environmentally destructive) policies and projects; they are veto-wielders. The last two functions correspond to what Rosanvallon (2008) call “counter-democratic functions”. By counter-democracy, the French author does not mean the opposite of democracy but "a form of democracy that reinforces the usual electoral democracy as a kind of buttress, a democracy of indirect powers disseminated throughout society—in other words, a durable democracy of distrust, which complements the episodic democracy of the usual electoral-representative system” (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 8). Through these functions, climate movements keep permanent tension and conflict alive to oblige governments to attend to social demands. We can say that counter-democracy is a remedy to post-democracy and authoritarianism.

Climate movements are fighting an essential battle for the future of human rights, democracy and life on Earth. The question is: are they winning? In 2019, the expectations were high. Then COVID came and erased massive climate protests for a year and a half. At the same time, each crisis is an opportunity. As Pleyers (2020, p.308) states, “the COVID-19 outbreak is a battlefield for alternative futures”, in which governments, parties, movements, counter-movements and enterprises participate. Some abrupt changes that once seemed unthinkable have occurred, from the suspension of the European Stability Pact to the Next Generation Recovery Fund, the global minimum tax, massive social spending and public investments even from conservative governments (Alteri et al., 2021). It seems that neo-liberalism is currently under an unprecedented attack and perhaps facing its worst crisis (Gerbaudo, 2021). Nevertheless, it is not clear what comes next. Moreover, we could not say that the pandemic worked as an environmental wake-up call as many hoped (Hood, 2020; Wright, 2020). The current energy crisis has brought an increase in the use of coal, the most polluting fossil

fuel, and liquefied natural gas, far from being green, especially if extracted through fracking. Moreover, new huge fossil investments and projects are on the way, threatening to produce devastating consequences (Carrington & Taylor, 2022). In general, it does not seem that our governments are rethinking our relationship with nature and challenging the capitalist myth of growth. On the contrary, in too many cases, they are promoting greenwashing or “green capitalism” while global greenhouse gas emissions keep growing. The demands to put climate science, our interdependence with ecosystems and care at the centre of politics seem unattended. In some way, the pandemic appears to be a lost opportunity to turn “the crises of symptoms into crises of the causes” (Malm, 2020, p. 146).

Inside Fridays for Future Italy, there is a crystal-clear awareness of the limited outcomes obtained so far. The Italian climate legislation is extremely weak, renewable energies have not been growing for years and greenhouse gas emissions trends are not positive (further analysis can be found in chapter 8). Finally, the new right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni is at the antipode of the values of the movement. The strategy of the movement must be re-thought and the growth of movements based on direct action is likely to put pressure in the direction of tactical radicalization. In terms of alliances, the most important decision of 2022 was the convergence with the radical workers of the former GKN factory of Campi Bisanzio<sup>26</sup>, in the attempt to overcome the juxtaposition between environment and work. However, the relationships with the more powerful confederate trade unions are much more ambiguous. The same is true for the relationship with the main green party Europa Verde which, in addition, seems unable to grow and become a key political actor and potential ally. Finally, if the narrative of urgency by FFF seemed working for a period, there are some doubts about how long it can be sustained. The future years will be key both for Fridays for Future and the destiny of our planet.

## The research and the dissertation

Social movements are key actors of social, cultural and political change (Bosi et al., 2016) and they perform key democratic functions (della Porta, 2013). Today, the climate crisis is one of the most serious, and even existential, threats we are facing. Hence, it is crucial to study a movement such as

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<sup>26</sup> GKN is a multinational enterprise that produce automotive and aerospace components. The company's name comes from the initials of three key early figures (Guest, Keen and Nettlefold). The chapter dedicated to strategy better explains the case of the plant of Campi Bisanzio.

Fridays for Future which is the vanguard of climate activism in Italy. This is why I chose it as my research topic.

Moreover, conducting a study on Fridays for Future has been an excellent opportunity to explore how new generations conceive politics and activism in a country with high levels of political disaffection and structural exclusion of youths (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). We need to go beyond the "myth of the passive citizen" (Rosanvallon, 2008) and analyse the qualitative change of political activism among youths or their "reinvention of politics" (Alteri et al., 2017).

This research has also been an occasion to scan young activists' representations of the present and future, in an uncertain world that is facing multiple crises but also attempts to bring back hope and utopia thanks to climate movements. These representations of time are deeply emotional: they involve fear, climate anxiety, and indignation but also pride and hope. All these emotions are crucial for mobilisation; however, the challenge is to find the best balance between them that could keep on galvanizing activists even in hard times.

Through the exploration of this "reinvention of politics", dichotomies such as old/new social movement, political/cultural, and material/post-material seem no longer current. At the same time, some neglected or understudied issues have emerged that I believe can contribute to the theoretical debate on social movements. Some of these elements of interest are the "pleasure of activism", the presence of soft leaders in a movement that claims to be horizontal, the use of alternative social media to the hegemonic ones, the experimentation of new tactics in the pandemic, youth identity as a key resource for mobilization and the re-education of the habitus through climate activism.

Let us see more in detail this specific research. A major problem with social movement studies is that they tend to adopt a theoretical background (resource mobilization, political process, frames...) which canalizes them toward some specific aspects decided a priori by the researcher, while others are ignored. In this way, they lose the holistic view of movements and the interconnections between their aspects. My position is that we need a Social Movement Integrated Approach (Muhtadi, 2008) that could take into account the resources, political context as well as cognitive and emotional aspects of activism without weighting them a priori.

The fieldwork of this research on FFF Italy was based on participant observation, ethnographic interviews, semi-structured interviews and complementary analysis of the movement's main publications.

The issue of relevance was the first key ethical issue considered. In fact, it has been noted that many social movement studies are considered distant, useless and irrelevant by movements (Milan, 2014). Researchers are many times miners that extract data from the subjects for their own benefit, without asking themselves any ethical questions. On the other hand, the participatory approach adopted during this study allowed the researcher to build a relationship of trust with FFF's activists, access knowledge that is normally not available and modify the research design in the interaction with the participants. The aspiration was to produce a study that could be relevant to the movement itself instead of simply extracting information from it. When we conduct research with social movements and not on social movements, we can produce forms of knowledge that empower them and multiply their potential.

The second ethical issue of this research was the fact that climate change is a human rights crisis that is already hitting especially the most vulnerable: children, women, farmers, poor, indigenous people, people of colour and with disabilities, mostly in the Global South. All those people have very few responsibilities in the climate crisis. My position is that the false "neutrality" of the research favours the current status quo that allows the climate crisis to aggravate.

Third ethical issue: a considerable component of FFF is adolescents below the age of majority. This research was inspired by the principles of the "new social studies of childhood" and in particular the "new sociology of childhood" (Allison & Prout, 1997; Prout, 2011). In these conceptions, children are influenced by social institutions, but they are also active in the interpretation, construction and determination of their own life, the lives of those around them and the society and culture in which they live. In short, children are not powerless, incompetent or passive receptors of adult socialization such as in dominant, deterministic and patronizing views, but they possess creativity and agency (Corsaro, 2020). Doing research with children requires this awareness and additional care and reflexivity on the position and power of the researcher.

Other relevant ethical questions that I asked myself before, during and after the research were the risks that activists may face during the study and how to be accountable to them. Regarding the latter, the phase called "respondent validation" assumed a crucial role.

To sum up, the current study is an attempt to conduct a participatory, movement-relevant, ethical, and holistic study on Fridays for Future Italy. I go back to each of these points in the methodological chapter.

Before moving to the structure of the dissertation, it is necessary to make some points regarding the Coronavirus. All the fieldwork was conducted during the pandemic. This disruptive scenario deeply influenced my daily life, research and vision of the world. COVID-19 was surely a challenge for all the researchers who expected to collect primary data, so it was necessary to adapt my research plan according to the evolution of the situation, especially to reduce the risks for activists. Most interviews were conducted online as well as many meetings, assemblies, and acts of protest that I joined. For a generation of digital natives as most of the interviewees, there were no technical difficulties, but it made even more necessary the construction of a relationship of trust during the whole process. When encounters were face-to-face, it was necessary to consider additional risks for both the researcher and the interviewees. These aspects are further explored in the methodological chapter.

At the same time, this exceptional situation was also deeply interesting for a sociologist. In the scientific literature, a crucial question is how social movements change. Many of them simply do not survive and others have recurrent lifecycles or tend to institutionalize, bureaucratize, moderate, destructure or radicalize (della Porta & Diani, 2006). The pandemic represented a new and powerful exogenous factor that forced social movements to adapt their tactical repertoires, organizational forms, frames and so on. In addition, this adaptation evolved according to the health situation and the new and frequent public measures adopted to limit the diffusion of the virus. Finally, according to Melucci (1989, 1996), protests should not be the only focus of social movement studies and it is important to pay more attention to less visible aspects, such as the preparation of protests, training, assemblies, as well as latent phases, in this case the hardest months of the pandemic. It is precisely in the moment of latency that social movements create and practice new cultural codes

The dissertation is structured as follows. The chapter “The sociology of social movements” is a literature review of social movement studies with a specific focus on the sociology of movements in the Global North. The chapter includes the main approaches in the field and those theories, paradigms and concepts that I consider of special importance for this thesis.

Social movements are not islands, they interact with each other, and they are influenced by past struggles. The chapter named “The roots of Fridays for Future Italy” is an exploration of past struggles that played an influence on FFF Italy, namely student movements, the environmental movement and the Global Justice Movement.

It follows the chapter “Research methodology” which focuses on my philosophical assumptions, research questions, methods and techniques, and data analysis. Special attention is dedicated to ethical issues and the complexity of doing research during a pandemic.

“A brief history of Fridays for Future Italy” is a chronology of the movement divided into four periods: emergence, momentum, pandemic decline, and rebound. Apart from describing the evolution of the movement, in each phase, the exogenous factors that played a relevant role are also identified. It represents the first empirical chapter.

The fifth chapter (“<We are the resistance>. Building a collective identity while preserving diversity”) is an exploration of the collective identity of FFF Italy and its internal diversity. One of the most relevant biographical consequences is also discussed: the adoption of a radical ecological habitus.

It is followed by the chapter dedicated to what I call the “liquid” structure of the movement (“The structure of Fridays for Future Italy”) and focused on the local and national levels, as well as their interconnections. The chapter ends with some observations and suggestions.

The seventh is the most conspicuous. “How do we change the world? The strategy of Fridays for Future” includes an analysis of the combination of claims, targets, allies, tactics and resources and it ends with an exploration of the political consequences of the movement. This is perhaps the most important chapter since the limited impact of FFF Italy is a crucial issue for the future of climate struggles.

The thesis ends with the general conclusions which summarize the key findings, and the contribution to the literature as well as discuss the main limitations and present some future perspectives.

## 2 The Sociology of Social Movements

This chapter is meant to be a look at social movement studies with a specific focus on the sociology of social movements. First, in section 2.1 I would like to give some preliminary definitions (social movement, environmental movement, environmental justice and climate justice) in order to make clearer the reading of the chapter. Then, the importance of social movements and the relevance of the research on them are discussed (section 2.2). The core of the chapter is dedicated to the main traditions of social movement studies with a focus on the approaches that are especially important for this thesis (sections 2.3 and 2.4). I conclude with a section on the combination of paradigms.

In this chapter, as well as in the whole thesis, the attention is focused on the Global North since my object of study is in Italy. However, it is important not to forget the relevance of decolonial, indigenous, environmental, pro-democracy and other social struggles in the Global South as well as Southern scholars that have studied them, many times with alternative theoretical frameworks than ours.

### 2.1 Definitions

#### Social movement

It is necessary to give some preliminary definitions to my object of study. In this, I am inspired by an ethical concern to produce forms of knowledge that are respectful and non-extractive. I agree that “social movements must be understood in their terms: namely, they are what they say they are” (Castells, 2010, p. 73). On its webpage, Fridays for Future Italy states that “Fridays for Future is a global movement for environmental and climate justice.” Therefore, there is no doubt that it is a movement, and we should begin by defining this concept.

Social movements are both a social and a theoretical construct, an abstraction from social reality whose purpose is to assist understanding and explanation (Rootes, 2004). There is no consensus on how to define them and I have no ambition to enter the debate to which several scholars with greater experience than me have already contributed. The Italian sociologist Mario Diani has developed a satisfactory definition that identifies those elements that are common to the different social movements' traditions.

A social movement can be defined as “networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, based on shared collective identities” (Diani, 1992, p. 1).

The existence of an informal network of individual and organized actors differentiates social movements from other collective actors such as formal organizations that can be a part, or not, of a social movement. Being an informal network does not imply a lack of organization.

Movements are engaged in political and/or cultural conflicts that are meant to promote or oppose social change. Conflict is an oppositional relationship between actors who seek control of the same political, economic or cultural power stake and make negative claims about each other. The opponents of social movements are generally the State, the Government or the elite. Social movements mobilize to challenge or defend current systems of authority.

Finally, the collective identity differentiates a social movement from protest events on certain issues or specific campaigns. It has been defined as “the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them” (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 91).

### Environmental movement

Fridays for Future is a specific form of social movement that can be labelled as an environmental movement. Combining two definitions (Brulle & Rootes, 2015; Diani, 1992), we can define an environmental movement as a social movement that advocates for a range of environmental concerns. This definition is very broad but indeed environmentalism is a very heterogeneous field of actors, actions, organizations, discourses and issues, ranging from the conservation of nature, animal rights, global climate change, protests against infrastructures, to the opposition to nuclear energy (Giugni & Grasso, 2015).

### Environmental justice

In its definition, Fridays for Future fights “for environmental and climate justice”. The concept of environmental justice emphasizes the unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of environmental issues. It puts under the radar the disadvantages in terms of ethnicity, class and gender and became popular thanks to the anti-toxics movement and the movement against environmental racism in the



United States, in the 1980s (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). In Italy, the association “A Sud” in the 2000s popularized the term even if environmental justice struggles were fought in the previous decades with different labels. An example is the civil disobedience conducted by Danilo Dolci and his group in the 1950s in Partinico, Sicily, for the equal access to water (Rosignoli, 2017).

### Climate justice

The concept of climate justice was developed in the late 1990s by several global groups such as CorpWatch, the Durban Group for Climate Justice and Climate Justice Now! at the beginning of the 21st century. There is no consensual definition of it in the academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), policymakers, social movements, and even inside FFF but we can say that its core is the politicization of climate change, i.e. a focus on the socio-political implications of climate change, starting from the role of inequalities both in the responsibilities and in the consequences (Meikle et al., 2016). FFF Italy’s conception of climate justice is explored in the chapter on strategy.

## 2.2 The importance of social movements

Social movements are a very old phenomenon that has shaped the course of history since their rise, from rebellions produced by plebeians, slaves, farmers, heretics, new cults, and indigenous people, to modern revolutions such as the American, the French, the Haitian, the Russian, the Chinese, and the Mexican.

With the rise of the liberal state in the XIX century, they multiplied and mobilized for very different goals: the abolition of slavery, the conservation of natural areas, against colonialization, and in favour of the rights of workers, women, migrants, indigenous people, animals and so on. Another turning point was the late 1960s. In that period they became a central and permanent component of Western societies, producing historical advances for the rights of Afro-Americans, women, LGBTQI+ people, and other categories. Consequently, social movements started attracting increasing interest from the Academy. Meyer & Tarrow (1998) argue we are living in a “social movement society”, in the sense protests are widespread, tolerated and even institutionalized and involve a heterogeneous plethora of citizens, not only radicals, unionised workers or students as in the past.

At the heart of social movements is the perception that the world is unjust (Castells, 2015; Gamson, 1992; Turner & Killian, 1987) because a powerful and privileged group dominates powerless or

subaltern groups and/or exploits nature and non-human species for its benefit. Privileged individuals are generally Western, white, belonging to an ethnic or religious majority, masculine, rich, and heterosexual while subalterns tend to be non-Western, non-white, minors, belonging to an ethnic or religious minority, feminine, poor, and non-heterosexual. Social movements generally fight to change the status quo, challenge existing relations of power and bring justice. Karl Marx famously said that “philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it”. Since social movements represent extremely or relatively powerless groups, they must resort to protest to make their voice heard (Lipsky, 1968), at least during the first phases.

History demonstrates mobilizations from below can produce deep and long-term social, cultural and political changes, as in the paradigmatic cases of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the national liberation movement of India. The change produced by movements is generally progressive, meaning more equality, freedom, autonomy, rights, and democracy. The relationship between social movements and democracy is of special importance. Social movements bring unattended issues to the public, exercise vigilance upon powerholders, ask for more participation and embody forms of participatory democracy (della Porta, 2013). If we consider the climate crisis a major existential threat and moral issue, it becomes crucial to study climate movements since they can be a crucial actor in ensuring a safe future for all.

However, we should not adopt a naïve vision of social movements. Even if most movements are progressive, some of them are reactionary, they fight to stop a change or they fight the status quo to restore a previous state of social affairs. Moreover, social movements are complex and heterogeneous phenomena, fields defined by social and ideological heterogeneity, they are not only vehicles for struggle but also sites of struggle (Juris & Khasnabish, 2015, p. 5).

Hence, social movements are a key component of our society and their study helps us to understand better our past, our present and our possible future. In “Nomads of the Present”, Alberto Melucci affirmed that social movements are “prophets of the present” since they announce and produce a new society, a transformation of the present, and an alternative future. Social movements are fora for experimenting with the new.

When we conduct research with social movement and not on social movement, we can produce forms of knowledge that empower them and multiply the potential for collective action. I explore these ethical concerns in the methodological chapter.

## 2.3 Main approaches to the sociology of social movements

In the following sections of the chapter, the main traditions of social movement studies are explored, with a focus on sociology. I begin with classic theories, which were not necessarily focused on social movements but more in general on collective behaviours. They were elaborated from the second half of the XIX century to the first half of the XX century and, besides being outdated, they still resonate in current discourses. Early Marxism also gave relevant contributions to the field from a conflict and determinist perspective. Then, I move to contemporary approaches to social movement studies which are resource mobilisation, political process, and a broad range of cultural approaches that focus on concepts such as frames, identities and emotions. Some recent theorizations on transnational networks and social media that have special importance for the topic of interest are also analysed. Finally, the chapter ends with some reflections on the combination of paradigms.

It would be impossible to include in this literature review all theories, paradigms, approaches and concepts that have been developed. The attempt is to include first the ones that are considered historical milestones and, secondly, those that I consider of special importance for this thesis.

### Classical theories of collective behaviour

Classical theories conceptualized collective behaviour as part of the relatively spontaneous, unregulated and unstructured set of group behaviours such as crowds, panics, riots, and social movements.

In 1894, the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon published “The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind”. He viewed crowds as unified actors with a mind of their own, capable to overwhelm individual judgments and force them to act irrationally, pathologically and violently<sup>27</sup>. This emphasis on the irrational and primordial inspired the tradition of collective behaviour theories. Moreover, remembrances of Le Bon’s ideas are still used by mass media and elites to stigmatize the demands of social movements as irrational and their behaviours as criminal and violent (Almeida, 2019).

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<sup>27</sup> Le Bon’s theory was very much inspired by his conservative interpretation of historical events he witnessed such as the Paris Commune and the rise of the authoritarian movement led by Georges Boulanger.

Another inspiration for collective behaviour theories was Émile Durkheim. For the French sociologist, as traditional societies grow in size and complexity and become industrial societies, social integration is weakened by anomie (insufficient regulation of behaviour) and egoism, contributing to unconventional behaviours such as suicide (Durkheim, 1897). The continued existence of a society is allowed by religious rituals. In his book “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (Durkheim, 1912), the French sociologist argued that intensive collective actions are made possible through the performance of rituals that produce collective effervescence, a process of synchronization and intensification of shared emotions that transcendence of the individual. These rituals bind the group together and enable it to pursue a shared action, such as the preparation for warfare or collective responses to natural disasters, and ultimately shared goals<sup>28</sup>. The influential “Introduction to the Science of Sociology” (1921) by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess from the Chicago School linked Durkheim’s ideas of social breakdown to collective behaviour as well as taking inspiration from Le Bon’s conceptualization of the crowd.

The symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer introduced a social-psychological orientation focused on the small, everyday tasks and the social construction of meaning in interaction. When people interact with each other, they exchange symbols. People are constantly trying to discern what type of behaviour is appropriate, so they do not respond directly to others’ behaviours but the interpretation of others’ behaviour. For Blumer, collective behaviour is triggered by some disruption in the standard routines of everyday life. In contrast with other scholars of the period, Blumer did not see collective behaviours as necessarily dangerous, because they could produce also positive outcomes as in the case of social movements.

In his theory, there are three kinds of social movements: general social movements (with broad and vague goals), specific social movements (with specific objectives), and expressive social movements (which do not seek to affect change but constitute expressive forms of collective behaviour) (Martin, 2015). One of his most influential contributions was the identification of the stages of social movements’ lifecycles (della Porta & Diani, 2006). The first is social ferment, characterized by unorganized, unfocused activities led by “agitators.” The second is popular excitement, in which the causes of discontent and the objectives of the action are defined. The third phase is formalization, i.e. the creation of a formal organization to discipline and coordinate participation. Finally, in the

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<sup>28</sup> Durkheim based his theories on the ethnographies conducted on Australian Aboriginal tribes by Walter Spencer and Frank Gillen. Successive theorisations on social movements’ rituals, collective emotions and identity clearly owe a debt to Durkheim.

institutionalization phase, the movement becomes a professional structure and an organic part of society<sup>29</sup>.

The value of Blumer's theory was to include agency, movements' cultures and solidarity (*esprit de corps*, in his words ) while the main problem was the lack of structural factors and contexts and the unawareness of the role of pre-existing organizations (Martin, 2015). Moreover, his rigid scheme of movements' lifecycles cannot be generalised since many of them simply do not survive, destructure, radicalize or become service providers.

The structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons had a deep influence on other collective behaviour theories. The general idea of the North American sociologist was that the breakdown of traditional patterns of order produces elementary forms of collective behaviour that can convert into social movements. These dysfunctions in the system need to be re-absorbed, in other words, integrated into new structures and norms.

Neil Smelser was an alumnus of Talcott Parsons who published a classic book called "Theory of Collective Behavior" (1962). Smelser shifted the focus of analysis from interactive processes (typical of the Chicago School) to structural problems at the macro level (Johnston, 2014). In his theory, he identified six determinants, or necessary conditions, for the life-cycle of social movements. Structural conduciveness is how the social structure encourages the development of collective behaviours. Structural strain is what nowadays we call grievances. The third determinant is the spread of generalized beliefs, generally an ideology. The fourth is the presence of precipitating factors that set off collective behaviours. Then, we have the mobilization of participants. Finally, social control must be broken down by activists since it is meant to prevent or inhibit the accumulation of determinants. Smelser's theory was based on the logic of value-added. In other words, the presence of a determinant activates the following one until the accumulation of the six triggers a collective episode such as panic, public demonstration, strike, riot or revolution.

Leadership was also analysed by some collective behaviour theorists. According to Max Weber<sup>30</sup> (2005), charisma is an extraordinary quality held by individuals to convince people to violate laws

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<sup>29</sup> These last phases recall Robert Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy, theorized in 1912 concerning political parties and trade unions. The German-Italian sociologist argued that as far as organizations grow, there is a necessity to build a professional bureaucracy to maintain efficiency. Again, for reasons of efficiency, the decisions are delegated to a few people that form this bureaucracy. With time, this group becomes a self-referential and self-perpetuating oligarchy, mainly interested to increase its power and detached from rank-and-file activists.

<sup>30</sup> Weber introduced the notion of charisma in his theorization of power and legitimate authority. Power is the ability of an individual or group to achieve their own goals against others' will. Legitimate authority is those forms of power that

and traditions and produce a revolutionary change. Some collective behaviour theorists (Kornhauser, 1959; Smelser, 1962) assumed that charismatic leaders produced a magnetic influence on individuals already marked by structural strains, leading them to collective action.

Classic structural-functionalist theories suffered from a certain mechanicism and reductionism and the absence of the micro level and internal variables such as agency, psychological factors, tactics and collective identity (Martin, 2015). However, successive theories of the political process were somehow inspired by their macro-level variables. The concept of Political Opportunity Structure, for instance, remembers Smelser's structural conduciveness.

Another influential collective behaviour sociologist was James C. Davies, who introduced the theory of unfulfilled expectations in the 1960s. In short, unfulfilled expectations lead to collective frustration and aggressive behaviours in the forms of unrest, protest and even revolution (Johnston, 2014). Davies' ideas were somehow similar to relative deprivation theories in which the perceived discrepancy between what people achieve and what they think they should achieve explain social mobilizations.

### Early Marxism

If in structural-functionalism change is generally gradual and conflicts are reabsorbed, in the conflict perspective introduced by Karl Marx social inequalities lead to permanent class conflicts<sup>31</sup> and quick and overwhelming changes. The works of Marx were very much related to social movements:

Marxism is a body of theory that developed from and was crafted for social movements. The work of Marx and Engels represents a distillation of the experiences, debates, theories and conflicts faced by the popular movements of the nineteenth century, that sought in turn to contribute to those movements' further development (Barker et al., 2013, p. 1).

For Marx, capitalism is dominated by competition which drives labour exploitation or the "pumping" of the surplus value (i.e. unpaid surplus labour in the money form). Social movements emerge as

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are considered just by subordinate individuals and groups. He distinguished between three types of authority: traditional, rational-legal and charismatic. The latter is the most revolutionary and it emerges in times of distress. It derives its legitimacy from the individual's extraordinary personal qualities but it is very unstable since it depends on the survival of the leader. This is why charismatic authority needs to be converted into the more stable traditional or rational-legal authorities.

<sup>31</sup> Marx believed that class struggle was the central fact of social evolution. In ancient societies, class conflict was between the ruling class of citizens and a class of slaves. In feudalism, the juxtaposition was between nobles and serfs. In industrial societies, class conflict is fought by the proletariat, which includes anyone who earns their livelihood by selling their labour power and being paid a salary, and the bourgeoisie, the owner of the means of production whose income derives from the pumping of the surplus value.

collective actors that transcend individual responses and carry on the class struggle until the burst of a social revolution, whose final goal is to build a non-capitalist, non-antagonist, and non-classist society (Barker, 2013). Karl Marx and orthodox Marxists prioritized their attention on the struggles carried on by the labour movement, which for them included trade unions, socialist parties, and cooperatives.

Class struggle is not only a “war of manoeuvre” (strikes, revolutions) but it is also a “war of position”, to use two concepts introduced by Antonio Gramsci. In classic Marxism, false consciousness permeates society. In other words, in a capitalist society, the masses are unable to recognize exploitation. Hence, the goal of labour movements is also to fight a war over people’s minds to shift from false consciousness to class consciousness, i.e. the sense of class belonging and awareness of class interests and aspirations. Through this, the class in-itself becomes a class for-itself. This conceptualization is quite similar to the contemporary concept of collective identity. I go back to Gramsci's theories in the section dedicated to the cultural turn.

The main criticisms of this Marxist tradition were three. First of all, it is quite deterministic since the level of development of productive forces and the dynamics of class relations determine the evolution of social and political conflicts. Second, the tendency among orthodox Marxists to see movements as homogeneous actors, denying internal conflicts. Third, the omission of other forms of oppression and social struggles, for instance, patriarchy and feminist movements.

### Resource Mobilization Theories (RMTs)

In the late 1960s and early 1970s social movements became a permanent component in the West, with some authors theorizing the formation of a “social movement society” (Meyer & Tarrow, 1997). Consequently, social movement studies grew considerably and North American scholars such as William Gamson, Charles Tilly, Anthony Oberschall, John McCarthy, Mayer Zald, Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, John Lofland, Roberta Ash, Jo Freeman, and Gary Marx revolutionized them. All those authors were more sympathetic to social movements than early scholars of the collective behaviour tradition. In their works, they adopted the paradigm of the rational actor. They did not view social movements as unusual or irrational phenomena, but rather as normal political behaviours adopted by excluded social groups led by a rational and utilitarian costs-benefits analysis.

The main authors in the Resource Mobilization field are considered Anthony Oberschall, Doug McCarthy and Mayer Zald. Resource mobilization theorists deemphasized the role of grievance and

discontent and claimed that the professionalized ability of movement “entrepreneurs” and organizations to procure and use resources and incentives were the key explanans of the success of social movements.

One of the starting points in the tradition of the RMTs was the rational choice theory and the collective action problem. According to Mancur Olson (1971), it is not rational for individuals to join a collective action if they perceive their contribution is marginal and if they will benefit from the public good pursued in any case. The solution to this collective action problem is to provide positive incentives, which reward participants, and/or negative incentives, which punish nonparticipants (Oberschall, 1973). Successive scholars have classified incentives as material, solidary or purposive (Oliver, 2013). Material incentives are economic goods and resources. Solidary or social incentives derive from social interactions and they can take the form of prestige, recognition, pleasure and emotional gratification. Purposive or moral incentives are benefits deriving from doing the right thing according to religious, ethical, and political ideologies or identities.

Adopting a sociological tradition dating back to Max Weber and Robert Michels, many resource mobilization scholars considered that social movements inevitably institutionalize and bureaucratize for efficiency reasons and finally convert into an organization. This led to a focus on the role of entrepreneurs and professionalized and well-structured Social Movements Organizations (SMO) in the recollection of resources (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and in influencing the likelihood of success (Gamson, 1975). On the other hand, other authors claimed that segmentary, polycephalous, and reticulate movements are better equipped to prevent repression, facilitate multipenetration, maximize adaptation, promote innovation, and reduce the effect of failures (Gerlach, 2016).

Resources can be divided into moral, cultural, social-organization, human and material (Edwards et al., 2018). Moral resources are legitimacy, solidarity and sympathetic support, and celebrity. Cultural resources are artefacts, symbols, beliefs, values, identities, know-how, tactical repertoires, and behavioural norms. Social-organizational resources are social networks, infrastructures, and organizations. Human resources are labour, experience, skills, expertise, and leadership. Finally, material resources are money, property, and supplies.

There are four mechanisms of resource access: self-production, aggregation (of the resources held by individuals and groups), co-optation/appropriation (borrowing of resources under the control of other groups and organizations) and patronage (substantive donations from individuals, foundations or governments) (Edwards et al., 2018).



Social networks play special importance in recent RMTs since they facilitate recruitment and sustenance of action over time, by collecting resources and keeping collective identity alive in periods of latency (della Porta & Diani, 2006). They are also the product of collective actions. The appropriation of pre-existing networks by a new social movement is a typical process named "bloc recruitment" (Oberschall, 1973). In some cases, however, the presence of social networks can discourage participation. Social networks are a meso-level factor that can fill the gap between structure and agency. For this reason, it is important to consider the context in which social networks operate.

Resource Mobilization Theories' contribution was fundamental since they depathologized social movements and help to identify crucial variables for the explanation of mobilizations. However, the over-emphasis on the rational decision-making of SMOs hid the structural sources of conflict as well as solidarity and emotional, cognitive, socio-psychological and cultural factors. At the end of section 2.3, we will see how the cultural turn addressed those variables.

#### Political-Process Theories (PPTs)

The political process approach was developed by Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow in the USA and then expanded by European scholars such as Hanspeter Kriesi, Herbert Kitschelt, Ruud Koopmans, and Jan Duyvendak. Those authors also started from the assumption of the rational view of the action but shifted the attention to the dynamic relationship between the political-institutional environment and social movements (della Porta & Diani, 2020).

The most used concept is political opportunity structure (POS) (Eisinger, 1973), which is the degree of openness and closure of the formal political system. More formalistically, it has been defined as "consistent but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements" (Tarrow, 1996, p. 54). The POS is constituted by opportunities, the positive cues from the political environment to the challengers, and threats, the negative signals. In more recent theorizations, opportunities and threats occur simultaneously and they are not an objective condition but something that must be interpreted by social movements (Almeida, 2019).

In the influential work of Tarrow (1990) on social protests in Italy, the focus is not on the reasons behind collective actions but on why they happen at a specific time. The answer is the opening of political opportunities, the presence of allies and the perception of the vulnerability of the enemy. If

the mobilization is successful, the POS is modified and protests can extend to other segments of the population giving rise to a "cycle of protest". On the other hand, demobilization can occur when high risks and costs frustrate activists.

In the literature, common examples of POS are the state's capacity and propensity for repression, the openness or closure of the political system, the stability or instability of the elite, and the presence or absence of elite allies (Giugni & Grasso, 2015). Some authors (Gamson & Meyer, 1996) also include the media system's openness/closeness to social movements as part of the POS. Others (Almeida, 2019) prefer to include media in a Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS) that encompass also other cultural factors such as legal discourse and media coverage, gender expectations, ideological currents and institutional norms.

The State's propensity for repression is one of the key variables in shaping social movements' behaviour. The escalated-force model for controlling public order tends to use violence, avoids communication with demonstrators, and can produce de-mobilization but also radicalization. The negotiated control model generally tolerates protests and promotes communication with demonstrators. Since the 1970s-1980s, there has been a general shift from the former to the latter even if with frequent reversals when symbolic and strategic territories are involved and with a distinction between "good" and "bad" protesters made by authorities (della Porta & Diani, 2006).

Besides the State, it is important to consider all other relevant allies and opponents that interact with social movements: the alliance system and conflict system. Within these systems, there are four different kinds of behaviours: cooperation and competition, which occur with allies, bargaining and confrontation, which occur with adversaries (della Porta & Rucht, 1995). If we also add the general public (sympathizers, bystanders) and mediators (mass media, third parties), we arrive at the concept of "System of Social Movements' Reference Groups" (Rucht, 2004b).

Another important concept within the political process tradition is the repertoire of contention (Tilly, 1986), which is the set of means used for making claims (della Porta & Diani, 2006). Tilly argued that each period and place is characterized by a common repertoire of contention that is widely available and transposable but that also bounds activists to familiar and routinary tactics (even though they are ineffective), limiting innovation and experimentation. A classic distinction is between conventional actions and unconventional actions. The first ones are related to party politics (standing for, working with, or belonging to a political party, or contacting a party official), and the latter are all other forms of political activity (petitions, boycotts, marches, sabotage etc.). However, that

distinction is now blurring and obsolete since some actions that in the past were considered unconventional and lowly tolerated, such as peaceful demonstrations, are now quite common and socially accepted. A more useful classification is around five types of activism: conventional, demonstrative (rallies and marches), confrontational (blockades and sit-ins), property damage and violence (Saunders, 2013).

The repertoire of each movement is influenced both by internal and external factors. The following characteristics have been identified as the most important for reaching effectiveness: novelty, militancy (or disruptiveness), variety, size, and cultural resonance (the link with mainstream values and beliefs) (Taylor & Van dyke, 2004).

The political process approach has been the most influential perspective on social movements over the past three decades (Almeida, 2019). However, some limits have been noted. The concept of POS has been over-stretched to include countless dimensions, it is considered too deterministic or based on old models of nation-states, mainstream “party democracies”, and specific mature welfare states while the social construction of opportunities has been neglected in most cases (della Porta, 2013). Moreover, as with RMTs, PPTs tend to neglect the role of cultural, social-psychological, cognitive, and emotional factors.

In response to some of these criticisms, PPTs’ scholars have recognized that opportunities shape movements, but that movements can also frame and create opportunities, sometimes with internal disputes (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Recent theorizations move the focus from the structure of opportunities to the dynamic interactions between them and movements, also considering temporal and geographic variations. Moreover, with the new wave of globalization in the 1990s, the scientific literature has started putting the spotlight on the transnational opportunity structure or multilevel opportunity structure and its interaction with the “rooted cosmopolitans” (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005) that form the rising global civil society.

### **New Social Movement (NSM) theories**

In the 1970s, European scholars started gaining prominence by studying new forms of subjectivities such as ecologism, feminism, gay liberation and peace movements, urban struggles, and student and youth activism. Those new forms of activism were grouped under the label of “new social movements by European scholars such as Alberto Melucci, Alain Touraine, Jürgen Habermas, and Claus Offe

that explicitly departed from Marxism and structural-functionalism and turned their attention to the cultural aspects of new social movements.

In the classic theory of political cleavages, the advent of the market economy and the construction of nation-states produced four kinds of conflict: capital vs labour, urban vs rural, centre vs periphery, church vs state, all with a specific social base and material or political interests (Lipset & Rokkan 1967). On the other hand, new social movements were considered a rupture from those previous forms of social mobilization and conflict.

In terms of social compositions, those scholars stressed that NSMs were constituted by highly educated new middle classes concerned with the self-defence of society against the intrusions of the state, the market and mass media, or with post-material goals such as the quality of life and the development of new lifestyles, rather than the seize of power and the redistribution of wealth (Pichardo, 1997). This was somehow in line with the theory of postmaterialism developed by the political scientists Ronald Inglehart (1977). These new middle classes were considered central in some aspects (educational level, geographical location, exposure to cultural messages) but marginal in others (position in the labour market, access to the political system, social recognition) (Melucci, 1996a).

Touraine (1971) theorized that in the post-industrial, technocratic or programmed society the cleavage capital-labour is replaced by the conflict between the structure of economic/political decision-making, formed by technocrats, bureaucrats and rationalizers, and those who are reduced to dependent participation such as professionals, students, research technicians, maintenance workers. In other words, the conflict is between “those segments of society which are central and those which are peripheral or marginal” (Touraine, 1971, p. 9). The latter suffers from alienation more than exploitation, i.e. their social and cultural relations are entirely dictated by the ruling class to maintain its domination. These new conflicts are not around wealth or property but programmatic decisions, knowledge and information, used by the organizational apparatus to build and sustain growth. Therefore, the fight shifts from economic rights to freedom and cultural and social rights (instruction, health and information).

Similarly, to Habermas (1981) new social movements emerge to resist the rising technocratic intervention of the (Welfare) State in more areas of social life through surveillance, regulation, and control. In other words, they are a form of resistance to the colonization of the lifeworld by seeking

a free space and autonomy. They are not interested in material claims but in post-material values such as quality of life, equality, self-realization, participation, and human rights.

On the other hand, Melucci (1996a) claimed that in complex societies power is hidden behind bureaucratic apparatuses (world media system, health and mental institutions, computer technology centres etcetera) and it is based on the production and circulation of symbols and information. New movements face the dominant codes with symbolic challenges whose goal is to expose the power that is hidden behind operational codes, formal rules, bureaucratic procedures and decision-making processes (Melucci, 1989). Once power becomes visible, it can be confronted. So also for Melucci the social struggle shifts from the economic/industrial system or the seizure of power to the cultural system such as the defence and revindication of difference and identity against apparatus, independence from the system or solidarity (Melucci, 1991).

In the struggles of the 1960s-1970s Melucci noted the end of the separation between public and private since everyday private life became a battlefield. “The personal is political” was a popular feminist slogan. In successive theorizations, this politicization of sectors that were considered non-political (e.g. economy, labour, but also everyday life’s consumption, leisure time etc.) has been called “subpolitics” (Beck, 1999). Beck saw it as part of the “reinvention of politics”, i.e. the end of the monopoly of politics by old institutions (parties, trade unions) and the emergence of a “new politics”, with new actors (e.g. movements), forms of organization (horizontality) and experimentation of tactics (Alteri et al., 2017).

Alberto Melucci, both sociologist and psychoanalyst, was one of the great theorists of collective identity. This can be defined as “the process by which social actors recognize themselves – and are recognized by other actors – as part of broader groupings, and develop emotional attachments to them” (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 91). This process implies the definition of “we”, “antagonists” and “audiences”. In the constructionist approach of Melucci, the movement identity is the product of negotiations between the various actors that form the movement, with a permanent tension between the auto-identification of the movement and the hetero-identification (Melucci, 1991) and the related social legitimization/delegitimization.

Collective identity can be exclusive or inclusive and multiple. It can be formed by specific social traits such as class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or the relationship with specific organizations, shared orientations, values, attitudes, worldviews, lifestyles, and shared experiences of action.

The novelty of “new” social movements is that the social construction of a collective identity tended to safeguard the individual identity (Melucci, 1996b). Also in current NSMs, collectivities, ideologies and identities are no longer rock-solid, monolithic and demanding self-sacrifice but they tend to preserve subjectivities (Raffini & Pirni, 2019). In other words, diversity is a value. According to Martuccelli (2017), mass societies are not only characterized by egoistic individualism or privatization but also by “singularism”, the self-affirmation of the individual which seeks recognition of its singularity, and unicity by interacting with others. However, this effort to respect every person in his/her singularity and autonomy can sometimes clash with the movement’s imperative of the organization setting or its own shared identity (Melucci, 1996b).

For Melucci, collective identity formation was a goal in itself. For others it is a vehicle that allows social movements to cohere, it provides its activists with incentives to participate, by reducing costs, risks and uncertainty, and allows the movement to have continuity in time (Johnston, 2014). It is also important to take into account that identities are constructed in and through spaces and places of interaction (Miller, 2000), sometimes leading to the creation of “free spaces” and “identity spaces” in which movements can maintain their autonomy.

NSMs theorists were also concerned with new forms of participation, in specific with the meta-political criticism of representative democracy assumed by movements by adopting decentralized and participatory forms of democracy (Offe, 1985). As Melucci stated, “the organizational forms of movements are not simply instrumental in their goals, but are goals in themselves” (Melucci, 2000, p. 95). Participatory democracy is part of NSMs’ identity and part of the world they want to realize.

Another influential European theorist of this period was the sociologist and psychologist Francesco Alberoni. His main contribution was the concept of “nascent state”, the emergence phase featuring creativity, high emotional involvement and the promise of a utopian renewal of the world that then leads to the formation of a movement and, finally, of a new institution (Alberoni, 1977).

Finally, other contributions to the study of NSM came from a group of researchers coordinated by Alessandro Pizzorno focused on the work struggles between 1968 and 1973 (Pizzorno et al., 1978). Regarding the rising environmental movements in Italy, the main works were conducted by Raimondo Strassoldo (1993) and Mario Diani (1988).

These intakes from European sociology revolutionized social movement studies. However, they were also accused of cultural reductionism and omission of political struggles, political contexts and

material concerns (Martin, 2015). Secondly, the affirmation that collective identity and autonomy are new claims is quite debatable. In general, the discontinuity between old social movements and new social movements is lower than what NSMs scholars argued. Thirdly, in the "Glorious Thirty", Fordism generally provided high salaries and leisure time to consume the mass product while the Keynesian State guaranteed generous welfare provisions and trade unions were strong enough. However, in the post-Fordist and neo-liberal societies that emerged in the late '70s, production has become flexible, welfare services have been dismantled, and trade unions weakened. The consequence is that struggles over material issues such as rising job precarity, unemployment, affordable housing, and inequalities have not disappeared. On the contrary, during the Great Recession, they have reinforced notably in countries such as Spain, Greece and Italy. The same is true with the burst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The cultural turn

In some ways, New Social Movement theories formed part of the cultural turn that since the 1970s had a deep impact on social movement studies, bringing back emotions but also introducing frames, narratives, storytelling, music and identity. In North America, authors such as David Snow, Robert Benford, James Jasper, Jeff Goodwin, and Francesca Polletta made a great contribution to the study of the cultural aspects of social movements.

### Frame theory, media, and narratives

A milestone of the cultural turn was the introduction of the frame theory. It has been recognized that a focus alone on mobilizing structures and political opportunities is not sufficient to account for collective action and that grievances must be put in an appropriate cultural context. Frame theory was introduced into social movement studies in an influential paper by Snow et al. (1986), taking inspiration from the works of Erwin Goffman<sup>32</sup> and the collective behaviour tradition.

In social movement studies, frames are schemata of interpretation or clusters of ideas that "guide participants' interpretations of what needs to be changed, how to do it, and why" (Johnston, 2014).

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<sup>32</sup> Goffman introduced the term in his book *Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (1974). With the concept, he meant that people use culturally determined definitions of reality to perceive and make sense of events.

On the other hand, framing is the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction that mediate between opportunity and action (McAdam et al., 1996).

Social movements frame opportunities and threats from the political system (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Nevertheless, they also develop strategic framing processes. In the framework by Snow et al. (1986), diagnostic framing is the social construction of grievances and responsibilities, prognostic framing consists of the social construction of solutions and motivation framing is the appeals to mobilize. William Gamson has introduced other concepts. As outcomes of diagnostic framing, injustice frames (Gamson, 1992) are essential resources used by movements to label an issue or event as unjust, identify the victims and blame a concrete target. Motivation framing, on the other hand, overlaps with the concept of agency frame used by Gamson (2013) to mean the "consciousness that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action". Finally, Gamson uses the term identity frame to mean a process of identity building.

Framing contests occur in a Discursive Opportunity Structure (DOS), the equivalent of the Political Opportunity Structure for policy outcomes. Regarding them, Rucht (2004a) claims that access to media and a positive media image are necessary preconditions for the success of social movements. Similarly, theorists of new social movements such as Touraine, Castells and Melucci have sustained that the central stake in the social conflict today is the control of the flow of information.

Social movements are aware of the importance of communication. Mass media spread activists' messages to activists, supporters, sympathizers, allies and decision-makers, help create and reinforce identity and perform artistic actions (della Porta & Diani, 2006; Rohlinger & Corrigan-Brown, 2018). That is why social movements develop media strategies, that for Rucht (2004a) are four: attack (the explicit critique and even violent action against media), adaptation (the acceptance of the mass media's rules), abstention (the withdrawal from attempts to influence the mass media) and alternative (the creation of movements' independent media).

However, the media arena is characterized by competition over access and resonance between movements, counter-movements and governments. Therefore, framing becomes a "struggle for cultural supremacy" (Tarrow, 2011) to impose one's frame, neutralize adversaries' frames and convince the "gallery" (bystanders, sympathizers) (Gamson, 2004).

At the same time, the relationship between movements and mass media is asymmetric. Social movements need media attention to conduct successful protests and so they need to carry out actions



which are at the same time newsworthy (innovative and/or massive) and aligned to the good taste of media. In other words, they are forced to accept the media's rules. On the other hand, mass media do not need so many social movements and they tend to under-represent them, focus only on newsworthy events, stigmatize or distort them or rely on official sources (Rohlinger & Corrigan-Brown, 2018). Therefore, a parallel strategy of movements is to create alternative media (e.g. newspapers, radio) or to use social media to bypass them.

In recent years, frame theory has been criticized for being too cognitive and focused on logical persuasion (Davis, 2002), though the works by William Gamson on injustice are a notable exception. In alternative to frames, scholars have developed analyses of the role of narratives (or stories), "an account of a sequence of events in the order in which they occurred" composed of an orientation (which sets the scene), a series of actions and an evaluation (Polletta, 2013). Narratives are used to amplify emotions, recruit, change opinions, cement social bonds, strengthen the commitment to goals and collective identity, and oppose dominant narratives (Polletta, 1998).

## Ideology

If frames are a common variable in contemporary social movement studies, the same is not true for ideologies. Ideologies are systems of beliefs, ideas, values, principles, ethics, morals, and goals that overlap, shape, and reinforce one another (Beck, 2013). The word ideology was coined in 1796 by the French writer Destutt de Tracy who conceived it as a "science of ideas" but it soon assumed a pejorative connotation (Oliver & Johnston, 2000).

For Robert Dalton (1994), ideology is a crucial variable that leads to the creation of collective identity and together they can influence the social movement's structures, strategies, tactics, alliance options, perception of political opportunities, and frames.

On the other hand, several authors have belittled the concept by stressing the lack of ideological coherence among individuals and the mismatch between ideas and behaviour (della Porta & Diani, 2006). Moreover, the notion of ideology collapses two different aspects of culture: values and the interpretative tools that enable people to make sense of their world (e.g. habits, memories, prejudices, mental schemata, predispositions, common wisdom, practical knowledge etcetera).

Many authors prefer to use frames instead of ideologies. It is necessary to clarify their difference. Ideologies are whole systems of beliefs, ideas, and values that are generally written and discussed as

such. Marxism is perhaps the best example but also liberalism, conservatism and fascism. Frames sometimes derive from ideologies, but they are not written and discussed as such, they are rather flexible and function on the cognitive and emotional levels to interpret and give meaning. However, in social movement studies, the distinction between ideologies and frames is not always clear and some scholars even use them interchangeably.

A different conception of ideology comes from Marxism. For Marx and Engels, ideology is the set of dominant ideas and beliefs that are used to justify the power of the ruling class by instilling false consciousness in the proletariat. Antonio Gramsci (2014) expanded this view in his “Prison Notebooks” in a very influential way. The State is not only an apparatus of coercion but also of manipulation of human minds. One of its functions is to create a cultural hegemony that can be viewed as the institutionalization of ideology within society, which serves to shape collective actions and produce social control and legitimation of the elite (Beck, 2013). The cultural hegemony of the ruling class is reproduced by religion, education, parties and family and exercised with at least the partial consensus of the subalterns since it penetrates common-sense and is perceived as natural and inevitable. Gramsci believed that what was needed was a struggle for cultural supremacy to shift from false consciousness (the unawareness of inequality, oppression, and exploitation) to class consciousness (the sense of class belonging and awareness of class interests).

Marxist concerns are nowadays centred on how the hegemony of neoliberal ideology built by the transnational historic bloc, composed of globalizing capitalists, institutions of global governance and various organic intellectuals, is challenged by the counterhegemony produced by anti-systemic social movements. In this "war of position" social movements create "post-capitalist sensibilities and values" and a "belief in the possibility of a radically transformed future" (Carroll & Ratner, 2010, p. 8).

## Emotions

The return of emotions, feelings, and affections in the 1990s was also part of the general cultural turn. If they were central in collective behaviour theories, they have been neglected by resource mobilization and political process scholars. James Jasper, one of the most prominent theorists of emotions in social movements, affirms that “emotions pervade all social life, social movements included” (Jasper, 1998, p. 398). This does not make social movements irrational, as in classic theories of collective behaviour. These and other theorizations were based on the Cartesian separation between body (*res extensa*) and

mind (*res cogitans*) and so between emotions and reasons. This conception was and is still very influential. Max Weber, for example, separated affective social action from instrumental-rational social action. On the contrary, neurocognitive studies (Damasio, 1995) stress that we need to go beyond Cartesian dualism since the body and the mind interact with each other and that emotions are essential for rational action.

The main authors in the analysis of emotions in social movement studies are Jeff Goodman and James Jasper who adopt a social-constructivist approach, also influenced by the sociology of emotions and feminism. In the weak version of social-constructivism, primary or reflex emotions (e.g. anger, surprise, fear, anger, happiness, sadness, disgust) are universal and directly tied to the body while secondary emotions (e.g. compassion, shame, disappointment, pride, alienation, hate, anxiety, indignation, and awe) are culturally constructed rather than being automatic somatic response and they are formed by a combination of primary emotions. In other words, secondary emotions make sense only in a specific cultural context. This explains why the emotional turn can be viewed as part of the more general cultural turn that began in the 1970s.

Emotions can have a positive or negative impact on participation, commitment, cohesion, sustained mobilization, identity building and demobilization (van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019). They are also a crucial component of frames (Jasper, 1998) and subjected to emotion work (Hochschild, 2015), i.e. those processes that try to change emotions in degree or quality, for instance through framing. Opponents of social movements also use emotions, especially to frighten and goad to a mistake made out of anger, leading to emotional or psychological warfare with activists (Jasper & Polletta, 2018)

Two categories of emotions are central to the emergence of protests: moral emotions and affective commitments (Jasper & Polletta, 2018). Moral emotions are involved in forming moral thoughts and behaviours, common examples are pride, shame, compassion, and indignation. Affective commitments are positive and negative feelings about people, places, ideas, and things such as love, hate, respect and trust. Another useful distinction is between shared emotions, similar emotional responses felt by activists, and reciprocal emotions, emotional ties binding together activists (Jasper, 1998).

Jasper (1997) gives some centrality to moral shocks which are “the experience of a sudden and deeply emotional stimulus that causes an individual to come to terms with a reality that is quite opposed to the values and morals already held by that individual” (Mariel Lemonik Arthur, 2013). In other words,

this emotional cocktail emerges when an unexpected event or information generates a sense of outrage that can lead to mobilization, with or without previous social networks.

For a long time, one of the most neglected aspects has been what Jasper (1997) calls the “pleasure of protest” which includes fun, joy, a sense of community and identity, opportunities for creativity, flirting, and romance. The defence of the right to play and find pleasure was central in movements such as the Yippies, the Metropolitan Indians, the gay liberation movement, the queer politics, the Provos, and the Global Justice Movement but we can claim that it has some relevance in all social movements, starting with their performances. Notable works in this field were conducted by Benjamin Shepard (2009, 2011) who first analysed the use of creativity, pleasure, and play as a resource of the queer community of New York for many functions such as social cohesion, recruitment, commitment, garnering media attention, reinventing protest repertoires, preventing burnouts. Moreover, Shepard sees pleasure and play as an expression of liberty and pursuit of happiness against the hegemonic culture of productivism, social control, and inhibition of body pleasure and passions.

## 2.4 Recent theorizations on the transnationalization of protests and the digital revolution

Fridays for Future is a transnational movement that heavily relies on digital technologies. In this section, some recent theorizations on the transnationalizations of protests and the digital revolution that have particular importance are discussed. The two aspects are interrelated: the transnationalization of protests is enormously facilitated, among other factors, by digital means such as e-mails, messaging apps, social media and video calls.

### The transnationalization of protest

Since the 1990s, the literature has strengthened its focus on the global and transnational dimensions of social mobilization. Cross-national boundaries can be traced back at least to the XVIII and XIX centuries in the struggles for demanding national constitutions, democracy, abolition of slavery, political rights for women, and socio-economic rights for workers (Bob, 2018).

Since the late 1980s, a series of changes in the global political context favoured the transnationalization of collective action: the collapse of the Soviet bloc; the growth of international institutions, treaties, and events; the rising power of transnational corporations; the development of

electronic communications and the spread of inexpensive international travels (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005). In the 1990s, a sharp qualitative and quantitative change became visible as the result of those factors and continued in the 2000s.

First, the collapse of the Soviet bloc opened new opportunities for Eastern European civil societies that were previously repressed by communist regimes (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005). Western governments gave active support to the growth of Eastern European civil society actors.

The 1990s were defined also by the proliferation and/or growth of international institutions (e.g. the European Union, the World Trade Organization), treaties (e.g. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), and events (e.g. G8). This internationalism was the result of rising awareness among states that global coordination was required to tackle problems (for instance climate change). At the same time, the growing power of transnational corporations, favoured by neo-liberal policies, became evident to the general public thanks to social mobilisations. In the last thirty years, the global civil society (Castells, 2008) has forged broad coalitions formed by NGOs, social movements, religious movements, and trade unions that have interacted with states in the conferences and fora organized by the United Nations. In the literature, this corresponds to the concept of transnational opportunity structure, i.e. the opportunities and threats at the international and supranational levels (Martin, 2015). At the same time, global civil society has contested some of those international events and organizations, for instance, the WTO and the G8, by organizing protests and creating its own spaces of debate such as the World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2001 (Bob, 2018).

Transnational corporations and international organisations have risen as the new favourite of the global civil, together with the old nation-state. Some authors claim that the assumption of the decline of the nation-state in favour of corporations and international institutions is exaggerated. “Nation-states remain the dominant actors and loci for all manner of politics, including contentious politics” (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005, p. 121). This implies that the analysis of the transnationalizing of protest cannot ignore that the nation-state remains the main target of movements.

As it has already been sustained, the growth of the power of transnational corporations in the 1990s was the consequence of neoliberal globalization. In the World System Approach developed in the Marxist tradition, capitalist expansion produces different forms of resistance in the core, the semi-periphery, and the periphery (Wallerstein, 1990). The 1990s-2000s saw the emergence of a new wave of anti-systemic movements, from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the Global Justice Movement and, with

the Great Recession, the anti-austerity movements and party-movements in Europe and Occupy Wall Street in the United States. What is interesting is the re-emergence of conflicts on material issues, something that New Social Movements' theorists felt pacified by Keynesianism and Fordism. Under the neoliberal regime and its consequent European "austericide", precarity, poverty and social inequalities have risen and the welfare state has retrenched, leading again to conflicts over material issues (though it is debatable if they have ever disappeared) (Andretta et al., 2018). The struggles that form part of "the environmentalism of the poor" (Martínez-Alier, 2009) but also many mobilisations that occurred during the pandemic have emphasized the material dimension of contemporary struggles.

The last two factors that have boosted transnational activism are the spread and the lowering cost of electronic communications and international travel. The availability of relatively cheap air flights is especially interesting since at the same time is a symbol of the extension of an unsustainable lifestyle to the global middle classes and the Northern working class but also the opportunity to bring climate activists and their demands to the UN climate summits and other fora.

To conclude with this section, it is important to distinguish between forms of transnational interaction. Commonly, activists work together through transnational networks which can take the form of solidarity networks (outsiders' assistance to foreign movements) and policy networks (aiming at international law-making, treaty negotiations, or cultural change) (Bob, 2018). These networks can activate processes of diffusion, internalization and externalization (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005). The former is used to spread ideas, practices, and frames from one country to another. The internalization is the domestication of external conflicts while the externalization is the opposite, the process through which domestic conflicts become supranational.

What emerged with the Global Justice Movement and then with the Climate Justice Movement are transnational collective actions, i.e. "coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions" (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005, pp. 2–3). Most of these actions are carried out by policy networks. On the other hand, true transnational movements are quite rare (Bob, 2018).

Apart from the new political context, coalitions, and tactics, it is also important to consider the cultural dimension and cultural resistance of movements in the neoliberal hegemony, for instance by challenging global cultural norms as the dogma of economic growth, consumerism, and bias against ethnic minorities (Andretta et al., 2019).

## The digital revolution

The third factor explaining the intensification of transnational bounds is the revolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that became a democratic tool in the 1990s.

Already Melucci (1996) suggested that the internet could develop into a site of conflict between the very few core centres that control the worldwide transmission and distribution of information and the rising resistance of hackers, information pirates, and self-managed networks whose primary goal is to change the cultural codes that organise information.

However, cyber-enthusiasm dominated the 1990s and early 2000s, omitting an analysis of the dark side of the web. Cyber-enthusiasts claim that ICTs can democratize information by lowering costs and multiplying sources, introducing new repertoires of contention, and allowing more people to be engaged in politics and direct democracy and so to empower citizens (Alteri & Raffini, 2014).

According to the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells (1996), we live in a network society in which the key social structures and activities are based on micro-electronic technologies. Power is no longer concentrated in institutions or organizations but it is diffused in global networks (government, finance, media, military, science and technology institutions...). These networks exercise their power not only by coercion but also by the construction of meaning in people's minds through multimedia networks of mass communication (Castells, 2015). Those who hold power in our society are programmers, who set the main networks, and switchers, who connect different networks.

Castells conceptualizes social movements as counter-powers that fight for building and reprogramming networks, disrupting the dominant switches and switching networks of resistance and change (Castells, 2015). They emerge when individuals experiencing the same mobilizing emotions (hope, anger) connect and propagate events and emotions attached through a communication process. Inspired by the works of Alberto Melucci and Alain Touraine, Castells (2002) argue that today the ultimate goal of social movements is to change current cultural values that is made possible by the development of democratic and autonomous communication through the internet, free from the control of power. For social movements, it is vital to bypass traditional media because they tend to under-represent activists, rely on official sources and offer a distorted representation of them (Martin, 2015).

For Castells, this rising “networked social movement” has horizontal and decentralized structures allowed by digital communication and direct participation in specific locations. They no longer require leaders and bureaucratic structures so they tend to be “leaderless”. This kind of movement no longer relies on the logic of collective action but rather on the logic of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). According to this theorization, social media allows individuals to form social movements and operate; collective identification and organizational control are no longer required.

The above-mentioned theses see the internet as an emancipatory tool in the hands of activists. However, several criticisms have been formulated. Generally speaking, there is an emerging awareness of the “dark side of internet freedom” (Morozov, 2012). In other words, the internet is a system dominated by a few corporations (Big Tech or GAFAM, i.e. Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft) that extract data and manipulate individuals. This model of business has been named by Shoshana Zuboff (2019) “surveillance capitalism”. At the same time, the internet can also be used by states and counter-movements for surveillance, tracking, propaganda, modifying behaviours and spreading fake news.

Moreover, true horizontal communities on the internet are far from common. On the contrary, the tendency is to have a hierarchical communication environment in which core groups of social movements’ organizers take decisions and produce most of the content (Gerbaudo, 2012). Leadership does not disappear but it becomes soft.

Finally, it has been noted that virtual networks alone are not able to generate high levels of trust and mutual commitment and they need to be backed by real social linkages to be effective (della Porta & Diani, 2020). The use of terms such as “clickactivism” or “slackactivism” is meant to stress that digital activism can broaden participation but with forms that are superficial and weakly effective.

Overall, it is important to recognize the role of digital technologies without exaggerating or forgetting their “dark side”. Moreover, it is necessary to take into account human agency and the socio-cultural context in which technologies operate.

## 2.5 Combining paradigms

Contemporary studies on social movements generally adopt one of the three paradigms: structuralism (to study the relation with the political-institutional context), rationalism (to study resources), or culturalism (to study framing, emotions, identities and so on). The problem is that the adoption of one



of these paradigms forces the research toward a focus on some specific aspects decided a priori by the researcher and ignores others, with the risk of cultural reductionism (new social movement theories) or political reductionism (resource mobilization and political process theories).

Social movements are complex, multifaceted and non-unitary phenomena. We need to recognise that social movements have a dual logic, instrumental and expressive, political and cultural. At the same time, they develop strategies to influence the political system as well as collective identities and socio-cultural struggles (Foweraker, 1995). McAdam (1996) was one of the few to combine different traditions, but he was criticized for recognising framing as merely a resource within a political process paradigm, neglecting other cultural dimensions (Martin, 2015). If we want to understand social movements, we need to study the combinations of opportunities, threats, mobilizing structures, and framing strategies (Almeida, 2019). A rare example is the study conducted by Muhtadi (2008) on the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia in which he adopted a Social Movement Integrated Approach that takes into account the resources, political context as well as the cognitive and emotional aspects of activism without weighting them a priori. I took his work as a source of inspiration for mine.

### 3 The roots of Fridays for Future Italy

Social movements do not develop in a vacuum and they are not an island. Global, national and local political, social and cultural contexts play a role in their origin, development and end. Past and contemporary movements have an obvious influence on these processes. The literature has documented a large inventory of cases of interchange, diffusion and adaptation of practices, tactics, frames, values and ideologies between movements, through relational (person-to-person), nonrelational (through media and social media) and mediated (by a third party) channels (Soule & Roggeband, 2019).

To understand Fridays for Future we need to trace back the development of, at least, the following: student movements, environmental movements (especially political ecology and the Climate Justice Movement), and the Global Justice Movement. One could note the absence of feminism. Many FFF's activists self-define as feminist and gender issues and intersectionality are topics of discussion in the movement. However, in the fieldwork, they rarely emerged as crucial issues for activists so I did not include feminism in this chapter. Currently, things are quickly changing and during Civitavecchia's National Assembly (April 2022) some activists created a "Gruppo Ecotransfemminista" (Ecotransfeminist Group) that works on these issues.

The focus of the analysis is on Italy and contextualized in the West. However, we should not forget that these struggles have been and are being fought in non-Western countries, in many cases paying a high cost in terms of lives. Guha (1999) is one of the main supporters of the idea that environmentalism is not only a Western thought.

The chapter is divided into the following sections. Section 3.1 is dedicated to the historical rise of environmentalism. Section 3.2 is on the modern environmental movement and youth movements between the 1940s and the 1980s. Section 3.3 is centred on the struggles for justice in the period 1990s-2000s. Section 3.4. is dedicated to environmentalism in the decade of 2010s. The chapter ends with some reflections on the influence of past and contemporary movements on Fridays for Future Italy.

### 3.1 The historical rise of environmentalism

It is hard to say when the first worries about forms of environmental degradation such as soil erosion, deforestation, and air and water pollution emerged. For sure there is evidence that concerns about the impact of human activities on the environment were already present in some ancient civilizations. Moreover, environmental conditions contributed to shaping their rise and fall. The Pacific island of Tikopia, New Guinea and Japan in the Tokugawa era are good examples of ancient civilizations which wisely managed and protected their natural resources while the Easter Island, Maya cities and the Greenland Norse mainly collapsed for the environmental damage they produced (Diamond, 2005). The Roman Empire flourished partially thanks to a warm, wet, and stable climate (the Roman Climate Optimum) (Harper, 2017). However, population growth, urbanization and globalization favoured the spread of pandemics. In addition, from the middle of the second century, the climate became less reliable, damaging Roman agriculture while a megadrought in the middle of the fourth century prodded Huns to move to the West, pushing Goths to migrate and lastly invade Rome.

The overall lesson offered by the anthropologist Jared Diamond and the historian Kyle Harper is to take into account the importance of environmental factors, including climate change and pandemic disease, in shaping the rise and fall of civilizations. Something that is a clear warning for today. The entire history of our species should be read again through an environmental lens.

Regarding the history of environmental ideas, proto-animalist and proto-environmentalist thoughts were expressed in ancient times by philosophers, artists, scientists, prophets such as Isaiah, Buddha, Mahavir, Pythagoras, Jesus, Plutarch, St. Francis, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Moore and religious movements such as the Cathars, perhaps the first vegans in history (Environmental History Timeline, n.d.).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, romantic artists such as William Wordsworth and Lord Byron expressed the attraction toward nature while the unprecedented levels of pollution due to the industrial revolution and the growth of natural sciences led to the foundation of the first nature conversation organizations in the United Kingdom, United States and Germany (Dalton, 1994). The Dust Bowl in the American and Canadian prairies in the 1930s was a great environmental disaster that pushed the rise of environmental activism. Other pioneers of environmentalism were the philosopher Henry David Thoreau who reflected on the simplicity of living in natural surroundings in his “Walden” and Gandhi, who championed traditional agriculture and handicrafts against industrialization (Guha, 1999).

In Italy, the first conservationist organizations were founded in the second half of the XIX century by a Northern, urban and liberal elite with a patriotic-aesthetic and romantic vision (della Valentina, 2011). The first entities were the Società Botanica Italiana, the Club Alpino Italiano, the Società Zoofila Piemontese, the Touring Club Ciclistico Italiano, and the Associazione Nazionale Pro Montibus et Silvis. Those organizations were quite elitist so it is hard to speak of a “movement”. Both the first and the second wave of Western conservationism (after the Second World War) were somehow accepted by the political system because they preferred moderate lobbying rather than protest (Dalton, 1994). However, some local environmental protests were organized against the health impact of factories, even during the fascist dictatorship (della Valentina, 2011).

Retrospectively, this first wave of Western environmentalism was rather anthropocentric and utilitarian since it viewed nature as a resource to be preserved for the enjoyment of humans (Dalton, 1994). These struggles nevertheless led to the first laws aimed at protecting animals, natural areas and historical sites.

### 3.2 The modern environmental movement and youth movements (1940s-1980s)

The reconstruction of Italy after the Second World War implied fast and massive socio-economic transformations under the political hegemony of the Christian Democracy, which expelled socialists and communists from the government in May 1947. The main socio-economic transformations were South-North migration, industrialization, and urbanization. The labour movement, reinforced by the Resistance and the Liberation, fought a harsh battle for workers’ rights and faced repression from the government and the entrepreneurs’ class. At the same time, the new conservationist organizations preferred a less conflictual relation with the political system.

The decade that goes from the end of the 1960s to the late 1970s was perhaps the most conflictive period of the Italian republican history and a landmark for the rise and growth of social movements and civil society in general. The late 1970s saw the beginning of the “riflusso” (reflux), a period of socio-political de-mobilization and return to the private sphere that continued in the 1980s. On the other hand, that context allowed Italian environmentalism to find more spaces for action and growth. Its greatest outcome was perhaps the historical stop of nuclear energy in 1987.

### The second wave of conservationism

After the Second World War, the ideology of economic expansion through rapid industrialization became an almost universal consensus among international agencies, Western governments, the Soviet Bloc and newly independent nations (Guha, 1999). Similarly, Gilbert Rist (1997) claims that since Harry Truman's inaugural speech in 1949 the Western myth of infinite development, founded in the Enlightenment, became a modern and religious "belief" that was considered a necessity virtually in all countries despite its environmental and social costs.

In Italy too, the economic development of the afterwar happened with high costs, especially during the so-called "economic miracle" (1958-1963). Three new organizations, the Movimento Italiano per la Protezione della Natura, Italia Nostra, and the World Wild Fund, formed part of the second wave of conservationism that combined the preservation of the environment with the defence of the cultural patrimony threatened by industrialization and urbanization (della Valentina, 2011). The overall strategy was again to influence the system, not to radically change it, so the repertoire of protests was rarely used (Diani, 1988). A series of disasters (Polesine in 1951, Vajont in 1963, and Florence in 1966) produced increasing worry in public opinion but developmentalist concerns prevailed in the political system (della Valentina, 2011).

Conservationism was highly institutionalized and moderate from the beginning. On the other hand, the student movement of the 1960s and the labour movement brought a decade of intense social conflict.

### The student movement

Student movements are modern phenomena that emerged after periods of mass enrolment in high education not only in Western democracies but also in authoritarian countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, generally challenging the existing regimes (Rootes, 2013).

In Italy, the movement began in the early 1960s against the Gui bill which proposed to introduce fixed quotas to restrict entry to the universities and it formed part of a global wave of student agitations (Revelli, 1995). The mobilization became massive between the autumn of 1967 and the first quarter of 1968 with a wave of occupations, first in the Universities of Trento, Naples, and the Catholic of Milan, then to the whole peninsula, spreading not only among universities but also in upper secondary schools, by imitation and identification (Lumley, 1990). Two key events forged the

movement's identity: the battle of Valle Giulia in Rome on 20 March 1968 and Milan's "Valle Giulia" on 25 March 1968. After those violent confrontations, the police and the State were identified by part of the movement as an enemy against whom it was legitimate to use violence.

The movement's goals expanded far above the initial goals. Students started attacking the subordination of the University to the logic of capitalism and all authoritarian aspects of Italian society with a subversive and revolutionary spirit that aimed at making students autonomous and independent (Revelli, 1995). Some echoes of these anti-authoritarian and anti-systemic positions are present in FFF even though its rejection of violence is total, unlike some factions of 1968.

Apart from street demonstrations, the student movement used innovative forms of struggle such as obstructions, sit-ins, occupations of buildings and interruption of public events. This innovative repertoire of action and the horizontal decision-making process has influenced successive social movements until the present (della Porta, 2010).

The movement greatly influenced also the cultural sphere. If in the first years of the reconstruction after the Second World War, youths did not develop a specific culture differentiated from the adult. However, the years of the economic miracle" (1958-1963) saw the construction of youth identity, made of different needs, hobbies, music, clothes, books, movies, gender roles, references (e.g. the stars), a general desire for more autonomy and a more critical and transgressive attitude toward the family, the old generations, the Church, the economic system, the school, the work and the political system (Cavalli & Leccardi, 1997).

As Melucci (1996a) noted, mass schooling created a delay in the entry into adult roles, creating the opportunity for the creation of a youth identity (needs, lifestyles, language) that antagonized the formal and rational culture of the system and that was also reinforced by the needs, products and symbols created by the market. In this way, youth became a cultural rather than a biological condition. Many anti-authoritarian and irreverent dimensions of those years, especially from the Beat counterculture, were assumed by the student movement, politicized and subordinated to the language of the class conflict (Cavalli & Leccardi, 1997).

The movement also brought new elements, such as the development of a specific political uniform (Eskimo jackets, trousers and long scarves) and freer looks (bright colours, trousers and no obligation for make-up for women, wild and unkempt looks for radical fringes) juxtaposed with the traditional appearance and clothes identified with consumerism, wealth and ostentation (Lumley, 1990). It also

influenced language with the introduction of an informal register, slang and new slogans, as well as contributing to counter-information and counter-culture. In some aspects, FFF's communication echoes 1968.

Sexual behaviours were also revolutionized with the idea of free love and sexual liberation even if the movement did not generally recognize the specific nature of women's oppression and remained stuck to a machist ideal that invisibilized women inside the movement (Lumley, 1990).

### The movement of 1977

The student movement shook the traditional relations between bosses and workers, parents and children, teachers and students and led to an impressive growth of civil society (Lumley, 1990). In fact, in the 1970s a proliferation of contentious politics began with workers, unions, students, gay liberation movements, urban struggles, feminists, youth countercultures, movements linked with sexuality, regional movements, consumer protest, ecology, anti-institutional protest (over justice, prisons, psychiatric hospitals) and struggles linked to the problems of health and medicine.

Another wave of student mobilizations was produced by the so-called "Movement of 1977" which contested political parties, and trade unions and rejected the utopian projects of 1968. One wing of the movement adopted a political and harsh contestation of institutions based on a radical left ideology.

On the other hand, the so-called Metropolitan Indians brought a new counter-cultural, libertarian, creative, and even anti-work dimension (Lumley, 1990). They also tried to construct a new youth identity, with an appropriation of the labels of deviance and marginality attributed by authorities. The movement was innovative in introducing a civil disobedience repertoire that included rule-breaking, squatting and the disruption of the routines of city life as a form of art. The Metropolitan Indians also protested against the construction of nuclear power stations (Lodi, 1988).

### Labour environmentalism

The economic boom produced rapid and massive industrialization in which health damages were considered a cost to be paid for economic development. In the 1960s-1970s, a neglected coalition was formed by workers' organizations and militant scientists, physicians and sociologists born out of the 1968 student movement (Barca, 2012, 2014). This labour environmentalism struggled for

occupational, environmental, and public health, a growing threat not only to the workforce but also to the Italian population at large due to the massive industrialization supported both by the capital and the Industrial State. In 1972, *Medicina Democratica* was founded as a grassroots action/research movement to fight for occupational and environmental health.

These struggles produced important social reforms such as the Labour Statute in 1970 and the Public Health System in 1978. On 10 July 1976, the explosion of a chemical reactor in the ICMESA chemical plant near Seveso, in Lombardy, caused the spread of a large cloud of dioxin that played a crucial role in the rise of this ecological consciousness. Even if the political and symbolic power of workers entered a crisis by the end of the 1980s, local struggles against polluting enterprises have resisted in time, as in the paradigmatic case of the steel plant of Taranto.

### Political ecology and anti-nuclearism

In the post-war, the increasing scientific knowledge on the impact of human activities rose concerns about the Earth's capacity to absorb the human footprint and sustain human life. The American biologist Rachel Carson published "Silent Spring" in 1962 in which she denounced the indiscriminate use of pesticides in the United States, becoming a milestone for modern environmentalism. Other influential works from the USA were Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" of 1968, Paul Ehrlich's "The Population Bomb" of 1968, Donella H. Meadows' "The Limits to Growth" of 1972, and Barry Commoner's "The Closing Cycle" of 1971 (Elliott, 2020). Following these concerns, Earth Day was established on the 22 of April 1970 in the USA, becoming instrumental in raising environmental awareness.

All these scientific publications greatly inspired both conservationist groups and the new environmental movements identified by the label of political ecology that rose in the 1960-1970s. Political ecology brought a revolution for modern environmentalism based on four pillars: protection of the environment, grassroots democracy, nonviolence and social justice (Giugni & Grasso, 2015). Compared to conservationism, political ecology challenged the social and political system, aiming at producing radical political and cultural changes (Diani, 1988). The political component of the movement included lobbying for environmental policies, the nomination of environmental candidates and the registration of green parties. The cultural component included promoting environmental social values, sustainable and alternative lifestyles (recycling, green and organic consumerism, vegan or vegetarian diets etc.), and the establishment of alternative communities.



Within this new wave of struggles and reflections, the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced in 1974 the term ecofeminism and a gender lens to read environmentalism. In the 1980s, American activists related to the Civil Rights movement started to protest against the placement of hazardous waste facilities in black neighbourhoods. This led to the formulation of the concept of environmental justice that focuses on the distribution of environmental benefits and risks, especially among disadvantaged groups (Rootes, 2004). Several local struggles in Italy have been framed under an environmental justice frame (Armiero & D'Alisa, 2012; della Porta et al., 2019).

Globally, the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 opened a new era of eco-diplomacy, leading to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The “oil shock” of 1973 made clear to the public opinion that resources are limited and seemed a confirmation of political ecologists’ theses, leading to severe measures to contain energy consumption but also to a push for nuclear power (della Valentina, 2011).

In Italy, the new political ecology was best represented by the Lega per l’Ambiente (then Legambiente) and Greenpeace, which merged environmental and pacifist concerns. In parallel, new environmental groups emerged with a less ideological and more concrete and single-issue approach such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Amici della Terra, Federnatura, Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli (LIPU), and Lega Italiana Antivivisezione (LAV). However, in the 1970s, the class conflict and the prevalence of material values (economy and public order) in public opinion and the political system did not allow the environmental themes to rise as public priorities, despite the industrial disaster in Seveso in 1976 (della Valentina, 2011). The conflictual relations between environmentalists and the Italian Communist Party as well as the high degree of cultural and political distance between organizations constrained the emergence of the environment as a priority. However, some legislative progress was made on the issues of smog and water and soil protection.

In the 1980s, Italian environmentalism found more spaces for actions and growth thanks to a combination of factors: the decreasing visibility of the class conflict, the growth of a tertiary and intellectual class (potential activists and supporters), the improved economic situation, the defeat of terrorism, a generalized political dissatisfaction, the preference towards unconventional, single-issue actions, and the decline of the new left and trade unions (della Valentina, 2011). More intense relations were established between groups thanks to less ideologically rigid positions, the common mobilization against nuclear power, the development of a green identity and the adoption of unconventional actions and critical positions by traditional organizations.

Those were years of intensive cultural actions such as the promotion of alternative and more sustainable lifestyles (Diani, 1988). In terms of political actions, apart from the nomination of environmental activists in left-wing traditional parties, the most notable change was the rise of green lists. The Federation of the Green was created in 1986 with modest electoral results in time (2-3%) but still it was able to express three times the Minister of Environment and several local administrators, including a mayor of Rome (Francesco Rutelli, elected in 1993 and the again in 1997).

The Chornobyl disaster of 1986 was a turning point that renewed concerns for environmental regulations at the global level and led to rising public concerns and consensus for Green parties (Dalton, 1994). In Italy, the Ministry of Environment was created just after the disaster, adopting a new language (sustainable development, green growth, green economy) influenced by environmentalism. The intense anti-nuclear mobilizations made environmental deterioration a transversal concern in public opinion and pushed for the historical stop to nuclear power, obtained with the 1987's referendum (Biorcio, 1988).

### 3.3 The struggles for justice (1990s-2000s)

The period late 1980s-early 1990s saw rapid and dramatic geopolitical changes. The unification of Germany, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Block were seen by many Westerns as a sign that the liberal democracy and the market economy had no longer ideological competitors (Fukuyama, 1992). If in the previous decade, neo-liberalism was in many cases imposed on the Global South, in the 1990s it was enthusiastically embraced in the West, in post-communist countries and the former Third World. Centre-left parties of the Third Way also joined the “Washington Consensus” of privatizations, liberalizations, deregulations and fiscal discipline. Post-communist parties in Eastern Europe but also in Italy, such as the Democratic Party of the Left (then Democrats of the Left), were especially eager to promote neo-liberal reforms, in an attempt to sweep away memories of their past ideology.

In this context, new social movements rose to fight the socio-ecological consequences of neo-liberalism and to promote global justice, at the local, national and global levels. On 15 February 2003, the greatest protest event of history opposed the imminent Western invasion of Iraq. At the end of the decade, the financial crisis spread from the US banking system to the rest of the world with Europe facing the worst socio-economic consequences. The adoption of neoliberal austerity measures was

opposed by a new wave of collective mobilizations that questioned the economic and political system, leading rise to new cleavages and political parties.

### The Italian environmental movement between institutionalization and conflict

The late 1980s and early 1990s were turbulent years for Italy. The so-called “First Republic” collapsed due to a nationwide judicial investigation (“Mani Pulite”, clean hands) that discovered systematic political corruption. The consecutive emergence of new right-wing parties (Lega Nord and Forza Italia) brought political issues such as immigration, and public order, overshadowing the public relevance of environmental issues (Diani & Forno, 2004).

In the same period, the Italian environmental movement continued its institutionalization at the national level that included: a decline of national protests and more radical actions, access to public resources and the decision-making arena, also through green activists elected in public offices, expansion of bureaucratic structures that were present since the beginning (della Porta & Diani, 2004). This happened also for other social movements in Italy (Reiter, 2007) and in other Western democracies (della Porta, 2007). However, in the late 1990s and the first decade of 2000, the movement also joined the radical struggle for global justice and climate justice, somehow balancing the process of institutionalization.

### The Global Justice Movement (GJM)

In the late 1990s, the Global Justice Movement (GJM) emerged and brought a radical challenge to neo-liberal globalization and the general crisis of political representation. The GJM was a rare case of a truly global movement, with global causes and targets, as FFF is. Its broad goal was the advancement of the cause of economic, social, political, and environmental justice among and between people on a global scale (della Porta, 2007). Under the broad concept of justice, it struggled for several goals such as the respect of human rights, environmental protection, defence of the Welfare State, peace, democratization of international institutions and against the neo-liberal, neo-colonial and financial globalization.

Its main target was neoliberal globalization, capitalism and the economic and political elite; in concrete terms national states and international organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization (della Porta, 2007).

In terms of composition, the GJM was a “movement of movements” organized horizontally. In Italy, it consisted of a heterogeneous coalition of environmentalists (Rete Lilliput), catholic groups (Pax Christi, Beati Costruttori di Pace, and Mani Tese), grassroots unions (COBAS and CUB), social centres, left-wing associations (ARCI), anarchists and even the anarchist commonly labelled as Black Blocks (Reiter, 2007).

This pluralism led to a diversification of the repertoire of protest, from massive global demonstrations to consumer activism (boycott and buycott) as well as direct actions, including property damage committed by its radical wing (della Porta, 2007). The movement reached its peak first in Seattle in November 1999 and then in Genoa in July 2001, during the sadly famous G8 that saw frightening repression which, together with the successive Global War on Terror, marked the end of the GJM.

Despite the end of the GJM, the anarchist anthropologist David Graeber (2010), who formed part of the movement, claimed that those mobilizations led to the failure of successive World Trade Organization negotiations and several free-trade agreements as well as the expulsion of the International Monetary Fund from some Asian and Latin-American countries.

Moreover, the GJM’s grievances, frames, repertoire, and organizational forms played an influence in the successive anti-austerity movements, Occupy Wall Street, Indignados and the Climate Justice Movement. It is also claimed to have contributed to the global scale shift of environmental concerns, networks, and actions (Giugni & Grasso, 2015).

I believe the memory of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) has played and is still playing a relevant role in the shaping of FFF Italy’s identity, frames and organizational forms. The Italian branch of FFF considers itself the heir of this movement. For instance, on the 21st of July 2021 FFF Italy joined the commemoration of Genoa’s G8 counter-summit organized by the GJM through a post saying:

In common we have the method, the practices from below, the idea of spaces to be self-organized bonded with the territory so that it becomes the main place for politics and confrontation, the method of consent in the assemblies, the inclusivity achieved through horizontality; they are a system not only internal but that proposes to redefine social relations.

Moreover, at the global level Fridays for Future has even adopted or adapted slogans from the GJM: “Another World is Possible”, “Another World is Necessary”, and “You the Illness, We the Cure”.

## The Climate Justice Movement (CJM)

The French physicist Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier is meant to have discovered the greenhouse effect in the 1820s. Already in the 1950s-1960s, the fossil-fuels companies were aware of the impact of the combustion of fossil fuels on the global increase of temperatures also because they funded a bunch of studies on it (Mann, 2021). In the 1980-1990s, it emerged a consensus in the scientific community that human emissions were causing climate change, especially thanks to the work of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) (Coventry & Okereke, 2017). The first treaty to tackle climate change, the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was signed in 1992, followed by the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. The environmental movement played an important role in this process.

If governments adopted a technocratic and market-based approach, the Climate Justice Movement (CJM) brought a process of politicization of climate change, focusing on the socio-political implications of climate change and the role of inequalities, both in the responsibilities and in the consequences (Meikle et al., 2016). The Transnational Resource and Action Center is attributed to have used the term for the first time in the report "Greenhouse Gangsters vs. Climate Justice", published in 1999 (Tokar, 2018). However, if some authors affirm that the CJM emerged from the environmental justice movement in the USA and found its global constitution with the formulation of the Bali Principles of 2002, others trace its origins to the Global South's criticism of the industrialized countries (Coventry & Okereke, 2017). In any case, the failure of Copenhagen's Conference of Parties in 2009 is considered a crucial trigger in the consolidation of the climate justice frame and the emergence of the movement (della Porta & Parks, 2014). The main international coalitions that were forged in the 2010s were Climate Justice Now! (CJN) and Climate Justice Action (CJA), now both dissolved.

The concept of climate justice has been adopted by mainstream environmentalism. In Italy, during Copenhagen's climate conference in 2009, unions, environmental associations, charities and NGOs promoted a broad coalition called "In marcia per il clima, the first attempt of this kind.

The concept of climate justice has also become mainstream among states and entered into the Paris Agreement of 2015, as we will see in the next section. However, in the practice, there is no consensus on how to define it and convert it into policies. Several principles have been formulated and debated under the climate justice umbrella: "polluters must pay", "beneficiaries pay", "climate debt",

“common but differentiated responsibility” and so on (Coventry & Okereke, 2017). Many of these principles have also been included in international treaties and hegemonic discourses, in an attempt to capture, deflect and transform the threat to the status quo represented by more radical versions of climate justice (de Lucia, 2009, 2014). Gramsci used the term “trasformismo” to mean the co-optation of leaders of subaltern social groups by dominant actors. Cox (1983) extended this to the assimilation and domestication of potentially dangerous ideas by hegemonic powers. In practice, the radical claims of the CJM to leave fossil fuels in the ground, invest in renewable energy, reduce wasteful consumption, huge financial transfers from North to South, and rights-based resource conservation have been accepted and applied by Northern governments only in a very marginal way (Tokar, 2018).

### Environmental territorial struggles

In the 1990s-2000s, environmental territorial struggles gained prominence as a consequence of neoliberal policies and a general crisis of trust in representative institutions (Imperatore, 2020). Those movements are commonly labelled “NIMBY” (“Not in My Backyard”) but more sympathetic scholars prefer to use the acronym “LULU” (Locally Unwanted Land Use) to avoid stigmatization. The most famous one is probably the No TAV movement that since the 1990s oppose the controversial high-speed railway project between Turin (in Italy) and Lyon (in France).

Those movements were generally born in defence of their territory threatened by the construction of big infrastructures and with a preference toward demonstrative, confrontative and even property damage actions, because of the closeness of the political opportunity structure (della Porta et al., 2019a). In many cases, they have experienced a scale-shift to broader national and global claims, proclaiming pacifist, ecologist, human rights, and democratic values against vertical and anti-democratic decisions taken from above and imposed on local communities, the militarization of the territory, the current economic and political system, fossil fuels and in opposition to the war. Beyond allegations of egoism, these movements have developed a “NOPE” (“Not On the Whole Planet”) discourse that entirely rejects the predatory economic model imposed by the State, not only in their territories.

Another feature of LULU movements is that they tend to promote a model of bottom-up democracy juxtaposed with the top-down model of liberal democracies (Imperatore, 2020), an element that has played an influence on local Fridays for Future’s groups. LULU movements differentiate from other

forms of environmentalism in the process of community building in which resistance plays a central role (Chiroli, 2017; della Porta et al., 2019b; della Porta & Piazza, 2016).

### Student mobilizations

After a decade from the “Movement of 1977”, students massively mobilized again, this time against the Ruberti reform, proposed by the then Minister of University and Research to open the doors to private enterprises in the funding and management of the Academia. The Pantera movement rose in December 1989 with the occupation of the University of Palermo and then spread to other universities and high schools until 1990. Many former activists of the Pantera took part in the successive Global Justice Movement. In 2004-2005, a new wave of student mobilization rose against the Moratti reform promoted by the centre-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi.

The last massive student movement in Italy before Fridays for Future was the so-called “Onda” (Wave) that was active in the period 2008-2010. At the beginning of the Great Recession, it mobilized against the Gelmini reform proposed again by a cabinet led by Berlusconi and in defence of a public education system threatened by a process of cuts, privatization and commodification and against the precarization of the labour market (Caruso et al., 2010). Compared with the 1968 movement, the “Onda” showed a less ideological and more pragmatic approach, with almost no use of radical or violent actions.

### 3.4 Old and new environmental struggles between victories and delusions (2010-2022)

The early 2010s saw the continuity of anti-austerity protests in Europe. On the other hand, the Copenhagen Climate Conference of 2009 rose high expectations that were completely betrayed but this did not produce a sustained climate mobilization in Italy. What was more successful was the national mobilizations for public water that obtained a historical win with the referendum of 2011, even though in practice the struggle has not ended yet. The decade 2010s also saw the rise of the Five Star Movement, a populist “party-movement” that was able to intercept anti-austerity, environmental and anti-systemic voters.

In 2015, the global climate movement obtained the adoption of the Paris Agreement that bonded the international community to limit global warming to below 2 degrees, if possible even 1.5 degrees (compared to pre-industrial levels). This was a milestone for its ambition and universal ratification

(adopted by 196 Parties), including the so-called developing countries that were not part of previous climate agreements. The need for ambitious climate policies and climate justice reached a consensus among states, international institutions, global civil society and enterprises, with some exceptions such as right-wing populists. However, the hope for drastic greenhouse cuts has quickly dissolved, leading to the rise of a new wave of climate mobilization since 2018. The 26th Conference of Parties of Glasgow, in November 2021, also rose high expectations that have been mostly betrayed.

### National environmental struggles

Nowadays, mainstream Italian environmentalism adheres to a general model of neo-corporativism that prioritizes involvement in policy-making and that is common in other European countries (Dalton, 1994). The repertoire of tactics is almost entirely conventional, apart from lobbying, awareness-raising and education campaigns, promotion of volunteering, and management of natural areas are promoted by environmental organisations even if some disruptive actions are still performed by Greenpeace and anti-speciesist groups (Bertuzzi, 2019; Zamponi et al., 2019). Some exceptions to this trend of neo-corporativism were the mobilizations for the referendum against nuclear power and for public water in 2011, won by environmentalism, and another one in 2016 against oil and natural gas drilling concessions that did not reach the quorum.

The new wave of climate movements that started in 2018 also reached Italy. Despite the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the reports of the scientific community warned for years that the plans for climate action, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs), are largely insufficient. In May 2018, Extinction Rebellion was founded in the United Kingdom, and then evolved into a global movement combining civil disobedience and digital activism to put pressure on policy-makers. In August of the same year, Greta Thunberg started her school strike, inspiring another global movement (Fridays for Future) that brought massive protests against political inaction. The two movements spread to Italy, bringing back national environmental protests and putting huge pressure on the political system. As we will see, the burst of the pandemic dramatically affected those protests.

Most of the mainstream environmental organizations have joined FFF's climate strikes (though they do not support more radical actions) and they have put climate mitigation, adaptation and justice at the core of their agenda. The Catholic world has also joined the climate struggle, especially after the publication of Pope Francis' "Laudato Si'" encyclical in 2015.



In 2021, a climate justice network led by the NGO A Sud started a lawsuit against the Italian State, following the climate litigations that successfully took place in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Colombia and France. In this innovative form of climate activism, the State is denounced for violating the “Social Contract” by putting at risk citizens with its inaction. The above-mentioned States were condemned by national tribunals and forced to adopt more ambitious climate targets and policies.

The climate mobilizations of the last years produced the impressive growth of the green parties of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Ireland, in most of these cases reaching power. Italy is a notable exception. The Federation of the Green entered a deep crisis in 2008, losing its representation in the government until now and in the Parliament between 2008 and 2015. In the European election of 2019, the Green Wave brought unprecedented levels of consensus for several European green parties. The Italian list Europa Verde only obtained a modest 2.3%, despite the massive climate mobilization. For the 2022 national elections, Europa Verde created a common list with the leftist Sinistra Italiana. However, the list Greens and Left Alliance reached a modest 3.5% for the Chamber (12 elected deputies) and 3.6% for the Senate (4 elected senators).

One of the reasons for that decline was the rise of a competitive party. The comedian Beppe Grillo founded the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle in Italian or M5S) in 2009, a movement-party that was able for a period to intercept ecological issues and voters, with electoral results far above the ones obtained by the Federation of the Greens in its history. In the beginning, the Five Star Movement was allied with several local environmental movements that even offered candidates for the party. In 2018, it was the most-voted party, reaching 32% of the votes. Once at the government, from 2018 to 2022, however, the M5S was not able to obtain relevant outcomes on environmental issues. Its incapacity to block harmful mega-infrastructures caused a quick deterioration of the relations with LULU movements, starting with No TAV.

### The persistence of local struggles

Local environmental movements and struggles, first of all, No TAV, are still relevant as we can see in the Environmental Justice Atlas (Ejatlas, n.d.) and its Italian version managed by the Centro di Documentazione sui Conflitti Ambientali that document dozens of conflicts around caves, highways, railways, airports, heavy factories, oil and gas facilities, and waste facilities. LULU movements tried to create a national network through two assemblies in 2018-2019 and a national march on the 25th

of March 2019. Nowadays we can witness a process of contamination of frames, issues, repertoires and resources and convergence between them and Fridays for Future, also thanks to the multiple memberships of activists (Bertuzzi et al, 2019). The second national assembly of FFF Italy, held in October 2019, ended with a statement that explicitly supported LULU's struggles:

We declare ourselves against all "grande opere" useless and harmful, understood as infrastructure, industry and projects that environmentally, economically and politically devastate territories without involving the inhabitants in their self-determination. We support every territorial battle against local committees, such as "No-TAV per Val di Susa", "No-Grandi navi per Venezia", "no Muos per Catania e Siracusa", "no TAP per Lecce" e "Stopbiocidio per Napoli e la terra dei fuochi", "Bagnoli Libera contro il commissariamento", the fight against Enel in Civitavecchia, Snam in Abruzzo, the Third Pass for Alessandria.

### 3.5 Discussion

Fridays for Future Italy has not developed in a vacuum and it is not an island. On the contrary, it is a sponge that has (selectively) absorbed claims, values, frames, tactics, and forms of organization from past and contemporary movements. These processes of diffusion are facilitated by mass media, social media, alliances, and multiple belonging of activists. I believe that the collective memory of past movements, such as in the case of the Global Justice Movement, has a crucial relevance in this and it has contributed to the construction of the collective identity of FFF Italy.

As we will see in the chapter on collective identity (the sixth), Fridays for Future perceive itself (and/or describe itself) as a youth movement, and even as a student movement. Even if workers participate too, young students represent its main component, as it emerged in two surveys conducted during the climate strikes of 2019 (della Porta et al., 2020; Zamponi et al., 2019) as well as in my fieldwork. The sixth chapter starts with the description of FFF's self-representation as youth resistance, which includes elements such as subalternity, anti-elitism, irony, and politically incorrectness. I believe that this identity was influenced by past student movements. Another point of continuity with the Onda, but in contrast with previous student movements, is the fact that FFF's activists are not so much ideological and even if they have a critical attitude toward the State, they recognize its legitimacy. Again, in continuity with the Onda, FFF's activists explicitly reject violence while several fringes of the student and youth movements of the 1960s-1970s did not or were much more ambiguous. Finally, it is important to make a brief mention of the school strike, the most novelty tactic used by FFF. Greta Thunberg took inspiration from the students of Parkland who used it after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Thunberg et al., 2019) but she brought it to a global and massive scale. This is an excellent example of the transnational diffusion of a tactic through media and social media.

Past environmental movements, and in specific the branches of Political Ecology and the Climate Justice Movement, have played an obvious influence in FFF Italy's main claims and ideals. The concepts of climate justice and just ecological transition are nothing new; the main novelty brought by FFF is the emphasis on the sense of urgency and emergency as well as on intergenerational justice. The same is true for claims such as public water, plant-based food production, and sustainable mobility. If the relationship between past ecologism and science was ambivalent, FFF is much less critical of science since it is the core element that justifies its claims. The other innovative tactic of FFF, the bike-strike, derives from the critical mass that was experimented on by environmentalists in the early 1990s in a less structured way.

Local movements against mega-infrastructures such as "No TAV" have deeply influenced FFF's groups. In many cases, they even overlap. The influence is notable in the choice of claims, targets, and local frames as well as in the ideal of horizontality. The second national assembly of FFF Italy, held in October 2019, ended with a statement that explicitly supported LULU's struggles.

The Global Justice Movement is also a powerful inspiration as admitted by the same FFF Italy. The method of consensus, the ideals of horizontality and inclusivity, and the cosmopolitan identity are not inventions of the GJM, but they have been transmitted to the Climate Justice Movement through spillover already years ago, as noticed by Hadden (2014), and then absorbed by FFF. Another legacy of the GJM is the necessity to form broad and global eco-social coalitions under the global injustice frame and the organisation of counter-summits and anti-summit protests, even against the same institutions targeted by the GJM such as the G8 and G20. The anti-capitalist and decolonial criticism of the GJM to the current global economic system based on the exploitation of labour and nature, financial domain over society and politics, inequalities as well as the claims of patent-free drugs, respect of human rights, international solidarity all resonate in FFF. The latter has even adopted or adapted slogans from the GJM, as I have said.

Retaking the initial metaphor, FFF Italy is a sponge which absorbs but also releases. Further studies are needed on the diffusion and adaptation of practices, tactics, frames, values and ideologies from past and contemporary movements as well as social centres to FFF and from FFF to other social actors such as LULU movements, institutionalized environmentalism and trade unions.

## 4 Research Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology used to conduct this research on Fridays for Future Italy is presented. Before moving to the core of the chapter, it is important to introduce two methodological sources of inspiration for the research.

First of all, the "new social studies of childhood" and in particular the "new sociology of childhood" (Allison & Prout, 1997; Prout, 2011). In this view, children are influenced by the social structure but they are also active in the interpretation, construction and determination of their own life, the lives of those around them as well as the society and culture in which they live. In short, children are creative and agentic and must be not viewed as powerless, incompetent or passive receivers of adult socialization (Corsaro, 2020), such as in dominant, deterministic and patronizing views. The consequence for the researcher is the importance to respect their rights (including staying silent) and conducting direct research with them as in the works of William Corsaro, instead of gathering information on them from adults. The ambition is to conduct research with or research for, in place of research on. A second pillar of the above-mentioned approaches is that childhood is a social construction, meaning that the conception of childhood, basically how childhood is distinguished from adulthood, changes depending on the specific historical, social, cultural, religious, family, and ethnic context (Heywood, 2018). Obviously, this does not mean neglecting the role of biology.

The second source of inspiration for my research was the movement-relevant theory by Bevington & Dixon (2005). In this approach, knowledge must be co-constructed with social movement instead of simply extracting it from them without any accountability and by reinforcing the unequal balance of power. The co-constructed knowledge aspires to be relevant not only for scholars and the general public but also for the movement itself since it could become a mirror in which activists look at themselves and individually and collectively reflect. The necessity to provide the movement with an opportunity to self-reflect is an incentive to produce more "objective" research. At the same time, this approach is more detached than militant research and maintains a critical attitude, without hiding the contradictions of social movements.

This chapter continues with the philosophical assumptions underlying my research (section 4.1). Then, I move to the complexity of formulating research questions that could be useful for social movements (section 4.2). Third, the methods and techniques that have been applied are discussed

(4.3), together with a reflection on the complexity of doing research between infections and lockdowns.

#### 4.1 Philosophical assumptions

Before discussing the methodology of this research, it is important to present the philosophical beliefs assumed in the research. Here I present four assumptions that are transversal to ontology, epistemology, axiology and ethics and that are inspired by the constructivist/interpretative paradigm and the transformative/emancipatory paradigm. Other ontological, epistemological, axiological and ethical reflections are incorporated into all the thesis. In this section, my ethical reflections assume special importance because the study of social movement implies a “special engagement with the ethical dimensions of research” (Milan, 2014, p. 446), from reflecting on our position and privilege to being respectful, avoid exposing the activists, and considering that research is time-consuming for the activists themselves. The same is true when children and adolescents are involved in the research, due to their vulnerable and subaltern position in our societies.

My four philosophical assumptions are the following:

- 1) There is one reality which is subjected to interpretation by individuals.
- 2) The position of the researcher cannot be erased.
- 3) The researcher must respect and take care of the research participants.
- 4) The research must be useful for social actors.

##### There is one reality which is subjected to interpretation by individuals

The scenario in which I conducted this research is a world in an ecological and climate crisis. This reality is undeniable due to the amount of scientific evidence that we have accumulated regarding soil, air and water pollution, deforestation, ocean acidification, biodiversity extinction and global warming. Regarding the object of study, Fridays for Future, my claim is not to discover a universal truth or a law as in positivist research. What is interesting is understanding and describing social phenomena and the processes by which subjects perceive, interpret and give meaning to that reality, under the influence of values, gender, age, ethnicity, and positions of power. I am also interested in

how the climate becomes an arena of conflicts between frames and counter-frames developed by movements and climate movements.

### The position of the researcher cannot be erased

I believe that the position of the researcher influences the choice of the object of the investigation, how the research is conducted and the production of the results. Positionality is an individual's worldview and the position he/she adopts about a research task and its socio-political context (Darwin Holmes, 2020) while reflexivity must be understood as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher” (Lincoln et al., 2018, p. 246), during the processes of interviewing, interpreting, writing and publishing (Heyl, 2001).

It is important to be transparent about these points and declare and self-reflect on how my worldview, values and beliefs may have influenced the work. All my research and dissertation are fed by self-reflections on my positionality. This process is complex, iterative, permanent and time-consuming but also necessary if we want to carry on ethical research and reduce bias and subjectivity, elements that, in any case, cannot be removed.

Very little research in social sciences can be value-free. My position on this is between the constructivist and the emancipatory paradigms. I recognize that our values inform the choice of paradigm, topic, methods, findings, interpretation, and reports, as in the constructivist paradigm (Kawulich, 2012). I also agree with the tradition of emancipatory social science that includes feminism, post-colonialism, Marxism, and a variety of critical approaches that reject value freedom, impartiality and neutrality. Many prominent and classic sociologists, from Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, W.E.B. Du Bois to Charles Wright Mills, had a moral impetus in the development of their careers (Burawoy, 2005). Their discipline was an engaged sociology aimed at producing change. I believe that the "assertion of the ideal of value freedom serves to hide the ways that power and position shape the social sciences and their results" (Risjord, 2014, p. 26).

Regarding this specific research, it is undeniable that the climate crisis is an issue of injustice and a human rights crisis (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015; UNICEF, 2021). The climate crisis is already hitting the most vulnerable disproportionately and unfairly: children, women, farmers, the poor, indigenous people, people of colour, and people with disabilities, especially from the Global South. Children, in specific, have been labelled as a “climate precariat” (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020) to stress how the climate crisis is making their lives insecure, vulnerable and unstable.

All those people have very few responsibilities in the emissions of greenhouse gases but they are the first victims of catastrophic events.

Fridays for Future can be seen as a social movement representing the climate precariat and fighting to change the status quo and bring justice. I believe that the false “neutrality” of the research favours the current status quo that allows the climate crisis to aggravate. Therefore, for transparency, it is important declare from the beginning that I am sympathetic to the cause of climate activism.

Moreover, “there is a close relation between the way researchers relate to the research objects and the type and quality of information they gather” (Milan, 2014, p. 446). It would be hard to conduct a social movement study and an ethnography without a certain degree of political alignment and empathy.

If social researchers facing the climate crisis should be value-committed, I also believe that some detachment from the population of interest is required. In my ethnographic work, I assumed a hybrid position between insider and outsider, also depending on the specific moment of the research. To state differently, I was simultaneously an insider and an outsider. This issue is further discussed in the methodological section.

A final remark on positionality regards the fact I am a male scholar and that my research has been conducted when I was 28-30 years old while the subjects were on average a bit younger than me and mainly students. In the methodological section, I further discuss this aspect of positionality.

### **The researcher must respect and take care of the research participants**

This issue could be seen as trivial but it is not. Social research is too many times based on epistemic extractivism (Grosfoguel, 2019). The researcher simply extracts the relevant information for his/her benefit, with few considerations on respecting, acknowledging and taking care of the social actors involved.

Researching with adolescents under the age of 18 involves a special awareness of the ethical dimension of research. In specific, it requires to respect their dignity, well-being and rights stated in the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child, especially the right to participate, to be heard, to stay silent and to be protected from any harm (Graham et al., 2013). Respecting children also means recognising they are active in the interpretation, construction and determination of their lives, their parents’ lives as well as the society and culture in which they live.

Before conducting the research, I asked myself: is it necessary to include adolescents in the research? I think the answer is yes. We do not have a lot of data to support this. According to a survey conducted during the climate strike in Florence on the 15 of March 2019, 32.6% of the participants had between 15 and 19 years (Zamponi et al., 2019). Even if this data is not detailed enough, it seems reasonable to say that an important percentage of FFF's strikers was below 18. The presence of adolescents under the age of majority is corroborated also by several media reports and personal observations.

Taking care is first of all reducing risks. Living in a democratic system does not imply the absence of threats to activists, both from the State and non-State actors. For instance, in the past years, some FFF's activists were denounced in Padua and Treviso, and others were detained in Naples and searched in Milan. That is why I adopted a comprehensive risk-reduction strategy.

Before conducting the research, it was important to present the activists the risk-reduction strategy and asked them if they had additional concerns through an online anonymous survey. When the interviews were conducted, I asked each participant to read and sign a consent form. In the case of participants under the age of 18 years, their parents or legal tutors were asked to sign a consent form too. The consent forms included information on the purpose of the research, its content, time requirement, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, the possibility of withdrawal and the researcher's contacts. The identity of the activists was protected during all the stages of the research through anonymization, safe achieving of the records and their destruction after the transcriptions. Part of the risk-reduction strategy was also to respect the activists' choice of the place, time and modality of the interview and all other precautionary measures they considered necessary. Finally, the respondent validation phase that is presented further on was also meant to evaluate possible risks in my future publications.

I also asked myself how to reduce the intrinsic power imbalance of research. Social scientists are a privileged group that tends to reproduce the differences of power in the larger society (Risjord, 2014). It is hard to deny there is an imbalance between the researcher and the activist, which could create suspicion toward the former (Milan, 2014), and between the adult and the adolescent, which could create expectations of compliance with adult authority, pushing the adolescent to perform in a particular way (the student role) and providing information that the adult wants to hear (Graham et al., 2013).

The power imbalance cannot be erased but it can be reduced through different channels. First, I was always transparent regarding my identity of PhD researcher, research goals and values. Second, the



idea of a preliminary survey in which I asked the activists to list the most important issues they thought should be studied was meant to make the research participatory and redistribute power. Third, the data collection took place in the most comfortable location, time and channel for the activists. Fourth, the potential benefits of the research from each side were explained and discussed on several occasions. Five, I did an important effort in building a relationship of trust and respect with the movement based on extended exchanges before, during and after the data collection. Six, the activists were offered the opportunity not only to freely add any kind of information during the interview but to add things even days after its conclusion. Seven, I tried to respect as much as I could the words used by the activists, not only during the transcription but also during the process of interpretation and writing.

Finally, being respectful is also being accountable. In extractivist research, the researcher is like a “miner” (Kvale, 2007) that arrives, extracts the relevant information, leaves and uses the information for his/her benefit (research publications and academic career). The flow of knowledge is one-way, from the “object of research” to the researcher. On the contrary, through my participatory approach, the research findings were shared in an activist-friendly format and organized a moment of discussion with FFF’s activists, the so-called respondent validation. Kvale (2007) names this role as “traveller” and emphasizes that he/she should spend time with activists, listen to their stories and foster participation. The idea is also that my academic publications on Fridays for Future should be freely accessible to all activists.

These aspects (human rights, risks, power imbalance, and accountability) are further discussed on the second part of the chapter.

### **The research must be useful for social actors**

If many social movement studies are considered distant and useless irrelevant by activists (Milan, 2014), the tradition of engaged research, inspired by Alain Touraine and Alberto Melucci, problematizes the relevance of the research for the movements themselves.

I have already mentioned that the approach adopted is in line with the movement-relevant theory proposed by Bevington & Dixon (2005). The idea is to find a middle-ground in which the research is respectful and relevant not only to the researcher but also to the activists, avoiding both the extreme poles of militant research, which has the risk of being acritical and biased and of positivist research, too detached and useless for the movement itself. This balance is not always easy. Sometimes, it

creates ethical dilemmas as when our analysis sharply differs from the movement' or when publishing some views or behaviours of a movement can damage it.

We can say that a study is useful for a movement when it offers the possibility of self-reflection, empowerment and awareness, especially related to negative internal dynamics and strategic limitations. This engaged research implies a dual audience: activists and social movement scholars (Hale, 2006).

To carry on this idea, a dialogue with the movement was established from the beginning to discuss the aspects to be studied and then the main findings, as it is said in the previous section. In the next sections, I further discuss this and the other issues and how I acted to conduct ethical-informed research.

## 4.2 Research questions

The formulation of the research questions was perhaps one of the hardest phases of the research. In this section, I reflect on the process of formulation of the research questions as well as the dilemmas that emerged during my study, in line with the attempt to be always transparent regarding my positionality.

A starting point was to take into account that less visible aspects of social movements are as much important as public actions. Researchers started studying Fridays for Future before the COVID-19 pandemic, surveying demonstrators and conducting frame and social media analysis. Those studies give us a profile of the participants (age, education, gender, and ideological background), information about the mobilization networks, communication and the role of emotions during the protests. However, demonstrators do not coincide with a movement's activists. Moreover, in line with the ideas of Alberto Melucci, my idea was that we needed to explore less visible and day-to-day activities of social movements (chats, rituals, calls, meetings, preparation of protests...) that are no less important than public actions. Erving Goffman (1959) called those dimensions the "back stage". Therefore, it was clear from the beginning the necessity to be an insider.

During the formulation of the dissertation prospectus, I elaborated the first version of my research questions based on what I thought would be the most interesting and relevant aspects of the movement: structure, identities, interaction with the political system, key explanans and the impact of the pandemic.

However, my idea was to be a “traveller” rather than a “miner” and to conduct a study not only relevant to me but also to the movement, considering at the same time the necessity to reduce the power imbalance, as it is said in the previous section. That is why I decided to conduct a small online survey with FFF’s activists in which three questions were asked.

The first was: which aspects of the movement should be studied? Then I presented my risk-reduction strategy: anonymity, confidentiality, use of safe software, informed consent, destruction of registrations, choice of place, time and modality of the interviewee by the activist. Hence, the second question was if they had additional suggestions regarding risk reduction. Finally, I asked them to express any supplementary suggestions.

On the 27th of November 2020, the survey was shared by my gatekeeper (that it is presented in the next section) in the Telegram chat which includes all representatives (“referenti”) of local groups that were supposed to spread it. After a few days of low response rate, I decided to communicate with all local groups on Instagram and Facebook, asking them to help me spread the questionnaire. On the 5th of December 2020, the survey was closed with 92 filled questionnaires. The exact number of FFF’s activists is unknown because there is no formal requirement for joining and no estimations have been conducted so far. Telegram’s group “Comunicazioni Attivist\* FFF Italia” is a broadcast channel for all activists so it is the most inclusive inside the movement. By May 27<sup>th</sup> 2021, it had 310 members (which then significantly increased). This allowed me to say that 92 filled questionnaires were a satisfying number. However, it is very likely that many former militants are still included while not all active members are necessarily included so it is hard to define how representative it is.

Concerning the first answer, the most voted items were ideology, identity, values (14.6%), the impact of the movement (14.4%), motivations of the activists (12.1%), tactics (10.9%), relationships with politics (8.2%) and strategy (8.2%). The relevance of the issue of the impact was surely one of the most important outcomes of the survey because I did not consider it at the beginning of the research. In the comments and answers to the third question, activists made some suggestions regarding issues such as strategy, tactics, pluralism, context, local groups, and future that I took into account.

The first interview outline was inspired both by my initial research interests and by the inputs received through the survey. It was then modified after my entrance to the field because I adopted a participatory approach, according to which the research design is circular and can be modified, including the initial research questions, in the interaction with the participants (de Cataldo & Russo, 2022). Another source of inspiration, especially for my participant observation, was the inductive

logic of the Grounded Theory in which the research problem emerges and is not decided a priori (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Being Fridays for Future a rather new movement, with a reduced pre-existing body of related literature collection, I thought that an inductive approach would be the best choice. Overall, the research questions were co-produced, in line with a tradition of qualitative studies that sees research questions as broad and open to unexpected findings, which means they can be modified, within a certain limit, as the research proceeds (Korstjens & Moser, 2017).

In the end, we can say that the research questions were inspired by the combination of my initial research interests, inductivism and the interests of FFF's activists. The final questions that were the following:

- What is the history of Fridays for Future Italy? (chapter 5)
- Who are we and who am I? (chapter 6)
- How do we interpret our present and future? (chapter 6)
- How do our lives change through the fight? (chapter 6)
- How do we get what we want? (chapter 7 and 8)
- What have we obtained so far? (chapter 8)

It is also important to say that this research was longitudinal. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2020 and April 2022, in the middle of the pandemic of COVID-19. Therefore, I had to take into consideration how the different stages of the pandemic influenced Fridays for Future Italy. As Pleyers (2020, p.38) states, "the COVID-19 outbreak is a battlefield for alternative futures", in which governments, parties, movements, counter-movements and enterprises participate. Hence, this was a crucial moment to study how Fridays for Future tried to place its vision of an alternative future on the political battlefield.

### 4.3 Methods and techniques

The fieldwork was based on participant observation, ethnographic interviews, semi-structured interviews and complementary analysis of the movement's main publications. Each aspect is discussed in the following sections. Then, I describe other issues such as data analysis, the conclusion

of the fieldwork, the respondent validation phase and some reflections on doing research during a pandemic.

### Entering the field

After sending an unsuccessful e-mail to the Italian account of the movement, I contacted FFF Milan's Facebook page on the 24th of November 2020 elucidating the research I wanted to conduct. The administrator of the page gave me the number of an activist, Marcello<sup>33</sup>, who then became my gatekeeper. In my conversation with him, it emerged that the best way to access the field was by joining the local group, rather than making contacts at the national level. The reason is the movement is very decentralized and national groups are generally constituted by people with some experience in local activism.

I took part in my first FFF Milan's online assembly on the 26th of November 2020. In that meeting, I introduced myself and the research I meant to carry on. I also expressed my ethical considerations on risks and accountability, committing myself to protect the identity of activists and sharing the preliminary results of my work before publication. The group welcomed me explaining that FFF is open to everybody, except fascists and racists, and the only concern was the necessity of not revealing sensitive information that could harm the movement. As it emerged since then, Fridays for Future is an inclusive movement with no formal rules of entry, except an informal expectation to share the general positions of the movement.

FFF is also a "liquid" movement with a continuous flow of new activists entering, old ones leaving, and others reducing their availability or "freezing" it during some periods. This means that the composition of each assembly and action changes a lot. Consequently, I had to re-introduce myself and the research on several other occasions, without receiving any negative commentary. Entering the field was not a one-off but rather a process.

Generally speaking, my positionality helped me every time I introduced myself and during the research. Fridays for Future is a self-proclaimed science-based movement so the relationship with scientists is very much appreciated and promoted. Moreover, it is mainly constituted of youths of my age or slightly younger with a scientific background. Finally, my explicit sympathy toward the

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<sup>33</sup> I use pseudonyms for all activists.

movement helped me to build the necessary trust to be included and have access to the information that was needed.

### Participant observation

Most studies on social movements focus on their public actions, the frontstage, to use the terminology by Goffman (1959). Consequently, the methods adopted are Protest Event Analysis, frame and discourse analysis, and standardized surveys. On the other hand, the backstage is much less explored. Participant observation is a fundamental tool to witness those aspects that are less visible, less accessible and daily, for instance, the internal organization, emotions, routines, rituals, symbols, power differences, dilemmas, disputes, production of meaning, processes of negotiation, re-negotiation and construction of collective identities (Juris & Khasnabish, 2015; Lambelet & Balsiger, 2014; Uldam & Mccurdy, 2013). Another advantage of participant observation is its intrinsic longitudinal approach that allows observing the evolution of a movement, in my case the continuous adaptation to the evolving epidemic context.

In the beginning, the participant observation consisted of taking part, observing and taking notes on the activities carried out by Milan's local group, from online and offline assemblies to formations, conferences, webinars, and protests such as flash-mobs, bike-strikes, mail-bombing, marches, rallies and so on. The total of these events was 34. This focus on Milan was due to the fact that the city has a well-known history of social movements (Bertuzzi, 2017; Diani, 1988; Lumley, 1990; Revelli, 1995) from animal-advocacy to environmentalism, feminism, student and workers protests, and social centres. Milan's FFF section was also one of the most active and influential. Moreover, in a period of harsh pandemic restrictions, it was surely advisable to conduct a considerable part of the fieldwork close to the researcher's residence.

With time, I also joined events organized at a national scale for the importance of that level. In this case, the total of events was 27. Finally, I also observed some activities organized at the European and international level (almost all online) and sporadic activities by other local groups to compare with Milan's. The European and international levels are very complex whereby they would require a separate study, so my observation was limited to seven events.

During the participant observation, I assumed a low profile, only performing small tasks such as joining social and mail bombing, writing minutes in meetings, holding signs or giving fliers during protests. I avoided other activities that could have had a greater influence such as writing statements,

posts or giving speeches. Being partially an insider allowed me to witness aspects that are less visible, less accessible and daily. It also allowed me to build trust with activists. In the end, all this helped me to produce a more truthful description and interpretation of the movement.

At the same time, my low profile equated with my decision to not embrace a full insider perspective since I still think that some detachment is necessary for the researcher. First of all, to reduce bias, and subjectivity and maintain a critical distance. I think this is beneficial for social movements since they do not need another “press office” or “spokesperson” from Academia but perhaps a chance for self-reflection, a mirror in which they can look at themselves and imagine potential changes. Secondly, the core group of Milan’s activists was significantly reduced during the worst phases of the pandemic (as all other groups) so a greater personal engagement could have played a considerable influence in that context. Thirdly, I think that when the ethnographer becomes too insider or militant it makes it hard to divide personal life and research and to leave the field. The risk is that activism becomes a priority over research.

This continuous seeking of a balance between the roles of insider and outsider and between engagement and detachment was one of the most important and difficult parts of my research. It involved dilemmas, compromises and negotiations.

The analysis of the ethnographic data (basically field notes) occurred in parallel with the data collection since participant observation is an iterative process.

## Interviews

Interviews in social movement studies are especially useful to learn about the mobilization strategies, the internal dynamics as well as the motives, beliefs, attitudes, identities and emotions of activists (della Porta, 2014).

Three kinds of interviews were conducted: ethnographic, semi-structured with activists, and semi-structured with key informants.

### Ethnographic interviews

The ethnographic interviews were conducted informally and spontaneously during protests or assemblies with activists with whom I had an established relationship to complement, confirm, or

discard my observations. Ethnographic interviewing is an interactive process which combines the emic, the reflections on a community by members of that community of community, with the etic, the researcher's insights on that same community (Allen, 2017).

#### Semi-structured interviews with activists

Regarding this kind of interview, it is important to clarify that there is no register of activists so it is not possible to have any sampling frame. However, it was possible to build a list of all FFF's local groups thanks to the social media data published on their website and the information given by some activists. At its peak in 2019, the movement had 169 local groups, even if some accounts may have been erased in time.

I divided the list of local groups into four regional categories: North-West, North-East, Centre, South and islands to balance my interviews territorially. Between December 2020 and January 2021, three pilot interviews were conducted by contacting the social media accounts of local groups. Then, I started contacting other accounts after having randomly extracted them from the four regional categories. In those communications, I suggested selecting the interviewee randomly since the idea was to avoid interviewing only leaders or more enterprising individuals. Rank-and-file activists are very important since they represent the largest population in social movements and they tend to provide more honest information regarding their private lives and their group, as they are less exposed to role pressures than leaders (della Porta, 2014). Then, as far as the interviews proceeded, I told some groups that activists of a specific gender were needed to balance the sample.

All participants were asked to read and sign a consent form before the interview. In the case of participants under the age of 18 years, their parents or legal tutors too will be asked to sign a consent form.

I used the criteria of saturation to stop sampling, in other words, my interviews finished when I felt that the inclusion of more cases did not contribute to any new information (Schreier, 2018). A total of 15 people composed the sample, as shown in annexe 2.

As it has already been said, no real names have been used but pseudonyms. To help the reader have more context when reading transcripts of interviews, I have created an identification code attributed to each activist. The reader will find it in the last column of table A. The first letters refer to the macro-region (NW=North-West, NE=North-East, C=Centre, S=South and Islands), the number is the



age while the last letter corresponds to their gender (M=Male, F=Female, N=Non-binary). Since two activists have the same code (Chiara and Carola) I added an “a” and a “b” at the end to distinguish them.

Since there is no data on the totality of activists in the movement, it is hard to say with certainty if the sample is balanced. Notwithstanding, based on the surveys conducted with demonstrators (which, however, do not coincide with activists) by Zamponi et al. (2019) and della Porta et al. (2020) and my field observation I can make some points that justify my impression that the sample is balanced. First, in the movement there is a prevalence of females over males. Second, the overwhelming majority are students. Third, there is a prevalence of Northern activists. The sample reflects all these considerations.

As I have already said, before, during and after the interviews special attention was paid to some ethical, methodological and epistemological concerns. First, I did a great effort to build a relationship of trust with each participant before the interview by introducing myself, carefully explaining the process and asking them to express their concerns. To reduce risks and power imbalance, I guaranteed anonymity, confidentiality, use of safe software for video calls and chats (generally Jitsi and Telegram or other options if preferred by the interviewee), informed consent, destruction of registrations, choice of place, time and modality of the interview by the activist. I used the outline of the interview as a flexible guide, giving priority to the expression of participants. I also gave them time to think about additional information they wanted to give me, even days after the conclusion of the interview.

I was especially careful with female teenagers under the age of majority because of the reinforced necessity to protect their dignity, well-being, and human rights. It is hard to deny that the “natural” power imbalance between the researcher and the interviewee is exacerbated in these cases (Graham et al., 2013). Hence, I spent more time before the interview detailing the process and clarifying their doubts, I asked their parents to sign an informed consent and agreed with two of them to avoid video recording. The use of open-ended questions and a certain degree of flexibility were two necessities that the literature suggests to allow children to bring their topics of interest (Eder & Fingerson, 2016).

The outline of these interviews is present at the end of the dissertation. Being semi-structured interviews the order of the outline was not always followed and in some cases, extra questions were added.

## Semi-structured interviews with key informants

By key informants from the movement, I mean activists that have some specific roles, generally in national groups. I conducted several interviews with them to explore some aspects that emerged as quite relevant during the fieldwork and needed more in-depth information. Here I present the list of key informants I interviewed and the main topics. Personal information is omitted because some of the national groups are rather small and the interviewees may be identifiable. The reader will find the table in annexe 3 at the end of the dissertation.

After the interviews, I maintained a channel of communication with many key informants, asking for some brief clarifications and short feedback on some of my findings. Some of them were even part of the respondent validation phase.

## Data analysis

In ethnography, there is no standardized set of steps, procedures or recipes to carry on the analysis (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007).

Through ethnography and interviews, different kinds of data were collected: field notes, analytical notes, memos, and transcriptions of conversations and interviews. However, since Fridays for Future is mainly composed of youths, it is fundamental to follow its social media accounts, especially Facebook and Instagram, and its national webpage, where relevant documents are published.

The content analysis of digital documents such as national assemblies' reports, materials of the campaign "Ritorno Al Futuro" and those related to the global climate strike has been important to study the collective identity, ideological aspects, frames, strategies, and tactics. The internal reports, on the other hand, allowed me to cast a light on the decision-making processes as well as the frame and ideological disputes that occur.

Regarding, social media publications, I used them only for triangulation since a complete analysis could have been very time-consuming. The use of multiple methods, data sources, theories, and/or observations can overcome the limits and biases inherent in studies that employ a single method, theory, data source, or observation and it can help to get a more holistic picture of the phenomenon (Ayoub et al., 2014). For the analysis, I extracted some Facebook and Telegram posts that hit my attention and that I found related to the research questions. I also made some keyword searches related

to topics that needed triangulation and randomly extracted some Facebook and Telegram posts that included those keywords, until data saturation.

The data analysis occurred in parallel with data collection as part of an iterative process. The software Nvivo was used to code the data with a combination of data-driven and theory-driven approaches.

### Leaving the field

In qualitative research, data collection usually ends when saturation is reached, i.e. when the inclusion of more cases does not provide any new information (Schreier, 2018). Data saturation is of course an ideal because it is impossible to get a perfect coverage of actors and events (Delamont & Atkinson, 2021), especially with an evolving phenomenon as a social movement. My core fieldwork was conducted between November 2021 and January 2022, when I felt I acquired a satisfactory familiarity with the phenomenon. In December 2021, I presented the preliminary results to the movement, receiving positive feedback. After January, I sporadically joined some events, to check for lacunae and confirmations. The most relevant event was the national assembly of April 2022, the first in presence since the burst of the COVID pandemic. That event was used as a symbolic cut-off for the research.

Engaged research rarely implies a full “leaving the field”. In my case, after April I continued joining some sporadic events organized by Fridays for Future both for personal reasons and to confirm or not by interpretations, even if without incorporating new elements into the analysis (such as antimilitarism). Moreover, I have maintained contact with some of the activists for feedback and discussions.

### Respondent validation

Respondent validation is the search for the assent of the participants to the interpretations given by the researcher (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). The benefits of this last stage are several: participants may have access to additional knowledge (of the context, of their experience, from their networks etcetera) that is not available to the researcher and it can help identify possible risks (e.g. repression or reputational) resulting from the publication of the study. Moreover, an ethical inquiry must consider the question of accountability (Milan, 2014).

However, we must be aware of the limits of this stage since participants could have an interest to give false information, misinterpretations or misdescriptions to counter the researcher's interpretation, or they could have memory loss (Milan, 2014). Hence, instead of being a real validation, we should conceptualize it as another form of triangulation, treating the feedback as another source of data.

As I said, at nearly the end of the fieldwork I did an online presentation of the preliminary results in an activist-friendly format. The comments were positive and the discussion was quite constructive. I also shared the recording and the slides for a month to encourage further comments. Then, I shared the key chapter of my dissertation with specific activists for feedback. This step was important in terms of accountability and reinforcing the idea of carrying on a study with the movement and not a study on the movement.

#### A final remark: doing research between infections and lockdowns

Almost the whole of my PhD (end of 2019-beginning of 2023) has been under the COVID-19 pandemic. This health crisis has deeply influenced my daily life, research and *Weltanschauung* (vision of the world). I summarize some key points related to its impact on my research.

Most interviews were conducted online because I privileged the minimization of risks for the interviewees and myself. In the hardest phases of the pandemic, there was simply no choice. In the more favourable moments in terms of infections, I gave the interviewees the choice and most of them opted for online. Since most FFF's activists are young and come from middle-class and urban areas, access to the internet and digital skills was not an issue.

I agree with those authors that consider online interviews as a viable option rather than just a secondary choice when face-to-face interviews cannot be done (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). A study by Shapka et al. (2016) suggests that the online modality with adolescents takes longer and produces fewer words but does not affect data quality, hence "there is no need for researchers to avoid conducting interviews online" (Shapka et al., 2016, p. 366). In any case, rapport building and technical preparation play a very relevant part in online interviews, as recognized by Nehls et al. (2015). Except this, in my experience, it is hard to generalize the advantages and disadvantages of online vs face-to-face interviews. I think it depends a lot on the interviewees. Online interviews allowed some of them to save time, be in comfortable places (e.g. in their room) and protect their health and privacy (especially important for female adolescents who had the opportunity to keep the webcam off). Moreover, it was easier for them to interrupt the interviews for any reason, though it did not happen.

I was also able to reach otherwise hard-to-reach adolescents (e.g. in small towns in the South, far from Milan) and save time and money thanks to online interviews. In other cases, I felt that the screen limited our interaction by reducing aspects such as small talk or by creating digital fatigue for both. The low quality of the internet connection of some interviewees is also a variable that created a bit of frustration. Except for these cases, technology was not a barrier at all since most FFF's activists are native digital who use ICTs every day.

Regarding my participation in events (assemblies, protests, webinars...), half of them were online and the other half offline. The online experience was different for me and the participants. In specific, what I call the "pleasure of activism" was hardly hit. I explore this in several chapters of the dissertation. I do not think this necessarily meant a reduction of the quality of the research but rather an opportunity for reflection, also for the activists themselves.

Obviously, the pandemic became one of the most important contents in my interviews, participant observation as well as in social media posts and publications by the movement. These aspects are discussed in the empirical chapters 6 (on identity), 7 (on structure) and 8 (on strategy).

I do not know if the quality of my work would have been different without the pandemic. What I know is that the pandemic has been the equivalent of an earthquake for a movement that was living its momentum just before the appearance of the Coronavirus. Apart from this, in terms of scientific knowledge, this was an excellent opportunity to study a movement's adaptation to an external shock and to witness their participation in the pandemic battlefield for an alternative future.

## 5 A brief history of Fridays for Future Italy

In this chapter, a chronology of Fridays for Future Italy divided into four periods is proposed: emergence, momentum, pandemic decline, and rebound. My sources include the book by Greta Thunberg and her family, newspapers, publications by FFF and the data collected during my fieldwork from November 2020. For the number of demonstrators, I mainly use the statistics published on the international website of the movement (<https://fridaysforfuture.org/>), even though I am aware these numbers have limitations: not all cities report and some groups may have the interest to inflate them. When it is not available, I use the data provided by activists directly to me or in mass media. When I joined small protests, I could directly count the numbers. I also detail the number of demonstrators in Milan and Rome since they are the Italian cities with the highest participation since the beginning.

The chronology ends with Civitavecchia's National Assembly of April 2022, which was the symbolical conclusion of the fieldwork.

A differentiation must be made between the Global Climate Strike, which is an event organized by FFF and supported by other movements and organizations, and the Global Day of Action, which was introduced in 2005, hence years before the rise of FFF but that is nowadays co-organized or entirely organized by the movement, depending on the country.

### 5.1 Emergence (November 2018-February 2019)

Greta Thunberg was born in 2003 in Stockholm. She first heard about climate change when she was eight years old, which led her to depression and eating disorders. She was also diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, obsessive-compulsive disorder and selective mutism.

Against the wishes of her parents, Greta Thunberg organized her first "School strike for climate" (Skolstrejk för klimatet) in front of the Swedish parliament, completely alone, on the 20th of August 2018. She took inspiration from the students of Parkland who used it after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Her request for Swedish politics was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. Quite soon, other students and workers joined her daily protest that was meant to put pressure on the Swedish general elections, held on the 9th of

September. On the 8th of September, they decided they would continue to strike every Friday to force Sweden to align with the Paris Agreement. It was the beginning of the hashtag #FridaysForFuture. Her activism and especially her public speeches went viral thanks to traditional media and her social media accounts, inspiring similar protests globally.

The first Italian climate strike was launched by Bruno Fracasso, a biology student and activist of Greenpeace, on the 30th of November 2018 in Pisa. Fracasso and the other activists who attended the rally then organized the first local group of FFF. In the following period, several other local groups were created, also inspired by the example of Greta and mainly organized by school and university students' networks. The first mobilizations were local and mainly based on the rally-strike conducted each Friday in the main squares. Some attempts were made to create a national coordination with several WhatsApp chats, then with Discord and finally with Telegram.

In this phase, there was a lack of concrete political proposals, at least at the national and international levels. Inspired by Greta Thunberg, the first mobilizations claimed that politicians should “listen to science”, “tell the “truth”, declare the climate emergency and that solutions were already available.

On the 15th of December 2018, Greta Thunberg made her first international speech at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Katowice, setting some influential topics such as anti-elitism, climate injustice, sense of urgency, and youth collective efficacy. The video of her intervention went viral and enormously influenced the rising movement.

In February 2019, the media visibility of the Italian groups of FFF soared for the announcement of the first Global Climate Strike.

## 5.2 Momentum (March 2019-January 2020)

This phase was characterized by a proliferation of local groups, the creation of a national structure and massive street mobilizations, probably the greatest in the history of environmentalism. The Italian section of Fridays for Future (and the other national branches) lived its momentum for an exceptional combination of factors: the popularity of Greta Thunberg; the use of a disruptive, novel and delightful tactic (the school strike) combined with an inclusive model of participation; a frame that combined sense of urgency, injustice and intergenerational clash; plenty of allies; good media coverage; a sympathetic government since Summer 2019; and an aligned public opinion. However, the so-called

Climate Decree that was approved by Conte II cabinet as a consequence of the climate strikes was mainly symbolic. The hope to multiply the street pressure to advance more ambitious legislation vanished with the burst of the pandemic.

Let us start with the beginning of the momentum phase. The turning point for Fridays for Future was the first Global Climate Strike, conducted on the 15th of March 2019 in 130 countries, 2348 cities and with 2,291,504 demonstrators. In Italy, 503,905 people mobilized in 278 cities. Milan saw the greatest participation with 140,000 people taking the streets while Rome reported 30,000. Adopting the terminology of della Porta (2020), that event can be considered as the beginning of a process of cracking which is the production of sudden ruptures in the system. Fridays for Future was able to break the myth of the passivity of youths and to deeply question our economic and political systems in its momentum. Thanks to the Global Strikes, the climate issue was pushed to the top of public attention in many countries and the core of the European agenda. Moreover, it radicalized and influenced mainstream environmentalism, trade unions, NGOs such as Amnesty International and even UN agencies such as UNICEF<sup>34</sup>.

In Italy, the first remarkable Global Strike galvanized the movement, leading to the creation of dozens of new local groups and the expansion of the existing ones. In the meanwhile, the national structure informally expanded. On the 12-13th of April 2019, the movement reunited in Milan for the first National Assembly which had the ambition to be a “momento costituente” (constitutive moment). More than 500 activists from 104 cities joined. Even though it did not produce remarkable agreements regarding the structure, it was a fundamental moment of networking, identity-building, and framing.

On the 17-19th of April, Greta Thunberg visited Italy and contributed to increasing, even more, the media visibility and reputation of the movement. The rising political pressure forced the city of Acri to declare the Climate Emergency on the 29th of April followed by other cities and regions. Milan was the first big city to declare it, on the 20th of May. The declaration of climate emergency was the first concrete claim of Fridays for Future Italy. Many of those cities and regions also opened a political-institutional dialogue with local FFF groups.

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<sup>34</sup> For instance, UNICEF multiplied its publications and programmes focused on climate change after the rise of Fridays for Future. In 2021, it published “The climate crisis is a child rights crisis. Introducing The Children’s Climate Risk Index” and “Children uprooted in a changing climate. Turning challenges into opportunities with and for young people on the move”. In 2022, it published “A Liveable Planet for Every Child UNICEF’s Strategy-at-a-Glance for Climate, Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Reduction — CEED (2022-2030)” and “Child-sensitive climate policies for every child”.



The second Global Strike was conducted on the 24th of May mainly to put pressure on the electorate and candidates for the European elections, which were held between the 23rd and 26th of May. The numbers were lower than the first Global Strike: 124 countries, 1970 cities and 768,976 protesters. In Italy, 110,000 people took to the streets in 191 cities. 30,000 demonstrators were counted in Milan and 10,000 in Rome. Using again the terminology of della Porta (2020), the second Global Strike contributed to the phase of protest vibration which is the reproduction of the ruptures produced in March. In the European elections, the green parties of countries such as Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Ireland and Belgium soared, pushing the new Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen to launch the European Green Deal. The Italian Greens (Europa Verde), however, were voted by a disappointing 2.4% of the voters, below the threshold of the electoral law.

The summer of 2019 was an important moment in the construction of transnational networks and claims. The first European joint strike was conducted on the 21st of June in Aachen (Germany). The first transnational meeting, the Summer Meeting in Lausanne Europe (SMILE), was held in Switzerland on August 5-9th, with 430 participants (30 Italians) from 38 countries. The idea of the SMILE was to be a moment of identity-building, networking, definition of claims and training.

In the meanwhile, the Conte I government, a coalition between the far-right party League and the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), collapsed. The climate crisis was one of the last priorities of a government which preferred to stick to a securitarian agenda, especially regarding migrants. The new cabinet was led again by Giuseppe Conte and supported by the Five Star Movement but with the centre-left Democratic Party and other minor forces instead of the League. If the climate entered into the political agenda and the structure of political opportunities seemed to open, the attitude of the government toward FFF was a mixture of paternalism and opportunism.

On the 7th of September, activists from FFF Venice and other movements and social centres occupied the Red Carpet during the Venice Film Festival, one of the most striking acts of civil disobedience conducted by Fridays for Future so far.

The flash-mob against RAI (the Italian public television) on the 20th of September marked the beginning of a strategy of attack against the invisibility or misrepresentation of the climate crisis by mass media. Other movements such as Extinction Rebellion performed more disruptive actions with the same goal.

On September 23, Greta Thunberg gave one of her most famous speeches at the U.N. Climate Action Summit of New York in which she told to global leaders: "you have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words", followed by the famous "how dare you!" and concluded with "the world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not." During her American trip, she was exposed to the struggles of Indigenous people and started acquiring a new perspective on the world centred on intersectionality and the North-South inequalities.

The third Global Strike was held in September 2019 (the 27th in Italy, in other countries on different dates) in 146 countries, 2254 cities and with 3,777,835 demonstrators. In Italy, 1,200,270 people took to the streets of 217 cities. The highest numbers were reached again in Milan with 220,000 people, followed by Rome with 200,250. This was the peak of the momentum phase of Fridays for Future, partially determined, I believe, by the decision of the Minister of the Education, University and Research Lorenzo Fioramonti to justify the absences of students. The powerful speech by Greta at the U.N. Climate Action Summit just a few days earlier surely was another mobilizing factor. Several politicians opportunistically joined the marches, including the Mayor of Milan Giuseppe Sala.

Galvanized by the success of the strike, FFF Italy held a second National Assembly in Naples between the 5th and 6th of October. More than 500 activists from 80 cities participated. The final declaration of the Assembly clarified the concepts of climate justice and system change, introduced intersectionality and proclaimed solidarity with workers and Local Unwanted Land Use movements. Compared to Lausanne's declaration, the rhetoric was more anti-establishment and centred on redistribution.

In the meanwhile, the Italian government started negotiating a "Climate Decree" which at the beginning rose high expectations. The decree was approved on the 14th of October but the final version was highly disappointing, starting with the fact that the announced cut of environmentally harmful subsidies was cancelled. FFF reacted with a post saying: "don't call it climate decree", criticising the low ambitions of the measure together with environmental organisations.

On 5 November 2019, the Minister of Education Fioramonti announced the introduction of the study of climate change in all schools but after two months the Associazione Nazionale Presidi (National Association of Deans) signed an agreement with Eni to train teachers on the topic, a choice heavily disputed by ecologists.

The European Parliament declared the Climate and Environmental Emergency on the 28th of November 2019, just a day before the fourth Global Strike. In the latter, 130 countries were involved, 2148 cities and 1 million people<sup>35</sup>. Italy reported 150,000 demonstrators in 140 cities, slightly higher than the second Global Strike but lower than the first and third. Milan's group did not publish its numbers on this occasion but a media close to Fridays for Future (Milano in Movimento) reported 20,000 people. The group of Rome reported 30,000 demonstrators. Those numbers were perhaps the combination of less favourable temperatures, the lack of school justification and a physiologic reduction after an intense period of mobilization. In Italy, the mobilizations were mainly directed against Black Friday.

After a failed attempt by the Senate in June, the Italian Chamber of Deputies declared the Climate Emergency on the 11th of December 2019, creating the illusion that political change was on the march. The following weeks showed that the distance between declarations and facts was abysmal.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, Lorenzo Fioramonti presented his resignation as Minister of Education, University and Research for his disappointment regarding the Budget Law and the movement lost what seemed to become its elite ally. The Budget Law was also disappointing for the broad environmental movement and it was labelled as a lost opportunity.

The beginning of 2020 was a dramatic moment for FFF Milan. Besides the mobilization from below, Bassini park was destructed by scrapers to allow the construction of a new building of the Polytechnic University. That act could be considered the moment of highest tension with the municipality of Milan and the definitive end of the dialogue with it.

In any case, Fridays for Future Italy had high expectations for the new year. The third National Assembly was planned for April in Sardinia and the second European Meeting for summer in the city of Turin while several Global Strikes were to be announced.

### 5.3 Pandemic decline (February 2020-August 2021)

This phase was the toughest in the history of the movement. Protests were prohibited in many countries and, when authorized again, under severe limitations. Overall, participation drastically

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<sup>35</sup> The movement reported 100,614,504 people but this number is likely to be a typo since it is remarkably higher than previous strikes. 1 million people is a more reasonable number.

declined. The mass media totally focused on the pandemic, invisibilizing the climate crisis and FFF. However, there was also some opportunity to experiment and diversify the tactical repertoire. The movement also explicitly frame-bridged health and climate and proposed an ambitious plan to build a “new normality” through a just ecological transition. However, the overall attempt to convert the pandemic into an environmental wake-up call failed, at least in Italy.

The first cases of SARS-CoV-2 were officially found in Italy on the 29th of January 2020, even though it is likely that the virus was already circulating at the end of 2019. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, the Italian Government formally declared the state of emergency. In February, the Coronavirus quickly diffused in some areas of the North of Italy, creating considerable doubts regarding the opportunity for mass mobilizations. On February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Government imposed the first local restrictive measures. On the 9th of March, it approved the so-called national lockdown with even harsher limitations since the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March. Citizens were prevented from leaving their homes with few exceptions (work, health, purchase of essential goods) while schools, universities, museums, cultural centres, sports facilities and any non-essential economic activity were shut down until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April. These were “unprecedented limitations to individual freedom and rights for a non-authoritarian regime” (Canestrini, 2020, p. 118).

The third National Assembly of FFF Italy, planned for April, was cancelled. In the impossibility of face-to-face assemblies and street demonstrations, FFF launched the campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” (RALF), a comprehensive set of proposals for a green recovery written with scientists and other civil society partners. Even though some steps were already taken before the pandemic, RALF can be considered the real beginning of the national advocacy strategy of the movement. Della Porta (2020) refers to “protest sedimentation” as the stabilization of the legacy of the rupture. The pandemic surely contributed to this process, but the institutionalization was only partial, as the following months demonstrated.

On the 24th of April, Fridays for Future launched its 5th Global Strike, the first completely digital, with included tweet storms and photos of protest signs with selfies. Compared to previous strikes, the media coverage was drastically reduced since the pandemic kept attracting all attention.

Even though the protests in the streets were prohibited, FFF intensively promoted cultural activities such as webinars with experts, media, celebrities and artists, the so-called “Cameretta Tour”, literally “Little Bedroom Tour. At the same time, Milan’s group promoted a series of webinars with the transfeminist movement Non Una di Meno, called “Fuori Classe. Appunti per una scuola

ecotransfeminista” (“Out of the Class. Notes on an ecotransfeminist school”). Some activists also created Risorse for Future, an only repository of cultural artefacts (videos, movies, series, books, articles, songs, podcasts...) related to the climate crisis.

In the meanwhile, Greta Thunberg kept a low profile but acquired a rising awareness of global inequalities and the struggles of Southern, black and Indigenous people thanks to the video calls and training organized by those activists who then will assume the name of Fridays for Future MAPA (Most Affected People and Areas). The intersectional and decolonial approach of FFF MAPA will have a relevant impact also on the Italian branch.

Since June 15th, the Italian government authorized again demonstrations and a few local groups organized small actions such as bike-strikes, rallies, flash mobs and face-to-face assemblies. However, the media attention remained low.

On the 20th of June, the movement was invited to present its proposals (RALF) to the Stati Generali (General States), an initiative of the Conte II cabinet to create a social dialogue for economic recovery.

On the 25th of September, FFF Italy mobilized for the Global Day of Climate Action and then on the 9th of October for a National Climate Strike in presence, the first protest events in presence since the burst of the pandemic. Few cities participated and the numbers of demonstrators were generally not reported. On the 9th of October, 200 people went on strike in Milan and 2000 in Rome, according to media reports.

In January 2021, the centrist party Italia Viva withdrew its support to the government and Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte was forced to resign. The entire Parliament, except the far-right party Fratelli d'Italia and some minor groups, voted the motion of confidence for the new cabinet led by the technician Mario Draghi. The new Prime Minister created the Ministry for Ecological Transition and proclaimed that climate would be one of his priorities. However, the hope for a radical change quickly dissolved.

For the Global Day of Action on the 19th of March 2021, FFF Italy mobilized in 53 cities mainly in static form but also with some bike-strikes. In Milan, only 200 people took the streets.

In April, two national demonstrations were organized against the Recovery and Resilience Plan in Rome and Bologna, followed, in May, by another national protest against the Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) project by ENI in the city of Ravenna.

Summer 2021 was a moment of ferment that prepared the successive rebound. Fridays for Future Italy joined the mobilizations against the G20 hosted in Naples, the counter-summit called Eco-Social Forum as well as the campaign “Giudizio Universale” (“Universal Judgement”), the first court case for climate inaction promoted against the Italian State.

After 2021’s summer, the overall impression was that with the improvement of the pandemic situation, the time was mature to relaunch massive protests and regain the political influence the movement had in 2019.

#### 5.4 Rebound (September 2021-April 2022)

In autumn 2021, the context turned more favourable for street mobilizations thanks to the progress of the vaccine campaign, the authorization of marches, the opening of schools and a series of international events hosted by Italy boosted by Greta Thunberg’s participation. FFF Italy was able to produce a new wave of large street demonstrations even without reaching the numbers of 2019 and with many local groups, especially in the South, still inactive. The return of national assemblies and training in presence were also symbolic moments of “rebirth”. However, overall, the political influence of FFF Italy seems limited.

The 6th Global Strike on September 24th-25th was the symbolic beginning of the “rebirth” of Fridays for Future. It was organized in 100 countries, 1328 cities and with 899,776 demonstrators. In Italy, 100,000 people mobilized. Milan did not report but its activists declared 5000 people in some media, but we must consider that most of the energy was being invested in the mobilizations of the following week. Rome reported 15,000 people. In terms of narrative, the great novelty was the incorporation of a decolonial approach thanks to the Global Southern activists of Fridays for Future MAPA. This new process of cracking produced a new wave of global demonstrations even though Italy did not reach the levels of the momentum period.

Between the 28th of September and the 2nd of October Milan was named the “capitale del clima” (climate capital) for hosting the pre-COP (a preparatory meeting for the climate Conference of the Parties of Glasgow), the Youth 4 Climate, both organized by the government, the Eco-Social Forum and the Climate Camp, managed by two different networks of the civil society. On September 30th, Martina Comparelli, national spokesperson of FFF Italy, Greta Thunberg and Vanessa Nakate, an

activist from Uganda, were received by Prime Minister Draghi in Milan. Milan's climate strike on the 1st of October is likely to have been the greatest climate demonstration since the burst of the pandemic in Italy, with 50,000 people reported by FFF. The participation of Greta Thunberg was surely a catalyst and her "blah blah blah" speech revealed all the frustration of the movement toward the lack of ambitious climate policies. Except for this event, Greta maintained a low profile, in line with her decision to foster internal decolonization and give more space to other activists, especially from MAPA. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 10,000 people joined the Global March for Climate Justice.

The successive Global Strike (the 7th) was held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2021 to exercise pressure before Glasgow's climate change Conference of the Parties. The data is not reported on the website but the participation in Italy and especially in Milan was quite modest, for the saturation of events in the previous weeks and the reorientation of energies toward the anti-G-20 demonstration of the 30<sup>th</sup> of October in Rome, with some unions and student associations.

In November, Glasgow hosted the 26th COP and several activists from Italy joined it as well as the counter-summit (The People's Summit for Climate Justice) and the massive protests. The official conference ended with disappointing results for activists. Some progress was made but with severe compromises that limited the ambition of the final declaration. The State parties committed "phase down" coal and not "phase out", to erase only "inefficient" fossil subsidies and not all of them. The countries of the Global Methane Pledge agreed to cut 30% of methane gas emissions by 2030 from 2020 levels but China, Russia and India (which concentrate 35% of emissions) refused to. No ambitious commitment to finance the ecological transition of the Global South was made. Intensive agriculture and breeding, hard-to-abate sectors and consumption reduction were ignored by policymakers.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, FFF Italy organized its first national training in Brescia (in Lombardy), a very relevant moment to build cohesion and motivate activists. 204 youths attended from 48 local groups with a disproportion between North and South, also due to the location of the event (North-West).

In February 2022, the Italian Parliament approved a constitutional law that introduced the protection of the environment, biodiversity and ecosystems "in the interest of future generations" and clarified that private economic initiatives shall not be carried out "in such a way as to damage health and the environment."

On March 25th, Fridays for Future organized its 8th Global Climate Strike in 93 countries, 675 cities and 505,338 demonstrators. On that occasion, the movement did not publish accurate data, but some activists estimated 50,000 people in Italy, with approximately 20,000 in Rome and 5000 in Milan.

On April 8-10th 2022, the city of Civitavecchia, close to Rome, hosted the third National Assembly, the first since 2019, another very symbolic moment of the phase of “rebound”. 120 people attended the event but again with weak participation from the South despite the city being in the centre of Italy. The Assembly was a moment of training and open discussion on several topics. It did not end with a public declaration as in previous assemblies, but several decisions were taken and pushed forward by working groups.

## Discussion

Fridays for Future and its Italian branch emerged and spread in the world in 2018, first with first small and local groups and protests, then with global and massive marches coordinated by rising national and international structures. In 2019 FFF was a meteor, a social movement with impressive speed and mass which created great political pressure and raised enormous expectations. The sudden burst of the pandemic meant a temporary reset to street mobilizations and a deep and painful process of adaption, mainly in the form of digitalisation. The gradual improvement of the health crisis relaunched the movement but without the numbers of the past. An activist who is involved in the counting of FFF's demonstrators believes the most recent estimations (2021-2022) are more realistic than in 2019 so the distance between the momentum and rebound is probably lower than shown by data. Still, it is hard to deny that the numbers of September 2019 have been unreachable, also because that strike relied on an alignment of very favourable conditions. In any case, after four years of protests, the frustration toward the inadequacy of the climate policies adopted by Italian governments is palpable and the rise of the new right-wing cabinet led by Giorgia Meloni does not represent good news for the movement.

This chapter ends with a graph showing the number of demonstrators in the main protests organised in these four years, whenever data is available. The data must be taken with some caution since there is always a temptation to inflate numbers and because of the most realistic estimations for the last period, as I have already said.



## Number of demonstrators in selected protests

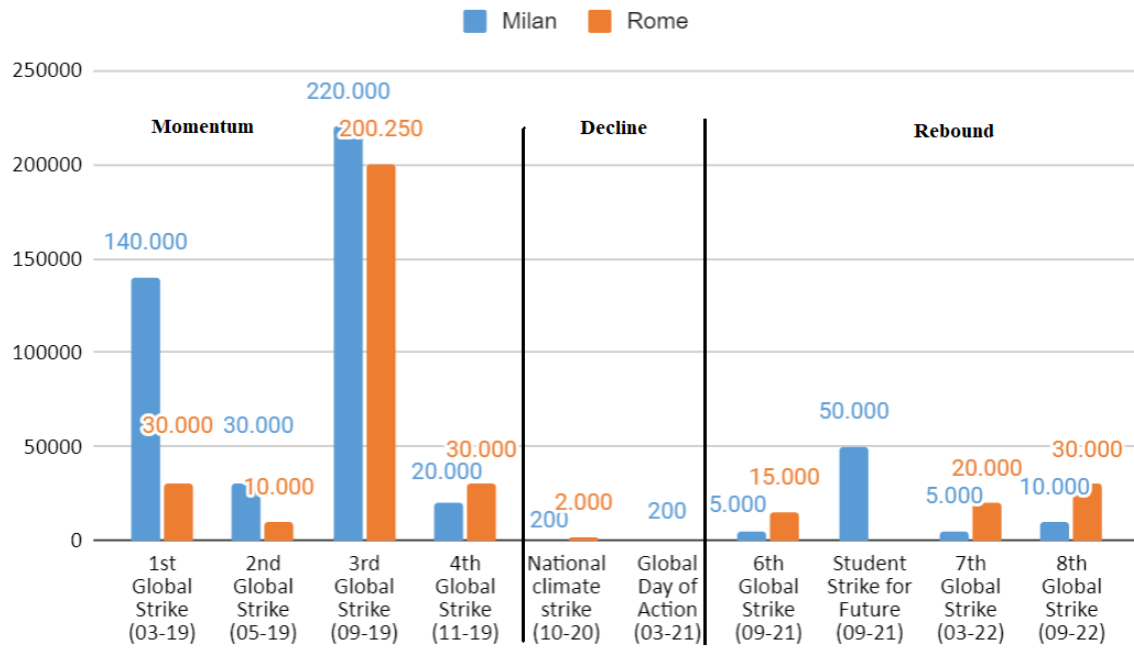


Figure 1: number of climate demonstrators in selected protests

## 6 “We are the resistance”. Building a collective identity while preserving diversity

This chapter is built around two questions. The question “who are we” brings us to the study of the collective identity of a movement or group which is the self-definition and the sense of belonging to a collectivity, in other words, the sense of “we-ness”. For humans as for all social creatures, the group is the unit of survival that provides protection against hostile environments and external enemies and a sense of psychological security (Frank & Melville, 2001). My focus in this chapter is on the collective identity of Fridays for Future at the national level, I do not explore the identity of its local groups.

The question “who am I” opens the door to exploring the individual identity, i.e. how activists perceive and define themselves. In a social movement, individual and collective identities interact influencing each other, in some cases even creating conflicts. Hence, we cannot analyse them separately.

In this section, some of the ideas developed by the Italian sociologist and psychotherapist Alberto Melucci (1989, 1991) are used. Melucci believed collective identity is one of the most important goals of social movements since it can produce cognitive, emotional, and moral impacts that sustain mobilization. In his conception, collective identity is “an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals” (Melucci, 1989, p. 34). Melucci explained that the movement identity is not a thing but a process that is always fluid. However, Saunders (2003) suggests that in some organizations it is can quite permanent for inertia or domain of leaders. My position is that collective identity, more than a process, is a fiction that emerges from an internal process of negotiation or by the imposition of a leader.

Following the social constructivist approach of Melucci, individual identities should not be seen as sets of pre-established characteristics but as the result of dynamic social processes of creation, displaying, and management of identity, what we can call identity work (Snow & Anderson, 1987). For Fridays for Future, face-to-face local and national assemblies, street protests and global meetings are key rituals in which internal identity work is activated. The pandemic has negatively affected them and digitalization could not balance this loss.

At the collective level, identity work can be directed internally and externally. The internal process of construction and maintenance of a coherent collective identity sustains participation by creating solidarity, pride and self-esteem (Jasper & McGarry, 2015). Hence, it involves a very important emotional dimension. For Fridays for Future Italy, the internal identity work is especially complex and articulated since it includes the local, national and global levels, with frequent disputes related to internal inequalities, privileges and ideological differences. The common solution to these disputes is a weak collective identity and the acceptance of diversity that implies that the process of convergence of individuals is not necessarily total. This is nothing new: with the appearance of New Social Movements, Melucci (1996b) already noted that collective identities were no longer rock-solid, monolithic and demanding self-sacrifice but they tended to preserve subjectivities, a statement that is still valid nowadays (Raffini & Pirni, 2019).

Externally, identity work is inserted in a clash between the auto-identification of a movement and the hetero-identification of powerful actors (Della Porta & Diani, 2020). Historically, identities have always been used to oppress or inspire stigmatized groups (Jasper & McGarry, 2015). At the core of this struggle, we find the clash between legitimization and delegitimization. In far-right media, climate activists are represented as kids, incompetent, lazy, catastrophists, incoherent or controlled by renewable companies. They have even been labelled as “rompiscatole” (pain in the ass) and “gretini” (a crasis between Greta and “cretini“, fools in Italian).

Based on previous studies, Zabern & Tulloch (2020) affirm they children are considered illegitimate political actors and their voices are often absent from media coverage or if they are present, they are stereotyped. The study conducted by the two authors on FFF Germany confirmed this: the press represents the movement as exploited by adults and its political agenda has been marginalized and depoliticized, hence reproducing existing power structures (Zabern & Tulloch, 2020). Another research (Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020) similarly affirms that the German press uses ageist images to de-legitimize the movement.

Stigmatization is a fundamental mechanism of social domination. Consequently, movements need to construct and defend their legitimization as political actors by projecting their identity as a message to authorities, bystanders, and opponents (Jasper & McGarry, 2015). This becomes even more important when disruptive tactics are adopted and during some phases of the pandemic when a discourse delegitimizing protests was activated. In short, protesters were considered irresponsible citizens for spreading the virus in their actions. The simple equations were: responsibility=inactivity,

protests=irresponsibility. For instance, in late 2020, the German government released a video celebrating citizens who did nothing and stayed at home as "COVID-19 heroes". Even if slightly less explicitly, the message from the Italian authorities was the same. Hence, the movement struggled to re-legitimize itself, its repertoire of contention protests and motivate again activists and sympathizers by emphasizing at the same time the urgency of acting against the climate crisis and the necessity to conduct responsible and safe mobilizations.

Another key idea that emerged from the sociology of social movements and the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1997) is that identities tend to be based on a juxtaposition between a positive definition of the self and the negative definition of the opponents, while the differences between groups and the similarities within the same group are exaggerated on purpose. Those sitting in a neutral position are also identified and defined. Hence, the construction of identity implies defining protagonists, antagonists, and audiences, as it is explained in the following sections.

The other theoretical concepts used in this chapter are frames, diagnostic framing and prognostic framing. Similarly to identity, frames generally emerge from an internal social process of negotiation (Gamson, 1992). When I talk of national frames, I mean the dominant schemata of interpretation used by FFF Italy. It is important to go beyond a vision of social movements as monolithic actors. In this sense, I agree with Benford (1993) that frame disputes are a crucial and essential feature of the everyday life of movements.

In this chapter, I first explore the concept of youth climate resistance as a possible national answer to the question "who are we?" (section 6.1). Then, the discussion continues with what it means to be a global movement (section 6.2). Third, the ideal of horizontalism is explored (section 6.3). Fourth, the values of inclusiveness and diversity and their downsides are analysed (section 6.4). Fifth, I discuss how identities are shaped by the experience of activism (section 6.5). After a very short section on ideology (6.6), the chapter concludes with a discussion of the main findings on the issue of identity (6.7).

## 6.1 Youth climate resistance

During the fieldwork, it emerged that a starting point to understand Fridays for Future Italy is by seeing it as a form of youth climate resistance, already used in this sense by Holmberg & Alvinus (2019). The report of the 2nd National Assembly of FFF Italy, held in Naples in October 2019,

affirmed: “We are not willing to give up, we are the resistance.” Another example: a post published on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 made a parallel between Partisans and climate activists, ending with #ResistereOggi (#ResistToday). In this sense, resistance can be seen as an opposition (not necessarily violent) to the oppression and injustice committed by a powerful actor against subaltern groups (in this case youths). I start this section by exploring the concept of climate injustice and the frame bridging with the health crisis, then moving to the subalternity of youths and the social construction of antagonists, a crucial element of identities. The section ends with the self-view of FFF as the youth climate resistance, as a possible answer to the question “who we are?”

### Climate injustice

Climate injustice and justice are, respectively, the core Fridays for Future’s grievance and claim. I believe that a discussion of climate injustice could be a starting point in understanding the movement. The issue of climate justice is discussed in chapter 8.

Injustice is the “moral indignation expressed in the form of political consciousness” (Gamson, 1992, p.7). Therefore, climate injustice is the political-moral indignation regarding the climate crisis and it represents the core global grievance of Fridays for Future since the beginning. Besides not being new, I believe that the concept has been popularized by Greta Thunberg. To explore it, we need to analyse the diagnostic framing conducted by the movement which is the social construction of grievances and responsibilities (Snow et al., 1986). Frame theory has its roots in social-constructivism. As Lindekilde (2004, p.203) suggests, “collective grievances and demands do not flow automatically from social structures and strain, but come into existence partly through processes of interpretation, discursive practices, and active meaning making” and that “a constant battle over dominance in defining social reality is unfolding.”

The key starting point is that climate change is reframed as climate crisis by FFF: a here-and-now threat not only to non-human species and ecosystems but especially to the most vulnerable humans. “The climate crisis is already here! [...] These effects will impact everyone, rich and poor, and will be more devastating to the most vulnerable: the poorest and the youngest” affirms the movement on its webpage. And again, “the climate and ecological crisis is the greatest threat humanity has ever faced”. Let us see also an extract from the first press release (March 2019): “humanity is causing the sixth mass extinction and the global climate situation is on the verge of a catastrophic crisis. Millions

of people around the world are already suffering dramatic consequences [...] Climate change is already here. People are already dead, they're dying, and they're gonna die because of it."

The other key point is that it is not considered a crisis by the political elite, which is the moral justification for mobilizing. As Beck (2014) argues, States and enterprises are involved in the "politics of invisibility" that makes global risks invisible or less visible to the general population. The reason is that those risks threaten the legitimacy of the State, founded on the capacity to provide safety for its citizens. The adoption of the expression "climate crisis" or "climate emergency" is a political choice also popularized by Greta Thunberg meant to cancel the potential positive and gradual connotations of climate change and global warming (see for instance Bedi, 2020) and to convey mobilizing emotions such as fear, indignation and rage. In this sense, this framing can be seen as a politics of visibility, the production of visibility of the threat represented by the climate crisis. Moreover, the expressions "crisis" or "emergency" also serve to justify forms of civil disobedience such as the school strike or more disruptive actions.

As it emerges from its frames, Fridays for Future has explicitly securitized the climate crisis (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020), hence the old assumption that environmentalism is essentially a post-material movement can no longer be sustained. I think the dominant position can be defined as anthropocentric ecologism in the sense that ecological problems are first of all seen as a threat to humans. The words of my gatekeeper Marcello well represent the position of the movement. During the interview he said that the climate crisis does not put at risk "only the biodiversity, the beauty of this planet and the life of this planet, it puts at risk us", in the sense of putting "at risk the cohesion of our societies, the respect of human rights in the world [...], the persistence of our democracy" and it could be causing a "potential direct extinction". The above-mentioned extract from the first press release regarding "millions of people around the world are already suffering dramatic consequences" is also an explicit securitization of the climate crisis.

To explore how the climate crisis converts into climate injustice we need to look at the three components of this climate injustice frame: temporal, spatial, and social.

The temporal component has been more relevant since the beginning. It stresses the juxtaposition between the future at risk of new generations and their marginal or null contribution to greenhouse emissions to the wealthy past and present of old generations, the main contributors to the climate crisis. The website of FFF Italy affirms that "the new generations see an increasingly dark future" while in the letter to the government in 2020 it was affirmed that "the youths will be the ones facing

the worst consequences of the climate crisis caused by the political inaction”. Children and youths can be seen not only as subalterns but also as “climate precariat” (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020), a concept that emphasizes their vulnerability and rising exposure to the climate crisis. In terms of temporality, this climate precariat is forced to constantly think about its future and the future consequences of its actions, making it hard to live peacefully in the present. In this way, the dimension of uncertainty and crisis of the future (Leccardi, 2009) that youths are facing is amplified. If FFF Italy frames our future as at stake, it also needs to reiterate that it is still open, and there is still hope. I go back to this point in the section dedicated to the sense of urgency in chapter eight.

The spatial component stresses the juxtaposition between the Global North, the most responsible for the climate crisis, and the Global South, the most affected by socio-natural disasters besides having a marginal responsibility for historical greenhouse emissions. In recent times, FFF Italy has adopted the acronym MAPA to name the Most Affected People and Areas by the climate crisis, mainly in the Global South but not only. Moreover, those territories have a history of exploitation under colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism that has never ended. As it is affirmed on the Instagram page of Fridays for Future Mapa (whose translated version was published on the website of FFF Italy), “MAPA are the areas that were colonized and historically marginalized in the globe. We are the least responsible for the climate emergency, but we are the ones who suffer the most from its consequences”.

The social component of climate injustice regards the clash between those categories which are at the same time marginal contributors to greenhouse emissions and more vulnerable (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color or BIPOC, women, people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ or belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, children and youths, people living in poverty and so on) with privileged people from the elite (the 1%) which are on the contrary main contributors and less vulnerable to the shocks of the climate crisis. Since at least the second National Assembly of 2019, Fridays for Future Italy has incorporated intersectionality into its climate injustice frame. In this perspective, the multiple identities of individuals intersect to create hierarchies of oppression, discrimination and privilege, within a system that is defined by the movement as “patriarchal, sexist, racist, colonialist, machist and based on the logic of accumulation of profit”. To use the definition published on the Instagram page of Fridays for Future (and translated into Italian by FFF Italy):

Intersectionality is the notion of intersecting (marginalized) identities and how this impacts one's lived experiences. Essentially it looks into how someone's various cultural, political, and social identities (such as gender identity, sexual or romantic orientation, racial identity, nationality, religion, disability, and more) intersect and create systems of discrimination, disadvantage, and privilege.

The climate crisis produces unequal effects according to the positions in these hierarchies and it threatens to reinforce them. As it is affirmed on the website of FFF Italy, “marginalised communities are more likely to be affected by the climate crisis both by the direct effects and by the structural mechanisms of oppression linked to the systemic causes of climate change”. The influence of FFF International and FFF MAPA has further strengthened this framework to the point that the Italian section uses the expression “intersectional climate (in)justice”. It is also important to notice that the concept of MAPA is spatial and social at the same time. Let us recall what it is affirmed on the Instagram page of Fridays for Future Mapa and the website of FFF Italy, “MAPA are the areas that were colonized and historically marginalized in the globe” but “includes [also] BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and People of Colour] and marginalized sectors in Global North countries as well. The factors making us the most impacted by the climate crisis are not just limited to geographical aspects but also socio-economic aspects that systematically make it difficult for us to adapt”.

To put some examples of climate injustice. The USA is responsible for 24.5% of cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> emissions between 1751 and 2020, and the European Union for 17.1% (Ritchie, 2019). At the global level, the richest 10% is responsible for almost 50% of anthropic emissions, and the 50% poorer for only 12%. According to UNICEF (2021), children in the Central African Republic, Chad, Nigeria, Guinea, and Guinea Bissau are the most vulnerable to environmental stresses and extreme weather events while their countries together contributed to 0.2% of cumulative emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>.

This framing of the climate crisis is a counter-hegemonic struggle against climate denialism, climate delayism greenwashing and the mainstream representation of climate change as a depoliticized problem to be solved only by cutting greenhouse emissions with market-based, technocratic management, and technological solutionism, what Deriu (2022) calls second-type denialism. In this way, capitalism itself provides the tools to “adjust” the problem while the social and historical responsibilities for emissions, the linkage with colonialism and the structural inequalities are neglected. However, as we will see, sometimes FFF also adopts a strategy of depoliticization but quite differently: it magnifies the role of science as the guiding light for politics but it rejects market-based solutionism.

With the burst of the COVID-19 pandemic, FFF extended the injustice frame to it to dispute the hegemonic discourse of the “war on the virus.” In January 2020, the perception by authorities was that the probability of the virus being introduced into Europe was moderate as well as the risk of infection and that its consequences were comparable to a common cold. At the end of February 2020,



it became clear that the initial evaluations were completely wrong. COVID-19 quickly converted into the biggest health threat of the last decades for our country and the Italian government, then followed by others in Europe, started framing the pandemic as a war unexpectedly started by an exogenous enemy. The war against the Coronavirus needed to be fought with a national mobilization, all together, all united and all responsibly. On several occasions, the then Prime Minister Conte proclaimed we are “altogether to defeat the invisible enemy”. The serious attitude (after the initial underestimation) and the draconian containment measures adopted by the government were widely appreciated by the population (Tosi, 2021). However, the underlying causes of pandemics, the vulnerability of Western health systems after years of drastic cuts and the correlation between mortality and air pollution were denounced by social activists and scientists but neglected by politicians. I believe the creation of an enemy image of the virus contributed to the invisibilization of those aspects and helped the enforcement of the containment measures.

Overall, the discourse of national unity tended to discourage protest. If we all need to fight together the virus, by staying at home, using masks, maintaining social distancing and vaccinating ourselves, why should I protest? In this complex scenario, Fridays for Future Italy acknowledged the seriousness of the threat represented by the pandemic, aligning with the warnings of the scientific community and sticking to the restriction applied by the government. Nevertheless, it also actively counter-framed the pandemic to maintain attention on the climate crisis high and legitimate protests.

In the beginning, the strategy was to emphasize the sense of urgency and threat represented by the climate crisis, whose importance must not be shadowed by the pandemic. At the global level, FFF adopted the hashtag #fighteverycrisis to recall that climate change is still an ongoing crisis that should not be forgotten or set aside. FFF Italy was even more explicit. In a picture published by the movement in 2020, COVID-19 was represented as a worrying tsunami but smaller than the recession tsunami in turn smaller than the climate change tsunami. The statement that launched the campaign “Ritorno al Futuro”<sup>36</sup> (Back to the Future) in April 2020 announced, “this is our last occasion”. Snow & Benford (1988) uses the term frame centrality to denote how important the grievance is on the hierarchy of public issues. Hence, the movement attempted to give centrality again to the climate crisis, completely overshadowed by the pandemic.

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<sup>36</sup> The title of the campaign, taken from the famous 1985’s movie, was meant to emphasize that after the pandemic crisis, we cannot go back to the past business-as-usual but that is necessary to build a new future. The campaign is further analysed in the chapter dedicated to strategy.

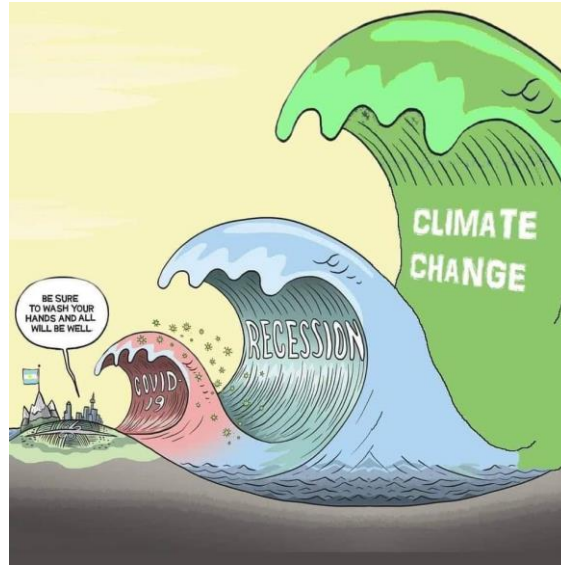


Figure 2: comics published by FFF Italy representing the fact that climate change is still the greatest threat

With time, FFF Italy reframed the pandemic as the product of the capitalist exploitation of nature more than a war started by an exogenous enemy. In this sense, both the climate and health crises were framed under the injustice frame and attributed to the exploitative economic system at the service of the elite. Snow et al. (1986) identify frame bridging as the linking of ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames. The two frames bridged by FFF Italy were health and environment. For years, the scientific community has appointed that the spillover of viruses from one species to another was facilitated by global warming, deforestation, intensive breeding and farming, wild animal traffics and wet markets (Quammen, 2014; Shah, 2020). Fridays for Future launched several messages related to this. In April 2020, a post named “Climate crisis and epidemics: our health depends on ecosystems” discussed the alarms contained in the book “Spillover” by David Quammen (2014) and declared that “we must stop burning #FossilFuels, devastate ecosystems and reset #biodiversity or events like this [the pandemic] will happen again”. The post by FFF was in line with the historical struggle of environmentalism to stress our vulnerability and interdependence with ecosystems and promote the consciousness of our limits that should guide us toward responsibility and care for the world (Pulcini, 2009).

Then, at the beginning of 2021, a study from the University of Cambridge revealed that the increase in temperatures, sunlight and CO<sub>2</sub> brought by climate change modified the natural habitats in the southern Chinese province of Yunnan (and adjacent regions in Myanmar and Laos) from tropical shrubland to tropical savannah and deciduous woodland (Beyer et al., 2021). That growth of forests favoured a suitable environment for many bat species, attracting them and hence converting the area

into a "global hotspot" for coronaviruses, including, probably, the SARS-CoV-2. Lastly, the study found that the alteration of habitats forced species to move into other areas, taking their viruses with them. FFF Italy took this opportunity to reinforce its frame bridging. In February, it made a clear statement on its social media: "it is more certain that the #ClimateCrisis has triggered the #Covid-19 pandemic in China".

The frame bridging between health and environment took the opportunity of the new discursive opportunity structure to give centrality to environmental issues and relaunch climate activism. The message was: the pandemic made clear that defending the environment is the best way to protect our health. At the national level, this frame bridging can be summarized with the slogan "our health depends on ecosystems". As Pleyers (2020, p. 308) noted, "progressive movements consider the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for humanity to take its future in its hand, at a time of rising inequalities and when the economic system endangers life and the planet itself", hence, "COVID-19 outbreak is a battlefield for alternative futures." I go back to the pandemic as a potential turning point in the eighth chapter, dedicated to strategy.

Some groups and activists used the frame bridging between health and climate/environment to replace the image of the virus as an enemy with elite blaming, in the attempt to create a sense of injustice that could break the pandemic apathy and produce mobilization. Milan's group, for instance, emphasized the link between air pollution, health privatization and COVID mortality. In the Global Strike of March 2021, its activists raised a banner in front of the region which was said: "aria inquinata, sanità privata: Lombardia malata" (polluted air, private health: ill Lombardy) and "La Regione uccide" (the Region kills). In the press release, they declared that the management of the pandemic by Fontana's junta – and Gallera initially [former Welfare Assessor]– was a succession of mistakes and very bad decisions."

The region Lombardy was an emblematic case of a syndemic. This biosocial concept stresses the interconnections between the coronavirus disease and other health problems, socio-economic inequalities, environmental conditions and political factors (Fronteira et al. 2021). It was not only the density of the population and the numerosity of displacements to produce a tragedy in the region, but also the decennial dismantlement of the health system and the very bad management of the pandemic (Agnoletto, 2020). Moreover, the impressive mortality rate was also conditioned by the extremely high levels of air pollution in the North of Italy (Renard et al., 2022) but public authorities neglected

all these factors. In Lombardy, 42,426 people died between 2020 and the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, 24% of the total in Italy (il Sole 24 Ore, 2022).



Picture 1: banner raised by FFF Milan in front of Lombardy's Regional Council. Credits: Matteo Spini.

Other activists preferred to underlie the relationship between environmental destruction, intensive agriculture and breeding and epidemics. Salem Ghribi (2020), an activist from Parma, published an article in the magazine “Jacobin Italia” saying that “the industrial agricultural organization, the use of antibiotics in intensive farms and pollution have reinforced the effects of Covid-19. The health emergency must be solved by facing the environmental emergency”.

Another message related to health injustice was the claim of equal access to vaccines which had a certain relevance in Autumn 2021 in concomitance with September’s strike, October’s pre-COP and November’s COP, when many activists from the Global South were restrained to travel for not having received the vaccine.

### Youths as subalterns

I have already discussed how youths (and children) are one of the main victims of climate injustice. Even though their contribution to greenhouse emissions is extremely marginal, their future is at risk

for the climate crisis. In this section, I discuss another aspect which is the representation of youths as subalterns.

A crucial point to understanding social movements is that they are constituted by groups that are relatively marginal in terms of political and economic power (Almeida, 2019). This condition, and perception, combines with the feeling of being under the threat of social, economic, and/or environmental risks and generates identity. According to Castells (2010, p. 8), "resistance identity is generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination".

It has already been noted that Italy is not a country for youths, if we look at the combination of the socio-economic situation (unemployment, precarity, low salaries, poverty, weakness of Welfare measures)<sup>37</sup> with the weak opportunity for participation offered by parties, trade unions and associations (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020; Lello, 2020; Rosina, 2020; Pirni & Raffini, 2022). Campanella (2010) explicitly talks of "a gerontocracy that locks the young out of its economy and politics". The Italian gerontocracy produces adultism, i.e. the discrimination and oppression of youth by adults or the "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, p. 169). Typical examples of adultism are those politicians, media and entrepreneurs labelling youths as "bamboccioni" (mama's boys), lazy, picky, NEETs and politically apathetic. In this way, dominant actors ignore the structural conditions of low-quality jobs (even for highly qualified workers), political exclusion and weak Welfare provisions suffered by youths.

Moreover, nowadays' children and youths are socialized in a country that has faced multiple overlapping crises (economic, social, financial, climate, health, and political) for years. As Pirni & Raffini (2022) affirm, their life perspective is worse than their parents' in economic and social terms. These children and youths ask themselves what crisis is, and what normality is. This situation creates an enormous sense of uncertainty since institutions do not seem able to respond adequately to social issues, especially concerning the climate crisis. It is no chance that the trust of youths in institutions is low, though slightly increasing with the pandemic (Bonanomi & Rosina, 2020). Given this evidence of this marginalization and exclusion, we can conceptualize Italian children and youths as subalterns, to use a term coined by Antonio Gramsci.

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<sup>37</sup> Just to give an example, in 2021 Italy had the highest European proportion of 15-29 year-olds neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET): 23.1 %, ten points above the average level (EUROSTAT, 2022).

The perception of being oppressed and subaltern is for sure a common view in the movement. The report of the first National Assembly of FFF Italy affirmed that “we are the generation that will be forced to pay most of the cost of an unsustainable and unjust development model”. In the explanation on its official website, it is affirmed that “we strike because we have no choice [...] we strike because we are not sitting at the table where decisions on the future of us and of our sons are taken”. In November 2020, the movement sent a letter to the government saying that the Next Generation EU “cannot be written only by 70 years old people” since “the youths will be the ones facing the worst consequences of the climate crisis caused by the political inaction”. Let us see also another extract from the first press release of the movement (March 2019):

We, young people, make up more than half of the global population. Our generation has grown up with climate change and we will have to face it for the rest of our lives. Nevertheless, many of us are not included in the decision-making process. We are the unheard future of humanity.

Many other examples come from activists. In the words of Maria (S17F)<sup>38</sup>: “frequently, past generations defined us as a generation that has no desire to do, no desire to believe. It is wrong”. During the national assembly held in 2022, an activist expressed a common opinion by saying we live in a “fictitious democracy” that ignores the voice of the people and responds only to the economic interests of big firms. A common slogan in this sense is: “Eni orders, the government executes”.

Many times, the criticism of the unrepresentativeness of the system is also directed to old environmental organizations such as WWF and Legambiente who are seen as too close to the establishment (they receive public and private sector funding), too moderate in their goals and tactics, not enough focused on the climate crisis, ineffective, quite hierarchical and with few spaces of participation for youths. For Alex (NW26N) they do “innocent things”, for Marco (S34M) they do not have a “360 degrees vision of the problematic” of climate change, for Antonia (S24F) they are “supported by enterprises”. Agnese (C20F) thought “they seemed already too structured” and she felt that “perhaps I could only be a small local activist without the possibility to act nationally or internationally”. Gioele told me that “Greenpeace’s local groups, similarly to Legambiente’s, are completely at the mercy of the decisions that come from above; they decide nothing, they discuss nothing, they only have to execute”. Similarly, Rita (NE23F) believes that “it is easier to enter into

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<sup>38</sup> I recall here the coding system explained in the methodological chapter. The first letters refer to the macro-region (NW=North-West, NE=North-East, C=Centre, S=South and Islands), the number is the age while the last letter corresponds to their gender (M=Male, F=Female, N=Non-binary). Since two activists have the same code (Chiara and Carola) I added an “a” and a “b” at the end to distinguish them. In the case of key-informant interviewees, I do not use this system for privacy reasons.

FFF. In Legambiente, and Greenpeace you have to register and there is a kind of hierarchy”. However, this scepticism does not impede the movement from forging alliances with those associations, even though WWF is controversial for many FFF activists.

I strongly believe that these specificities of the Italian context (gerontocracy, multiple crises, unrepresentativeness of traditional institutions, political climate inaction) partially explain the resonance of the anti-establishment and intergenerational criticism of the movement at least until the huge destabilization provoked by COVID-19. Moreover, they clearly explain why these youths prefer to join a social movement rather than more conventional forms of politics such as associations and parties.

### The social construction of antagonists

If youths and children are in a subaltern position, the question is who are those actors in a dominant position and with more responsibilities in the origins of climate injustice, according to the perception of the movement. In other words, this section explores the social construction of antagonists and its function.

Collective identities are essentially constructed around an opposition (della Porta & Diani, 2020). As Jaspers notices (1998), the perception that the source of the threat is natural can lead to fatalism and grief, not protest. But if the source of the threat is perceived as social, then somebody can be blamed to provoke outrage, anger, hatred and other emotions that can mobilize people and create internal solidarity and cohesion.

For FFF Italy, we can identify an abstract level of antagonists composed of the development model, the political-economic elite and the system, defined as toxic, patriarchal, capitalist, extractivist, and colonialist. Nevertheless, there is also a concrete identification of guilty actors which is necessary to produce the emotional component of an injustice frame (Gamson, 1992), both internally and externally. During my fieldwork, several concrete figures were identified as opponents, especially former Prime Ministers Conte and Draghi and their ministers of the environment, agriculture and economic development. Finally, CEOs from transnational corporations such as Amazon (Jeff Bezos) and Big Oil (Claudio Descalzi, CEO of Eni) are also common antagonists. In short, we could say that the antagonists are the “polluter elite” (Kenner, 2019) and the block of power that defends its interests by slowing down or freezing the ecological transition.

What is presented in this section is how three main antagonists are framed by Fridays for Future at the national level: Eni, the state and the elite. As it is affirmed on the website of the movement, “at the top of the pyramid we find governments and about 100 large private and public companies that are causing the global crisis and at the same time minimizing or publicly denying the problem”. We must be aware that these frames are dominant but, as I have already said, the idea of a monolithic movement must be rejected. For instance, many activists interviewed in the research are not fully aligned with this anti-elitism and anti-capitalism and opt to blame humanity for the climate crisis. This is an example of the frame dispute (Benford, 1993) that emerges in horizontal and pluralist movements.

## Eni

Eni has a special role in the conflictive system of Fridays for Future. It is the main Italian private energy company, though the Ministry of Economy and Finance is its main shareholder. It is the most polluting Italian enterprise since its core business is still fossil fuels and it has been the 30th greatest global contributor to greenhouse emissions between 1988 and 2015 (Riley, 2017) but this is hidden behind a carefully orchestrated green image. The influence played by Eni on Italian foreign politics, media, university and culture is well documented, as well as how it threatens the freedom of press and dissuades protests, poisons territories and systematically slows down the ecological transition (Spini, 2021). However, the enormous political influence of Eni is invisible to the general public. In this sense, social movements such as FFF Italy fight “to make power visible and force it to assume a shape” (Melucci, 1996, p. 174).

For FFF, Eni is the symbol of the System to be changed and it is criticized daily in public events, internal meetings and in many of the interviews I have conducted, clearly evoking strong emotions such as rage, hatred and indignation. According to Oppenheimer (2006), groups create and maintain enemy images and they contrast and compare with them to reinforce their collective identity.

In our case, we can find at least four enemy images attributed to Eni: criminal, toxic monster, repressor, and greenwasher. First, Eni is accused of committing illegal and even criminal actions against people and the environment by polluting territories, corrupting governments, and making misleading advertisements, for instance with its “Green Diesel”. The hashtag #EniKills has been used several times. This overlaps with the image of a monster that pollutes territories and poisons people with its fossil fuel infrastructures and negligence. An excellent example is the poster of the campaign



against the Carbon and Capture Storage of Ravenna, where Eni is represented as the Lochness monster (see figure 2). Third, Eni is accused of being an authoritarian enterprise that violates the freedom of expression by denouncing activists and journalists and imposing decisions on governments, hence constituting a direct threat to FFF activists. This reflects the idea of post-democratic involution, to use the concept by Crouch (2004, 2020). For instance, a common slogan used by Italy is: “Eni orders, the government executes”. Fourth, thanks to its well-documented influence on media, culture, schools, universities, and governments, Eni projects an image of champion of environmental sustainability. As the FFF activist Camilla told me, “if one opens the website of Eni it seems an environmentalist society”. However, its core business is still based on fossil fuels and there are several documented examples of lobbying against the ecological transition (Spini, 2021). Moreover, its “salvific” technologies such as the Carbon and Capture Storage project and “Green Diesel” are quite controversial and far from being an immediate solution to the climate crisis. Hence, the challenge to Eni includes is also a battle over the minds of people, counter-balancing its powerful greenwashing. When it self-proclaims as a champion of sustainability, Eni actively appropriates the vocabulary of the ecology movement: circular economy, sustainability, and just transition. This greenwashing can be seen as a discursive kind of Gramscian *trasformismo*, a strategy of the elite to domesticate radical ideas and movements that challenge the legitimacy of the establishment (Cox, 1983). *Trasformismo* appropriates and domesticates radical ideas such as the just transition to maintain the status quo, i.e. the current power relations and model of business. It serves to re-legitimate the current system which itself is providing the “solutions” to the climate crisis. Hence, it proclaims there is no necessity for system change. The ecological transition is presented as a post-political, technocratic, win-win solution in which conflicts can be avoided and the capitalist model maintained. On the contrary, the just ecological transition is framed by FFF not as a win-win proposal but rather a zero-sum game since polluting enterprises such as Eni should pay the cost of the transition under a general plan of wealth and power redistribution. I go back to this point in chapter 8.



Figure 3: Eni represented as the Lochness monster in a poster of a protest

As it emerges from this description, Eni is considered an illegitimate actor by FFF. Hence, actions against the corporation aim to damage its reputation by exposing the reality to public opinion, boycotting it and lastly forcing the government to change its benevolent attitude. Against Eni, more radical tactics are considered legitimate such as blockade, under what della Porta & Diani (2020) call the logic of damage. Eni must be fought; discussion and negotiation are not possible. This is an example of how the choice of a target influences the tactics adopted.

I believe the conflict with Eni helps FFF to produce the internal solidarity, self-esteem and emotions that reinforce its collective identity. Every time it is evoked, it generates emotions such as rage, indignation, and hatred. Moreover, this helps the movement to build bridges with other civil society partners who are also active against the multinational corporation. The most important is perhaps the campaign “Il futuro non si sTocca – NO CCS” against the controversial project of a Carbon and Capture Storage in Ravenna, in the North-East of Italy.

### The state

The other great antagonist of FFF is the state, as for all social movements. The state is part of the system and promoter of the development model opposed by Fridays for Future. The difference with Eni is that the state is recognized as a legitimate actor with whom dialogue is possible even if it is viewed as “corrupted” by private interests. This framing is close to what Crouch (2004, 2020) defines as post-democracy, a political system that maintains a formal democratic appearance (elections, press

freedom and so on) but that is de facto hijacked by corporations and technocrats while real participation is blocked. The generation of Fridays for Future seems “affected” by the syndrome of the critical citizen: they do not question the value of democracy, but they are unsatisfied with its performance and they even question if we still have a democracy. To use the words of an activist during a national assembly, we live in a “fictitious democracy”, while for Andrea (S21N) the governments “are allowing themselves to be pushed around by multinationals. I mean, in this epoch multinationals have much more power than governments, this is because multinational leads the economy of the planet and governments depend on the economy”. For Marta (C21F), the problem is the “connubio” (a kind of shady partnership) between politics and industrial groups. Sara (S15F) believes that politics cannot say “<I cut all investments on fossil fuels> for the lobbying of big enterprises, big transnational companies. I don’t know how if politics is led by politicians or by them”.

Hence, the underlying idea of the movement is that the climate crisis is not tackled seriously by the state also because of the negative influence of polluting enterprises and private interests. However, this “corrupted” state can and must be “redeemed” since a successful ecological transition should be led by it, as it is depicted by FFF in its campaigns “Ritorno al Futuro”, “Non fossilizziamoci” and the recent “Agenda Climatica”. The state is not only an opponent but also an arena of conflict as Jasper & McGarry (2015) also argue.

The core of the political strategy of the movement, as we will see in chapter 8, is putting pressure on the state through protest and advocacy. However, advocacy is a constant point of discussion since the fear of some activists is to legitimate the system, make compromises, or be assimilated and domesticated.

### The elite

In the vision of the movement, the climate crisis is the consequence of the current development model that benefits a privileged elite. As it is affirmed in the final statement of FFF’s National Assembly of Naples (2019), “we are the youth, and not only the youth, against the current powerful of the earth, against the multinationals and against those who hold the economic and political power and that are not doing anything about it”. This elite dominates a system that was defined as “patriarchal, sexist, racist, colonialist, machist and based on the logic of the accumulation of profit” in the same report. The elite identified by the movement as its antagonist is basically those managers and environmentally harmful enterprises that belong to “toxic” capitalism: the energy sector, fast fashion,

real estate, construction, heavy industry and those actors which support them such as fossil banks and politicians. Moreover, extremely rich and privileged individuals with an enormous carbon footprint but necessarily linked to those enterprises are also identified as part of the problem. Wealthy individuals have an enormous ecological impact: the richest 10% is responsible for almost 50% of anthropic emissions (Our World in Data, 2022). This was clearly denounced by FFF Italy in an article titled “The irresponsible rich minority which frequently travels by airplane”, which brought to the attention a publication by the Guardian. As I have already affirmed, this economic elite is also accused of having hijacked our democracy by privileging the interests of the 1% over those of the 99%.

In the beginning, Greta Thunberg’s criticism of the elite had a clear generational component and it tended to erase the distinction between old generations and the old elite. In her Davos speech in 2019, she denounced that “the older generations are failing us. And the political leaders are failing us”. FFF Italy has incorporated this criticism in its narratives and frames but with some specificities: even though individual activists also express accuses to old generations, the public criticism of FFF Italy is usually against gerontocracy. As it has already been said, the perception of FFF Italy’s activists is that we live in a country under the control of a male gerontocracy, an oligarchy of old leaders which treats youths with paternalism and systematically excludes them from decisions. An excellent example of this was a press release published after a meeting with former Prime Minister Conte in June 2020:

We couldn't free ourselves from the impression that youths – those millions that took the squares of hundreds of countries everywhere in the world to shout at the emergency - are still treated with paternalism and not as a real party in the lawsuit.

And then:

When will it happen, in these infinite tables, that someone apart from us, the youths, will have the courage to stop the tsunami of words and begins to treat the climate emergency as the epochal emergency is?

Another example: in November 2020, the movement sent a letter to the government regarding the Recovery and Resilience Plan saying that:

It is called Next Generation EU, not Old Generation. The Next Generation EU will delineate the future of the next 70 years: it cannot be written only by 70 years old people. The youths will be the ones facing the worst consequences of the climate crisis caused by political inaction and for this, we have the right to be included in the drafting of the plan.

It is important to notice that the movement has also promoted several calls for solidarity for old generations. For instance, for September 2021’s strike, the movement wrote an “Open mail to you, the adults, the youths of yesterday” in which it recognized the struggles of the past made by current

adults and made an appeal to forge a unified front with youths. This choice was surely strategic: an excessive identification of old generations as the antagonist could galvanize youth but perhaps alienate other sympathizers and supporters. Hence, the choice was to prioritize elite blaming and criticising systemic oppression rather than the population in general or old generations. I believe this shift is quite evident also in Greta Thunberg's communication. We must also notice that other activists prefer to avoid blaming people and opt to promote more positive messages based on "we fight for, not against."

On the other hand, some activists extend the criticism not only to the gerontocracy but to old generations per se, accused of benefitting from high levels of material well-being without considering the future consequences and not doing enough against the climate crisis, with high levels of envy and resentment. Let us see an example from an interview conducted during the fieldwork:

Let's say somehow that I'm incredibly pessimist and so I believe very much at the end of the word. Hence, let's say I was a bit envious of the generation of my parents [...] Frequently, the past generations defined us as a generation that has no desire to do, no desire to believe. It is wrong. The firsts with no desire to do were them (Maria, S17F)

#### Fridays for Future as the youth climate resistance

So far, I have described a scenario in which the climate crisis is worsening because of political inaction, creating a new form of intergenerational injustice against a category (children and youths) that is already in a subaltern position. Fridays for Future Italy sees itself as the only representative of those youths and children who cannot vote and whose rights and voices are ignored by the political-economic elite. Moreover, FFF sees its mobilizations as a necessary form of resistance. This is the core of the movement's collective identity. Let us recall again the words that concluded the second National Assembly of the movement, at the end of 2019:

We leave this national assembly with the awareness that we are able, together, to change the system. We are not willing to give up, we are the resistance.

But what does climate resistance mean in practice? Resistance means "telling the truth", in other words denouncing the severity of the climate crisis and political-economic inaction. Resistance also means civil disobedience in the form of striking from school and protesting to demand system change and climate justice but also Blockadia (Klein, 2014), the practice of activists putting their bodies on the line to stop fossil fuel projects. Climate justice derives from the idea that climate change should not be seen as a merely techno-scientific issue but as a socio-political and ethical issue. In other words, it is the politicization of climate change. In practice, the movement converts climate justice

into the concept of just ecological transition, a shift to a decarbonized economic system accompanied by a redistribution of power and wealth from the rich and polluting enterprises to the most marginalized and the abandonment of the ideology of growth. This just transition rejects green capitalist realism, the idea that the only solution to the climate crisis is green capitalism. Hence, resistance also means imagining a counter-future, a "new normality" and building it here and now through prefigurative politics. To sum up, resistance means curing the planet, the climate and humanity.

Fridays for Future is not only composed of youths but they are surely the majority and youth is an important part of its collective identity. Marks of this youth are a specific register which includes irony, debunking, politically incorrect expressions and pop references targeting youths and a critical and transgressive attitude toward institutions and old generations which brings echoes from other movements of the past. As it was stated in several interviews I conducted, this youth identity and targeted communication were very important factors for recruitment. Most "Fridays" recognise that youth should be the "engine, glue, network" of mobilization, as an activist expressed in an assembly.

Youths are depicted by FFF as the only ones able to change things. As it is affirmed on its website, "we are the only generation that can stop this crisis!" and "collective action is the only response to this crisis, to take to the streets, to make civil disobedience: all this serves to create a public opinion on the topic and to force those in power to resolve it!" Let us see an extract from the first press release (March 2019): "we young people are mobilizing. We will change the fate of humanity, whether you like it or not. We will demonstrate together on March 15th, and many more times, until climate justice is done". A strong sense of moral responsibility and agency emerges in depicting youths as the only hope for humanity. This differs from the responsibility of causes and the political responsibility, entirely attributable to the adversaries of the movement. This sense of moral responsibility emerges from the fact that the elite, the old generations, the parties and the old environmentalism are not willing or able to produce the necessary change to guarantee a safe future for youths. On the other hand, climate mobilisations led by youths have demonstrated, according to FFF, to be the only hope to force a change. "Activism works!" is a slogan used sometimes by the movement. This corresponds to what Bandura (1997) calls collective efficacy (or agency), the perception of being able to produce a change through collective action. For Klandermans (1997) collective identity, sense of injustice and collective efficacy are the key elements of a collective action frame.

What is also interesting is how youth disobedience and resistance are displayed in forms of participatory democracy. In fact, the movement rejects delegation and the claimed monopolization of politics by parties and institutions and it vindicates not only the legitimacy of its struggles but its qualitative shift from conventional politics. This was stated in a post (see picture 2) published on the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2021: “we do Politics, not politics”. The post was accompanied by a photo juxtaposing an institutional meeting inside the “Palace” (politics) with a FFF's assembly in a public garden (Politics). Opacity vs transparency, delegation vs participation, and verticalism vs horizontalism are the key dichotomies expressed by the movement against conventional politics. In this way, FFF perfectly embodies what Beck (1999) called the “reinvention of politics” (Beck, 1999), i.e. the end of the monopoly of politics by old institutions and the emergence of a “new politics” based on horizontality, participatory democracy and experimentation.

Within this claim to define what politics is, the separation between the public and the private is frequently rejected, as Melucci had already noticed decades ago. I go back to this point at the end of the chapter, for now, it is important to show the words of the activist Leonardo that perfectly summarizes this:

Politics is us, politics is what we eat, what we buy, watch, and the things we do. Politics is taking care of the community's life, the city's life, and the life around us, every day. We do politics even if we choose to not do politics because choosing to do nothing is a very precise choice, even if it is maybe unconscious.



Picture 2: a meme displaying the juxtaposition between the participatory democracy embodied by FFF and the top-down model of the elite. Credits: Fridays for Future Milan.

Another important point is the issue of memory. The scientific literature underlines the instrumental role of collective memory in identity building, mobilization and legitimation of claims (Berger et al., 2021). Fridays for Future sees itself as the heir of past fights such as the Italian Resistance against “Nazifascismo”, the student movements, environmentalism, and the global justice movement. For instance, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2021, the movement made a Facebook post thanking Italian Partisans “because you gave us #Freedom and taught us to #Act for a #better #Future. Today it is our turn to fight, for them, for us and for those who in 76 years will live the future we’ll have left them.” The post concluded with the hashtag #ResistereOggi (ResistToday). For the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Genoa’s G8, FFF Italy claimed to be also the heir of the Global Justice Movement, recognizing they are united by the “method, practices from below, self-organized spaces”, consensus, inclusivity through horizontality, the criticism to the current global system and the exploration of an alternative world. Second, FFF sees itself as the turning point for environmental and climate struggles. Hence, the



memory of the first rallies by Greta and local Italian groups, and the great climate strikes and national assemblies of 2019 have converted into foundational myths that emotionally reinforce the movement's identity.

As I have already said, identities are dynamic and socially constructed. During the fieldwork, it emerged that activists can make strategic use of identities which depend on the social field in which they compete but also on the specific weight of internal factions at that specific moment. For instance, when activists are engaged in national advocacy, they try to project an image of a responsible movement willing to promote reforms and justice within the system. In other contexts, for instance, during assemblies hosted by social centres, the anti-capitalist, anti-systemic identity emerges with more clarity to galvanize activists. These are only two examples of how identity is used dynamically and strategically.

## 6.2 Subaltern and rooted cosmopolitanism

Another important element of the collective identity of FFF Italy is the sense of belonging to a global movement. As it is said in the FAQ section of the official website, "Fridays for Future is a global movement for climate and environmental justice". The struggle is not only local and national but also global as the climate crisis is. As suggested by the literature (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Martin, 2015), international treaties such as the Paris Agreement, events such as the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the development of electronic communications and inexpensive international travels have surely boosted the transnationalization of collective action and created a transnational opportunity structure.

The Italian branch of FFF is well integrated into the transnational networks of the movement through chats and meetings so the global level plays a considerable influence on it. The sense of belonging to a global struggle is also reinforced by joining transnational collective actions such as the Global Strikes, the Global Days of Action, and specific campaigns. These campaigns are elaborated and conducted by ad hoc working groups that target not only domestic actors but also other States (e.g. Brazil for the destruction of Amazonia) and supranational actors such as corporations (e.g. Standard Chartered Bank), the European Union and the G20. On a more abstract level, neoliberal capitalism and the Northern elite are identified as global antagonists. Activists from Italy participate in the

construction of global targets, slogans, frames, narratives, posts, hashtags, songs, and symbols that then are diffused to the national and local levels.

In his work “Toward a New Legal Common Sense: Law, Globalization, and Emancipation” Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2020) uses the term “subaltern cosmopolitanism” or “cosmopolitanism of the oppressed” to mean the transnational networks formed by progressive movements and organizations that promote a plurality of projects against social exclusion and in the name of counter-hegemonic globalization. This label well applies to a movement constituted by a global community of subaltern categories (children and youths, many from MAPA and BIPOC) well connected by digital networks and solidarity.

The international connection of FFF Italy with other national sections has contributed to shaping its narratives and even its identity. FFF MAPA (Most Affected People and Areas) is a sub-group that has developed a narration which links the climate crisis with capitalism and colonialism, stressing the importance to decolonize the relation between the core (Global North) and the peripheries (MAPA), not only at the level of States but also inside social movements. Among their claims, we find climate reparations, the cancellation of debts, redistribution, an ethic of care, the right to self-determination of communities and the inclusion of most affected people in the decision-making. For the global strike on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2021, FFF Italy adopted this decolonial narrative and claims. I believe that the incorporation of a decolonial approach is a sign of radicalisation and perhaps of the construction of a stronger collective identity.

In the Risk Society, the production of risks and the exposition of risks are temporally and spatially separated (Beck, 2015). In other words, the Northern emissions of the past decades will have their worst impact on Southern countries in the future. Hence, when FFF Italy adopts the frames and narration developed by MAPA activists, it evokes what Bauman (2001) would call the “globalization of responsibility”, an ethical stance of global and generational solidarity. As an activist said during an assembly: "We are not only fighting for us but also for those who cannot fight."

Belonging to a global movement intersects with belonging to a national and local level. Regarding the Global Justice Movement, della Porta & Tarrow (2005) use the expression by Anthony Appiah of “rooted cosmopolitans”, an activism rooted in specific contexts but engaged in transnational networks. The same is true for FFF activists, who can be active at the local, national and international levels at the same time. However, it is not always easy to negotiate and find a compromise between the three levels that influence the movement’s collective identity. A typical example is the use of

English hashtags to align with the global level which is sometimes criticized for not being resonant enough in Italy. Another example is the decision between a focus on harmful infrastructures, projects or socio-natural events in MAPA or Italy<sup>39</sup>. MAPA are surely more vulnerable and with higher levels of repression than Italy, hence a focus on them can be morally justified. However, it could also create a certain psychological distance for less empathic supporters and activists, consequently producing weaker mobilizing emotions (Chu & Zang, 2019).

### 6.3 Horizontalism

Horizontalism is also part of the collective identity of Fridays for Future Italy. It can be viewed as a value, an ideal of aspiration that concretizes in a model of participation where decisions are made in local and national assemblies without a vertical chain of command or formal leaders. Horizontalism reflects a meta-political critique of the hierarchical model of public institutions and parties (Andretta, 2007; Offe, 1985). This criticism is both procedural, the limitations of decision-making processes of representative democracy, and substantial, the incapacity to deal with the climate crisis.

As I have said, in practice horizontalism means that the place of decisions is the assembly: an inclusive and transparent space of deliberation based on consensus. As it is said in the report of the first National Assembly of FFF Italy, held in Milan in 2019: “nobody represents us, we have no flag, our voice comes from the assemblies and squares of mobilization”. Or as it is affirmed on the official website of the movement: “FFF has no bosses. Decisions are taken all together trying to come to an agreement with as many people as possible”.

Assemblies are “pure zones of social experiment” (Graeber, 2010, p. 287) or Temporary Autonomous Zones (Bey, 1991) that elude formal structures of control and represent the society the movement wants to realize (horizontal, respectful, transparent, non-authoritarian...). In this sense, horizontalism is a goal in itself and a prefigurative practice, i.e. “the deliberate experimental implementation of desired future social relations and practices in the here-and-now” (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020, p. 10). This corresponds to the prophetic function of social movements theorized by Alberto Melucci, in the sense that these actors announce and create the alternative society they imagine.

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<sup>39</sup> Note that for some activists MAPA include also the peripheries of the Global North. Nevertheless, the focus is generally on the Global South.

In practice, it is common in all social movements that some tensions, conflicts and compromises are made around horizontality, mainly for reasons of effectiveness, as we will see in the chapters on structure and strategy.

#### 6.4 Inclusiveness, diversity and individual identities

An important point of discussion regarding the collective identity of Fridays for Future Italy is how inclusiveness and diversity are at the same time values and strategic necessities. A related phenomenon is the presence of multiple identities, perhaps one of the most valuable resources of some local groups. However, these aspirations have some downsides such as ineffectiveness and problems with security do not always make it easy to find a balance between the interests at play.

The diversity I refer to in this section is political/ideological differences that are located inside a left-wing orientation. In terms of socio-economic, racial backgrounds and age, there is a notable homogeneity among the activists interviewed during the fieldwork, much more than demonstrators in climate strikes. Leaving aside the interviews with key informants, 14/15 of my interviewees were students (7 in high school, 7 at the university) from 15 to 26 years old and only one was a 34 years worker. All of them were Italian, white and mainly from middle-class backgrounds. The German activists interviewed by Sorce (2022) had the same socio-economic and racial homogeneity. What is interesting to notice is that “Fridays” activists are quite younger than past environmentalists (for comparison, see for instance Diani, 1988; Strassoldo, 1993). On the other hand, a study conducted with the survey data on the European strikes of 2019 found a greater heterogeneity in the social composition of demonstrators, rejecting the idea they are just “rich kids” (della Porta & Portos, 2021). Even though this last study is not focused on Italy, we could still hypothesize a gap between demonstrators and core activists.

#### Inclusiveness and diversity as values

The first thing that I noticed when I approached Fridays for Future is inclusiveness. There are no formal rules of entry, except an informal expectation to share the general positions of the movement and not support violent and authoritarian ideologies. Anyone can join meetings even without prior communication. During an assembly, for instance, a boy made an intervention and then concluded

with: “here I’m new, I’m not properly part of Fridays.” A veteran activist replied: “you’re here, you’re part of.” Access to the chats and working groups are also quite easy.

The consequence of inclusiveness is a certain degree of diversity that is not considered an obstacle to unitary action but a value. This is not a novelty element. In the 1960s, civil rights and anti-colonial movements accused the egalitarian ideal of the Enlightenment to cancel any specificity and assimilating all cultural models and lifestyles not aligned with the White, heterosexual, Western model (Colombo, 2003). The claim of difference and identity, both collective and individual, became a goal in itself and continued with the Global Justice Movement and its "tolerant identities" (della Porta, 2005). In a 2004's conference, the Uruguayan sociologist Raúl Zibechi stated that for Zapatists “the unity is fascism because it is the cancelling the difference. And we need to enhance the difference, be more different than them. And not creating a unitary apparatus”. This well summarizes how diversity represents a value.

Diversity is also possible because the collective identity of Fridays for Future is not monolithic, normative and demanding self-sacrifice but it tends to safeguard the individual identity, as Alberto Melucci (1996b) already noted in the feminist and gay rights movements and Raffini & Pigni (2019) for many other current movements. This marks a difference from traditional left-wing organizations which demanded obedience, sacrifice and unity. Even if in FFF we can identify processes of identity convergence (Snow & McAdam, 2000) by which individual identities become congruent with a movement's collective identity, the latter is never a strong “collective we” and individuals can maintain their identities and differences. This choice of a weak identity or less normative identity by the movement contrasts with other climate movements such as Rise Up 4 Climate Justice, Ultima Generazione and Ende Gelände which opt for a stronger identity, also because they do not rely on the logic of numbers but on the logic of damage and the logic of bearing witness, to use the terminology by della Porta and Diani (2020).

Participation in FFF is rather free and many activists alternate phases of activity and passivity or they join and leave working groups without being judged for their behaviours. Pigni & Raffini (2022) distinguish between militants, who totally adhere to a collective project and whose identities are shaped and overpowered by collective identity, and activists, defined on the basis of the activities in which they take part and on a more individualized participation.

These conceptualizations are in line with what Leccardi & Volonte (2017) call "new individualism" in which individuals do not act as "members" of a collectivity that demands sacrifice and obedience

but as individuals engaged in collective and private projects that are reversible and provisional. According to Martuccelli (2017), mass societies are not only characterized by egoistic individualism or privatization but also by "singularism", the self-affirmation of the individual that seeks recognition of its singularity and unicity by interacting with others.

In this last part, I present some examples of the points I have just made regarding different positions that coexist and that are tolerated. It is also possible that some divergent views are then absorbed through the re-socialization process that occurs through FFF but not all of them.

In FFF we can meet vegans, and vegetarians but also omnivores. Publicly, the movement promotes plant-based diets but it has not adopted a strong and normative vegetarian or vegan identity that could alienate some supporters. Another example: radical anti-capitalism is common among militants coming from social centres, who also would prefer to stop any dialogue with the political system and they agree with civil disobedience. On the other hand, many other activists interviewed during the fieldwork support enhancing the dialogue with the government and are sceptic about civil disobedience.

Moreover, some activists are not fully aligned with the national politicized framing of the climate crisis and they promote a post-political frame that tends to attribute the responsibility of the climate crisis to humanity or fossil fuels and identify technocratic solutions centred on renewable energies. In short, the system must not be uprooted but reformed by creating a transversal consensus. This position is very common outside of social movements. Anthony Giddens, for instance, argues that "climate change should be lifted out of a right-left context, where it has no place [...] there has to be agreement that the issue is so important and all-encompassing that the usual party conflicts should be suspended or muted" (Giddens, 2009, p. 114). In the interview with the activists Marco (S34M), for instance, more than adhering to the anti-elitist and anti-capitalist national frames he preferred to accuse humanity:

Me: Regarding the climate crisis, who is the main one responsible for you?

Marco: for sure mankind, for sure the human activities that have led to the increment of the quantity of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere and so to the warming.

Also for Maria (S17F), "human activity has been the straw that broke the camel's back". She also pointed to our economic development ("our progress has made us pollute more") and even to "our evolution" without mentioning capitalism, multinational corporations or the responsibility of the Northern elite as in the national frames.

When we look at the solution to the climate crisis, according to FFF Italy the main one is the just ecological transition while the role of individual lifestyle change is frequently minimized, as we will see in the chapter on strategy. On the other hand, many activists I have interviewed tend to give priority to this individual change or at least they give it the same priority as political action.

### Inclusiveness and diversity as strategic necessities

Inclusiveness and diversity are not only values or goals in themselves, but also strategic necessities. Fridays for Future is a movement with a recruitment strategy based on reach (Marwell & Oliver, 1993) and a political strategy based on massive mobilisations, hence a strong identity could alienate current and potential activists and supporters. Saunders (2003) suggests that individuals mainly develop an identity as a subgroup within social movements hence a strong movement's identity can damage social cohesion.

Even if processes of identity convergence are always active, the congruence between individual identities and the movement's collective identity is not necessarily total, as I have already sustained. Inevitably, the plethora of positions inside FFF can sometimes slow down decision-making processes and makes it hard to find a common position. Sometimes, individuals with no experience and not aligned with the movement join assemblies and disrupt the routinized activities of the group. The sensation of ineffectiveness, lack of congruence and cohesion can disorient activists, pushing them to reduce their commitment or even abandon the movement in some circumstances.

The classic dilemma of effectiveness combines with the risk of externalizing an incoherent and confusing image. Still, my perception during the fieldwork is that activists value diversity much more than unity. This is the result of an anti-hierarchical culture among youths that fear that the suppression of minorities and the construction of an apparatus is the way to create an oligarchy that would reproduce the dynamics of the system they want to uproot. For Benford (1993), frame disputes are a crucial and essential feature of the everyday life of movements and they can lead both to negative and positive consequences such as mobilization and demobilization, resource depletion and resource concentration, factionalism and cohesiveness, chasms and a division of labour.

A serious problem is that such a high level of flexibility in entrance leads to infiltrations and hence problems of security. Even though the State has been quite benevolent with Fridays for Future, generally speaking, we must recognize that some episodes of repression have been committed. The

most serious happened on the 19th of May 2022 when the Police searched the houses of three activists after a protest against the Russian company Gazprom in Milan. This episode made Milan's group care more about its safety and enhanced the use of more private chats to coordinate. This decision made clear that total inclusiveness and transparency are risky.

One of the most important consequences of inclusiveness is dual and multiple belongings and identities. Many "fridays" are also active in Extinction Rebellion, Non Una di Meno, social centres, locally unwanted land use movements, student associations, local environmental movements and even the green party Europa Verde. In the terminology used by Castells (2015), those activists are the switchers who operate the connections between different networks. Diani (2003) prefers the term brokers. In creating those connections, they bring new contributions to the construction of the collective identity of the movement and its local groups, as it happened with the anti-systemic counterculture of social centres in Milan and Veneto. Dual and multiple belongings are also very useful to recruit activists and use spaces, ideas, skills, and creativity of the allied groups. For instance, the social centres linked to the group of Milan (Lambretta and Il Cantiere) are the "backstage" that hosts assemblies and the preparation of actions and materials such as banners, flyers, signs, and. Moreover, they provide key artefacts during the actions such as speakers, rickshaws, and megaphones.

A flexible collective identity and the multiple identities of activists are also powerful tools to construct broad socio-ecological coalitions for specific campaigns. The best example is the Climate Open Platform that constructed a counter-climate summit and several actions of protest when Milan hosted the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Youth4Climate in the autumn of 2021. A key component in the construction of the platform was those activists belonging at the same time to FFF and youth associations and social centres. However, these broad alliances also create some dilemmas such as the dilution of the identity of a movement and the participation of some specific actors far from being aligned with FFF, as it emerged during the Climate Open Platform.

A potential risk of multiple identities is creating factionalism, "the conflict between an organizational faction and other members, or between competing organizational factions" (Kretschmer, 2013). In this scenario, factions tend to privilege themselves rather than the whole movement or local group with consequent tensions that can carry to paralysis or schisms.



## Diversity of motivations

In the initial survey I conducted in 2020, motivation was considered one of the most important issues. Hence, I developed a typology that illustrates the diversity of motivations behind the choice of joining the movement. Walgrave et al. (2021) take back the ideas of Max Weber to make a theoretical distinction between instrumental motivations, acting to achieve a particular goal, and expressive motivations, acting to express one's ideology, values and or emotions. The two should not be seen as exclusive, though. The overall idea is again that we cannot see FFF as a monolithic movement and that complexity and even internal contradictions are quite common.

According to the interviews conducted during this research, we can say that there are five main motivations behind the decision to join the movement: defence of the Creation and non-human beings, defence of the quality of our life, solidarity, sense of responsibility, and the pleasure of activism. These categories must be viewed as ideal-type and two or more motivations can be present in the same person.

### Defence of the Creation and non-human beings

A first group of interviewees joined the movement mainly to defend, protect and take care of the Creation, the nature or non-human beings threatened by the ecological and climate crisis. This motivation to become activists is instrumental since it draws upon the potential later effect, but it is deeply biocentric or ecocentric<sup>40</sup>, depending on the activists. Some are inspired by religious values and beliefs transmitted by their parents or the Scouts.

I think that [when you are catholic] you feel more about the value of the world and life in general. When we talk about nature, plants, trees, as many times we think, we talk about life, all beings, all human beings [...]. There is perhaps the fact to dedicate your own life for the Good" (Sara, S15F).

For sure, I've always been sensitive to the environment also because my parents were actively part of Legambiente when I was a child. They brought me to do trekking and then I entered the scouts where there is a lot of environmental sensibility (Antonia, S24F).

### Defence of the quality of our life

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<sup>40</sup> In biocentrism, all life deserves equal moral consideration while ecocentrism prioritizes the preservation of the integrity of ecosystems rather than the lives of its individual elements.

Other activists state that activism is mainly a way to defend our quality of life, well-being and human rights threatened by the climate crisis. This anthropocentric ecologism echoes somehow the initial frames of Greta Thunberg, adopted also by Fridays for Future Italy. Instrumentality and expressivity overlap in these cases.

In some activists, the personal dimension of the global threat emerged with clarity. Chiara (NW18Fa) affirmed that “I realized it was my life, my future” at stake. For others, the sense of threat is extended to the risk of extinction for humanity.

Me: what are the reasons that motivated you to become an activist?

Roberto (NE18M): for the fact of being a bit distressed by the deadline, the terminal of humanity if we don't change, if we don't stop the rising of global temperatures.

A similar position was expressed by an activist explained in an article published by the HuffPost:

Don't call us environmentalists because, as a movement, we do not take to the streets for “the environment” [...] we take the square because the climate crisis is the greatest threat to its survival that the man has ever faced” (Ferrieri Caputi, 2020).

#### Solidarity

A third motivation is related to solidarity, social justice and climate justice. This group of activists fight to defend the most vulnerable humans such as the poor, marginalized and racialized communities in the Global South that are also subjected to high levels of repression. Moreover, future generations risk receiving a world in a dramatic situation without having any responsibility. As an activist said during an assembly in Milan: “we are not only fighting for us but also for those who cannot fight.” This kind of motivation for mobilizing is again instrumental but with a high level of altruism and ethics. The words of other two activists well explain this position:

We care a lot about climate justice as social justice because we want governments to act to safeguard the last ones, those that nobody wants to see [...]. Hence, it is important to act now to protect those who will be in trouble, who are already in trouble (Agnese, C20F).

The idea that approached me to the environmental question, this already seven years ago, that then let me flow into Fridays for Future was...hmm, the resolution of the environmental question was a tool to reach social justice [...]. If we want to see the ultimate goal for what I deal with thematic is people, it is not plants or rocks [...]. I have nothing against plants and shells but I do it for people (Alex, NW26N).

#### Sense of responsibility

A fourth group mentioned the sense of responsibility or duty or even a need as the reason to become an activist. In this case, the motivation is not so much instrumental, but it is more intrinsic, internal,

and expressive. Rita (NE23F) mentioned the idea of “trying to change the world”. Marco (FS34M) felt the necessity to raise awareness among his citizens: “So the reasons are these. First, for sure in the city there was no consciousness regarding this very great problem that is the climate crisis”. Then, he mentioned the necessity of “someone taking control of the situation” to lead young activists from high school. For Sara (S15F) it was a life vocation, a need:

Those who do activism cannot decide when to do activism and when to not do it. You cannot treat it as a hobby because it is a need that you feel in any case, even when you bind yourself to other activities; you have it in your mind.

For Marta (C21F) it was “the pressure, the importance of this, of climate change. I felt the responsibility to do something.”

The scientists tell you: look, there is little time, look, we need to do this or this so I feel [laugh] a great responsibility and great anxiety that tells me: I must do something.”

In many cases, this sense of responsibility derives from the actions of Greta Thunberg. For instance, Carla (NE18F) mentioned that when she was looking at her, she told herself “I must do it as well” and “I want to do something more.”

### The pleasure of activism

Finally, some activists stated that what pushed them to join the movement was what I call the pleasure of activism, expanding the concept of pleasure of protest by James Jasper (1997). This concept includes the possibility to meet new people, make new friends or spend meaningful time with friends with similar values, have fun and joy, and a positive sense of belonging to a group but also opportunities for creativity, flirting, and romance. This kind of motivation is expressive since participation in the movement is gratifying on its own.

All this must not be seen as a form of delegitimizing the choices of those youths. On the contrary, many times this seeking for pleasure overlap with the above-mentioned motivations. As Jasper (2013) also recognizes, it is common that activists try to pursue at the same time their personal ends and the group ends. During the respondent validation, an activist stated that for him this dimension of pleasure was key to recruiting youths not yet sensitized to the cause of the movement. Martiskainen et al. (2020) believe too that it can broaden political constituencies for the environmental movement. Pleasure is not only used to recruit but to sustain participation. One of the most mentioned elements is the possibility of doing activities with current friends with similar values:

Me: Why did you decide to become an activist of Fridays for Future instead of another reality?

Luca (S18M): Well, to begin with, as I've said earlier, it seemed closer to my generation [...] there were a lot of acquaintances for that has played a role, it was very open so, it was we could say, a group of teenagers for teenagers, we were looking to obtain something, and this convinced me.

Other activists mentioned the importance of meeting new people and making new friends with similar values, "to find <i compagni> (the comrades) around and to really fight together" (Matteo, NW19M).

For Alex (NW26N), this meant fighting the sense of loneliness:

Since the beginning of 2019, I felt alone. It is not that I didn't have friends, but I didn't know people, at least of my age, more and less, that cared for the same cause [...]. So yes, the reasons were to know people who shared the same worry with me (Alex, NW26N)

Similarly, another activist stated the importance of the personal sense of belonging to a group that is fighting to produce change:

I liked the idea to do something collectively, being part of something, trying to change the world in a sense, and then as far as I've participated I've understood that probably being an activist is the best way to try to make a change, compared to acting only on my own life (Carola, NW18Fb).

Another side of this issue is how the pleasure of activism mitigates climate anxiety that can be seen as the distress related to the climate crisis, or eco-anxiety, a broader concept related to the multiple ecological crises<sup>41</sup>. This distress is quite widespread among activists. "You develop, as far as you deepen this topic, I don't know if you ever heard of it, a certain anxiety, the infamous eco-anxiety" (Matteo, NW19M). "I can really feel this anxiety of the passing of time and seeing politics do nothing" (Marta, C21F). Eco-anxiety pushes activism. Hence, climate activism is a remedy to eco-anxiety or at least a way to reduce it and make it tolerable. More in general, activism is a way to fight pessimism and resignation toward the future, as it emerges in the words of Maria (S17F):

Let's say that the motivation was the fact that I don't want to look at myself, I don't want to look at my future pessimistically. Perhaps thinking that maybe there will be no future or if it will exist will be incredibly depressing, a bit as it's described by scientists and activists during interviews, let's say.

A recent quantitative study (Schwartz et al., 2022) found evidence that collective actions significantly attenuate the association between Climate Change Anxiety (CCA) cognitive emotional impairment and Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) symptoms, strengthening the results of qualitative studies appointing the role of activism in managing fears, building hope, and creating feelings of connection (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017; Nairn, 2019).

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<sup>41</sup> The American Psychological Association defines it as "a chronic fear of environmental doom" (Clayon et al. 2017).

## 6.5 Biographical consequences: the radical ecological habitus

In this section, I present an example of how the process of joining FFF produces a transformation of individual identities by acquiring what we can call a radical ecological habitus that challenges hegemonic worldviews and predisposes to action. I focus on three elements that emerged in the interviews: the responsibility and solutions to the climate crisis and how the shift in individual behaviours has repercussions in the social environment of activists. This model is based on the works of Pierre Bourdieu, some ideas introduced by Antonio Gramsci and the concept of “imperial mode of living” (IML) by Wissen & Brand (2021).

In the literature, the personal transformations induced by a movement are called biographical consequences of activism (Passy & Monsch, 2018). These outcomes range from marital status to children, relationship ties, work-life/career, extended involvement, consumer behaviour, identity, empowerment, radicalization/politicization, legitimacy, sustained commitment, self-esteem, general wellbeing, ‘traits’, self-confidence, religion, organizing, knowledge, and home skills (Vestergren et al., 2016).

The transformation of identity is one of the least explored. This is paradoxical since individual identity is one of the central characteristics of our time (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001) and the adherence to a movement can radically transform it. For Matteo (NW19M), the adherence to FFF "changed me a lot, I must say perhaps more than any other thing in my life." This is an example of what Travisaro (1981) calls conversion, a radical transformation of a person's life. In other cases, the transformation is less radical and more in continuity with previous identities, what Travisaro calls alternation. Many times, both outcomes derive from a specific identity work process called identity convergence which is when a social movement pushes individual identities to become congruent with its collective identity. The personal transformation of an activist also affects his/her social environment and contributes to re-shaping the collective identity of the movement. Hence, the process of interaction between the individual and the collective identity is the double way.

For Bourdieu, an individual's identity is largely shaped by his/her habitus. By habitus, Bourdieu (1977) meant partly unconscious durable systems of internalised dispositions for interpretation, perception, feeling, thinking, and action embodied in every aspect of everyday life. The habitus works on the habitual, nonreflexive level and mediates between agency and structure. These systems of

dispositions are learned through socialization and even though they are quite conservative, they can still be changed through re-socialization, for instance by joining a social movement. The habitus is structured structures, generated by movement practices, and structuring structures since it generates movement practices. The habitus predisposes but does not determine.

Social movements are sites of learning in which individuals re-socialize, dispose of old habitus and acquire new ones, a process that can be called re-education of the habitus (Haluzi-DeLay, 2008). Social movements are social fields that not only create new habitus but also continuously support them. All this happens during assemblies, chats, video calls, and protests. This re-education of the habitus is one of the most important, though not visible, activities of social movements. Drawing from Crossley (2003), we can conceptualize the “radical habitus” as dispositions to question and criticize the social world around them and to translate ideas into action through activism. The concept of “ecological habitus” has already been used in the literature (Haluzi-DeLay, 2008; Kasper, 2009; Rocha, 2022) in different senses, with it I mean pro-environmental dispositions.

FFF activists interiorize both habitus so if we put the two concepts together we can talk of a radical ecological habitus as a system of dispositions to interpret our reality as an unjust world in a climate emergency that must be transformed through behavioural change and protests.

On the upper level, the acquired habitus predisposes activists to see, understand and interpret the world differently. If climate denialism in Italy is minoritarian (see for instance Climalteranti & Italian Climate Network, 2022), soft denialism and the discourses of climate delay (Lamb et al., 2020) pervade current debates. These discourses recognize the existence of climate change but justify inaction or inadequate efforts. They can be grouped into redirecting responsibilities (on individuals, other countries or free-riders), pushing non-transformative solutions (technological optimism; fossil fuel solutionism; all talk, little action; and no sticks just carrots), emphasizing the downsides (social costs, well-being and disproportional caution) or surrendering (change is impossible and doomism). For many people, these discourses have converted into the doxa which is the system of taken-for-granted beliefs, unquestioned truth, assumptions and presuppositions (Bourdieu, 1977). To put it differently, doxa is the ideology of the elite that becomes common sense. It is hegemonic in a Gramscian sense when it counts on the acceptance of the subalterns.

The radical ecological habitus acquired inside FFF produces a new worldview that is meant to deconstruct those discourses that delay political actions and discourage bottom-up mobilisations. In practice, the acquisition of the new habitus meant, for many activists, breaking the doxa and acquiring

awareness of the seriousness of the climate crisis, politicizing it and forging a critical view of the current political system as hijacked by the elite and its corporations.

Let us see an example. During the interview with Alex (NW26N), it clearly emerged the discourse of redirecting responsibility. According to Mann (2021), fossil fuels companies and their allies (conservative media, think tanks, politicians and pseudoscientists) have conducted for years a campaign to blame individuals for climate change and emphasize that individual behavioural change is sufficient to solve the problem. This is an example of how neoliberalism pushes us to find biographic solutions to systemic problems, as Leccardi & Volonté (2007) argue taking back Ulrich Beck. Alex's thought before joining FFF was perfectly aligned with this doxa. The following words summarize Alex's thoughts when he first saw FFF's protests:

This news left me feeling perplexed: what are these striking? There is climate change, there is an environmental crisis in a broader sense and you strike, you strike against something that is happening? Why do they not think to change their life behaviours and their consumption model instead of striking, what are they striking?

This doxa clearly discourages political collective action and supports the status quo. If it is sufficient to change our individual behaviour, there is no necessity to create political pressure. The re-socialization through Fridays for Future allowed Alex to break the doxa and re-politicize the climate crisis. I take back again his words:

Then, by joining, aggregating into Fridays for Future [name of the city], by discussing, and contrasting with them I've grown and now my opinion is very different. I think change must be political, and collective and in this the change of individual behaviours is important but in terms of percentage, it is collective change. Collective change then addresses individual lifestyles.

Another activist, Rita (NE23F), told me that "before I entered Fridays I thought that the problem was the litter on the ground", another typical example of deflecting responsibility. However, when she joined FFF she "discovered a whole subworld of what the climate crisis really is and opened my eyes on my awareness as a citizen".

On a second level, the radical ecological habitus consists of dispositions for action in the public sphere. One of the most important outcomes of FFF has been to convert many youths into engaged citizens. According to a survey conducted in 13 European cities during the first global strike (Wahlström et al., 2019), 38.1% of school students were attending a demonstration for the first time. In Florence, it was 35.4% in Italy (Zamponi et al., 2019). With time, the school strike has converted into a sort of interiorized routine for many activists. Assemblies are also fundamental: they exercise a democratic pedagogic function since in those places youths learn to debate, cooperate, democratically decide and become aware of their rights. They are spaces of citizen empowerment

(Bobbio, 2006). In the words of Fisher (2019, p. 430) “this growing movement [Fridays for Future] is important beyond its potential impact on climate policy because it is creating a cohort of citizens who will be active participants in democracy”.

On a third level, the radical ecological habitus predisposed for behavioural change also in the personal sphere of activists. Besides the public discourse of FFF being centred on the re-politicization of the climate crisis, individual behavioural change is still considered a necessity by activists. When I asked the activists how their life changed after joining FFF, the most common answer was related to the shift in individual behaviours. That shift is not lived by activists as a surrender to individualism but as an act of responsibility that must be combined with collective actions. Being a climate activist means going to a protest but also adopting specific models of behaviour that challenge the dominant.

Thanks to an era of abundant and cheap fossil fuels, Western citizens have interiorized a way of life based on the use of private cars, animal-based diets, compulsive buying of clothes, digital apparatuses, and frequent air travel. We have deceived ourselves that it is possible to pursue an unlimited satisfaction of our material desires, denying the limits of the planet and neglecting the socio-ecological impacts of our behaviours. Wissen & Brand (2021) use the concept of “imperial mode of living”, stressing how it is based on nature and labour exploitation as well as on externalising social and ecological consequences, in the forms of pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and waste. From a Bourdieusian perspective, we can say that the imperial mode of living is a collection of hexis, which are habits or relatively automatic and “natural” ways of doing, thinking and judging which represent the manifestation of the habitus. Unsustainable behaviours, hence, are mostly lived unconsciously but they are fostered by multiple corporative and political strategies such as advertisement, subsidies and low prices (Brand & Wissen, 2021). These allow the imperial mode of living to be hegemonic, in the sense that it is widely accepted. The IML is a social compromise that permeates our daily life and reinforces the status quo.

If the imperial way of life has entered the common sense, the radical ecological habitus defies it by revealing the truth behind our destructive behaviours and giving life to ecological hexis such as blaming energy waste, use of cars, meat consumption, and consumerism but also recycling, riding bikes, eating plant-based products, using water bottles, boycotting, buycotting and even avoiding shopping. In our interviews, Andrea (S21N) told me that “I don’t buy anything except if is necessary. Lately, I had to buy a tablet [...] and I feel a bit guilty about this thing”. For Marta (C21F), joining the movement has meant “changing the way I approach, for example, my purchases. I don’t buy new



clothes or I buy one per year because I know the impact of fashion in specific areas of the world”. Carola (NW18Fb) told me: “if I hadn’t joined Fridays, I would have not found alternatives to certain things, for instance, to plastic”.

For “Fridays”, there is no separation between public political activity and engagement in the private sphere. The old slogan “the personal is political” is still valid and we should not see individual behavioural change as necessarily apolitical. For instance, one of the most symbolically powerful individual actions is the decision to avoid flying. The first striking gesture was the travel of Greta Thunberg from Plymouth to New York by boat in 2019. For the COP26 in 2021, many activists travelled from Italy to Glasgow by train. This latter action was not only meant to avoid feeling guilty for the enormous emissions of aeroplanes but also to raise awareness on it and send a message: the fact that an ecological choice such as the train is enormously more expensive than the polluting aeroplanes (four times for that specific travel) is the result of political choices that must be reversed. This is an example of subpoliticization, by which Beck (1992) denoted how areas of life that were not considered political are converted into political issues.

Besides sending a political message, this radical ecological and politically engaged lifestyle becomes a daily resistance against the dominant unsustainable habitus, a “micro-political guerrilla”, to use the words of Petrilli (2021), which aims at transforming the social environment of activists. Though frequently neglected, youths have the potential to produce a change in their social environment (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Yates & Youniss, 1999). FFF activists organize assemblies, webinars, protests, and counter-summits but they also sensitize their close social networks, directly and indirectly. This process of transforming the activist’s social environment happens during the protest but also in the private sphere. Influenced by the movement, the activists have become active forces of challenge and transformation of their family, friends, school and university mates and so on, many times producing new habitus and new identities such as vegetarians, vegans, critical consumerists, bikers, “flight shamers” as well as other protesters and activists.

One of the most common examples presented by the activists interviewed during the fieldwork was the shift to a vegetarian or vegan diet, with a relevant impact on the social circle of the activists.

Me: how joining Fridays for Future has changed your life?

Agnese (C20F): I think about the fact I no longer eat meat and at the beginning for my grandparents, mainly, it was a shock, they didn’t know what to cook for me. Then they slowly started to experiment with new plates, maybe I gave them to taste, and they have minimally reduced meat consumption.

Therefore, when I became vegetarian it was weird for everybody. Because they were saying: “ok, vegetarian is still acceptable”, so to speak. Then when I became vegan, it triggered the spark in my sister and the rest of the family. Indeed, in my house parts of animals no longer enter, only secretion, so to speak (Andrea, S21N).

Maria (S17F), convinced her parents to do recycling and biological production:

For instance, in my house, there was no waste sorting. Now I’ve obliged my family to do it. It is something that I said: “do whatever you want but at least waste sorting must be done” [...]. They [my parents] have a winery and they’ve decided to transform all terrains into biological terrains and so do the biological product. [Laughing] it was a much appreciated thing for me because I’m somehow happy that the discussions that begin at lunchtime or dinner with my family are somehow heard by my parents.

These are cases of conversion (Travisaro, 1981) that radically change self-conceptions and produce a clash with the hegemonic habitus and doxa, affecting activists’ networks dramatically. In other activists, the transformation takes the form of alternation (Travisaro, 1981), a less radical process and more in continuity with previous identities. In many cases, the family field of the activist supported the new habitus. For example, some of the parents of the activists I interviewed were already vegetarians or their parents already had a past of activism in old environmental organisations such as Legambiente. In this last case, the habitus of the activists was at the same time structured by the family, but it also structured the family. In other words, those youths were already ecologists but with the adhesion to FFF they radicalized by acquiring a predisposition for protest and a critical attitude toward old environmentalism.

To sum up, the re-socialization through FFF can produce a radical ecological habitus that transforms the individual identities of activists more or less deeply. On a first level, it predisposes a new worldview that opens the eyes to the seriousness of the climate crisis and politicizes it, wiping out individualistic beliefs. On a second level, the radical ecological habitus produces engaged citizens. On a third level, it is embodied in the form of ecological hexis that challenges the imperial mode of living and in turn affects the social networks of activists, subpoliticizing their lives. Overall, these processes shape the identities of activists as well as their friends, relatives and acquaintances. Moreover, this embodiment of new practices is the prefiguration of a new society based on inter-dependence, sobriety, solidarity, care and respect for human and non-human beings.

## 6.6 Does Fridays for Future adopt an ideology?

By ideology, I mean a system of beliefs, ideas, values, and principles (Beck, 2013). If the question is if Fridays for Future Italy openly adopts an ideology the answer is no. This is a strategic choice: it would be hard for such a heterogeneous movement based on reaching as many people as possible to

adopt an explicit ideology. On the other hand, when we look at the workshops and conferences organized by the movement and, even more importantly, at the proposals produced by it, we can identify two ideological references: eco-socialism and de-growth. Decolonial thought is increasingly diffused inside the movement thanks to the influence of FFF MAPA. However, this process is quite recent and decolonial claims were not included in “Ritorno al Futuro”, the main political proposal analysed during the fieldwork.

Here, I make some examples of the two ideological inspirations I have mentioned without the pretension to conduct a comprehensive analysis. The website of the campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” affirms that “it has been demonstrated that the myth of decoupling between economic growth and environmental impact cannot guide political proposals” and then it proposes to reduce economic production to favour activities linked to social reproduction and care. This thought is in line with the principles of de-growth, i.e. the project which aims at challenging the hegemony of economic growth and reducing production and consumption (see for instance Latouche, 2008). The same campaign also emphasizes the role of the State during the ecological transition. The idea is that the State should increase its presence in the economy and society, by producing essential goods and services, coordinating and supporting the transition of enterprises, nationalizing key sectors such as the energetic, strengthening Welfare services, guaranteeing full employment, increasing taxes to great patrimonies and polluting enterprises. These ideas are very close to the ideology of eco-socialism which shares with de-growth theorists the criticism of capitalism and growth but puts more emphasis on the public collective control of the means of production and planning (Löwy, 2021). Both ideological inspirations reject the post-political approach of the European Green Deal, based on technocratic, market-based and individual behaviour change solutions.

When we look at the workshops and conferences organized by the movement, eco-feminist and trans-feminist ideas are also present and they have surely been interiorized by many activists, for instance in their language, attitudes and behaviours. On the other hand, they are not so much integrated into the movement’s proposals, and they never emerged as central in my fieldwork. In any case, we cannot talk of ideologies. In addition, during the interviews, anti-capitalist and left-wing values, principles, and ideas such as social and climate justice, and even progressive Catholicism have been mentioned as sources of inspiration but the reference to specific ideologies is quite rare.

The point is that it is not necessary to have a structured, defined and written ideology to be an activist as it was somehow expected in the past. A pragmatic approach tends to prevail: the priority is to force

the government to face the climate crisis with urgent measures such as cutting fossil fuels subsidies, stopping new oil and gas projects and promoting renewable energies, not to develop an ideological manifesto. Still, I believe that ideologies are a source of inspiration besides not being fully embraced by FFF.

## 6.7 Discussion

The construction of the collective identity of Fridays for Future Italy has been a strategic necessity to sustain participation by creating solidarity, pride and self-esteem but also outrage and anger when it is juxtaposed with antagonists such as the elite, the State and Eni. Moreover, identity works protects the legitimacy and reputation of the movement when faced with attempts to stigmatise it, as it happens especially with far-right mass media. The starting point of my chapter was that FFF Italy represents the world we are living in as a world in crisis and deeply unjust but with a spark of hope represented by the movement itself. I believe that the self-representation of the movement as the youth climate resistance has been a key mobilising factor in a country dominated by an adultist gerontocracy and surely a factor of novelty in the history of Italian environmentalism. In 2019, the break-in of this youth identity combined with other innovative resources such as the march-strike, a narrative of urgency, and the global leadership of Greta Thunberg contributed to the momentum of Fridays for Future Italy. With the irruption of the pandemic, this emphasis on injustice was emphasized: both the climate and the pandemic crisis are the product of the unjust capitalist exploitation of nature. The main message was that we do not need palliatives, we need to go to the roots of the problem and completely change the system (#UprootTheSystem).

Another novelty brought by FFF is its global and cosmopolitan identity. Transnational collective actions have considerably grown since the 1990s thanks to the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the proliferation of international institutions, events, and corporations, the development of ICTs and relatively inexpensive international travel (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005). However, true global movements such as FFF are very uncommon (Bob, 2018). What is interesting is how this global collective identity is adapted in each national and local group. For instance, the Lausanne Declaration approved in the first European meeting of FFF mentioned the necessity to have non-hierarchical structures. Besides this, in countries such as Germany, Belgium and Uganda we can identify strong leaders such as Luis Neubauer, Anuna De Wever, Adélaïde Charlier and Vanessa Nakate while in Italy the anti-hierarchical culture has prevented it and horizontalism has prevailed. Another Italian

specificity is surely the contrast with Eni, an enterprise that plays a massive influence on politics, media, university and culture. The contrast with Eni can be seen as not only a fight to "purify" Italian politics and society, but also to emotionally reinforce the collective identity of the movement. Further studies should be conducted on the specificities of each national section of FFF.

Another characteristic of FFF Italy is the common presence of multiple identities and the absence of a monolithic and demanding self-sacrifice collective identity and ideology that are in line with other social movements of the last years. Inclusiveness and diversity are both values and strategic necessities of a movement based on mobilising as many people as possible in the present. However, this comes with some potential downsides, among which the greatest is perhaps the risk to project an image of incoherence.

We have also seen that even though individual identities do not need to be fully aligned with the collective one, they are still transformed by the experience of activism, as the adoption of a radical ecological habitus demonstrates. This habitus shapes the individual identity of activists, affects their social networks and subpoliticizes their lives.

After four years of mobilisation, the political impact of Fridays for Future Italy has been limited, as discussed in the chapter dedicated to strategy. In this scenario of frustration, there is a growing potential for radicalizing the tactics of the movement. This decision could have an impact on its identity as well as in terms of participation. Other possible future scenarios that could influence identity and participation are the growing incorporation of decolonial thought and the alliance with parts of the worker movement such as the Collettivo Di Fabbrica - Lavoratori GKN Firenze. Once more, identities are not fixed but they continually mutate.

## 7 The “liquid” structure of Fridays for Future Italy

Social movements are subjected to centrifugal forces and external repression. For Melucci (1996a), not only collective identity but also a relatively stable organization and leadership are essential elements for the survival of a movement. The organizational structure is vital to unify the components of a movement and effectively mobilize resources for the achievement of its goals.

Before moving to the description of the “liquid” structure of FFF Italy, I need to make some clarifications. By Fridays for Future’s structure, I mean the informal system of roles, responsibilities, decision-making and information flow rules. Almost nothing is written so there are a lot of take-for-granted and latent norms that are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated. This can sometimes create a sense of disorientation in activists (and I felt it at the beginning). In any case, we can identify some elements that are more and less stable in time and others that are evolving in different directions.

We must consider also that some activists reject the word “structure.” However, I agree with the feminist scholar Jo Freeman (1972) when she noticed that “any group of people of whatever nature coming together for any length of time, for any purpose, will inevitably structure itself in some fashion”.

Another point to clarify is that the structure of FFF is dynamic; it continuously and informally evolves not only thanks to the decisions taken in the national assemblies (or similar moments) but in the daily life of the movement, during video calls, chats and sometimes even for external contingencies. For instance, the 2022’s elections, the crisis of many local groups induced by the pandemic, Eni’s Carbon Capture and Storage project in Ravenna, and the invitation to the Stati Generali, induced the creation of new national groups. Some considerations made by Pleyers (2014) some years ago are still valid: young activists refuse to adopt a specific model of organization as in the past and they privilege learning by experience, trial and error, and experimentation. As the Zapatists in Chiapas say, “there is no path. The path is made by walking.”

The chapter begins by exploring what I call the “liquid” model of organisation of Fridays for Future Italy (section 7.1). Then I present my analysis of the structure of the movement that I reconstructed and represented in figure 3 (see below). There are three main geographical levels involved: local (in green, section 7.2 of the chapter), national (in blue, section 7.3) and global (section 7.4). In some regions, local groups have created loosely structured regional coordination (in purple) but they are

not particularly active, as far as I could observe. The chapter ends with some reflections on the conflict between idealism and pragmatism as well as with some suggestions regarding the structure (section 7.5).

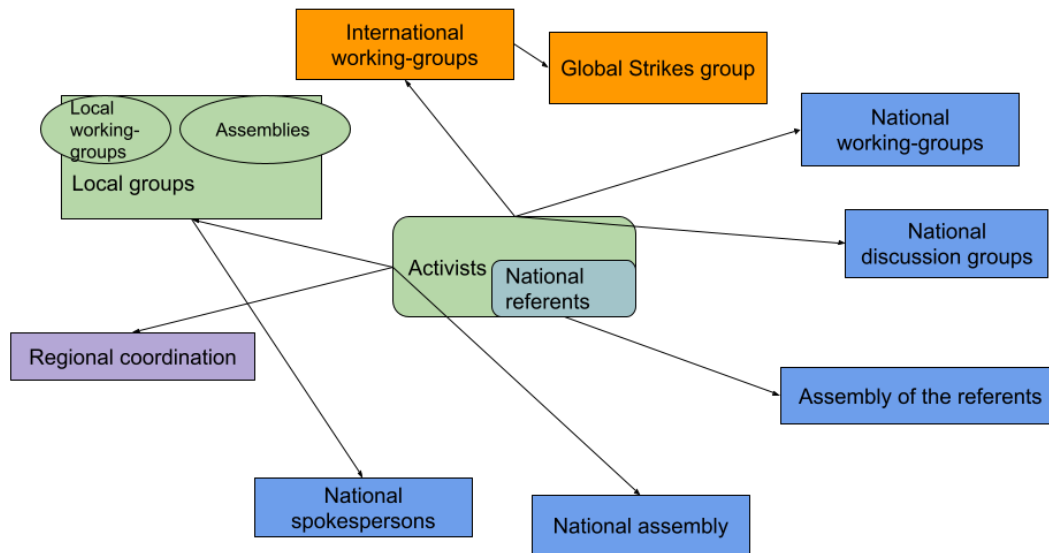


Figure 4: structure of Fridays for Future Italy

### 7.1 Features of the “liquid” model of organisation

Taking back the metaphor by Zygmunt Bauman, Pasquier (2018) juxtaposes a “solid model of unionism” with a “liquid model of unionism”. The key characteristics of the solid model are a pyramidal bureaucratic structure, a marginal use of ICTs, and a hard leadership that commands and controls. The main features of the liquid model are a network structure, b) a central role of ICTs, and c) a soft leadership that inspires, influences and connects.

FFF Italy is close to this model as it is explained below. I believe the “liquid” model adopted by FFF Italy has been a powerful factor of attraction for many youths sceptical of the formal, bureaucratic and vertical model of institutionalized environmentalism and political parties. Moreover, it is a model that easily adapts to changes in the context, such as the pandemic, and that can survive to defections of leaders or local groups. However, it has also some problems that need to be addressed.

## Network structure

Those movements (or unions) with a network structure use horizontalism as their guiding principle. According to Sitrin (2005), the term “horizontalidad” was introduced by Argentinian radical movements during the 2001's economic crisis. Horizontality is interpreted by FFF Italy as a lack of hierarchy: nobody can take a decision and vertically imposes it. On the contrary, decisions are collectively and democratically taken in local and national assemblies or groups (generally) by consensus while local sections have no obligations to follow national positions; they are autonomous. To sum up, we can say FFF Italy is a decentralized and participatory movement. These ideals are clearly the legacy of political ecology and the Global Justice Movement and more in general of a youth political culture of diffidence toward all forms of hierarchy and bureaucracy. David Graeber (2010) would argue that “horizontalidad”, consensus and the anti-hierarchical culture come from the anarchist tradition. Besides this “anarchist” organizational model, FFF Italy does not reject the legitimacy of the State. On the contrary, it sees it as the engine of the ecological transition, as it is described in the next chapter.

The form of social movements is a message, as it is discussed in this dissertation (see chapter 6) by taking inspiration from the works of Alberto Melucci (1989). The presence of a horizontal structure is then the prefiguration of the kind of society that FFF Italy aspires to create, in juxtaposition with the hierarchical model of public institutions and parties.

The perception of FFF as a horizontal movement, where everybody can contribute to the decision-making and not be subjected to top-down decisions, is a factor of attraction for those Italian youths who do not feel represented by public institutions, parties, trade unions and associations. In the interview with Agnese (C20F), she affirmed that old environmental associations “seemed already too structured.” In fact, the “old” Italian environmentalism (WWF, Legambiente, Greenpeace, LIPU, LAV, Italia Nostra and so on) has never rejected bureaucratic structures (della Porta & Diani, 2009). On the other hand, Agnese felt that only FFF was a “very horizontal movement”, where her opinion “could really count something”, and where she could “contribute to modify” the world, “to change it also according to my critical believe.”



## Digital technologies

Fridays for Future has no offices and few material resources. It is a “light” movement whose structure heavily relies on Telegram, an instant messaging chat, Trello, a collaborative tool, Zoom, a video call service, and other digital applications. To a lesser extent, WhatsApp has also a role. According to Milan & Barbosa (2020), WhatsApp is one of the hallmarks of contemporary digital activism since through its pervasiveness mediates a variety of essential daily needs of social movements such as reaching people in real-time, broadcasting messages to large groups, and forging communities of interest on civic matters that can also involve politically inactive people. The same considerations can be made for Telegram inside FFF Italy.

The “lightness” of FFF surely reduces entry barriers, allows the easy creation of new local groups and ensured continuity during the lockdowns. In the formulation of Bennett & Segerberg (2012), social media allows individuals to form social movements and operate while collective identification and organizational control are no longer required. The authors label this a shift from the logic of collective action to the logic of connective action. According to Castells (2021), the internet fosters horizontalism in social movements. However, the reality is more complex. For instance, during my fieldwork, it has emerged that the control of social media is usually in the hands of a few core activists, as Gerbaudo (2012) noticed for the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* and Occupy Wall Street. More in general, there are always groups of core militants that are more involved in setting the agenda, organizing assemblies and the activity of sub-groups, controlling the access to WhatsApp, Telegram groups, video calls and other digital services as well as managing them. If we tack back the formulation by Bennet & Segeberg (2012), we can say that organization control is not present in FFF but collective identification is still an important feature.

## Soft leadership

Most contemporary social movements have a leaderless-ness discourse based on an anti-hierarchical culture or ideology. However, besides the absence of formalised leadership, social movements still have leaders who perform the tasks of leadership behind the scenes (Wells, 2018). I agree with Gerbaudo (2012) when he says that in all social movements we can find at least "soft" leaders that inspire, influence and connect but do not order, as Pasquier (2018) also suggests.

In FFF, the “referenti”, the spokespersons, and some key activists especially active at the national level tend to be de facto leaders. These leaders perform a series of functions such as relationship and coalition building, storytelling, strategizing, structuring, and negotiating, as recognised in the literature (Ganz & McKenna, 2018). A notable feature is that leadership is diffused but its presence inevitably creates some tensions with the anti-hierarchical culture of FFF. The creation of the charges of “portavoci” (spokespersons) at the national level has been for sure a turning point for the movement but it is not necessarily a step toward institutionalization or leaderism.

## 7.2 The local level

This section starts with a description of the structure of the movement. I mainly base this part on my ethnographic experience in the group of Milan. Thanks to my conversations with activists from other groups and feedback, some points can surely be generalized. In other cases, it is hard to say since nobody has a complete panorama of all local groups.

Since the beginning, Fridays for Future Italy is a highly decentralized movement. Local groups are substantially autonomous. They are created spontaneously without any kind of control from “above” and they deliberate without being accountable at the national or global level. They have no obligation to follow decisions taken at the national or global level which do not monitor local groups in any way (except to support them through the group “Supporto gruppi locali”, meaning “Support to local groups”). Some groups are even quite disconnected from the national level. For instance, some of them focus on local issues without supporting campaigns coming from the national and global levels and they even tend to avoid participating in national working groups and assemblies. These are excellent examples of the different meanings that Fridays for Future can assume.

On the 13th of July 2022, the website of the movement reported 162 local groups (in 2019 they were probably more): 43 in the North-West, 37 in the Center, 34 in the North-East, 29 in the South, and 19 in the two islands (Sicily and Sardinia). The regions concentrating more groups were Piedmont (20), Lombardy (18) and Emilia-Romagna (17). Not all of them are constantly active. For instance, some of them organize only the Global Strikes or only some of them.

Local groups are founded on local assemblies, working-groups and “referenti.” I discuss each one in the following sections.

## Local assemblies

Local groups generally reunite in a local assembly to take essential decisions. As it was affirmed in the report of the first National Assembly, “local public assemblies are the main tool for participation and discussion of FFF Italy”. Together with the Friday’s protest, they form part of the collective rituals of Fridays for Future which generate pleasure, shared emotions (such as joy, pride, and hope), reciprocal emotions (such as friendship, love, solidarity, trust and loyalty) and contribute to the identity of the local group. Assemblies are also spaces in which activists are trained and empowered by the practice of direct democracy. All these elements contribute to the sustained commitment of activists. Moreover, assemblies are also essential moments to recruit new members, create or enhance an alliance, attract media attention and put pressure on decision-makers. Some of these goals are internally oriented, others are externally oriented and it is not always easy to find a balance between them.

Public assemblies take place in different locations such as gardens, parks, public squares, social centres or other social spaces (e.g. the sites of associations). The decision of the place is many times taken with a specific purpose, apart from the availability and the weather conditions. Assemblies in green areas are highly symbolic and identitarian for ecologists. Moreover, according to the theories of restorativeness (Kaplan, 1995) activities carried out in the middle of nature improve physiological well-being hence it is possible that these kinds of assemblies could reduce tensions inside groups and improve collaboration and productivity. Another advantage of parks is that during the summer they are cooler than more urbanized areas.



*Picture 3: assembly of FFF Milan in a park. Credits: Fridays for Future Milan.*

Assemblies in central squares have also symbolic meanings since they are a citizen reappropriation of public spaces, frequently subjected to touristification and commodification. These squares generally host the institutions targeted by FFF such as municipalities, so the assemblies openly challenge them in their proximity. Moreover, assemblies in central squares are very visible so they can easily attract media, decision-makers, and citizens that could be potentially recruited (as it happened many times).

Finally, assemblies held in social centres or other social spaces are generally the outcomes of an alliance with those realities or an attempt to forge or enhance an alliance. Activists belonging both to FFF and social centres may also push to organize assemblies in their spaces to increase the influence of the faction on the local branch of the movement. Another obvious element pushing to organize indoor assemblies in social centres or similar spaces is the weather conditions, rain, snow and cold in specific.

During the hardest phases of the pandemic, the assemblies shifted online, sometimes keeping their public character, in others being open only to activists. In 2021 and 2022, face-to-face assemblies returned widely but not universally.

Assemblies can be face-to-face and public; face-to-face and private; online and public; online and private. A hybrid face-to-face/online model has been used as well and its benefit is to include activists

that have difficulties in reaching the place, for instance for COVID-19 or logistical reasons. Some groups alternate between these models, while others stick to one type.

In each assembly, there is generally a moderator and a reporter plus a set of norms regarding the agenda, the booking of interventions, their duration, and the reactions of approval/disapproval. In digital assemblies, these norms assume the form of a specific netiquette (network etiquette), which is a guideline for courteous online conversation, and communication is both vocal and textual through the general chat of the software used for the video call. Examples of netiquette are the use of the asterisk to book interventions, the double asterisk for a direct response, the letter “c” to ask for clarifications, the letter “t” for technical interventions (i.e. clarify something), and “+” and “-” to express approval/disapproval. Netiquette is supposed to make online debates kinder and more ordered.

When held in public, assemblies are generally inclusive since everybody can join without asking and can express his/her opinion or just listen. No significant barriers to joining or leaving exist and transparency is the rule. Bobbio (2006) calls it “the method of the open door” and it represents a symbolic challenge to the closeness of political institutions. If in public assemblies there is a higher degree of diversity of positions than in private meetings, the self-selection of participants limits it, as recognized also by Bobbio. In other words, participants of FFF’s assemblies are generally militants, activists or volunteers from social centres, associations, citizens with progressive and environmental values, networks of friends etcetera. Those activists with more experience, charisma, or social capital clearly exercise a greater influence in the assemblies.

During assemblies, it is common to make a minute that is shared among activists. Another feature is that participants sit in a circle, looking at each other, hence reinforcing the idea of equality. In general, the rule of decision-making is consensus which must not be seen as unanimity but as a process of convergence to a common position in which not all activists completely agree. Votes are hardly used in assemblies.

One downside of participatory democracy is the sensation of ineffectiveness that sometimes permeates assemblies. People approaching the first time the movement during public assemblies can find these moments very long and inefficient, especially when there is no close planned action and discussions tend to be more abstract, on the political, ideological, and philosophical level, and less focused on the concrete organization of the group or of a protest. A good performance of the moderator can improve the effectiveness of the assembly.

### Working-groups and *referenti*

The second downside of assemblies is that reaching consensus can be exhausting. As consequence, local groups frequently create working-groups to carry on daily activities, for instance, communication and organization of the logistics of protests, but even to take important decisions without passing through long and complex debates. These groups can be permanent or temporary. Temporary groups are created on the occasion of specific events or campaigns and then dissolved. Working-groups implement a basic division of labour and they use digital tools such as Trello and Telegram to coordinate and carry on their activities. Signal is another chat application that is sometimes used for sensitive issues since its level of protection is higher than the rivals, as Edward Snowden has declared, among others.

Every local group elects one or two “referenti” (referents) that are the contact point between the national and the local level. Usually, the “referenti” are the de facto leaders of the local group. The referent is an informal charge. Even though it should be communicated at the national level, its duration, election system, re-eligibility, and responsibilities are not generally formalized. The “referenti” always form part of a group of local core organizers with high levels of involvement and experience who plays a relevant role in planning, organizing, motivating and giving direction. In this sense, I agree with Gerbaudo (2012) when he says that besides a discourse of leaderlessness, in all social movements we can find at least "soft" leaders who perform functions such as relationship building, storytelling, strategizing, structuring, motivating, and inspiring which are essential for the functioning and even the survival of a movement as recognised by Melucci (1996a). Even mass digital communication is far from being horizontal since it is generally controlled by core activists. The presence of leaders and highly engaged activists creates informal hierarchies from the very start, determined by skills, time availability, experience, resources, charisma and so on (Rucht, 2017).

### 7.3 The national level

The first important clarification is that the national level is constituted of activists who are also active in their local groups. Hence, they maintain this double identity that allows them to bridge the local and the national. Activists are rarely active only in national groups.

The national level is constituted by five types of “organs”: 1) the national assembly and similar events, 2) the assembly of referents, 3) the national working-groups and the national discussion groups and 4) spokespersons.

### The national assembly and similar events

Fridays for Future is not an association but a movement so there are no constitutive acts nor statutes that discipline these events. In principle, the national assembly is open to every activist even though sometimes only delegates from local groups are entitled to speak. The movement held two assemblies in 2019 (in Milan and Naples) and one in 2022 (in Civitavecchia, close to Rome). The first two ended with a public report of high relevance, the last one did not.

In 2021, two similar events called “due giorni” (“two days”) were held online in private form. They were not called online assemblies but de facto they were not so different. In 2021, a national training was held in Brescia, in the East of Lombardy. The difference between these three forms (assembly, “due giorni” and training) are small and, in practice, they all involve moments of training with experts or peer-to-peer, frame alignment, identity work, alliance building, and decisions on the structure and strategy. These events must not necessarily be seen as the most important for taking crucial decisions as an assembly is for associations. On the contrary, at least in the four events I attended between 2021 and 2022, there were very few turning decisions, also for the multiplicity of goals. The daily and informal life of the other “organs” I describe is probably more important for the evolution of the structure of the movement. Moreover, even when decisions were taken in the assemblies they were not written in stone, on the contrary, they were further discussed inside different groups.

In any case, national assemblies and the similar events I have mentioned are unique occasions to sustain or transform the collective identity of the movement since most of the daily interactions happen in local national groups with few highly engaged activists. National protests are very uncommon, and they do not attract so many activists from other cities. To sum up, national assemblies, “due giorni” and training are basically the key national rituals in which activists experience shared and reciprocal emotions that foster a sense of belonging to a national movement, not only to their local group.



*Picture 4: national FFF training in Brescia. Credits: Matteo Spini.*

### The assembly of referents

As I have already said, each local group elects one or two “referenti” that are the contact point between the national and the local. They interact in a working-group called “Talk”. Every two weeks they organize a video call in which referents or delegates (if the formers are not available) from local groups have the “right to speak” but which is open for the audience to every activist since 2022. I call it “assembly of referents” even if it is not called as such. Many issues of national relevance are discussed in those calls and referents are supposed to report to local groups. It is quite common that working and discussion groups are created after decisions taken in the assembly of referents.

### Discussion and working groups

National discussion groups are supposed to be only for debates while national working-groups are meant to be more operative and not for taking decisions. However, the difference between the two types is blurring, as many activists recognize. Both types of groups are generally created after decisions taken in the assembly of referents, in national assemblies or in other national groups. In October 2022, there were 40 active working-groups and 4 discussion groups plus 5 broadcast channels



(used for wide communications). Some groups are permanent while others are created for specific events or campaigns and then suspended or eliminated.

Beyond the above-mentioned dichotomy, I think we can divide national groups into three clusters. The first cluster of working and discussion groups operates on highly relevant themes or campaigns: relations with politics, trade unions and workers, international relations, elections, schools, Eni and so on. A second cluster is composed of groups that support the external reaching of the movement. They work on social media, press relations, the website, articles, newsletters, graphics, translations, and the website Action Network which is used for mail bombing. A third cluster is made of support groups more internally oriented: legal support, internal communication, coordination of actions, support of local groups, elections of spokespersons, crowdfunding and so on. Some groups are hard to categorise since they perform several functions. Among them, the group “Scienza” (“Science”) is very significant since it is responsible for scientific divulgation, internal training, public webinars, and networking with scientists, and it also provides a scientific base for the claims of the movement.

Highly relevant is also “Comunicazioni Attivist\* FFF Italia” which is the Telegram broadcast channel used to diffuse information to “all” activists. I put the quotation marks because even though this is the group that includes most activists, many of them are not present, especially if they are lowly connected with the national level. At the same time, it is very likely that former activists are still included. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2022, 481 people were part of the group. The internal surveys are generally diffused through this channel.

National groups do not work in silos. On the contrary, the tasks they perform tend to be based on intergroup collaborations. For instance, the publication of a post on a recently published study surely involves the group “Scienza”, the group “Redazione Social e Sito” (“Social Editing and Website”) and maybe the group “Grafiche” (“Graphic”) and “Traduzioni” (“Translations”). Complex national campaigns even more groups at the same time.

### Spokespersons

In 2021, after a long process, the first 6 national spokespersons were elected by local groups through an online vote. The vote was made by local groups and not by single activists to maintain control of the process since it is very easy to get a link and then spread it. In 2022, 8 spokespersons were elected.

The spokespersons are the “megaphone”, in the words of the movement, since they only represent it but are not entitled to take decisions. A “press office” constituted of three people supports their activities. The creation of the charge of spokespersons came from the necessity to be more effective since in the past some opportunities to participate in public debates or interviews were lost for the slowness of the decision-making of national groups. On the contrary, the spokespersons can autonomously accept invitations. Moreover, in the past, some people de facto assumed the role of spokespersons without any legitimation. Hence, the protection of the reputation of the movement was the second reason to create these charges. Third, I believe the decision to have public, recognized and mediatic figures is an adaptation to a time in which politics is highly personalized. Media themselves prefer to interview well-known and mediatic activists.

The process of election was complex and long. A typical worry of movements is to avoid the creation of an internal oligarchy. Robert Michels (1911) described in his book “Political Parties” the rise of internal oligarchies as a necessity of all complex organizations. The perspective of Michels of an “iron law of oligarchy” was too deterministic and Diefenbach (2018) prefers to use the term “iron threat of oligarchy” which suggests that antidemocratic, illegitimate internal elite could potentially rise but that this risk can be limited by applying several counter-measures. The model of distributed leadership discussed by Diefenbach is what FFF Italy follows for spokespersons. In this model, leadership is a shared activity, open to contestation, change and reinterpretation.

FFF Italy has taken at least four counter-measures to limit the power of spokespersons. First, the decision to initially elect six people was meant to distribute the authority. The successive increase from six to eight allowed even more distribution and plurality, for instance in terms of territorial distribution, hence limiting the possibility of forging a block with similar interests. Second, the functions are limited to representation and not decision. Third, the weighting system of the 2022’s vote favoured activists from the South, clearly less numerous and influential in the movement than the Northern. In 2021, 3 of them came from North-Western groups (Mori, Comparelli, Vallaro), 2 from groups located in the centre (Sotgiu, Iovino) and only one from the South (Spina). In 2022, the North-West kept 3 spokespersons (Comparelli, Vallaro, Sardo), the North-East gained 1 (Casadei), the centre kept 2 (Sotgiu, Mancin) and the South rose from 1 to 2 (Spina, Modugno). The geographical distribution was more balanced than in 2021 but the North kept a certain prominence. Fourth, the decision to change spokesperson each year is an important limitation to their power, even if four of them were re-elected.

## 7.4 The global level

The global level is very informal, non-structured, and non-explicit so even experienced activists struggle in understanding how it works. In this context, it is very hard to take global decisions that are inclusive and legitimate.

One of the most relevant discussions at the global level of FFF is the demand coming from self-defined MAPA (Most Affected People and Areas) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People Of Colour) activists to decolonise the movement. This demand has gained prominence with the burst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In practice, it means recognizing the privileges of activists from White, Educated, Industrial, Rich, Democracies (WEIRD), redistributing power by giving more (safe) spaces and resources to MAPA and BIPOC, giving priority to their narratives and demands, democratizing decision-making and access to media, as well as eradicating racism and white saviourism. Mitsi Jonelle Tan, one of the most visible MAPA activists, affirmed during a webinar that this internal decolonisation “is going to be a lifelong process of unlearning and it’s going to hurt”.

The fieldwork was not focused on this level so here I make only a few points regarding the network of national groups, the Telegram groups, the international summits and Greta Thunberg. Due to this and to the fact that there are no specific studies published on the global level, as far as I know, this section is far from complete.

### The network of national groups

Fridays for Future is a decentralized, grassroots, global network of activists. The decisions taken at the global level are never binding for national and local groups. It is also important to say that even though Fridays for Future is the most common denomination, some countries adopt a translated version (e.g. Viernes por el Futuro in some Spanish-speaking countries) or a different one (Youth for Climate in Belgium and France, UK Student Climate Network, Strike 4 Future in Israel, Juventud Por El Clima in Spain, Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines etcetera). Generally speaking, the countries of the first group tend to use the same logo, colour palette, and hashtags while the others are more autonomous even though there are exceptions to both considerations. In any case, they all form part of the global network of FFF. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2022, the website reported that the

movement was present in 96 countries (including some regions such as England, Wales, Iraq Kurdistan Region etcetera). In some countries, there is even more than one national section.

### The transnational Telegram groups

The global level is based on two broad Telegram groups (Open Chat and Discussion Chat) that are for general discussions and not decisional. Activists from each country can participate in Working Groups that are entitled to take decisions, but they do not officially represent their national section. Generally speaking, very few core national activists participate at the global level. Working Groups are active on specific topics and organize campaigns that target national states and supranational actors such as corporations, banks, the European Union and the G20. One of the most relevant examples was the campaign Not My Taxonomy which combined mail bombing, protests in Brussels and lobbying against the inclusion of gas and nuclear power in the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities. In another campaign, the movement collected signatures for a European Citizens Initiative (ECI) on Climate Emergency, failing in the attempt. These two examples show how FFF's transnational activism can assume and combine very different tactics.

A key group is the one entitled to organize the Global Climate Strikes. If at the beginning the decision-making was somehow opaque since 2021 this group organizes sets of proposals on the dates, slogans, hashtags and other aspects related to the Global Strikes that are then voted by local groups.

### The International Summits

Finally, the global level organized two international summits. The first was held in Lausanne in 2019 with the name of SMILE (Summer Meeting in Lausanne Europe). In the joint statement, the activists set broad claims, more specific demands and some common values and principles. Another Summit was held in Turin in July 2022, ending without a public statement but addressing all the problems of structure and internal decolonization. It must be noted that both were considered European meetings for the impossibility of having an equal global representation, even though some non-European activists were invited as guests.

## Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg created Fridays for Future so it is clear that at least at the beginning she took several key decisions regarding the name, hashtag, narrative, frames, tactics, and organization. She also embodies the public image of the movement since the beginning and she still represents a powerful source of inspiration and motivation. In the words of Maria (S17F):

Let's say that is clear the fact that seeing such as young girl doing determined things and the greatest, most absurd, really absurd things, greater than me and perhaps her together it's really something that inspires you very much. You feel something inside that tells you: <damn, I want to be like her> [...] I've joined this association [Fridays for Future] because she, as young, for what she did, she inspired me.

Especially since the burst of the pandemic, Greta voluntarily moved a step back to give more room to activists from MAPA (Mathiesen, 2022). This was the result of her personal evolution toward social justice but also partly to some criticisms. During the fieldwork some, though not many, activists expressed criticised the centrality of her figure inside the movement in the past. A controversial episode was the letter named “Face The Climate Emergency” sent to several European leaders by Greta, Vanessa Nakate (from Uganda), Dominika Lasota (from Poland) and Mitzi Tan (from the Philippines) in the name of the movement but apparently without its legitimization. Some internal criticisms of Greta were also confirmed by a study conducted in Germany (Sorce, 2022). Nowadays she still can be considered the de facto symbolic and “soft” leader of Fridays for Future. She inspires and motivates, but she does not decide anymore. Still, she is a key resource for the movement. For instance, every time she joins another city's strike there is a clear “Greta effect” that galvanizes people and produces higher levels of participation, *ceteris paribus*, as I witnessed in Milan in October 2021. Her social media accounts are also very powerful resources, as it is discussed in the chapter on strategy.

## 7.5 Discussion

Since the beginning, Fridays for Future aspires to be as decentralized, inclusive and horizontal as possible. I believe that an organizational model based on these principles has certain advantages: it allows the proliferation of local groups and a certain resilience in hard times such as the pandemic, it fosters tactical experimentation, it attracts youths since they perceive that can easily enter the spaces of the movement and exercise their agency, unlike in associations and parties. The best example of these spaces are assemblies, the backbones of FFF, potentially open to everybody sharing the values of the movement. However, the ideal to be as horizontal as possible can lead to the problem of

ineffectiveness, which can turn into low political impact and dropouts if newcomers live a frustrating experience.

The problem of ineffectiveness was partially compensated by the creation of institutions such as working-groups and the “assembly” of referees, who de facto take quicker decisions that cannot be discussed and negotiated with the whole movement. The creation of the charge of the spokesperson is also a compromise between the ideal of horizontalism and the necessity to have credible, public and recognized figures quickly available for mass media. In this sense, we should recognise that FFF Italy has at least “soft” leaders, as well as its local groups. At the same time, this leadership is more distributed than in other countries such as Germany, Belgium and the Philippines. The challenge remains to find a balance between the benefits that leaders can bring (coalition building, storytelling, strategizing, structuring, motivating, negotiating, media attraction...), especially in a period in which Greta Thunberg has assumed a lower profile, and the necessity to enforce mechanisms that limit their power and produce transparency and accountability.

Another issue related to the internal distribution of power is the sub-representation of Southern groups and activists in FFF Italy and the parallel dominance of groups and activists from big Northern cities (Milan, Turin, and Brescia) and Rome. At the same time, inside FFF International activists from the Global North are overrepresented. There are no easy solutions to these issues since they also depend on structural problems that go beyond Fridays for Future. However, I believe the movement should follow the path of internal decolonisation in the sense of guaranteeing more access to mass media and to key internal charges to activists from the South (of Italy and the world) and/or with underprivileged backgrounds as well as providing funds and practical support, at the expenses of those coming from the North (of Italy and the world) and with privileged backgrounds. As the movement has always expressed, the demand for a more just and equal society can be accompanied by its prefiguration, in other words, its construction here-and-now.

A structural problem of FFF is that the ease of entry is mirrored by the ease of exit, a sign of the difficulty of the movement to create and maintain newcomers’ commitment. The Regenerative Culture of Extinction Rebellion, which consists in putting the care of the self and others at the heart of everything, could be a powerful source of inspiration for FFF. For instance, the figure of the buddy who supports new activists could foster integration and reduce dropouts.

The extreme decentralisation and autonomy of local groups can produce incoherence and disputes. In many cases, I have witnessed that local groups are almost totally disconnected from the national

and international levels. In these cases, Fridays for Future tends to be a hybrid between a movement and an umbrella term or slogan that is interpreted very differently by local groups. The enhancement of working-groups such as “Supporto gruppi locali” (local groups support) and “Comunicazione interna” (internal communication) could foster internal integration.

Finally, I agree with Freeman (1972) that the informality of structures tends to advantage those with more experience, time availability, and know-how, with the risk of creating an internal elite. Moreover, the internet does not necessarily foster horizontalism because it creates new charges such as gatekeepers that manage access to digital services and social media managers that tend to be permanently assumed by few core activists. Therefore, I believe the structure and decision-making processes of the movement should be clarified and made more explicit to all activists. Secondly, some basic norms regarding at least key charges (social media managers, spokespersons, referenti) should be further formalized, for instance in terms of duration, re-election, functions, election and so on. This could improve transparency and accountability and limit their power.

The structure of FFF Italy has always evolved. It is not solid; it is not based on a specific model of organization. Using the famous expression by Bauman, we could say it is “liquid.” It has evolved through experience, trial and error, and experimentation and it will evolve again. The challenge is to keep the positive elements and change what is more problematic, always by decisions that are consensual and democratic. The international structure is even more complex, and my thesis did not focus on it. In any way, the general impression is that radical changes are needed there but it is not always clear how to take decisions that are inclusive and legitimate.

## 8 "How do we change the world?" The strategy of Fridays for Future Italy

Strategy is one of the most critical elements of social movements even though it is many times neglected. It is the answer to the question “how do we change the world?” or “how do we obtain what we want?” For Jenkins (1981, p. 135), “strategy is the overall plan for action” or the big picture. I expand the conceptualization of Meyer & Staggenborg (2012) and see strategy as the set of interrelated and debated decisions about claims; opponents, allies, audiences and arenas; resources and tactics. It is important to remark that strategies are a social product of negotiations and debates that depends on the internal factors of each group but also external factors such as the structure of political opportunities and the reaction of other actors such as media, allies, opponents, bystanders, and supporters. Strategy must be seen as a dynamic, iterative and relational process (Doherty & Hayes, 2018) which often presents contradictions, incoherences and disputes. A final remark regards the fact that activists not only negotiate strategies, but they frame them.

Having said this, we should not imagine that the strategy of FFF Italy is elaborated from the top by core activists that sit around a table, discuss and take rock-solid decisions. In many cases, strategic choices are taken in assemblies, chats and video calls entitled to take them. In other cases, the process is much more informal and not necessarily shared with the whole movement. The strategy is not written in any document, it is the product of negotiations, learning by experience, trial and error and experimentation, exactly as the structure. Again, as the Zapatists say, “there is no path. The path is made by walking.” The “liquid” structure is a crucial factor that allows FFF to adapt to the contextual changes, the COVID-19 pandemic *in primis*. In this section, I generalize the national strategy of the movement, but we must be aware that this is in some sense an abstraction from reality. Moreover, each local group develops its own strategy that is not necessarily aligned with the national one.

In short, we can say that the overall goal of Fridays for Future Italy is a just ecological transition that could comply with the Paris Agreement and guarantee a safe future for everybody. At the beginning, the idea was mainly to force a political change through massive street mobilizations under a narrative of urgency. The power of numbers was meant to be sufficient to obtain the goal. Then, the pandemic reset street protests, obscured the climate crisis, threatened activists and sympathisers, increased the dependency of the movement on mass media and weakened the pleasure derived from activism (a powerful incentive to mobilize). FFF Italy was forced to re-think its strategy, with advocacy and more



concrete political proposals gaining prominence and experimenting with new tactics to surprise mass media, public opinion and policy-makers. Since September 2021, massive protests are back but without the power of the past. In the same period, the experiment of a broad socio-ecological coalition (the Climate Open Platform) led by FFF Italy during the pre-COP of 2021 was surely an important achievement but the inclusion of some controversial actors led to the creation of a parallel coalition (the Climate Justice Platform). The Climate Open Platform did not extend its activities beyond the counter-summit and the protests during the pre-COP of Milan. A very different strategic choice was made in 2022: the alliance with the Collettivo Di Fabbrica - Laboratori GKN Firenze to overcome the old environmental job blackmail that entrepreneurs and politicians promote. The *Collettivo* is a vanguard of workers aligned with the values of Fridays for Future but the limited engagement of confederal trade unions prevents the massification of workers' mobilisation.

The disappointing climate policies adopted so far and the lack of a powerful green party are signs that the Italian climate movement has not triggered yet the expected change. Moreover, the pandemic did not seem to work as an environmental wake-up call as many hoped. The debate inside FFF on which strategic shifts must be taken is open with the issues of leadership, tactics, alliances and frames playing a crucial role.

This chapter is divided into four parts. First, I discuss the claims of FFF Italy through frame analysis, focusing on the recognition of the climate emergency and the just ecological transition (section 8.1). Then, I move to the main allies, targeted opponents and ambivalent actors (section 8.2). Third, the primary tactics adopted so far are analysed (section 8.3). Since all the fieldwork has been conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on tactics has a crucial relevance. Fourth, I present the resources that the movement has been able to mobilise, with a centrality given to leadership, the pleasure of activism and the sense of urgency (section 8.4). Fifth, the issue of the political outcomes of the movement in Italy is briefly discussed (section 8.5). The chapter ends with a summary and some further points on the limited political impact of FFF Italy (section 8.6).

## 8.1 Claims

Claims or demands of social movements derive from the processes of framing problems (diagnostic framing) and solutions (prognostic framing). The process by which these demands are publicly staged is called claims-making. In this section, I analyse the two main claims of FFF Italy: recognize the

climate emergency and make the just ecological transition. The common feature of these two claims is their non-negotiability, unlike the compromise strategy of trade unions and old environmentalism, as Pellizzoni (2019a) also noticed.

The climate crisis is a multi-faceted phenomenon that interacts with other environmental issues such as air pollution, plastic pollution, soil consumption, ocean acidification and biodiversity loss which are also addressed by FFF. Local groups also promote other environmental or non-environmental issues generally related to social justice and depending on their context. For instance, the groups of FFF in the Southern region of Calabria give special relevance to the dramatic conditions of their public health system. In this section, I focus on the climate crisis since it represents the core grievance of FFF at the national scale while the deepening of other claims, including local, could be conducted in further studies.

Before moving to the two main positive claims, it is important to say that FFF Italy carries on also negative claims such as removing or blocking specific projects of harmful infrastructures (e.g. Turin-Lyon high-speed railway, the Carbon and Capture Storage of Ravenna, mines, pipelines, highways...), policies (e.g. environmentally harmful subsidies, the European Common Agricultural Policy...) or treaties (e.g. EU-MERCOSUR free trade agreement...), at the local, regional, national, European and international level. The struggle against these initiatives is not only political but also cultural since it includes activities of counterframing and challenge of hegemonic discourses.

Some of these projects, policies and treaties are the perpetuation of the fossil and extractivist business-as-usual but they are presented by dominant actors as part of the solutions to the climate crisis. The best example is natural gas, framed by those actors as a necessity in the energy transition. The Complementary Climate Delegated Act proposed by the European Commission in 2022 added nuclear and gas energy activities to the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities, under certain conditions. In practice, this is an incentive for new investments in those sectors. However, nuclear power is based on non-renewable materials such as uranium and produces the unsolved problem of waste while if natural gas emits less CO<sub>2</sub> than coal when burned, its leaks have high and underestimated warming effects (Alvarez et al., 2018). This discourse that legitimises fossil energy as part of the solutions to the climate crisis they are causing is called “fossil fuel solutionism” (Lamb et al., 2020).

The Turin-Lyon high-speed railway is also framed by hegemonic actors as “green” and even as an essential project of the European Green New Deal. FFF Italy is aligned with the no-Tav movement

in representing these mega-infrastructure as environmental and climate crimes. For instance, in an article published on the official webpage, the movement defined the Turin-Lyon high-speed railway as a “climate crime” and it affirmed that the enormous emissions of the project will be compensated only by 2055 in the best scenario while the Paris Agreement requires resetting emissions by 2050. Other critical aspects are local environmental pollution, biodiversity loss, the disproportionate cost and the top-down, non-participatory process. The most explicit statement came from the second national assembly of FFF Italy, held in October 2019, which explicitly supported Locally Unwanted Land Use movements:

We declare ourselves against all useless and harmful “grande opere”, understood as infrastructure, industry and project that environmentally, economically and politically devastates territories without involving the inhabitants in their own self-determination. We support every territorial battle against local committees, such as “No-TAV per Val di Susa”, “No-Grandi navi per Venezia”, “no Muos per Catania e Siracusa”, “no TAP per Lecce” e “Stopbiocidio per Napoli e la terra dei fuochi”, “Bagnoli Libera contro il commissariamento”, the fight against Enel in Civitavecchia, Snam in Abruzzo, the Third Pass for Alessandria.

In other cases, the solutions proposed by dominant actors are part of a market-based and technological solutionism that is proposed by capitalism to “adjust” the problem of climate change, neglecting the social and historical responsibilities for emissions and environmental destruction (including colonialism). If the system itself is providing the “solutions” to the climate crisis, there is no need for protests or system change. This technological optimism (Lamb et al., 2020) proposes solutions such as Carbon and Capture Storage (CCS), geo-engineering and Emission Trade Schemes whose effectiveness is controversial and with plenty of risks which are not taken into account. For instance, CCS projects are used as an excuse to reduce ambition and their current potential to absorb carbon on large scale is extremely limited (Robertson & Mousavian, 2022). In other cases, fossil fuel companies such as Eni discharge the responsibility to solve the climate crisis on individuals and consumers, a climate delay discourse of individualism (Lamb et al., 2020) which overshadows the responsibilities of fossil capital.

After this analysis of negative claims, I move to the two main positive claims of the movement. By positive I mean that they do not aim at removing or blocking such as with negative claims but at requesting new public actions.

### Recognize the climate emergency

As it has already been said in the chapter on identity, FFF frames our reality as a world in climate emergency. “Our house is on fire”, pronounced Greta Thunberg in her Davos speech in 2019. The

Swedish activist was the one setting the first historical and global claim of the movement: recognize the climate emergency. The first year of FFF Italy was mainly centred on demanding institutions such as municipalities, regions, universities, Parliament, Government and so on to officially recognize the climate emergency. The website <https://www.cedamia.org/> collected the Emergency Climate Declarations (ECD) until 2020. In Italy, 105 cities out of 7903 (1.3%) and 7 regions out of 21 declared it (30%). Besides the percentage of cities being low, the population covered was higher. Among the first ten Italian cities for population, seven are part of the list (Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin, Genova, Bologna and Bari); only Palermo (the 5<sup>th</sup>), Florence (the 8<sup>th</sup>) and Catania (the 10<sup>th</sup>) are not. Those seven cities alone cover 12% of the Italian population. In 2020-2021, other municipalities declared the ECD but the data was not collected. On the 11th of December 2019, the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Republic also approved a declaration of climate emergency, formally legitimizing the central claim of FFF. Overall, we could say that the campaign of FFF to demand the approval of ECDs was quite successful.

At the discursive level, former Prime Ministers Giuseppe Conte (2018-2021) and Mario Draghi (2021-2022) used dramatic expressions regarding the climate crisis, even though they did not call it such (as far as I could observe). For instance, at the UN General Assembly of September 2021, Draghi said that “it’s also true that we are still struggling with the pandemic, but this is an equally – and perhaps even greater – emergency and we should not absolutely diminish our determination to address climate change”. He even added that “current measures are insufficient to stop global energy emission from returning to the 2019 levels by 2022 and continuing upward after 2023. All this is clear: this is far from the trajectory needed to reach net zero by 2050.” During the COP-26 of Glasgow in 2021, he affirmed that “the impact of climate change is already too evident” and “the foregone rising of global temperature is destined to influence the life on the planet in a dramatic way”.

To sum up, we could say that in the period 2019-2021, the severity of the situation was somehow recognized by the Italian State and explicit climate denialism was restricted to far-right fringes. However, this does not mean that those words were converted into concrete and ambitious policies. Greta famously called it the “bla bla bla” and Lamb et al. (2020) include this “all talk, little action” into their twelve climate delay discourses. I go back to this in section 8.5.

## Just ecological transition

The second key global claim of the movement is climate justice. There is no consensual definition of it in academia, NGOs, policymakers, social movements, and even inside FFF. The one thing in common in all the existing conceptualizations is that they put equity and justice aspects at the centre of the analysis of both the causes and the effects of climate change (Meikle et al., 2016).

In the Italian context, FFF applies the concept of climate justice to the transition or conversion to a low-carbon economy. This assumes the name of just ecological transition or just transition (or conversion or reconversion). When the movement refers to climate justice, it generally and implicitly means just transition. This corresponds to the prognostic frame which is the social construction of solutions (Snow et al., 1986). The overall goal of the just transition is to keep the temperature rise below 1.5 °C compared to pre-industrial levels, as set by the Paris Treaty and affirmed in the Declaration of Lausanne released at the end of the European Meeting of FFF in 2019 as well as protecting most vulnerable categories in the process and reducing inequalities. Respecting the goals of the Paris Treaty would mean safeguarding the lives and rights of the most vulnerable, including non-human species, ecosystems and future generations. To use the words of the movement after the so-called *Stati Generali* in 2020, “our country has a duty and an opportunity to implement a total ecological conversion of the economy, in order to prevent climate collapse and protect the welfare of citizens”.

More in general, the just transition is supposed to accomplish what Hans Jonas (1979) called the Imperative of Responsibility which consists in acting so that the effects of our action are compatible with the permanence of genuine life. In practice, responsibility assumes the meaning of caring for the planet, which is not only preserving the living but also imagining another future (Pulcini, 2009). If the future is at stake, we need to imagine a counter-future or an alternative future and push for it, which is the core of the prognostic framing.

The campaign “Ritorno Al Futuro” (RALF) was launched in 2020 and it outlined the just ecological transition as conceptualized by the movement. In this way, Fridays for Future Italy answered to the “no clear-cut solutions” criticism and distanced itself from environmental doomism. In fact, the campaign was centred on the ideas that there is still time to prevent the catastrophe, that we are at a crossroads and, if we choose the right street, that we will be able to build a “new normaliy”, an ecological and happier society. In this way, the movement attempted at keeping hope high in its worst period and to exercise political pressure even without the tool of school strikes. An essential point of

the campaign was the ecotopian<sup>42</sup> (ecological utopia) representation of the future achievable through the just transition, with “well-being and work for all”, “natural, healthy and intact eco-systems” in which “we will produce all our energy from renewable sources” and “cities will be green and free from traffic”. In this sense, we should not necessarily see the “Principle of Hope” by Bloch (2005) as juxtaposed with the Imperative of Responsibility. Jonas (1979) believed that the limitlessness of utopias praised by Bloch must be abandoned and substituted with moderation, limits, and caution, in order to preserve life (the Imperative of Responsibility). However, I believe that what FFF imagines is a responsible utopia since it rejects the ideology of economic growth and proposes to reduce the aggregated economic production to favour activities linked to social reproduction and care. These ideas were further reinforced in the press release published with the workers of the *Collettivo Di Fabbrica* of the ex GKN plant of Campi Bisanzio in 2022 in which they claim that the ecological transition implies a democratic redefinition of what and how is really necessary to produce for human beings within the biocapacity<sup>43</sup> limits of the planet. I go back to this in the section on alliances.

In August 2022, a few weeks before the national elections, FFF Italy published a new version of RALF called “Agenda Climatica” (“Climate Agenda”) with a detailed table of costs and financial coverage. The proposal did not bring many substantial novelties and since it was presented after the end of the fieldwork, it is not included in the analysis.

The concept of ecological transition has become mainstream, as the transformation of the Ministry of the Environment to the Ministry of the Ecological Transition between 2021 and 2022 demonstrates. However, beyond an apparent consensus, its meaning is disputed. If the government did not spin the Climate Decree of 2019 so much, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) was presented as the turning point for the ecological transition. The official document states that “the NRPP is an extraordinary occasion to accelerate the ecological transition and overcome the critical barriers of the past” (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, 2021). However, the plan was heavily criticized for its insufficient ambition, top-down management and influences of private interests. After an evaluation

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<sup>42</sup> The term “Ecotopia” comes from the novel “Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston” published in 1975 by Ernest Callenbach. The ecological utopia described in the book had a great influence on the counterculture and the green movement.

<sup>43</sup> “Biocapacity is the ability of a particular area to support human life in terms of the amount of food, fuel, etc. it can produce and the amount of waste it can deal with”. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/biocapacity>.

made with the think tank ECCO<sup>44</sup>, FFF Italy labelled it as “far from being defined as green” and that it “does not enable the start of any <Green Revolution>”. The movement even mobilized against it in April 2021 with two national demonstrations in Bologna and Rome. The NGO ReCommon<sup>45</sup> (2021) noticed that between July 2020 and June 2021, at least 102 meetings were held between the State and Big Oil regarding the elaboration of the plan while environmentalists were almost ignored, a fact publicly denounced also by FFF. Moreover, the Draghi cabinet hired the giant of consultancy McKinsey for assistance, another worrying sign of the influence of private interests on Italian governments.

FFF Italy stated that the recovery plan of the government was merely a going back to the business-as-usual after the pandemic shock. The pandemic is a “battlefield for alternative futures”, as Pleyers (2020) affirms. In this battlefield, FFF challenged the commonsensical discourse of the “return to normality” by adopting the slogan projected by the collective of artists Delight Lab on a wall in 2020 in Santiago: “we won’t return to normality because normality was the problem.” When FFF Italy was invited to the Stati Generali, the activists affirmed that “we have forgotten that <normality> is the incessant burn of the Australian forests and the Amazonia under the effect of the climate crisis. We’re forgetting that <normality> are Venice’s inhabitants <with water in the throat> (dire straits). Normality is a crisis.” If normality is the problem, the just ecological transition is meant to build a “new normality”, not by cosmetic interventions but through a “total ecological reconversion of the economy”, as it was expressed in the public statement following the Stati Generali.

Within the general claim of just ecological transition, we can find a plethora of specific demands that are meant to realize it, for instance, public policies related to renewable energies, sustainable mobility, agriculture and so on. So far, the movement has made only broad policy proposals but not concrete bills, at least at the national level. These demands create in some activists the dilemma of short-term activities vs middle-term activities (Wallerstein, 2014). In the short-term, FFF needs to offer pragmatic solutions that are effective in fighting climate change immediately, to use the words by Wallerstein, to “minimize the pain”. However, for many activists, the risk is that this would reinforce

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<sup>44</sup> “ECCO is the first independent Italian climate change think tank. The Italian word ‘ECCO’ contains the initials of its main themes, energy and climate change, and in Italian evokes a sense of urgency and innovation consistent with the approach we must take towards climate action”. <https://eccoclimate.org/about/>

<sup>45</sup> ReCommon is an association which fights against abuses of power and the plunder of territories, with a focus on the fossil system and the principle of justice.

the legitimacy of the system they reject<sup>46</sup>. I will not enter the details of these specific claims since I prefer to analyse the general principles of the just ecological transition as conceptualized by FFF Italy. The three key features analysed are the role of the State, the role of science and the principle of justice.

### The role of the State

This first characteristic emerged quite clearly from the campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” and in its shorter and updated version “Non Fossilizziamoci”. The State is meant to coordinate, support, control and finance the conversion of polluting enterprises (agriculture, breeding, energy, construction, heavy industries...) or their drastic downsizing, the energetic efficiency increase of buildings, the development of renewable energies, sustainable mobility, and the research on new technologies for the transition. The nationalization of the energy sector is also contemplated as well as the reinforcement of the Welfare state (public health, school, university, social protection and so on), the reduction of working hours and the increase of the minimum wage. Even if not explicitly mentioned, I believe the ideological reference for these ideas is eco-socialism. The State is supposed to become the key social and economic actor of the transition while there is a clear scepticism toward market-based solutions. This is one of the reasons for choosing the State as the main target of FFF Italy.

While the emphasis is put on public policies, the weight of market-based solutions and individual lifestyle change is usually minimized. Individual behavioural change is still considered a necessity; all activists do their best to reduce their ecological footprints. However, the national communication of the movement generally focuses on policies and system change. The reasons for this are the alleged ineffectiveness of individual solutions facing the climate crisis and the perception that the neo-liberal over-emphasis on individual responsibility is an attempt of polluting enterprises and governments to shift the blame to individuals, neglect their responsibility and so discourage collective actions, what Mann (2021) calls “deflection”. For Maniates (2001, p. 34), “the individualization of responsibility, because it characterizes environmental problems as the consequence of destructive consumer choice, asks that individuals imagine themselves as consumers first and citizens second”. This corresponds to what Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2002) referred to as the seeking of biographical solutions to

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<sup>46</sup> Wallerstein discussed this dilemma in relation to the Global Left. He suggested accepting short-term compromises but rejecting them in the middle-run (20-40 years) since in this case the battle between the spirit of Davos and the spirit of Porto Alegre is total and the stake is the construction of a non-capitalist system.



systemic contradictions of the Western type of individualized society. In the words of Marcello from FFF Italy:

This thing [the climate crisis] is not a thing that can be solved by cycling or buying organic peaches. This thing has not been understood yet. It has not been understood because for our government and Eni is not convenient.

In 2020, FFF Italy shared a post by the group of Brescia that mentioned an article in which the journalist Jaap Tielbeke attacked the over-emphasis on individual lifestyle change. The post well represents the position of the movement on this issue and it started with this title: “Let’s debunk the myth of the green consumer: the individuals are not the really responsible for the climate crisis. The only true answer is political action.” Then, the post continued with this:

It is evident that the current ecological disaster is continuing despite the individual efforts of many! This is because it is necessary a structural change at the global level to tackle the climate crisis, and this can happen only with political action.

The post continued with a description of how enterprises constructed the “myth of the green consumer” to deflect attention from their responsibilities. Then, it ended by saying that “it is clear that individuals can do little in this regard. In any case, this does not take away that some personal choices can have a significant impact”.

Another post of 2021 reinforced these ideas:

The #amletic doubt of every activist. For years, we were recommended to act in our small to make a difference: recycle, use water bottles, don’t waste water...A narrative that has deflected the attention from who is more and really responsible for the #climate crisis: polluting enterprises, governments that support them, banks and institutes that finance them [...]

The movement’s emphasis on systemic solutions is reproduced by activists as well. For Giada, “Fridays always wants to underline that individual gestures in the daily life are ok, using less the car, separate waste, producing less waste, using a water bottle... but the focus of Fridays is a systemic discourse, to change the system”.

Once more, this position of the movement is an anti-hegemonic challenge to the neoliberal obsession with individual consumer behaviours that dominates the mainstream environmental discourse. This focus on systemic and structural change is shared also by other climate justice movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Rise Up 4 Climate Justice.

However, this dominant position inside FFF Italy is frequently challenged by some activists that would prefer a prognosis that prioritizes lifestyle change or at least put it on the same level of political

action. This is an example again of the internal plurality of the movement and a potential frame dispute.

### The role of science

The appeal to “listen to science”, and especially climate science, has always been very central since the first strikes of Greta Thunberg, almost reaching scientism in some cases. Leonardo, an activist from the working group “Politica”, told me that “the first phase, if we can call it as such, was: we want to be the voice of science”. The reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and other scientific studies are used since the beginning to legitimate the representation of a world in climate crisis (the diagnostic frame). FFF’s mobilisation are explicitly meant to make politicians listen to scientists. As Greta said in 2019, “you must not listen to us, but you must listen to the united science, the scientists. And this is all we ask: let us unite behind science!” Let us see another example taken from the official website of FFF Italy:

FFF is based on the overwhelming consensus of the scientific community, which has long described the serious Climate Crisis in which we find ourselves, to pressure governments and institutions to honour those agreements that they have already made, but that are always too much at risk of being disregarded.

The campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” was elaborated with a group of scientists and the ecological transition that it imagines is heavily based on scientific studies. However, with time, both Greta and FFF Italy have increasingly accompanied the appeal to science with an emphasis on justice. This can be seen as an attempt to re-politicize the climate crisis and remove the pretensions of technocratic management.

However, the belief that science, technology and a science-informed political class are per se the solutions to the climate crisis is still present in many activists, especially the youngest. For Roberto (NE18M) the main solution to the climate crisis is “a political class, some politicians must be elected and who believe in science”. Carla (NE18F) answered my question on the main solutions to the climate crisis by saying: “trivially, I would tell you following what science says. Hence reducing, eliminating etcetera, etcetera”. Maria (S17F) mentioned “capturing CO<sub>2</sub> underground” among the main solutions.

Also in public, many activists present the movement as responsible and not so anti-systemic, preferring to focus on win-win technocratic solutions such as electrification and renewable energies rather than on more radical and controversial proposals such as shutting down polluting industries,

redistributing wealth and reducing the volumes of production. In a public mail sent to the former Minister of the Ecological Transition Roberto Cingolani in 2021, the movement juxtaposed science-driven decisions with political-driven decisions by saying “Minister: where are you? Will you give value to science or will you try to politicize it?” and then “if we want to let a planet liveable for next generations and safeguard the health of the current, it is fundamental that decisions taken by politics are based on climatology, as we did with virology during the pandemic.” The depoliticization that occurs in these cases is based on the ratio that if presented as scientific, the proposals of the movement could be legitimized in front of the public opinion and decision-makers hence fostering a consensus that overcomes political divisions. On the other hand, not accepting the movement’s proposals is implicitly labelled as an irrational and unscientific decision. Plenty of scientists, including Anthony Giddens (2009), sustain the idea of depoliticization. Since the 1980s, this discourse has gained prominence through concepts such as ecological modernisation, Green Growth, and Green Economy and an overall idea of managerial and technocratic solutions (Kenis & Lievens, 2014).

## Justice

At the national level, I argue that the strategy of depoliticizing the ecological transition has turned minoritarian and replaced by an increasing emphasis on justice. This is another example of a potential frame dispute inside the movement. To put it in other words, FFF believes that the ecological transition should not only be based on science but also climate and social justice. A similar evolution has been noted for Greta Thunberg as well (Mathiesen, 2022) and it is possible that she indirectly pushed FFF Italy in this direction, together with FFF MAPA and the most politicized wings of FFF Italy. Moreover, the frustration related to the weak political response has surely contributed to this radicalization of the contents.

When framed as such, the ecological transition becomes part of a strategy of re-politicization that aims to reveal the competing perspectives and interests at work (Maesele & Pepermans, 2017). A just transition means that the State should protect the most vulnerable groups during the transition, such as workers and Southern areas, that the cost of the transition should be paid by those individuals and enterprises with more wealth and responsibility in the climate crisis and that the individuals that are more hit by the climate crisis (in Italy and abroad) should receive compensation and support. Let us see the words of the movement taken from the campaign “Ritorno Al Futuro”:

The reconversion must be carried out with the protection of workers and its cost must be borne by those who have the greatest economic resources and the greatest responsibility in the climate crisis. It is also necessary to prepare a plan of economic aid for people and territories that are directly affected by climate disruption.

In this framing, the transition is represented as a win-lose strategy to redistribute wealth and power. According to FFF, polluting companies such as Eni should be decarbonized and taxed to finance the just transition, also as a moral reparation for the damage they have caused. Moreover, the movement believes that those companies should not be key players in climate summits and the elaboration of climate policies, as happened with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

More in general, the overall idea is to shift to a new economic system not only decarbonized but also freed from the ideology of economic growth. “System change, not climate change” is the common global slogan of FFF. This represents a rejection of the ideology of “green growth” that sustains the hegemonic conception of the ecological transition, an example of the influence of the ideas of the de-growth movement on FFF. In this sense, the proposal of a transition based on climate justice is an anti-hegemonic challenge against the market-based, technocratic, top-down, and growth-oriented transition pushed by the European Union and Western governments. In “Ritorno al Futuro”, FFF Italy explicitly rejects the “myth of decoupling” between economic growth and environmental impacts that is one of the pillars of the European Green Deal. Moreover, it proposes to reduce economic production to favour activities linked to social reproduction and care.

As I have already said, FFF Italy has adopted the claims coming from the group of activists from Most Affected People and Areas since 2021. Hence, a just transition also implies a global process of wealth and power redistribution from the North to MAPA through climate reparations, loss and damage funds, the cancellation of debts and the inclusion of most affected people in the decision-making.

The ecologist Alexander Langer<sup>47</sup> used to say that ecological conversion would be established only if it will appear socially desirable. The emphasis on justice by FFF is precisely meant to present the transition as socially desirable and rebut the climate delay discourses that instrumentally appeal to well-being and social justice (see Lamb et al., 2020). For instance, former Minister of the Ecological Transition Roberto Cingolani represented the transition as a likely “bloodbath” (Griseri, 2021), a clear attempt to justify his political inaction.

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<sup>47</sup> Alexander Langer (1946-1995) was an Italian journalist, politician, peace activist and ecologist. He was one of the founders of the Federation of the Greens and the ecological thought in Italy. In 1995, shocked by the war in the Balkans, he committed suicide.

## 8.2 Targets, allies and ambivalent actors

Social movements attempt to obtain what they claim in different fields in opposition, competition or collaboration with other movements, organizations, states, enterprises, media and so on. Klandermans (2013) defines a social movement multiorganizational field as “the total possible number of organizations with which the movement organization might establish specific links”. It is composed of the alliance system, the conflict system and the groups and organizations that are indifferent. The conflict system is formed by those groups and organizations that oppose a specific social movement. The actions of social movements are directed against specific targets that belong to this system. I discuss this in the next section. In the following, I analyse the alliance system, formed by those actors that support the social movement. Discussing those actors that are indifferent would be dispersive so in the last section the focus is on ambivalent organisations.

### Targets

The identification and blaming of concrete human targets are essential for the success of protests since it generates mobilising emotions such as indignation and outrage (Gamson, 1992; Jasper, 1998). The choice of a target influences the tactics adopted (Walker et al., 2008), as it is explained in section 8.3. In the case of FFF Italy, we can identify three main targets: governments, the European Union and “toxic” capitalism. They overlap but do not completely coincide with the antagonists that are analysed in the chapter on identity. The difference is that targets are concrete institutions or people while antagonists can be also more abstract (such as the system and the elite).

Governments are the usual targets of social movements. FFF Italy’s claims and actions are generally directed at the national government while local groups focus more on municipalities and regions. As I have already said, FFF Italy believes that the just ecological transition should be State-led so it is coherent to target public institutions. The common perception inside the movement is that the State is “corrupted” by private and fossil interests but that it can be “redeemed” and pushed to decarbonize our system. Sometimes, even foreign governments and presidents are attacked, such as the Brazilian Jair Bolsonaro for the devastation of the Amazon. The European Union is targeted when FFF Italy adheres to the European campaigns of the movement.

Another typical target of Fridays for Future is big enterprises with a relevant responsibility in the climate crisis. These enterprises are targeted to inform the public, inflict economic and reputational damage and force the State to intervene to regulate them. “Toxic capitalism” is a common expression used in the climate justice movement. It is composed of those extra-polluting enterprises belonging to the energy sector (in Italy mainly Eni, ENEL and SNAM), fast fashion, real estate, construction, heavy industry and those actors which support them such as the banks Unicredit and Intesa San Paolo and the export credit agency SACE. The conflict with the companies of the energy sector is especially accentuated. The reason is that the 60 biggest oil and gas companies contributed to more than 40% of global cumulative industrial emissions between 1988 and 2015 while the top ten ones accounted for almost 21.9% (Grasso, 2018). As I have already said, Eni is a common target of Fridays for Future and it is not by chance: it plays a crucial role in defending the current unsustainable fossil economy, also through an aggressive political and cultural influence. However, the enormous political influence of Eni is invisible to the general public. The actions of social movements such as FFF Italy against Eni contribute to making “power visible and force it to assume a shape” (Melucci, 1996, p. 174). In some cases, foreign companies such as the British Standard Chartered Bank have been targeted as well, as part of the transnational campaigns of the movement.

Finally, other actors such as the economic elite, the political class, specific individuals (ministers, prime ministers, CEOs, European commissioners...), old generations, gerontocracy and media are also attacked by FFF Italy but they do not represent its core targets.

## Allies

Allies of social movements can provide resources such as money, prestige, reputation, legitimation, know-how, skills, demonstrators, visibility, and creativity. In many cases, these alliances are favoured by switchers (Castells, 2015) or brokers (Diani, 2003) with dual or multiple belongings.

We can differentiate three kinds of main allies for Fridays for Future Italy: progressive media, civil society collective actors, and civil society individuals.

LifeGate, HuffPost, Jacobin Italia, Il Manifesto, Valori, Fanpage and Greenreport are examples of allied media or at least very friendly media. They frequently host contributions written by activists and their positions are sympathetic. They are all rather small and independent media, except for HuffPost, owned by the corporation Gedi which also controls La Stampa and Repubblica.

Regarding civil society, FFF Italy counts on a large set of allies or at least very sympathetic actors, such as grassroots trade unions (COBAS and USB), the labour collective of the former GKN industry, the transfeminist movement Non Una Di Meno, student movements, collectives and associations (e.g. Priorità alla Scuola, Studenti Tsunami, Unione Degli Studenti, Link), several social centres, and a part of environmentalism. The closest environmental actors are civic committees, movements such as Extinction Rebellion, Rise Up 4 Climate Justice, Teachers for Future, and Scientists for Future, LULU movements, NGOs such as Greenpeace, Re: Common, and A Sud and the think tank Ecco which has partnered FFF in some analyses. The biggest environmental organisation, Legambiente, is also close to FFF; it supports climate strikes and the campaigns led by the movement. On the other hand, it is generally perceived as too moderate by FFF activists. The “block recruitment” (Oberschall, 1973) of activists from these allies is a very visible phenomenon that occurs for climate demonstrations. In the words of the activist Agata: “during demonstrations, we ask all the politicized groups of the city to give us a hand to bring people and frequently, indeed, these groups have played a big role in bringing people”.

Social centres play a very relevant role in some local groups of FFF. The occupied self-managed social centres “Lambretta” and “Il Cantiere”, for instance, are key allies of FFF Milan. The capital of Lombardy is the city with the longest tradition of social centres in the country. They emerged during the sunset of Fordism in the 1970s, in concomitance with the disappearance of traditional meeting places such as open squares, workplaces, and party offices (Mudu, 2004). Social centres combine political demands, small economic activities, counter-cultural activities and spaces of solidarity, discussion, leisure, and political socialisation (Ruggiero, 2010). The social centres “Lambretta” and “Il Cantiere” are the “backstage” that hosts assemblies and the preparation of protest actions of FFF, and they provide creativity, skills, know-how, demonstrators and other resources to the movement. They also play a radical influence on the frames, narrative and tactics of the group. For instance, militants from those social centres hold anti-capitalist and antagonist political cultures and ideologies and they are prone to confrontational tactics. Many activists belong to both FFF and those social centres, so they perform the role of brokers (Diani, 2003). This brings back the issue of multiple belongings and identities that is discussed in chapter 6.

The relation with the Collettivo Di Fabbrica - Lavoratori GKN Firenze has historical relevance since it has produced a frame bridging between labour and climate that has the ambition to overcome past juxtapositions. These historical divisions are mainly the outcome of the environmental job blackmail (Kazis & Grossman, 1982) which forces people to choose between jobs and environmental quality

(that in turn affects their health). The *collettivo* is composed of the radical workers of a former GKN factory shut down in 2021 by e-mail. The workers have engaged in a struggle not only to save their jobs but also to reconvert the production to electric public transport. With time, FFF and the *collettivo* allied and built a joint narration of the ecological transition which implies a democratic redefinition of what and how is really necessary to produce for human beings within the biocapacity limits of the planet and a reduction of the working hours (as it is mentioned in section 8.1). Under this narration, joint mobilizations were produced in the first half of 2022. However, we must notice that the Collettivo di Fabbrica is a radical vanguard of the worker movement but it is not so much representative.

The engagement of workers in the climate struggle is essential since a just ecological transition implies not only the creation of new green jobs but also the downsizing of polluting sectors that threaten the climate and workers' health as well as the taxation of environmentally harmful behaviours and products. A just ecological transition as conceptualized by FFF is meant to protect workers and the most vulnerable citizens. A completely opposite decision was taken by the French government in 2018 by raising the price of fuel and determining the massive protests of the *Gilets Jaunes*. That episode was read by many as a demonstration that citizens are not ready to accept an ecological transition but in fact, the main problem was the lack of justice in the decision taken by President Macron.

It is important to notice that no political party can be considered an ally of FFF even though some single members of the parliament and the European parliament have forged considerable links with the movement, all from Europa Verde and FacciamoEco (a former ecologist group of the Parliament). This is also because some FFF activists are part of Giovani Europeisti Verdi (Young Green Europeanists), the youth section of Europa Verde.

Finally, the movement can count on friendly artists, writers, celebrities and scientists. For instance, globally, the movement has been supported by Pope Francis, Barack Obama, Naomi Klein, Vandana Shiva and Leonardo di Caprio, though they are not necessarily all allies. In Italy, famous scientists such as Antonello Pasini and Luca Mercalli are allies of the movement that have organized training, webinars, and technical support to the movement, apart from publicly supporting it. Moreover, these actors are very important since they provide what Snow & Benford (2000) call the credibility of frame articulators that can make the movement's claims and frames more resonant.



FFF has also contributed to the creation of socio-ecological coalitions. As already noted in the literature (della Porta & Parks, 2014) climate justice has become a master frame, a collective action frame that is wider than movement-specific frames and allows connections between heterogeneous movements and the creation of socio-ecological coalitions. The most important example was the Climate Open Platform (COP), a heterogeneous coalition that organized a climate counter-summit and two marches during the pre-COP (Conference of Parties) of Milan in 2021. The coalition ranged from mainstream environmentalism (Legambiente, WWF) and unions (CGIL) to student associations, NGOs, civic committees, and social centres. However, the ideological breadth and inclusivity of the COP created some problems, with some activists criticizing the participation of the CGIL, the main trade union accused of supporting harmful projects, and the WWF, accused of being neo-colonialist. The inclusion of the two organizations pushed away more radical subjects such as Extinction Rebellion, Survival International and Rise Up 4 Climate Justice which created a parallel coalition called Climate Justice Platform (CJP). Even if the Climate Open Platform produced an initial statement before the summit, it did not end with a public declaration or set of proposals, a clue of the difficulties of bringing together such different actors and producing a coherent narrative and proposal in a short time.

### Ambivalent actors

These actors have a complex relationship with Fridays for Future Italy and they cannot be labelled as simply allies or antagonists/targets.

First, the relations of FFF Italy with mainstream confederal trade unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) are very ambivalent. On one hand, the confederal unions support the idea of a just transition which is at the core of many of their documents. On the other, they tend to follow the idea that growth, including its green version, is necessary to create jobs and improve salaries, while FFF is closer to de-growth, post-growth and steady-state economy. In terms of mobilizations, there are also several ambiguities. Most of the unions have officially supported climate mobilizations and the biggest organization, the CGIL, joined the climate counter-summit of September 2021 and supported FFF's campaign "Ritorno Al Futuro". However, confederal unions have always rejected to proclaim the general strike (only some sectors did it) in concomitance with climate mobilizations, preventing workers from participating or obliging them to take holidays. At the local level, confederal unions tend to support environmentally harmful projects, especially in the so-called "sacrifice zones", which are strongly opposed by FFF.

The best example is perhaps the city of Ravenna, dominated by the infrastructures of Eni and where it proposed the controversial project of Carbon and Capture Storage with the support of unions but with the opposition of the climate justice movement. In many of these cases, unions are the victims of the environmental job blackmail (Kazis & Grossman, 1982) orchestrated by corporations and governments which forces them to choose between jobs, on one hand, and environmental preservation and health on the other. One positive exception to this trend of diverge between FFF and unions is the case of Civitavecchia, close to Rome, which in the last years has seen a joint mobilization of environmentalists and workers against the reconversion of the coal power plant to gas and created an alternative project based on renewable energies. Even right-wing politicians supported the mobilisation. It is not by chance that FFF chose Civitavecchia for its 2022's National Assembly. This case and the alliance with the *Collettivo* prefigure a potential broad workers-ecologists coalition.

The relationship with the World Wild Fund (WWF) is also quite ambivalent. On one hand, the historical environmental organisation supports climate strikes and it even joined “Ritorno al Futuro” and the Climate Open Platform. On the other, it is considered too moderate both in terms of goals and tactics and it is criticised by many activists for its neo-colonial attitude in the Global South. In specific, its “fortress conservation” model is criticized for expelling indigenous people and violating their rights.

Finally, if we look at the political proposals by the party Europa Verde (EV) we can see an almost complete harmony with Fridays for Future, from renewable energies, opposition to nuclear power, Welfare system, sustainable mobility, closure of intensive farms, and justice. Europa Verde also completely supports climate strikes. However, if some FFF activists maintain direct contact with single members of EV and there are even cases of double belonging and candidatures, the movement itself prefers to maintain a certain public distance from the party. In short, the movement has no real referent in the political arena, as also noticed by Pellizzoni (2019a).

### 8.3 Tactics

By tactics, I mean the forms of action that aim at influencing or coercing opponents, the general public, and activists (Doherty, 2013). The choice of a tactic instead of another is a complex decision which depends on a plethora of interrelated internal and external variables (Dalton, 1994; Ennis, 1987): the resources available, the ideological preferences of the activists, the perceived strength of

the group, its identity, the Political Opportunity Structure, the target, the arena, and even the structural conditions of the city. When we analyse the repertoires of contention (Tilly, 1986), it is important to adopt a relational approach which focuses on the interaction between social movements, other actors and the arenas in which they operate (Doherty & Hayes, 2018). Behind the adoption of each tactic, there is a process of negotiation that involve dilemmas, trade-offs, and a calculation of potential benefits and risks. The complexity of the decision is because protests aim at the same time at winning media attention, forcing decision-makers to act, galvanizing supporters, allies and activists (whose preferences do not necessarily coincide), and sustaining the collective identity (della Porta & Diani, 2020).

Regarding Fridays for Future, the existence of multiple belongings and transnational networks means the tactics can be imported from other movements or sections of FFF. The paradigmatic case is the school strike, imported into Europe by Greta Thunberg from the USA and then adopted by all local groups. On the other hand, the adoption of more confrontational tactics is very much due to the influence of radical activists from social centres and collectives.

Another important point to clarify is that we should overcome the old juxtaposition between old and new social movements according to which the former were engaged in political struggles over material claims such as better salaries and redistribution and the latter more in cultural struggles over post-material issues such as quality of life, equality, self-realization, participation and revindication of difference and identity. I believe contemporary social movements such as FFF tend to have a dual logic: instrumental and expressive, political and cultural. When we look at most of the tactics they display, we can see that they are at the same time directed to reach a political outcome and create a cultural change in the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of activists (internal), on one hand, and politicians, enterprises and citizens (external) on the other. The two logics are interrelated: a political outcome can reinforce a cultural outcome and vice versa. Obtaining a climate law, for instance, is a political outcome that can contribute to sensitising the general public on the necessity of behavioural change. At the same time, a campaign informing the population about the climate crisis could potentially mobilize people in the streets and open the door to approving a climate legislation.

Let us see an example here. The Complementary Climate Delegated Act proposed by the European Commission in 2022 added: “under strict conditions, specific nuclear and gas energy activities in the list of economic activities covered by the EU taxonomy.” The EU taxonomy for sustainable activities is a classification system for investors of environmentally sustainable economic activities. FFF

organized flash-mobs and rallies as part of a political strategy aiming at blocking the amendment of the taxonomy. At the same time, these actions and the communicative strategy were aimed at deconstructing the attempt to build a hegemonic narration of nuclear power and gas as sustainable and of gas as transition energy.

Moreover, protests are not only directed at external actors. As Graeber (2010) suggests, they are the same time a performance meant to impress the external public and a collective ritual meant to instruct, inspire, motivate, entertain, transform participants and sustain or transform a collective identity. At the same time, collective identities shape tactical choices (Smithey, 2004).

The repertoire of tactics adopted by Fridays for Future is very broad, an effect of decentralization and internal plurality. In the first two years, the rally-strike and the rally-march were the main tactics adopted (with some sporadic confrontational action), supported by the use of mass media and social media. The epidemiological situation played an enormous influence in shaping and diversifying the repertoire. The political-institutional dialogue and the bike-strike, already present before the pandemic, grew considerably while with the decline of media coverage, it became vital to have a more effective media strategy. Before moving to the analysis of the main tactics adopted by the movement, I discuss the general impact of the pandemic on its repertoire.

#### The impact of the pandemic tsunami on tactics

The Conte II cabinet was born just before the pandemic supported by the centre-left (the Democratic Party and the coalition Free and Equal) and the populist Five Star Movement which in the previous government was allied with the far-right. The government was born with the only clear mission of avoiding elections and the likely triumph of the right-wing, but it did not have a substantial programme and internal conflicts were daily. With COVID-19, it found a new *raison d'être*: the bio-political mission to protect lives, limit the diffusion of the Coronavirus, and deal with the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. This was done through unprecedented bio-political measures that limited plenty of human rights and freedoms, including the freedom of mobility and the right to protest which are essential for social movement. The idea is not to judge if those measures were necessary and proportionate but only to discuss their impact on Fridays for Future.

The first restrictive measures were approved in February 2020 in specific locations in the North of Italy and then extended to the whole country. Between the 11th of March 2020 and the 14th of June

2020, all demonstrations were prohibited and movements limited to a few exceptional motives by decree. These measures were part of the so-called lockdown that was meant to limit the rampant diffusion of the virus and safeguard the Italian health system from collapse. For a mass movement living its momentum, this was the equivalent of a tsunami. In the impossibility to use the public space for its activities, FFF was forced to a complete, though temporary, digitalization. April's Global Strike was entirely digital (and quite ineffective). From the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, demonstrations were authorized again but only in a static form and under several perceived threats.

Since November 2020, in concomitance with the second COVID wave, each Italian region was classified as red, orange or yellow (white was added in 2021) according to a set of indicators. Different containment measures were applied in each zone. The red zones were in the condition of semi-lockdown while the others counted on lower restrictions. In these different scenarios, local groups of FFF reacted in different ways, depending on internal factors, the framing of the local epidemiological situation and the local Political Opportunity Structure (POS). The local epidemiological situation cannot be considered as an objective set of opportunities and threats constituted by the numbers of infections, infection rates, deaths, hospitalization rates etcetera but as something that was interpreted by local groups. In terms of local POS, there was less freedom of interpretation because Prefects (the government's territorial representatives) explicitly authorized or prohibited marches, in this last case strictly applying the national norms.

A first cluster of local FFF groups simply decided to continue to avoid protesting in squares and streets and to maintain the focus on online activism (webinars, posts, social bombing and so on). Others decided to dissolve their group, re-organize it or "freeze" it until an improvement in the health situation. A third cluster decided to carry on protests in presence under COVID regulations while other groups experimented with tactics such as the bike strike to overcome those restrictive rules, a tactic that I analyse further on. In any case, participation drastically dropped for several factors that go from the health threat to the discourse legitimating the government and delegitimizing dissent, the fear of sanctions, the closure of schools, the decline of media coverage and insufficient gratification.

First, the direct health threat represented by the Coronavirus scared many activists, sympathizers and allies. If threats can be important triggers for mobilization (Dyke, 2013), in this case, they worked in the opposite direction for FFF, as almost all the interviewees recognized. Putting aside digital activities, social activism implies leaving one's house, displacing with public transport, gathering in assemblies with other people (sometimes indoors) or in acts of protests where people talk, sing and

shout. All these actions potentially spread the Coronavirus. Moreover, the health threat was extended to the lives of the relatives that could be infected in a second moment by the activists participating in the above-mentioned activities. The main component of FFF activists is young students who either were living with their families or massively returned to their houses during the pandemic. Hence, it was hard to maintain social distancing from their families. As the activist Agata recognised during our interview, “in many cases it could be parents to discourage” participating in protests.

A study conducted on Black Lives Matter in the United States rejected the idea that its 2020’s protests led to a rise in COVID rates (Neyman & Dalsey, 2021). However, the sensation at the time was different for many and in general, threats are subjectively perceived. If the (objective) local epidemiological trends and data surely played a role, the authorities, media, families, groups of friends, the local group of FFF and individual characteristics intervened to shape this perception. The result was that each local group and activist of FFF differently evaluated the health threat and acted in various ways.

The health threat created what I call the first pandemic mobilization dilemma: how to make an impact without producing a rise of contagions? If in “normal times”, the movement relied on the power of numbers (the higher the participation, the higher the impact), in pandemic times the formula was: the higher the participation, the higher the risk of contagions. Hong et al. (2022, p.1) see it as “a complex trade-off between democratic rights of freedom of assembly and an epidemic risk”. There was no easy solution to this dilemma and the solutions adopted could mitigate the health threat only relatively.

A common strategy to reduce the sense of threat was emphasising the safety of protests, with appeals to use masks, hands-cleaning products and maintain social distancing. Those appeals were launched before and during actions. For instance, during an assembly in Milan in preparation for a strike, a well-known activist called for responsibility since “if the  $R_t$  rises [the reproduction number of infections], we are screwed.” Similar messages were sent on the social media of the movement. Let us see, for instance, a post published in November 2020: “in the rallies and strikes remember to keep physical distance and to follow all anti-COVID-19 norms that are relevant in your region”. In many protests held in 2020, the activists marked signs on the ground to signal people where to stand and consequently keep social distance and remembered them to respect all COVID-related norms. The bike strike was explicitly used since it easily allowed maintaining social distance. At the same time, in the strikes of 2020, the movement offered alternative ways of mobilizing such as digital actions

(webinars, photos with protest signs, social bombing and so on). Several groups decided to perform actions only by core activists without public calls for joining. In Lucca, activists symbolically substituted people with shoes and in Turin with hundreds of protest signs (see the picture below), thanks to the convergence of several groups into the same city. These were all cases of artistic and creative reactions to the COVID-19 restrictions, a demonstration of the innovative wind brought by climate activism. In the end, the health threat drastically dropped as far as the vaccine campaign advanced in 2021.



Picture 5: collection of placards forming the sentence "no more empty promises" during Turin's Global Strike in March 2021. Credits: Fridays for Future Turin.

A second factor of demobilisation was the discourse of national unity and delegitimation of protests activated by the government and other actors during some phases of the pandemic. As Pleyers (2020) suggests, if in 2019 governments were harshly questioned by global protests, the pandemic was the perfect moment to call for national unity and regain legitimacy by offering protection to citizens. As I have already said, the Conte II cabinet was born just before the pandemic without a substantial programme and the pandemic gave it a new bio-political *raison d'être*. The popularity of the then Primer Minister Giuseppe Conte soared, reaching 71% in the first lockdown (Tosi, 2021). Moreover, if during the first lockdown street demonstrations were prohibited, from the 15th of June they were authorized again but protesters were labelled by mass media as irresponsible citizens for spreading the virus in their actions. The simple equations were responsibility=inactivity and protests=irresponsibility. In late 2020, the German government released a video celebrating citizens who do nothing and stay at home as "COVID-19 heroes". Similar messages circulated in Italy as well,

especially when the protests against COVID restrictions and vaccinations spread. That can be seen as part of a general strategy to marginalize or even erase social conflict (Bertuzzi, 2021).

Apart from the discourse of national unity and delegitimation of dissent, the legal restriction on protests produced a perceived threat to be sanctioned for not respecting social distancing as it happened on several occasions, which made the organizational process even more complex and uneasy. The Prefects acted in very different ways in each city hence the local Political Opportunity Structure shaped a lot of the life of FFF's groups. For instance, some Prefects prohibited the bike strike, protests in central squares, and dynamic protests and they were actively sanctioning demonstrators for violating COVID restrictions. This enhanced the perceived threat of legal sanctions and discouraged protests. This closing of the POS was even more evident after the burst of the protests against the "Green pass", introduced in August 2021 and then eliminated in April 2022.

Hence, something new grew up for activists: the threat of being stigmatized for attending a potentially risky protest against a government recently re-legitimated. This combined with a reputational threat to the movement in general, leading rise to what I call the second pandemic mobilization dilemma: how to create an impact without being stigmatized or sanctioned? In other words, the higher the participation, the higher the potential stigmatization and reputational risk. The combination of low media coverage with a declining reputation could have been fatal for the movement. However, in general, I have not found many stigmatizing media reports or political declarations against FFF (except the far-right), so I believe the movement was able to protect its reputation (contrary to anti-Green Pass demonstrators). When faced with the health and reputational threat, the movement maintained a responsible attitude, sensitive to the alarms of the scientific community, inviting people to take the virus seriously and to protest according to the legal measures. This was also meant to differentiate FFF from the anti-vax and anti-green pass demonstrations which in many cases were completely disrespectful of sanitary norms and public authority decisions and which contributed to their stigmatization by mass media and authorities. As my gatekeeper Marcello told me, "for us, this COVID-crisis is a crisis on which we could only be absolutely vigilant and shrewd for the fact that one of our founding principles is to listen to the voice of science".

In Summer-Autumn 2021, the overall pandemic situation greatly improved thanks to the vaccination campaign, as I have already sustained. In April 2022, the abolishment of the "Green Pass" ended the movement against restrictions. These two factors almost vanished the reputational risk and the risk of stigmatization.



A third factor that reduced participation was the closure of schools. Since the end of February 2020, several Italian regions in the North started closing schools and universities. Then, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March, the national government shut down all schools and universities in the country. In September 2020, schools and universities were opened again but with a percentage of online didactic. With the rise of the second wave of Coronavirus in Autumn, many schools and classrooms were forced to close again, also depending on the situation of each region and the continuous evolution of the anti-COVID regulation. At the same time, universities also adopted a mixed online-in presence didactic.

Students are the key component of Fridays for Future since the beginning. Michele, an activist from the national FFF group which nurtures relationships with schools, affirms that: “in the end, school is where we were born. We were born like this, all as students. We are, I mean, the movement was born from students.” Since schools and universities were key places for recruiting activists and demonstrators and communicating actions, it is clear that the closing down of both institutions hurt the movement. Ludovico, another climate activist, told me that “above all, we have lost a lot the force of student collective who are struggling to bring their claims since they are not going to school”. Social media compensated for this factor only in a very partial way. Again, with the gradual improvement of the pandemic situation, schools and universities gradually went back to their normal functioning.

A fourth factor contributing to the decline was the drop in media attention on environmental issues. We could say that the politics of invisibility intervened to publicly manufacture the invisibility of the climate crisis and the climate movement. Without the power of numbers and mass media coverage, it was harder for FFF to influence decision-makers. Second, the absence of media coverage contributed to the perception of the low efficacy of pandemic protests that in turn fostered demobilization and low commitment, also for the allies of the movement. The manufacturing of the invisibility of the climate crisis happened again with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. If the cost of energy has risen as a top priority, the ecological consequences of the increased dependence on coal and liquefied natural gas are not considered by hegemonic actors.

The fifth factor that hit the levels of participation was the decline of the gratification deriving from activism, strictly related to over-digitalization. This aspect is explored in the part dedicated to the pleasure of activism (section 8.4).

The five factors I mentioned that influenced participation were subjective and contextual. Not every activist perceived them or perceived them the same, both for individual reasons and for the context

in which they were living. For instance, not only the pandemic situation in each city was different, but also each local group framed it differently and intervened to mitigate (or not) its impact on participation in very heterogeneous ways, contributing to modifying the perception of threats. The different attitudes of Prefects in each location also contributed to shaping these factors. Other actors that intervened in this game of perceptions were the media, the families and the group of peers of the activists.

Some of the five factors mentioned were per se emotional and, taken in combination, they produced further emotions such as fear, frustration, resignation, deception, apathy, and a weakened sense of individual and collective efficacy for many activists. Overall, this led to low commitment and demobilisation. Moreover, the perception of the complexity of producing effective actions converted into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Let us take for instance the words of an activist interviewed during the fieldwork named Alex (NW26N): "our activism was based on squares [...]. In a moment in which you cannot use squares or they are subject to a thousand restrictions, you're dead." In this case, it is not important if other forms of activism than the ones mentioned by Alex ("based on squares") are effective. If he believed so, it is likely that he simply discarded them or carried on them with low commitment. In this sense, I speak of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Let us see now tack back the data that is mentioned in chapter five on the protests in Milan and Rome between 2019 and 2022. According to the movement's data, the 2019's global strikes (marches) gathered between 25,000 and 220,000 people in Milan and between 10,000 and 200,000 in Rome. In the strikes of October 2020 (rally) and March 2021 (bike strike), only 200 people attended in Milan, according to media reports on the first event and my counting on the second. The October 2021's strike in Milan (march) finally saw an important return of participation, with 50,000 demonstrators, according to the movement's data. The successive strikes saw relatively modest numbers compared to that: 5000 in March 2022 and 10,000 in September while Rome made higher numbers: 20,000 and 30,000. If it is undeniable the dramatic decline between 2020 and October 2021, the other numbers must be taken with some caution. An activist from the movement sustains that the data of the last strikes is more accurate than the first ones when local groups tended to inflate numbers. In any case, those who participated in all the protests confirm that participation in 2021-2022 is lower than in 2019, with October 2021's strike being a notable exception. Interestingly, in 2022 Rome was able to overtake Milan while in 2019 it was the opposite.

If the impact on participation was dramatic, the pandemic was also a laboratory of experimentation and diversification of tactics, from the bike strike, and the boost of the political-institutional dialogue, to new forms of digital and performative actions to surprise and attract media attention. This was a significant evolution for the movement but all this did not compensate for the crisis of participation and even the crisis of identity that many activists suffered from.

In what remains of this section I analyse only the main tactics and the more innovative ones used by FFF Italy. It is not a comprehensive catalogue. Legal actions such as “Giudizio Universale” are excluded since FFF is not the main promoter though it supports it. I have also not included the European Citizens Initiative launched in 2019 since my focus is on Italy. Other actions such as guerrilla gardening, local petitions and proposals are also not touched since they are not so widespread, and I do not have enough data to compare local groups on these aspects. The analysis is focused on the following actions: the rally-strike, the march-strike, confrontational actions, the political-institutional dialogue, the bike strike, cultural actions, and communication. These tactics are not necessarily separated, in some cases, they are combined, and they reinforce each other.

### The rally-strike

At the beginning, the first local groups of FFF adopted from Greta Thunberg the idea of a weekly strike which generally took the form of a rally in central squares to give visibility to the claims, motivate activists, recruit new ones and start putting pressure on local administrations. Greta took inspiration from the students of Parkland (Florida) who used it after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School to demand a weapon ban (Thunberg et al., 2019). The first Italian gatherings of FFF were small but enriched by apocalyptic and ironic signs, speeches, music and with a strong emphasis given on the social component. In some cases, they were accompanied by flash-mobs to attract attention. With time, they increased the direct targeting of local institutions. The rally-strike quickly became a ritual, contributing to the collective identity of the movement and many local groups. It is still used even though very few groups have maintained the weekly cadence.

The school strike is a form of civil disobedience for those pupils legally required to attend school (between 6 and 16 years old in Italy). Mattheis (2020) uses the term “youth disobedience” to mean civil (and other forms of principled) law-breaking by children and youths. The question is: why does Fridays for Future strike? As it is said on the official website, we strike “because we have no choice”, because “we are not sitting at the table where decisions on the future of us and of our sons are taken”,

because “the climate crisis is already here” and its “effects will have an impact on everybody, rich and poor, and they will be more devastating for more vulnerable people.” In this context, “collective action is the only answer to this crisis.” To sum up, the school strike is considered the only way in the hands of an unheard population to force a change and avoid a catastrophic future. The re-framing of climate change as a climate emergency or climate crisis overcomes all considerations on the illegal nature of civil disobedience.

The novelty and disruptiveness of a tactic are two of the factors increasing the likelihood of success of a movement (Almeida, 2019). The school strike was sure new and disruptive at least during the biennium 2018-2019 and I believe it contributes to explaining the large numbers of students mobilised by FFF. At the same time, it was not represented as outrageous by mass media and politicians, unlike the more confrontative actions of civil disobedience carried on by Ultima Generazione and similar movements since 2021 (roadblocks, smearing buildings and art objects...). In short, it was tolerated despite its illegal nature.

In the period 2018-2019 period, the rally-strike, the assembly and then the march-strike became the key rituals of Fridays for Future Italy. Rituals are symbolic, standardized, and repetitive socially effective actions that are used not only for strategic-political purposes but also to forge a sense of collective identity (Casquete, 2006). Hence, both demonstrations and public assemblies combine an external form of communication (to authorities, sympathizers, mass media and public opinion) and an internal one (to activists). If the practice of striking for the climate assumed the form of ritual for thousands of students, we could not say the same for the rest of the population, also for the refusal of confederal trade unions to proclaim the general strike.

As I have already said, at the end of February 2020 the rally-strike disappeared. Demonstrations were authorized again on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2020 only in static forms. Hence, the rally-strike returned as the key tactic of the movement, more than the march-strike (which was prohibited). Pandemic rallies were organized respecting the COVID rules in terms of social distancing, use of facial masks, and hygiene of hands.



*Picture 6: a socially distant rally organised in Ravenna in May 2021. Credits: Matteo Spini.*

### The march-strike

With the first Global Strike of March 2019, the central tactic of Fridays for Future became the march-strike, an innovative form of protest that since then regularly empty schools. The march is an old tactic of all massive social movements based on the logic of numbers that consists in mobilizing the greatest number of demonstrators possible to put pressure on policy-makers, similarly to elections (della Porta & Diani, 2006). The main innovation of FFF was to combine the march with the school strike to encourage students to demonstrate and create disruption.

This first global demonstration is still remembered by many activists for being massive and highly emotional:

It was great, it was very nice because it made me feel less alone, I mean, in my sensibility toward environmental issues. Several people spoke at the microphone, me too, I mean... (Antonia, S24F).

When I decided to join my first demonstration, the first Global Strike on the 15th of March in Florence, I found myself with many, many people. I don't remember how many, they said almost 40,000 demonstrating in the city. It was a marvellous moment, a moment of union (Agnese, C20F).

If the demonstrators went to that protest moved by anger, fear, and indignation, the march itself produced other mobilizing shared emotions (held by demonstrators at the same time) such as pride,

euphoria and hope and reciprocal emotions (felt by demonstrators toward each other) such as friendship, sense of belonging and solidarity. Hope has particular importance since it mediates the paralyzing potential of fear deriving from the awareness of the threat of the climate crisis (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017). Moreover, the first Global Strike enormously increased the sense of collective efficacy, which is the perception of being able to produce a change through collective action (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, high levels of efficacy bring high commitment and motivation that sustain action, which is exactly what the first Global Strike produced. Swim et al. (2019) found evidence that climate change marches increased bystanders' collective efficacy beliefs, a robust predictor of climate change action.

In 2019, it became clear that the march-strike was the most effective weapon of the movement. The large numbers were surely a positive factor that, according to the literature (Glover & Ozden, 2022), can predict protest movement success. Moreover, the movement counted on very favourable media coverage and the support from prominent international scientists, leaders, and celebrities produced a waterfall effect. In Italy (and not only), politicians from all sides expressed their support and declared the climate emergency in their cities, regions and then at the national level. The impression at the time was that the Political Opportunity Structure was opening, and this produced enthusiasm, pride, hope and a sense of collective political efficacy (Yeich & Levine, 1994), in other words, the perception that the system was responsive to mass mobilizations.

Some days before the Third global strike planned for the 27th of September 2019, the then Minister of Education Lorenzo Fioramonti (at the time belonging to the Five Star Movement) declared that pupils would be justified if they wanted to strike. With that declaration, he totally removed the threat of being sanctioned for striking and seemed to become an elite ally of the movement. I believe that decision allowed the movement to reach its peak of participation, with more than 1 million mobilized for the Third global strike, according to the data collected by FFF Italy. Perhaps for the first time in our country, the climate reached the second stage of the issue-attention cycle (Downs, 1972) which is when euphoric enthusiasm rises about society's ability to do something effectively and quickly and even create a structural change. On 5 November 2019, Fioramonti announced the introduction of the study of climate change in all schools. However, the Climate Decree approved by the Government after the strike deluded all expectations. At the same time, Fioramonti resigned since the Budget Law did not adequately fund its ministry and then the burst of the pandemic determined a decline of public interest in the climate crisis and ended that window of opportunity.

In the first semester of 2020, the POS turned substantially closed for the march-strike. For the global strike of October 2020, a few groups organized marches with social distancing, facial masks and sanitisers but with very low numbers. Only 200 people mobilized in Milan, for instance. Then, in September-October 2021, the scenario returned more favourable for several interrelated variables. First, the vaccine campaign reduced the perceived health threat. Second, thanks to the general improvement of the pandemic situation the POS opened again for marches, even though with the wave of anti-vax and anti-green pass protests some Prefects prohibited them for the second time or applied some restrictions to the route. Third, the opening of schools made it easier to mobilize students. Fourth, a series of international events on climate hosted by Italy (pre-COP, Youth4Climate and partially the G-20) attracted again media attention, especially when Greta Thunberg came to Milan between September and October. Thanks to that scenario, the phase of “rebound” began for the movement, characterised by the return of large street demonstrations. However, it soon became clear that reaching the momentum of 2019 was hard and that the political impact was still limited. That relaunched a debate in the movement that is still going on: is the climate march becoming old, normalized, unnewsworthy and losing effectiveness after three years? Should we switch to more disruptive forms of protest?

Let us now turn to the features of the march-strike. In FFF’s rallies, the number of demonstrators is reduced and core activists are relatively relaxed. On the contrary, marches with thousands of people are much more stressful for core activists and they require careful planning and staging since the expectations and the risks are both high. To perform well, it is necessary a good division of roles among activists. Key roles are frontrunners who guide the march, charismatic activists who give the speeches, activists leading the media and social media strategy, those maintaining the relations with the Police, those who take care of the security of the event, performers of flash-mobs, and DJs in charge of the soundtrack. An important point to say is that FFF Italy always negotiates with authorities the locations, routes, times, and manners of the march. In some cases, small groups composed of trained militants detach from the march and perform more spectacular, radical, confrontational and even illegal actions such as flash-mobs, occupations, blockades or smearing the walls of enterprises. However, the overall march (almost) always respect the normative and the Police’s dispositions. Post-protest media activities such as media interviews, press notes, and articles are also fundamental to maintaining attention and political pressure high. At the same time, a large demonstration generally produces new “recruits”. In those cases, local groups cannot allow themselves to rest so much since they need to integrate them.

The marches organized by FFF Italy are quite inclusive and involve a wide range of allies or sympathetic actors from trade unions, mainstream environmentalism, other climate movements, LULU movements, student associations, social centres, and even the party Europa Verde (though party flags are not welcomed). However, the leadership of the march-strike is always assumed by FFF even if allies can give their support to the organization.

The march generally targets local, regional and national public authorities. Walker et al. (2008) sustain that the State have great capacities for repression (use of violence), facilitation (offer of concessions), channelling (into more conventional tactics), and routinization (it negotiates the routes of the protest, the spaces, times, and manners), and it is more open and less vulnerable to delegitimation and nonparticipation. Hence, the events that target the State tend to employ tactical repertoires that are less disruptive, such as the march or the rally. However, it is interesting to note that many times during the marches of FFF small groups detach and perform more radical actions against enterprises, as I have already said.

Most of the time, the march-strikes form part of the Global Climate Strike or the Global Day of Action, both multi-country mobilizations which generally happen on the same day, with similar targets, frames, and narratives. Since 2021, FFF's local groups democratically choose the date and hashtags of the global mobilizations by vote. Then, national and local groups autonomously decide the specific demands and the tactics to be employed, among which the most prominent tend to be the march except for the biennium 2020-2021. The alignment to the global level produces slogans and claims that tend to be abstract (climate justice, uproot the system, people not profit and so on) and without a specific national goal. If this could attract a large and diverse plethora of supporters to the demonstrations, it could also miss the opportunity to obtain an immediate and specific political outcome such as the adoption or block of a specific policy or project that could produce a galvanizing effect. This dilemma periodically emerges in the internal discussions of the movement.

Another key aspect of FFF's march-strike is the dimension of pleasure. Even if the march-strike remains a demonstration with political goals, it is clear that the dimension of pleasure is an incentive that social movements use to mobilize, recruit, garner media attention and sustain participation in time. During our interview, the activist Agata well explained how pleasure was a key resource in those mass mobilizations:

At a certain point, for sure, going to the square was cool for a certain age range. A waterfall effect was created because if everybody goes, if all your friends go, besides the fact you're not interested at all...there were a lot of people not interested in staying in the square. It was funny. Hence, the squares lived on that. And then, perhaps, as it happens sometimes with



these things, by staying there they convinced themselves, then convincing others, that the square was a beautiful thing, a living thing and so on.

I further discuss this topic in the section on the pleasure of activism (section 8.4) that we can conceptualize as a crucial resource in the hands of Fridays for Future. The dimension of pleasure is interrelated with the spectacularization of protests. The public actions of social movements can be seen as a form of dramaturgical performance aimed at influencing the audience (Benford & Hunt, 1992), among other things. It has been noted that the increasing mediatization and spectacularization of the tactical repertoires is part of the broader process of mediatization of society and politics (Mosca, 2007).



Picture 7: Milan's climate strike in March 2022. Credits: Matteo Spini.

### Confrontational actions

Examples of confrontational actions are blockades, occupations, sit-ins (Saunders, 2013), and smearing the building of corporations and public institutions. If the march relies on the logic of numbers, confrontational actions are based on the logic of damage (in which the aim is to impose costs on the opponent) and the logic of bearing witness (when activists demonstrate a strong commitment to a vital objective).

Confrontational actions tend to be illegal and they are the core of climate justice movements movement such as Extinction Rebellion, Ende Gelände, Rise Up 4 Climate Justice, and Ultima Generazione. In Fridays for Future, they are much less common. Most of the activists I have interviewed support confrontational actions in principle even if they prefer to use other tactics such as the march or the dialogue with the authorities. Many of them think it is more adequate that confrontational actions are performed by a specialized movement such as Extinction Rebellion and they do not believe they are (or they should be) part of the DNA of FFF.

For Antonia (S24F):

Extinction Rebellion does these things. Honestly, in principle I am not prone, but I understand that in some ways there is a necessity for actions, they don't necessarily need to be strong.

For Chiara (NW18Fa):

I like both Fridays and XR, maybe because they are different. Personally, I would prefer that Fridays keeps being the same to collect all those who want to do their part but are not prone to do...illegal things. And a parallel movement that could do this thing [confrontational actions].

Similarly, Carola (NW18Fb) believes that

These more intense actions, with many quotation marks, I mean, are more typical of another movement that is Extinction Rebellion. So let's say I agree but I don't think it's in the veins of Fridays for now.

Agnese (C20F) has a similar opinion, and she speaks of a "perfect equilibrium" between the two movements (FFF and XR), which have the same goal but "act on two different points".

A second group I have interviewed, quite a minoritarian, explicitly rejects confrontational actions and associates them with violence. On some occasions, the events of Genoa in 2001 were mentioned to justify this scepticism, suggesting that confrontational actions could trigger repression and end the movement as happened with the Global Justice Movement in Italy.

Even if with different nuances, both the first and second group have the perception that those actions are ineffective and even counter-productive because of the risks they present, both in terms of repression and the reputation of the movement. They also think they could potentially drive away more moderate supporters.

Even though confrontational actions are not common in general, some FFF local groups with good connections with social centres or with somehow more radical activists, for instance from Veneto, Piedmont, Naples, and Milan, periodically use those tactics. The most mediatic were performed in 2019 with the occupation of the red carpet at Venice's movie gala (with other movements), the

blockade of the access to a Q8 storage in Naples, and to fashion streets in Turin. The justification for those actions is generally that marches are getting “old” and ineffective, and that the urgency of the situation requires harsh actions to stop harmful projects or to counter corporations such as Eni. Walker et al. (2008) affirm that corporations are not organized on democratic principles and so they are less open to influence, they have lower capacities for repression, facilitation, channelling, and routinization, and they are more vulnerable to delegitimation. These factors explain why confrontational tactics are commonly used against corporations. In the case of FFF, the construction of an “evil” image of those enterprises, Eni *in primis*, serves to justify more radical actions. Supporters of confrontational actions in the movement are also generally sceptic toward advocacy that they find ineffective and even counter-productive since it opens the doors to political opportunism.

Currently, there is some potential for radicalization, to “raise the bar”, to use the words of some activists, especially given the limited political impact of marches and advocacy so far and the general feeling of frustration and detachment from the political systems. These positions were quite frequent in the assemblies I attended in 2022, especially from more radical activists. Let us take the emblematic words of Alex (NW26N) for instance:

[Demonstrations] are abused instruments that have shown a whole series of limitations in previous decades and I wonder why we continue to use an instrument that we know is not working very well. This instrument has given us a certain result, how can we now expect the same instrument to give us different results? I’m interested, though I remain a bit sceptical, in other tools of struggle, such as those of Extinction Rebellion and Rise Up 4 Climate Justice.

The pace of innovation inside social movements is indeed usually slow since new tactics must be learnt, negotiated, communicated, practised and so on, but the proximity of FFF with Extinction Rebellion and Rise Up 4 Climate Justice can accelerate the process. The literature suggests that disruptive tactics are quite effective and can push authorities to negotiate but they could also lead to alienating some supporters and allies (Almeida, 2019; Gamson, 1975). In any case, violence against people is always rejected while sabotage is contemplated by some. This debate remains open and the potential radicalization of tactics will probably affect the identity of the movement.



Picture 8: occupation of Venice's Red Carpet in 2019. Credits: Globalproject.info.

### The bike-strike

Though the first year and a half of the pandemic was dramatic in terms of reduction of participation, it was also a laboratory of experimentation, adaptation and diversification of tactics, as I have already mentioned. According to Schock (2005), movements with diversified tactics are more effective and less vulnerable to repression than movements relying on a single action. In other words, diversification and innovation increase the resilience of a movement. Pinckney & Rivers (2020, p. 26) argue too that "an overreliance on any one tactic may lead to the tactic becoming less effective". The bike-strike is perhaps the best example of experimentation and diversification induced by the pandemic. It is also an example of how the decentralized nature of a movement fosters tactical innovation (Schock, 2005). This denomination "bike-strike" is the most common inside FFF but some groups prefer the Italian "bicicletata" (bike ride).

The bike-strike can be seen in two ways. In one sense, it is a sort of more structured and politicized variant of the critical mass. The critical mass (CM) is a group of people gathering in a place, moving

on a bike, scooter and other similar transports and blocking the traffic. Created in San Francisco in 1992, it is generally decentralized and anarchic, with no leader nor political programme and with a route spontaneously established (Carlsson, 2003). However, the one described by Carlsson is an ideal type. In Milan, for instance, there is a core group of organizers which decide at least the route. In any case, the CM is not necessarily lived by everybody as a protest, many see it simply as a sport and recreational activity. In the bike-strike, the organizers have a stronger role in planning the activity and leading the group toward symbolic places to be targeted (e.g. ministries, schools, banks, municipalities...). In those places, the group stops and the core activists make speeches targeting the institution, similarly to marches. In the bike-strike, the media strategy is also much more important than in the CM. Even if it is more explicitly political, it maintains the dimension of fun, pleasure, humour and solidarity derived from the sense of protection, all typical features of the critical mass (Carlsson, 2003). In another way, the bike strike can be seen as a traditional march but performed by bike (or rollers, scooters and similar transports) while striking from school or work, as its name suggests.

The bike-strike was already used by some FFF groups in 2018-2019 but with the arrival of the Coronavirus it assumed a new importance and became a key tactic for many groups, at least temporarily. I analyse here its (at least) six advantages during the pandemic.

First, the bike occupies a wider space than pedestrians and requires a certain distance from people and other objects when it is in movement. Consequently, it is easier to maintain social distance by bike than on foot for physical reasons. According to Marcello, “we are more distanced because we have bicycles”. This allowed the movement to reduce the fear of infections and protect its reputation.

Second, the bike strike was accepted by some Prefects as a sports activity or at least tolerated more than marches so it bypassed the legal obligation of static demonstrations. If in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup>, the bike was a symbol of freedom for women and workers (Horton, 2006), during the COVID-19 pandemic it turned the same for climate activists. However, in some cities it was prohibited, demonstrating again how the local POS enormously shaped the tactics adopted in the pandemic period, contributing to determining the “life or death” of many local groups.

Third, the bike-strike had some advantages over socially distant rallies. For participants, it is much more fun to move by bike around the city than standing in the same place or even spot for hours. Moreover, unlike rallies, it allowed FFF’s groups to target different institutions during the route and even perform flash-mobs.

Fourth, the bike-strike elicits a mixture of curiosity, sympathy and disruption by blocking the traffic hence even relatively small groups can attract media attention. As for the other performances of social movements, the media strategy is one of the most important aspects of the bike-strike.

Fifth, similarly to what Horton (2006) notices, the bicycle is a practice of resistance against car-centrism and the embodiment of the ecological, solidaristic and egalitarian identity of climate activists. In this sense, I believe the bike strike reinforces the sense of belonging and identity of FFF groups.

Finally, and related to the previous point, the use of the bike sends a strong symbolic message to the public: there is a safe, healthy and clean alternative to private automobility. In the words of the activist Marcello, “bikes are relatively safer in terms of virus transmission and symbolically interesting because they are also an individual and common lifestyle to relaunch the idea we have about living and moving in the city”.

Cars monopolize our streets and surfaces, excluding their use for public sociability (such as children’s games) or cycling, endanger people and contribute to urban heat, air pollution and climate change. This domination of cars is not only due to cultural reasons but especially to direct policy support to the car sector and huge investments in road infrastructures. In the last ten years, the Italian governments spent 98.6 billion euros in favour of the car versus 1.2 for bicycles (Magliulo & Telluri, 2022). Cars contribute to the health impact of air pollution which is devastating: according to Khomenko et al. (2021) more than 50,000 preventable deaths every year in Europe, for the European Environment Agency (2021) more than 350,000. In the North of Italy, air quality is especially dramatic. Among the 10 European cities with the highest mortality burden for PM<sub>2.5</sub>, four are in Italy: Brescia (1<sup>st</sup> place), Bergamo (2<sup>nd</sup> place), Vicenza (4<sup>th</sup> place) and Saronno (8<sup>th</sup> place) while the ranking of the top 10 European cities for NO<sub>2</sub> mortality burden includes Turin (3<sup>rd</sup> place) and Milan (5<sup>th</sup> places) (Khomenko et al., 2021). All these cities are located in the North of Italy, in the highly industrialized and heavily populated Padan Plain. The terrible air quality in our cities became even more relevant after the 2020’s lockdown. If the severe restrictions improved the air quality and saves thousands of lives (Malpede & Percoco, 2020), with the end of the lockdown the use of private cars soared for the fear of contagions. The problem is that scientific studies hypothesized and then found evidence that high levels of air pollution contributed to dramatic rates of COVID cases and deaths (Faruk et al., 2022), especially in the North of Italy (Renard et al., 2022).

Mass automobility is also the reification of capitalism since individual competes to have the faster and bigger cars (fed by fossil fuels) to “get ahead in the rat race” (Wissen & Brand, 2021, p. 147), all at the expense of the lives of children, pedestrians, cyclists and passengers in smaller cars. Once more, the use of bikes challenges the violent competitive model brought by the massive, state-funded automobilisation. In this context, the bike-strike can be seen as a Temporary Autonomous Zone that prefigures the alternative green society and culture Fridays for Future is aiming at, with inverted hierarchies (the cyclists block cars and re-take the streets), slower rhythms, sociability, fun outside the logic of the market and no production of air pollution. Moreover, since in the bike-strike, as in the critical mass, my safety depends on the others protecting me, it fosters a sense of solidarity and interdependence rather than competition. This is an example of how a tactical performance sends a double message: internal (to reinforce identity and galvanize) and external (to sensitize on the clean alternative to the destructiveness of car-centrism).

Despite the above-mentioned benefits, we cannot say that every bike-strike was successful during the pandemic. The strike of October 2021 in Milan was quite disappointing, probably for the saturation of events in the previous weeks. There is also a relevant problem with the bike-strike: it is not fully inclusive. Not everybody has a bike (or similar transport), especially in big cities, or can ride it (e.g. people with disabilities) or want to ride it (it can be energy-demanding). This critical point was noticed by activists who on many occasions established a final rally after the bike strike to expand participation to everybody. This limitation is probably the reason that pushed many local groups to reduce its use in favour of the march-strike as far as the pandemic situation improved.



Picture 9: a bike-strike in March 2021 in the city of Milan. Credits: Matteo Spini.

### The political-institutional dialogue

Regarding the use of advocacy or political-institutional dialogue, we can find two extreme poles in the environmental movement. A first group prioritizes it over other tactics, as in the typical case of conservationism (e.g. WWF, Italia Nostra, and LIPU) but also Legambiente. Italian environmentalism is very much institutionalized and moderate in its tactics since the beginning (della Porta & Diani, 2004). On the other pole, more radical fringes such as Rise Up 4 Climate Justice rejects advocacy since they believe no change can be expected from the system that is responsible for the climate crisis. Hence, they prefer disruptive tactics and a general strategy of collision with the system. A minority of FFF's activists and groups agree with this thesis. They fear the opportunism of politicians and the risk of co-optation and they would prefer not to lose time and energy in advocacy, especially when policymakers are very conservative and harmful projects are involved.

However, the general position of the movement stays between the two above-mentioned poles and it combines protest and advocacy. A good example was the Youth 4 Climate and the pre-COP of Milan in 2021. Activists from FFF movement organized street protests and a counter-summit while at the same time others were participating in the official summits with a critical attitude and in a private meeting with the then Prime Minister Mario Draghi. Apart from the broad goal of influencing policy-making, advocacy allows FFF Italy to know the adversaries, hinder them and attract media attention.

The use of advocacy is not necessarily a symptom of a process of institutionalisation of the movement. Since the beginning, Fridays for Future's strategy has been to criticize and influence the system by staying out of it, to avoid being "corrupted". The political-institutional dialogue has been developed by different groups with the prominence of the national working-group currently named "Politica" which was created after the invitation of the former Minister of Education Fioramonti to open a dialogue. Gioele, an activist of the group "Politica", told me "there was a bit of distrust and an initial strong adversity even to open a dialogue, even in private". This was mainly due to the anti-systemic position of many activists in the movement, the perception of political opportunism and the feeling of disillusion. Gioele reported that many activists were saying: "generally, when politics calls you for these things, it wants to greenwash, it wants to say that it has spoken with youths, it wants to make a post, it wants to <uscire> (publicly communicate) in some way".



Despite these objections, advocacy has become a key tactic since 2020, with the burst of the pandemic. In the impossibility to protest, Fridays for Future resorted to proposals. Launched in April, the campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” (Back to the Future) was its first comprehensive set of proposals at a national scale, elaborated with other movements, associations and scientists. It addressed the “no clear-cut solutions” criticism that was made in the previous period. A shorter and updated campaign called “Non Fossilizziamoci”<sup>48</sup> was launched in November 2020. These are examples of unplanned opportunities created by the pandemic. The activist Agata, who was one of the national spokespersons at the time of the interview, told me that “Ritorno al Futuro” was “a project that we probably could have not built without the pandemic” since all energy was concentrated on organising the global strikes.

Thanks to these efforts and to the positive reputation acquired in 2019, on the 20th of June 2020 the movement was invited to the “Stati Generali” (General States), an initiative of the Conte II cabinet to create a social dialogue for the economic recovery. At the time, the Political Opportunity Structure was two-faced. On one hand, closed or semi-closed for street demonstrations. On the other, open for dialogue. Successively, the movement was invited again by the Government and the Parliament to hear its proposals in October 2020 and the dialogue continued also with the new cabinet led by Mario Draghi which began in February 2021. Hence, the movement became fully recognized as a legitimate actor by the system, something that has not happened for other climate movements.

The advocacy publicly carried out by FFF Italy is completely different from mainstream organizations. The key features of the communicative style of the movement are replied in its advocacy style: apocalyptic tones combined with provocation, irony, informality, and even breaking the conventional norms of institutions. For instance, a common sentence to end a speech is: “buona crisi climatica a tutti”, something like “we wish a merry climate crisis to everybody.” The first ratio of the use of this register is to create disruption, break the routine and common sense and force the audience to reflect. In this sense, even advocacy can be seen as a dramaturgy, at least when it is public. Secondly, I believe the provocative style is meant to tackle the criticism of those who see advocacy as “working within the system” and that the movement is distancing itself from the streets. Third, this style resonates with the register used by youths and it sustains the movement’s identity.

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<sup>48</sup> Literally “let’s not fossilize”, a word game referring to fossil fuels, old ideas and gerontocracy.

Another important point is the strategic use of depoliticization (of identity and solutions) in specific institutional arenas. This aspect has already been discussed in previous sections and chapters. Here I just want to recall that the depiction of the solutions provided by the movement as science-driven made them the only rational choice that policy-makers could take. In a period of radicalization of climate activism (both in terms of content and tactics), this strategy will likely lose weight.

A recurrent question that “Fridays” ask themselves are: should we candidate ourselves? If yes, how? Through current parties or a new party? Most of the activists answer “no” and justify it by resorting to arguments that resemble the “iron law of oligarchy” by Robert Michels (1912). In short, the perception is that once people get inside institutions, power and political dynamics exercise a negative and corruptive influence, forcing them to make compromises or pursue an agenda that betrays the goals and values of grassroots militants. Hence, the dominant position is to stay out of the political-electoral competition and to influence the system from the outside, without making compromises. As one activist said in an assembly: “if politics make compromises, we cannot” since we will always obtain less than what we claimed. What is at stake for FFF is not the seizure of the Winter Palace through elections or revolution, but to condition the system from the outside, to be a thorn in the side of power. There are several cases of “Fridays” who run in local, regional and national elections, mainly in the lists of Europa Verde. Even though this is allowed by the movement, it has never happened with its formal support. Those were not FFF candidates but only single activists running in the elections.

### Cultural actions

As I have already affirmed, I believe that FFF has political and cultural goals at the same time. The dominant narrative and strategy of FFF prioritize political actions but the cultural arena is very important for many activists interviewed during the fieldwork. Cultural actions have a dual logic: internal and external. On one hand, they aim at internally fostering the collective identity, producing mobilising emotions, and changing or reinforcing habitus and hexis. On the other hand, they aspire at changing dominant societal ideas, beliefs, values, and behaviours which, in turn, can support the political actions of the movement, directly or indirectly. Hence, political and cultural actions are interrelated. I have already discussed the issue of the collective identity of FFF Italy and the actions that sustain it. In this section, I focus on those cultural actions with an external projection.

From a Gramscian perspective, the ruling class exercises cultural control over society through the dominant ideology (Gramsci, 2014). The institutionalization of ideology within society is called cultural hegemony and it serves to shape collective actions and produce social control and legitimation by the elite (Beck, 2013). The cultural hegemony of the ruling class is reproduced by religion, education, parties and family and exercised with at least the partial consensus of the subalterns since it penetrates common sense and is perceived as natural and inevitable.

The ruling class produces discourses that aspire to become hegemonic. Climate denialism in Europe and Italy is restricted to right-wing populist voters, parties and leaders (Kulin et al., 2021; Lockwood, 2018; Yan et al., 2021). For instance, during his stump speeches, the leader of the League Matteo Salvini makes a deliberate confusion between weather and climate as well as conservative media such as La Verità, Il Giornale, the think tank Bruno Leoni, and the Associazione di Scienziati e Tecnologi per la Ricerca Italiana. On the other hand, I believe that climate delayism is much more common, even among centre-left parties, though I am not aware of any specific study on the issue. Lamb et al. (2020) identify twelve dominant discourses of climate delay. These discourses accept the existence of climate change, but they justify inaction or inadequate efforts. By doing it, they enforce the status quo which is the maintenance of the power of big polluting corporations, Big Oil *in primis*, rich people and the Global North as well as the dominant unsustainable lifestyle that sustains their power.

I argue that some of these climate delay discourses have become hegemonic in Italy, in the sense they are widely accepted and commonsensical. From a Bourdieusian perspective, these discourses represent the doxa which is the system of taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions and presuppositions. Even though further studies should be conducted, I believe that the discourses of "fossil fuel solutionism" (the legitimation of fossil energy as part of the solutions) and "individualism" (the responsibility is entirely discharged on individuals and consumers) have acquired a hegemonic dimension. The discourse of "all talk, little action" is widespread among centre-left forces and the Five Star Movement but most of the public opinion does not seem satisfied with the actions carried out by governments and parties so far (ECCO, 2022) so we cannot say it is hegemonic. There is a fourth set of discourse that was especially adopted by former Minister Cingolani, a clear antagonist of climate activists, which was based on emphasizing the downsides of the ecological transition, a potential "bloodbath" as he defined it.

The status quo is also maintained by perpetuating a specific mode of living by the upper and middle classes (mainly in the Global North but also in the Rising South) defined as imperial (Wissen &

Brand, 2021). I have already discussed this issue but here it is important to remark that these unsustainable behaviours are mostly lived unconsciously, and they are widely perceived as desirable thanks to the action of specific public policies, corporate strategies (e.g. advertisement) and specific cultural contexts. Especially in a time of crisis, this way of living favours the status quo since it integrates broad strata of the population into its social compromises while the business-as-usual economic model that is causing the climate crisis can continue to operate.

The “war of position” (Gramsci, 2014) is the struggle for cultural supremacy that aims at shifting from false consciousness (the unawareness of inequality, oppression, and exploitation) to class consciousness (the sense of class belonging and awareness of class interests). Social movements are engaged in this anti-hegemonic struggle against countermovements, governments, enterprises, mass media, think tanks and other actors of the ruling class. Accordingly, the cultural actions promoted by FFF Italy (webinars, conferences, podcasts, interviews, articles, books, comics, conferences...) aim at challenging the hegemonic frames, values, ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of people and substituting them. In this sense, Fridays for Future is the holder of a counterculture so we could even define it as a countercultural movement.

Its first priority is perhaps to unmask the widespread greenwashing by “telling the truth” (a popular slogan in FFF): the climate crisis is here and now, and governments and enterprises are not doing enough to tackle it, despite their promises. In other words, this is the deconstruction of the discourse that Lamb et al. (2020) call “all talk, little action”. A main component of this cultural struggle is the instillation of a generational consciousness, more than a class consciousness. With this, I mean that through FFF youths become conscious that climate inaction is a form of injustice committed by the ruling class against them.

Debunking the neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility is also one of the priorities of the cultural struggle of FFF. This individualization of responsibility produces psychological consequences such as guilt, conflicts and neuroses (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Moreover, it does not foster collective actions but rather individualized behaviours. For Harvey (2006, p. 145), neoliberalism is so hegemonic that “it has become incorporated into the common-sense way we interpret, live in and understand the world”. The anti-hegemonic struggle of FFF aspires to instil into the common sense that responsibilities are systemic and attributable to fossil capitalism and governments, hence the solutions are also systemic and collective, not individual. In this sense, it is

an attempt to re-politicize the climate crisis: it is not only technical and private but also a public, moral and political issue.

Another key arena of the cultural struggle is the rejection of “fossil fuel solutionism”. As I have already mentioned, gas is framed by European Commission, governments, and Big Oil as an energy transition and even as sustainable, under certain conditions. The fossil lobbies are over-represented in the international climate summits: more than 600 lobbyists joined the COP-27 in Sharm el Sheikh in 2022, the biggest delegation. Fossil lobbies exercise an enormous influence on governments and media (that receive their money in exchange for advertisement and benevolent articles). FFF Italy explicitly rejects not only fossil fuels but also the idea that Big Oil can be part of the solution. Climate justice and system change mean charging the cost of the ecological transition on rich individuals and polluting enterprises hence redistributing wealth and power. A win-lose narrative instead of the dominant win-win.

Finally, many FFF’s cultural actions aim at deposing old unsustainable, submissive habitus with a radical ecological habitus that could predispose people to understand and interpret the world differently and become transformative forces in every aspect of their lives, including uprooting the imperial mode of living that is a fundamental mechanism of social stabilization. Moreover, this transformation of the habitus also serves to produce emotions and a sense of belonging to motivate activists. I have already discussed these aspects in the chapter on identity but here it is important to remark that the shift in the individual behaviour of FFF activists is not lived by them as a surrender to individualism but as an act of responsibility that must be combined with collective actions.

During the first year and half of the pandemic, the restricted Political Opportunity Structure for protests opened the door for a soar in the production of cultural resources by FFF Italy such as webinars, conferences, podcasts, interviews, articles, and books, often in collaboration with friendly scientists, activists, writers, celebrities, and journalists. This reinforces the idea that political and cultural actions are equally important and interrelated.

## Communication

Pamphlets, books, newspapers and then radio and television have been vital resources for social movements for centuries. The centrality of the control of the flow of information in late-modern age was already emphasized by Touraine, Castells and Melucci. The advent of the internet has fostered the mediatization of society and politics and increased the necessity of a media strategy by social

movements (Mosca, 2007). Media are important for social movements for at least four reasons: to communicate with present and potential members, to create and reinforce an identity, to locate and mobilize potential allies, and to influence policy-makers (Dalton, 1994). We could argue that a good media strategy is a necessary condition for the effectiveness of the tactics employed by social movements. Besides the massive use of social media that supports participation, I believe that traditional media are still essential for social movements.

Mass media can be seen as an arena characterized by competition over access and resonance between movements, counter-movements, governments and other actors. However, the relationship between social movements and media is asymmetric. Movements need media but media do not need movements so they dictate the conditions. To use the words of an activist during a national training: “i media hanno il coltello dalla parte del manico” (media have the whip hand).

In the communication of FFF, scientific reports and socio-natural disasters assume a central position since they give empirical credibility (Snow & Benford, 2000) to their collective action frames hence potentially enhancing their resonance with the general public. Snow & Benford (2000) argue that another factor contributing to resonance is experiential commensurability that is if frames are congruent with the everyday experiences of people. When disasters are framed by FFF as the manifestation of the climate crisis the ratio is to reduce the psychological distance with a phenomenon that tends to appear as abstract, complex and distant. Hence, this framing of socio-natural disasters is strategic: it is meant to mobilize people through emotions, not only fear but also a sense of urgency, solidarity, empathy, indignation and rage against the inactivity of public institutions and the responsibility of polluting enterprises.

A second central aspect of the communication of the movement, especially in social media, is informality, irony, sarcasm, and provocation. For instance, in 2021 the group of Gorizia (in the North-East) published this post: “year after year, #Valentine's Day is more and more #hot. Make love, not CO<sub>2</sub>”. In 2022, FFF Italy even made an April fool with an advertisement that imitates a famous campaign by Eni. The image says: “Eni+Fridays for Future Italia is better than Eni. Together we have another energy”.



Figure 5: April fool imitating a famous campaign by Eni

A common feature in FFF's communication is also the inclusion of pop references such as memos based on popular movies or series (see for instance figure 5) whose function is to make the frames of the movement resonate with those of the general public, in other words, to be culturally compatible, and to provoke surprise and amusement. Climate change is an enormously complex phenomenon so the tasks of simplification and divulgation through pop references and graphics assume a crucial role.



Figure 6: a meme that uses Harry Potter to criticize the inclusion of gas in the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities

In terms of the medium used by the movement, we can make a distinction between mainstream mass media, alternative mass media, mainstream social media, alternative social media and the website. The choice of the medium depends on several factors among which are the purpose (recruit, mobilize, sensitize, strengthen identity, and perform actions...) and the target of the action (sympathizers, allies, adversaries or general public).

### Mainstream mass media

Italian media are mainly under the control of oligopolistic conglomerates. The group GEDI managed by the Agnelli family controls La Repubblica, La Stampa, Il Secolo XIX, HuffPost Italia and other newspapers, radios, magazines and so on. Those media but also more alternative ones such as Internazionale and Il Manifesto host the advertisement of fossil fuel companies such as Eni. As Zabern & Tulloch (2020, p. 26) suggest, "media are prone to culturally reproduce these broader economic and political <power relationships>".

Despite these problems, media are essential for social movements, as I have already said. FFF Italy pragmatically grows relationships with journalists belonging to moderate and progressive mainstream media to influence the coverage. The accusation of the movement to those media is first of all that their coverage of the climate crisis is quantitatively and qualitatively insufficient.

In terms of quality, a study financed by Greenpeace (2022) found that newspapers produce a distorted reporting of climate issues and give prominent space to the fossil fuel and other polluting industries which finance them.

In 2019 the attention toward climate change and climate activism was high. Moreover, the representation of FFF by moderate and progressive media was generally benevolent (and it continues to be) for the following reasons. First, the newsworthiness of Greta's story, at least at the beginning: a young and determined girl with Asperger syndrome who first overcame her personal fears, then forced her parents to change, and finally started attacking the establishment with emotional speeches, innovative tactics that mobilized thousands of youths, and even committed to sacrifice comforts such as the plane to conduct a "heroic" trip by boat from Plymouth to New York. Second, youth mobilizations contradict the mainstream representation of adolescents and youths as apathetic, politically disillusioned and detached. They are newsworthy. Third, I believe the support of moderate and progressive media for climate activism is aligned with the general attitude of their readers. Media



are enterprises and they always take into account this last aspect. Fourth, the movement is somehow aligned with the “good taste” of media, since its demonstration are peaceful and confrontational actions are rare.

From 2020 to Autumn 2021, climate change almost disappeared in the media coverage, with few exceptions, despite the multiple connections between environment and health. As Pleyers (2020, p. 296) says, “the spread of the new coronavirus and its mitigation overshadowed any other political or social issue. It became the only focus of political debates, mainstream and alternative media and most conversations in daily life”. We could say that the politics of invisibility intervened to publicly manufacture the invisibility of the climate crisis and the climate movements.

Under the COVID threat, the delegitimization of protests, the closure of schools and the insufficient gratification, the climate protests organized by FFF in 2020 and 2021 (until September) were small and (mainly) non-disruptive so the media attention declined. Consequently, the relationship between the movement and media became even more asymmetric in favour of the latter. This forced FFF to channel a lot of energy into producing more creative mobilizations to gain back attention and to spend more time developing continuous relationships with media. In addition, the pandemic introduced the risk of being stigmatized for protesting or protesting in a “bad way”, meaning without respecting COVID norms. Hence, the movement needed to carefully plan its actions, reiterate the necessity to respect all COVID norms and mark a distance from the anti-vax and anti-green pass demonstrators that received very stigmatizing media coverage. With Milan’s pre-COP and Y4C, the attention rose again but only for a short period. It is not a surprise that when media attention declines a movement starts debating more radical and spectacular confrontative actions. If those actions could attract the attention of the media again, the risk is they provide a distorted and stigmatizing representation.

Apart from developing relationships with journalists, FFF Italy has also attacked mass media. The campaign “Informazione Fossil-Free” was meant to denounce the problem of mass media hosting advertisements from the fossil fuel industry. In the section of the webpage FFF Italy dedicated to the campaign it is said that:

Fridays For Future owes a lot to the press. Many of our activists were interested, trained and alarmed by the articles of passionate journalists who tried to communicate to society the gravity of the climate crisis that we are now experiencing. But lately, when we read the newspapers, we get a strange feeling. Browsing the pages, we find ourselves reading impressive articles on climate change (in recent months, their presence in the media is increasing) and noticing, a few frames later, the cheerful advertisements of companies intertwined in glove with fossil fuels. Shell, Q8, Total, but also Eni, Enel and SNAM spend huge sums of money to advertise their alleged sustainability projects on every type of newspaper or website [...] What freedom can a newspaper have on a subject of this importance if it bases its profit on the incomes of the main climate deniers?

On some occasions, FFF even organized protests targeting them, for instance, a flash-mob against the public television RAI. Another target of the movement is ultra-conservative media such as *Liberò*, *La Verità*, *Il Foglio* and *Il Giornale* which tend to give distorted, stereotyped and stigmatizing representations of FFF and they are openly climate negationist. For instance, as I say in the introduction, those media label climate activists as “rompiscatole” (pain in the ass) and “gretini” (a crasis between Greta and “cretini“, fools in Italian). Extinction Rebellion has also targeted some media either for their low coverage of the climate crisis or for the funds they receive from Big Oil companies.

### Alliances with independent media

FFF has also been able to ally with independent and progressive media, in a less subordinate position compared to the relationships with mainstream media. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Fanpage* and *Domani* allow the movement to directly publish their opinions. The online newspaper *LifeGate* hosts “Radio for Future”, a podcast by prominent FFF activist Giovanni Mori. *LifeGate*, *HuffPost*, *Jacobin Italia*, *Il Manifesto*, *Valori*, and *Greenreport* are also very close to the movement, as I have already said. They offer good coverage of climate activism and environmental issues. The advantage of these alliances is that the messages diffused are far more genuine than the ones filtered by mainstream media. However, their circulation is quite lower than mainstream media.

### The use of social media

As it has already been said, the relationships between movements and mass media are asymmetric. Social movements need media attention to conduct successful protests and so they try to carry out actions which are at the same time newsworthy (innovative and/or massive) and aligned with the good taste of media. In other words, they are forced to accept the media’s rules. On the other hand, mass media do not need so much social movements and they tend to under-represent them, stigmatize or distort them, rely on official sources, and focus only on newsworthy events (Rohlinger & Corrigan-Brown, 2018).

To bypass the media’s rules, social movements have always developed alternative channels such as magazines, booklets, flyers, leaflets, videos, and radio broadcasts. Social media such as Facebook

and Instagram are also essential tools of communication for every social movement which aims at producing a mass change and they are even more important for a youth movement mainly composed of digital natives. Social media and instant messaging apps can support offline tactics before, during and after tactical performances, turning them Internet-enhanced (Vegh, 2003). The capillary diffusion of FFF among students is partially due to social media. According to a global survey (Moor et al., 2020) conducted during September 2019's strike, 44.7% of youths (25 years or lower) affirmed online social media are their most important information channel about climate protests (39.1% for adults). Traditional mass media were way less important: among youths, only 1.3% affirmed that newspapers were the most important information channel and 0.8% said the same for radio and television. The results among adults were only slightly higher: 6.1% for newspapers and 2.7% for radio and television.

Through social media and e-mails, it is also possible to perform direct online protests. In these cases, we can use the denomination Internet-based tactics (Vegh, 2003). Moreover, the internal organisation of FFF is also heavily based on applications such as Telegram (for chats and surveys), Zoom (for video calls) and Trello (for collaborative work). The transnational bounds of the movement are also essentially internet-based since the lack of resources and time (there are no paid activists in the movement) as well as the distance and some environmental concerns limit face-to-face interactions. From 2018 to 2022, only two face-to-face international meetings were organized by FFF and mainly with European activists.

As I have already argued several times, the pandemic had an enormous impact on the tactics adopted by FFF. During the first lockdown (March-June 2020) we can talk of forced digitalization since all actions were performed online, including the 5th Global Strike in April. As my gatekeeper Marcello told me, "we tried to avoid strikes in the harshest moments of the pandemic. Hence, the decision to shift from physical to online actions was not only practical but also political". On the occasion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Strike, there were at least six kinds of digital tactics: digital rallies (activists geo-localizing in the same place), social bombing (massively flooding the web with the same messages, in some cases tagging policymakers), mail bombing (the same against specific mail accounts), photo-petitions (publishing photos with a message), online petitions, and webinars. This was again an interesting example of diversification of tactics. However, having all actions only digital did not provide the necessary solidarity incentives and emotions to foster participation. Moreover, many activists interviewed during the fieldwork perceived that digital actions during the pandemic period had limited effectiveness if not connected with actions in squares and streets. I think this belief weakened

the sense of political efficacy and collective efficacy and converted it into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Moreover, if offline actions made it easy to recruit new activists almost spontaneously, the same is not true for digital tactics. The last problem is that with digital protests is very hard to get media attention. Similar results on the ineffectiveness of this over-digitalization were found in a study conducted on the Cyprian branch of FFF (Christou et al., 2022). To sum up, I agree with the authors that affirm that digital activism can in no way replace face-to-face interactions.

The pandemic forced the movement to rely even more on the social media provided by Big Tech (Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube and so on) as well as on instant messaging, video call services and collaborative software owned by digital corporations. Consequently, a sub-group of the movement called “Open for Future” started a reflection regarding the ethic of trying to change the world by using the tools of a model of business defined as “toxic.” Surveillance capitalism is the business model based on the massive extraction of data that has produced an unprecedented concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few corporations (Zuboff, 2019). Another problem for social activists is that the control of the contents of social media is only relative since the feed (what we see on the homepage) is managed by algorithms and subjected to censure (as well as the profiles of social movements), as many activists denounced in the past. The consequence of algorithms is that the messages tend to be restricted to sympathizers, creating the phenomenon of eco-chambers. The environmental and social of the internet is also not negligible since it requires enormous amounts of energy and materials and labour exploitation is very common (Cara & Palazzo, 2022).

Hence, nowadays cyberoptimism must be read in a different light. Authors such as Castells (2012) saw social media as emancipative tools that allowed movements to develop an autonomous communicative capacity able to bypass traditional media. However, what is really emancipatory is the use of the alternative social media (ASM) promoted, among others, by “Open for Future”. These platforms are more sustainable, decentralized, open-source and with fewer ethical problems (Spini, 2022). Examples of APS used by FFF are PeerTube (for videos), Mastodon (for posts), Jitsi (for videoconferences), Open Street Maps (for maps), Cryptpad (for documents) and other collaborative tools such as Trello, Mattermost and Mobilizon. Only those platforms allow the construction of an autonomous communication free from the control of power, which is the first form through which social movements exercise counterpower (Castells, 2015). We can also frame the use of ASM as the prefiguration of a decentralized and ethical digital system that does not rely on the exploitation of nature and people.

The implementation of an alternative autonomous communication is not easy. The urgency of abating greenhouse emissions means the strategy of Fridays for Future Italy is based on mobilizing as many people as possible and in quick times. However, promoting ASM takes time while mainstream social media already have a massive diffusion, especially among youths. Hence, FFF Italy still uses the tools provided by Big Tech but reduces its promotion in the perspective of a gradual reduction and final substitution. In March 2022, the broadcast channel of FFF Italy on Telegram had approximately 3100 subscribers, the Mastodon account 400, the Instagram more than 100.000. It is clear that the fight against Big Tech is very challenging and the route is still long. Yet, the seeds of the alternative have been sowed.

Similarly, to ASM, the website of the movement allows too to develop an autonomous communication. The website is extremely rich. It presents the movement, its main claims and campaigns, it hosts a wide archive of materials related to ecology (Risorse For Future), articles, contact of each local group, a newsletter and so on. It is the best way to have a big picture of the movement. Moreover, it is hosted by a certified green server.

## 8.4 Resources

With the rise of the Resource Mobilizations Theories, it became clear that social movements cannot mobilize without resources. When resources are used to reward participants or punish non-participants, they assume the name of selective incentives (Oberschall, 1973). One of the most striking features of Fridays for Future is the absence of abundant material resources. Despite this, it has been able to mobilize a large amount of non-material resources and produce massive mobilizations. Other specificities of the movement are the use of pleasure, the sense of urgency and its ability to forge broad coalitions. Resources are self-produced, aggregated from activists, borrowed from friendly groups and organizations, and even donated from friendly organizations. The phenomenon of multiple belongings and the good reputation of FFF facilitate the accumulation of resources. In the rest of this section, the focus is on the main resources used.

### Material resources

Unlike other civil society actors, the mobilization of material resources is far from being a fundamental pillar of Fridays for Future's strategy. There are no offices, no headquarters, and no

structured flows of supplies and money. Money and supplies are collected on the occasion of actions but not always with a defined national strategy and generally by crowdfunding, self-financing dinners, aperitifs and so on. In specific moments such as national assemblies and trainings and European meetings, environmental organizations, Banca Etica (an Italian ethical bank), Patagonia and other national sections of the movement contributed to the funding. The lack of structured resources is compensated by other resources, as we will see in the next sections.

### Moral resources

The moral resources accumulated in the history of FFF have assumed a certain relevance. By moral resources, I mean prestige, reputation, legitimacy, solidarity support and sympathetic support (Edwards et al., 2018). Except for far-right politicians, extra-polluting enterprises, and conservative media, Greta Thunberg and FFF are benevolently represented by the media and praised by the majority of civil society as well as by left-wing, centre-left and even some centre-right politicians. The Conte II and the Draghi cabinets as well as the Parliament have received several times FFF activists, recognizing the movement as a legitimate actor. Moreover, the movement is also supported by prominent scientists, environmental organizations, other social movements such as Non Una Di Meno, famous actors and singers and even Pope Francis. Almost all trade unions, both mainstream and grassroots, also publicly support climate strikes even though in practice the relations are more complex. According to a survey conducted by Demos & Pi in 2019, Fridays for Future received vast and transversal support from the Italian public opinion (76%) and especially among youths between 14 and 24 years (87%). As far as I know, no further surveys have been conducted on the issue. Moreover, despite the pandemic, the large majority of Italian public opinion is quite (45%) or highly (39%) worried by climate change, considers the governmental action insufficient or totally absent (74%) and that none of the parties is doing enough (61%) (ECCO, 2022).

To sum up, Fridays for Future has been able to accumulate prestige, reputation, legitimacy and support from a wide range of actors. This moral capital is surely a key resource to recruit, mobilize, galvanize, forge alliances, and access mass media and policy-makers.

### Cultural resources

Cultural resources are a broad category that includes artefacts, symbols, beliefs, values, identities, know-how, tactical repertoires, and behavioural norms (Edwards et al., 2018). I have already

discussed some of these issues in previous sections and chapters. First, the collective identity of FFF Italy, even though is not monolithic and demanding, is still a key resource to sustain participation by creating solidarity, pride, and self-esteem but also outrage and anger, when it is juxtaposed with antagonists such as the elite, gerontocracy, the State and Eni. I have also already discussed how the phenomenon of dual and multiple belongings and identities is also strategic to recruit activists and use spaces, ideas, skills, and creativity of the allied groups and to build bridges with them.

To collective identity, it is important to add the specialized knowledge of many activists who are studying disciplines such as environmental engineering, biology, political science, climate change, and communication that allow them to develop specific skills for framing and counter-framing. Moreover, activists coming from other movements or social centres bring tactical repertoires (e.g. confrontational actions), other protest-related skills and know-how that have key relevance such as the creativity used to create posters, banners, slogans and so on.

Finally, I have already mentioned that the movement produces countercultural artefacts such as webinars, podcasts, books, and comics that challenge the hegemonic frames, values, ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. These resources are used to show the world is in climate crisis and that we need a radical State-led just ecological transition to avoid a catastrophic future and to instil into people what I call a radical ecological habitus.

## Leadership

Among the human resources mobilised by social movements, leaders play a very important role. In previous sections it was mentioned that referents, spokespersons and Greta Thunberg are de facto soft leaders who inspire, motivate, and connect, instead of giving orders.

When I asked Carola (NW18Fb) why she became an activist, she told me that “I was watching the television with all those guys taking the street, so behind the trail of Greta Thunberg, and me saying <I must do it as well>” [...] because at the end she had my age, my same year, seeing her I think that brought me...”.

A survey conducted during the first Global Strike in Florence found that 49.1% of all school students agreed that Greta Thunberg affected their decision to join the Climate Strike very much while 15.1% answered “quite” (Zamponi et al., 2019), a percentage that reduced to 20% and 21% for the third strike, probably for the emergence of local leaders (della Porta et al., 2020). The two surveys found

a lower but still remarkable "Greta effect" on adults. Even though in 2019's Florence strikes there was a predominance of female protesters, Sorce (2022) sustains that female and non-binary German activists often dismiss Thunberg's gender as a mobilizing factor. During my interviews with female activists, Thunberg's gender never emerged as a key topic for them. According to a representative study conducted by Sabherwal et al. (2021) in the United States, those adults who are more familiar with Greta develop stronger collective efficacy and higher intentions of taking collective actions. The effect is stronger for liberals. The fact that Greta pushed many youths to protest and become activists also emerged in several interviews conducted during the fieldwork. It is quite clear also that when Greta joins a protest in another city, as she did in Turin and Rome in 2019 and Milan in 2021, the growth of participation is considerable, even though no studies have been conducted on this specific point.

Greta is also a key mobilizing figure through her social media accounts. In August 2022, she had 3.5 million followers on Facebook, 14.5 million on Instagram and 5 million on Twitter, with very high levels of interactions. Through these accounts, she sensitizes people on the climate crisis, blames the elites, and incites people to mobilize, in line with the "soft leaderships" theorized by Gerbaudo (2012). Sorce (2022) prefers to use the term "connective leadership" in the sense that other FFF groups retweet or share Thunberg's posts to use her mobilizing power.

Despite her role in mobilizing people, some of the activists I interviewed (but not all) sustain that Greta does not have a daily role in the movement. As I have already mentioned, since 2020 Greta assumed a lower profile in an attempt to give more space to other activists, especially from MAPA. Besides this, I believe her positions still have a great influence in setting the agenda of the movement. For instance, her support was decisive for the adoption of the expression "colonizers of the North" and the subjacent decolonial framing of the climate crisis (Mathiesen, 2022). Another study (Díaz-Pérez et al., 2021) found that Greta's frame has considerably influenced the discourse of Fridays for Future Barcelona and its social media followers.

The impact of Greta Thunberg is also extended to other aspects than protests. For instance, there are likely "Greta effects" on flight shaming and carbon offsetting though not scientifically proven yet (Berton, 2019; Laville, 2019).

Moreover, she inspired new national and local leaders who are performing similar roles to hers. These leaders in turn inspire activists, influence agenda-setting, carry on advocacy and build bridges with other FFF sections and struggles. At the national level, Michela Spina (Naples's group), Laura Vallaro



(Chieri's group, close to Turin), Martina Comparelli (Milan's group) and Filippo Sotgiu (Rome's group) have been elected twice as spokespersons, a sign of their influence inside the movement. Giovanni Mori (Brescia's group) was elected only in 2021 for the same charge but he is still one of the most visible activists, especially for his communicative skills and technical knowledge (he is an engineer). However, the anti-hierarchical culture of FFF forbids them to give orders, take decisions and even overexpose themselves in the mass media. Moreover, the large number of spokespersons and key national groups demonstrates that the leadership in the movement is diffused.

### The pleasure of activism

What I found very relevant during the fieldwork was the dimension of pleasure mobilized by Fridays for Future. Jasper (1997) uses the expression "the pleasure of protest" but I prefer to use the expression "the pleasure of activism" since not only protests but all activities of social movements involve enjoyment. It is part of what the literature identifies as solidarity incentives whose common characteristic is that they tend to be independent of the goals of the movement (Edwards et al., 2018). Similarly to Jasper's theorization, the pleasure of activism includes the possibility to meet new people, make new friends, spend meaningful time with people with similar values, expand one's knowledge, have fun, play, express one's creativity, flirt, have romances, and the sense of community, belonging and identity. As Jasper (1997) notices, some of these pleasures are not available in the routines of daily life, such as the euphoria of crowds, a sense of making the evening news or even History. Pleasure is closely linked with emotions such as joy, pride, and fulfilment (Jasper, 1998).

In all forms of social activism, this dimension of pleasure is present, but in the case of FFF is particularly accentuated, also due to its youth identity. For the movement, pleasure is a resource mobilized to sustain commitment, galvanize militants, recruit new activists and garner media attention. I have already mentioned that several studies (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017; Nairn, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2022) found evidence that collective actions can have beneficial psychological effects on activists. Hence, for some activists, pleasure can also be seen as a goal in itself that overlaps (or does not) with the goals of the movement. Commonly, activists try to pursue their personal ends at the same time as the group ends (or instead of) (Jasper, 2013). In the chapter on identity, I have already discussed how some of the youths interviewed in the fieldwork approached the movement attracted by the idea of meeting and fighting with other youths with similar values and feeling part of a group. In those cases, pleasure overlapped with mobilizing emotions such as joy, thrill, and

enthusiasm. The communicative strategy of planned actions frequently frames them as political but also funny moments. Let us give an example of a post published by FFF Brescia: “Join our rallies! You will find us every weekend in Brescia’s squares. Fun guaranteed 😊.” This register would be impossible for mainstream associations, but it is common for a social movement such as FFF, highly informal, ironic and young.

During and after each action promoted by the movement (not only protests but also assemblies and similar events) we can find music from the left-wing tradition (Bella ciao, La Canzone del Maggio, El Pueblo Unido Jamàs Serà Vencido, Vieni a Ballare in Puglia and so on), dances, games, comics and other artistic performances and games, aperitifs, and humour. The choirs and protest signs are not only dramatic but also colourful, provocative and ironic, with many puns even with sexual references, typically with the word “hot”. As an activist said once: "siamo seri ma non seriosi" (something like “we are serious, not staid”). The demonstration is a moment in which youths talk, create new relations, sing, dance, and shout together. It is an experience that generates shared emotions (Jasper, 1998) such as joy, pride, thrill, enthusiasm, hope and reciprocal emotions such as friendship, love, solidarity, and loyalty as well as curiosity and delightfulness, all elements that motivate demonstrators to attend again or to join the core group of organizers. If mobilizations last for years as in the case of FFF, the delightfulness of protests becomes even more important to sustain a mobilization that risks decline otherwise. Hence “activism has to reinvent itself over and over again” (Shepard, 2009, p. 272) through play, pleasure, irony, but also new innovative tactics.



Picture 10: examples of ironic protest signs and performances displayed by FFF. Credits: Fridays for Future.

An important way to foster a sense of satisfaction and pride in doing activism is to reclaim that #ActivismWorks, as used in several publications both at the national, local and international levels. It is quite clear that the climate policies adopted by Italy so far are far from satisfactory, as we will see in section 8.5. The perception of political immobility can foster indignation and consequent mobilizations for a period but after some years and with the pandemic restrictions the scenario is quite different: frustration and resignation spread among activists. Hence, a strategy that FFF promotes to re-motivate is to reclaim that activism is producing a change, even if it is not satisfactory. The narratives of the movement are generally trying to find a middle-ground between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Complete satisfaction would remove the rationale for mobilization. Complete dissatisfaction after years of protests could demotivate activists. On the other hand, a narrative that emphasizes that activism is producing a change that is insufficient and needs to be pushed even more could be galvanizing. This forms part of what the literature defines as purposive incentives which are the awards deriving from reaching some of the goals of a movement (Edwards et al., 2018).

FFF Italy periodically emphasizes the victories of the social movements of the past, but it also celebrates its own outcomes. For instance, in February 2022, the movement published a post reclaiming that the modification of articles 9 and 41 of the Constitution was “the result of years of our and previous generations’ fight, fatigue and enthusiasm”. In fact, this was one of the demands of the campaign Ritorno al Futuro. The post ended with the hashtag #ActivismWorks. The message was that the counter-future, the “new normality”, and the ecotopia will not be “presents” from above but they will be conquered from below. As proclaimed in a post published on the 25th of March 2022: “The richest 1% greedily devours the resources at the expense of everybody? Hence, let’s claim to be that 99% that will change the course of history!”

The hashtag #ActivismWorks is connected to the power of hope. FFF activists are aware that it is fundamental to keep hope alive in order to mobilize people. Doomist discourses (Lamb et al., 2020) support the idea that any mitigation action is too little, too late and that we cannot avoid a catastrophe. This discourse has reached broad sectors of the population as well as some wings of the climate movements. However, the message of FFF is that the future is at stake but it is still open, still editable. Even if we are running out of time, we still have time to act.

The declining gratification during the pandemic is a sign that the life of social movements is not only a bed of roses. Pleasure and other associated emotions and feelings (e.g. joy, hope) are accompanied or replaced on some occasions by pain, sadness, grievance, and frustration that arise from repression, internal divisions, lack of outcomes and a devastating event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. During our interview, the climate activist Andrea (S21N) admitted the latter “made me feel very badly at the psychological level” since zir<sup>49</sup> group switched from making “marches, all together, making noise, in the streets, exposing us...to making presentations”. During our interview, Roberto (NE18M) told me he was “preso molto, molto, molto male” (something like “I feel very, very, very bad”) since his group was “doing nothing. Discussions, works, future projects are blocked” and that for him it was a “setback”.

The overdigitalization forced by the pandemic weakened the motivating function of pleasure. In other words, the ineffectiveness of this over-digitalization was mainly due to the drastic reduction of the incentives provided by the pleasure of activism. Klandermans (2014) calls this “insufficient gratification”. The Information and Communication Technologies allowed the movement to survive

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<sup>49</sup> Gender-neutral pronoun.

and continue its struggle, in other words, they contributed to its resilience. However, most of the interviewees expressed this over-digitalization was quite ineffective and unpleasant. Enzo, an activist who was supporting the local groups of FFF, expressed to me the frustration he felt regarding online assemblies: “it looked like we were doing things only to do things, to stay there only to talk but in fact without having an impact on what occurs in the world”. My gatekeeper Marcello told me that “the world of activism is a world made of sociality, community, friendship and this aspect failed. For sure, we suffered from this point of view”. Agata, a former spokesperson, told me that “the fact of not seeing each other was a reason that reduced us [...] because online you lack the contact [...] at home you’re alone for 2-3 hours in front of the computer, you get distracted and so people talk, nobody answers and depression descends so one clearly loses their will to do things”. Matteo (NW19M) used even more poignant words:

It was also shocking to see how almost powerless [digital strikes] made you feel. I mean, like having all your feet and hands cut off and going around with your stumps. I mean, not doing anything except moving in this virtual space but without really affecting opinions and things.

Social relations and social rituals maintain activists’ commitment (Downton & Wehr, 1997). When they decline, they can produce insufficient gratification. The lack of direct social contacts and the end of rituals such as the face-to-face assembly and Friday’s strike for a long period cancelled many solidarity incentives. The closing down of schools, key spaces of recruitment for FFF, was also a harsh hit. Moreover, neurosciences underline the importance of touch for our happiness. Touch starvation or touch hunger can produce aggressive behaviours, impairment in speech and communication, lowered self-esteem, anxiety, depression, self-injurious behaviour, and eating disorders (Golaya, 2021). It is possible the touch famine starvation activists experienced during the lockdowns contributed to a general process of demobilization. The lack of face-to-face interactions demotivated many activists until the point that many local groups dissolved or froze their activism.

Even if the movement tried to stimulate social contacts, moments of distraction and outlet online, the over-abundance of online activities during the two first years of the pandemic produced an inevitable digital fatigue and limited the effectiveness of these measures. In the words of the activist Enzo, “the problem is also that you have done eight hours of class by video call, I don’t want to do other four-hour video calls. And it looked like we were not working at all.”

For those groups who went back to squares after the first lockdown, the organization of activities was highly frustrating. The number of activists was reduced for the reasons explained in section 8.3 but also because many of them went back to their families in other cities. Hence, the few who remained

active were overcharged with responsibilities. The first protests after the lockdown were far from being as funny as in 2019. They involved few people, social distancing, restricted mobility and a constant worry about infections and media coverage. The bike strike was also meant to overcome the “boredom” of a static demonstration and it was somehow successful in this. I believe that autumn 2021 was a turning point since the overall impression was that the pandemic was turning drastically less severe than during the first year and a half. This favoured face-to-face activities, the return of mass mobilisations and the dimension of pleasure in its best way.

### The sense of urgency

Social movement theories do not generally take into account the temporal dimension. However, for environmental movements, it is crucial since they are engaged in a struggle with opponents around the meaning of urgency, emergency, and the representation of the past, present and future. For decades, environmentalists have denounced that the accelerated extraction of natural resources, emission of greenhouse gases, and production of dumps are incompatible with the Earth’s capacity to reproduce the natural capital, absorb emissions and dispose of dumps. We are simply too fast for nature. The definition of sustainable development as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) was meant to solve that contradiction. Many environmental thinkers belonging to the de-growth movement, deep ecology, eco-feminism, and eco-socialism argue that it is imperative to radically slow down the rhythms of extraction, production, consumption and waste generation to ensure intergenerational and interspecies justice.

Another key concept that is highly relevant for this discussion is the high-speed society. According to Rosa & Scheuerman (2008) the acceleration of time started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the current high-speed society, almost everything is changing at increasingly higher rates than in the past. The technological acceleration of transport, production and communication and the social acceleration of values, habits, behaviours, and lifestyles determine the acceleration of the individual pace of life. This acceleration of the speed of life has a subjective side and an objective side. The subjective consists of the perception that time goes faster. The objective side is the measurable contraction of the time spent on activities and actions or the measurable reduction of pauses and intervals between activities or actions. The high-speed society produces a paradox: the acceleration of technology increases the number of potentially realizable options, but it also creates the sensation of time scarcity since we

can only make a small fraction of those options. This pressure to do as many things as possible, to update one's knowledge, skills and technologies to avoid falling behind inevitably produces negative psychological consequences.

In this section, I conceptualize the sense of urgency and the acceleration of time as fundamental intangible resources mobilised by Fridays for Future that also have several unintended negative consequences. To begin with, it is important to say that FFF Italy is shaped by the high-speed society but it also reproduces it. The IPCC (2021) objectively signals that climate change is accelerating and intensifying in all regions and the window of opportunity to mitigate its worst effects is closing. Socio-natural disasters are already happening at increasingly higher rates of frequency and intensity. This induces FFF to interiorize a sense of time acceleration, time scarcity and urgency. At the same time, the narratives of the movement contribute to the subjective perception of time acceleration, time scarcity and urgency which are used for strategic-political purposes.

A second point to reiterate is that Fridays for Future frames the climate crisis as a here-and-now threat that must be faced urgently otherwise the consequences will be catastrophic, as the scientific community also warns. FFF Italy emphasizes that humanity has acquired an unprecedented power to shape its future and the future of the planet for better or for worse. The future is strategically framed as a dichotomy between a dystopic and apocalyptic scenario made of disasters, mass migrations, wars and impoverishment (the outcome of the business-as-usual), and an ecotopia (or ecological utopia) in which humanity finds an equilibrium that benefits both the planet and our well-being in a just way and that can only be built with through the ecological transition. For the movement, this is the only choice, and the choice must be made now. "Dear Italy, you are facing a crossroad in your history," affirms the movement in the launching of the campaign "Ritorno al Futuro" in April 2020.

That statement continued by saying that "this is our last occasion". Then, in criticizing the Recovery Plan of Italy, the movement announced that "the last occasion to reverse the route is given by the Next Generation EU". This sensation of urgency is reinforced by the inclusion of the Climate Clock on the landing page of the website of FFF Italy. It is not a real clock but a timer that gives us the time left until the carbon budget runs out, given the amount of carbon we continue to emit globally. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, once the carbon budget ends, it becomes unfeasible to keep global warming below 1.5°C and devastating consequences will follow. At the moment I am writing (18th of July 2022), the timer says we have just 7 years, 4 days, 1 hour, 44 minutes and 27 seconds to limit global warming to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. If

global greenhouse emissions continue to rise, the time at disposable reduces even more and the perception of time scarcity grows. If global greenhouse emissions decline, the time at disposal increases. Besides the carbon budget, the increasing frequency and intensity of socio-natural disasters (something undeniable) are also strategically used by the movement to create this sensation of time acceleration and time scarcity.



*Figure 7: the climate clock embedded in the website of FFF Italy*

As I have already said, the campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” insisted on the sense of being at a crossroad. Hence, contrary to more doomist movements, FFF tries to instil a sense of urgency without neglecting the potential of hope in mobilizing people. Why should I protest if the die has already been cast? In short, the time is running out but there is still time to correct the course. On the website of the movement and in several declarations and publications, FFF Italy declares that “we are the only generation that can stop this crisis!” Youths in our time are facing uncertainty, the crisis of the future and the end of the optimism of the Enlightenment (Leccardi, 2009), also for the effect of the never-ending emergencies (the Great Recession, the COVID-19, the invasion of Ukraine...). However, the message of FFF is that the future is at stake but it is still open, still editable. There is still hope. As Greta Thunberg once said, “I am telling you there is hope. I have seen it. But it does not come from governments or corporations. It comes from the people.”

Framing the climate crisis as an emergency and fostering a sense of urgency has important and unintended consequences. In the intention of the movement, they are meant as resources to recruit and mobilize activists and sympathizers. This could have worked, according to the interviews conducted during the fieldwork. Secondly, they are also a weapon to put pressure on public opinion, the media and the government. However, despite all declarations, it does not seem that Italian politics is convinced that the situation needs an urgent intervention hence the effectiveness in this sense seems limited.

The sense of urgency comes with a great downside: sacrifice. The school strike is already an action that sacrifices part of the education of activists. Moreover, many of them are involved in an



accelerated and 24/7 activism that expands to every aspect of their personal life. In some way, these activists sacrifice their present for a better future for all. In the poignant words of Ludovico, national spokesperson of FFF Italy: “boh, personally I have no time to live just for these things [the amount of activism-related activities] ”. Another activist, Enzo, admitted during the interview that he was included in 46 FFF’s chats (local, national and international). The pervasiveness and real-timeness of mobile chat applications such as Whatsapp and Telegram erase the separation between the time dedicated to leisure and the time dedicated to activism and foster this 24/7 engagement. Moreover, digital technologies produce the paradox analysed by Rosa & Scheuerman (2008): they increase the number and speed of potentially realizable options, but it also creates a sensation of time scarcity because we want to carry on all of them.

Another point of reflection is burnout. A well-known activist of the movement had to stop because of it. Social justice and human rights activists are especially susceptible to burnout for their high levels of understanding of suffering and oppression as well as for a culture of selflessness and martyrdom that discourages conversations about psychological well-being and self-care (Chen & Gorski, 2015). This culture of martyrdom is even more striking in those activists involved in radical acts of civil disobedience.

Moreover, the first year and half of the pandemic seemed to many activists in Italy as a lost time, because the increased biographical availability of activists could not be converted into protests, and as a lost opportunity, since the climate crisis was invisibilized in the public debate and political agenda (while the Recovery and Resilience Plan was judged by FFF as insufficient to foster a just ecological transition).

Even if all activists sacrifice something in their lives, only climate activists have this sense of urgency so interiorized for the warnings of the scientific community on the fact that we only have left few years to drastically cut greenhouse gas emissions. The dimension of pleasure that has already been discussed is surely also a remedy used by the movement to tackle the psychological burden of its activists. However, it is clear that there is a need for an internal cultural change in social movements. I go back to this point in the conclusion of the chapter.

A final problem of this narrative of crossroads and deadlines is that is unsustainable after a while, and it could even produce resignation and a lack of credibility. Currently, the scientific community argues that respecting the 1.5°C goals is becoming unlikely, though still possible. Hence, it will become crucial to adjust the narrative of urgency in the future. The point is, as Ozden (2022) credibly suggests,

that every 0.1°C of mitigation is crucial, even if it becomes unfeasible to keep global warming below 1.5°C (when the Climate Clock reaches 0) or 2°C.

To sum up, the sense of urgency is a vital resource in the hands of Fridays for Future and it should not be abandoned, also because it somehow corresponds to the warnings of the scientific community. However, it could also become a boomerang if proper corrections are not implemented. The necessary balance between the sense of urgency and activists' psychological well-being is not easy at all.

## 8.5 What did we get?

Strategy is the overall plan for action that aims at obtaining specific goals. What remains open is if these goals have been reached. The issue of outcomes is one of the most complex in social movement studies. In fact, the effects can be attributed to the movement (direct effect), to the movement and external influences such as political allies and public opinion (joint effect), to external influences but that bear directly to the movement claims (indirect effect) (Giugni & Grasso, 2004) but the attribution is not always easy. Besides, the struggles carried on by social movements can also produce unintended consequences. The outcomes of social movements can be short-term or long-term, political, cultural, or biographical (Bosi & Uba, 2009).

In the survey I conducted at the beginning of my fieldwork the issue of the impact of the movement was the second most voted item (58), just after ideology, identity and values (59). In this section, I briefly the current “state of the art” of climate policies in Italy but without the pretension to be exhaustive and attribute responsibilities to FFF Italy (which is hard). The cultural outcomes are excluded since it would require an ad hoc study while some of the main biographical consequences in the short term have already been discussed.

I adopt the conceptualization of Schumaker (1975) which distinguishes between access responsiveness, agenda responsiveness, policy responsiveness, output responsiveness, and impact responsiveness.

The focus is mainly on Italy from 2019 (the year of the first climate strikes) until the 2022 elections. It is clearly a short period of time for policies. However, the scientific community agrees that we need a radical decarbonisation in a few years so it is important that evaluate if we are taking the right decisions now.

I only make a few mentions of the European level though it is also very important. For instance, FFF Italy's mobilisation contributed to the birth of the European Green Deal. In an interview, the European Commission's Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal and European Commissioner for Climate Action Frans Timmermans declared that Greta Thunberg is "a hero. Absolutely. We would have no European Green Deal without her and the Fridays For Future movement" (Euronews, 2021). On the other hand, European climate protests could not stop the disputed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the inclusion of nuclear and gas energy activities in the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities.

### Access responsiveness

Access responsiveness is the openness of the political system toward social movements and their claims. We can say that Fridays for Future Italy is considered a legitimate actor, and it maintained a moderate opportunity to have private and public meetings with members of the parliament and the government Conte II and Draghi between 2019 and 2022, notwithstanding the restrictions to protests that have already been analysed in details. However, the relationships with the then Minister of the Environment (Sergio Costa) and the first Minister of Ecological Transition (Roberto Cingolani) were tense and far from being friendly. Moreover, as emerged from the study by ReCommon (2021), fossil fuel companies have much greater access to policy-makers than Italian environmentalists. Regarding political parties, the access is relatively higher with politicians and parties belonging to Europa Verde, FacciamoEco (a former group of ecologists not belonging to Europa Verde), the 5 Star Movement and the Democratic Party than with the right-wing.

I believe the acceptance of FFF Italy as a legitimate political actor is due to its positive prestige and reputation among the opinion public, celebrities and mass media. The fact the tactical repertoire of FFF is mainly perceived as non-disruptive by authorities is a key component of this moral capital. On the other hand, more disruptive movements such as Ultima Generazione and Extinction Rebellion which block roads and defiantly glue themselves to or attack art (without damages) have provoked extremely harsh reactions from authorities in the forms of sanctions, arrests and denounces. So far, the access responsiveness toward those movements is very low. Even environmental associations such as WWF, Legambiente and Greenpeace as well as Europa Verde have expressed themselves against the two civil disobedient movements. The tolerance to FFF's activism, however, ends when more radical actions are adopted and/or when the interests of Big Oil are touched. In the past years,

some FFF activists were denounced in Padua and Treviso and others were detained in Naples. However, the most serious act of repression happened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2022 at 6.30 am when three activists of FFF Milan were searched in their houses by 6 *carabinieri*<sup>50</sup> each. One of the activists was even asked to undress and make flexions. The search request came from Gazprom which accused them of having obscured their cameras and smeared one of their buildings. This unprecedented intimidating act seemed a message to climate activists that attacks against energy facilities would not be tolerated.

To sum up, between 2019 and 2022 the political system was on average moderately open to Fridays for Future and its claims though protests were tolerated only in specific forms (non-disruptive and static in some periods).

### Agenda responsiveness

Agenda responsiveness is how much the claims of social movements are added as an issue to the political agenda. In 2019, there was moderate responsiveness toward FFF Italy. The parliament declared the Climate Emergency, followed by the “Climate Decree” of the Conte II cabinet that recognized the “climate emergency” and its “rising negative impacts on several areas of the planet and public health.”

In 2020, the overall attention was directed to pandemic management and the climate crisis abruptly disappeared from the political agenda for a while. Then, the Recovery and Resilience Plan, approved in 2021, was meant to stimulate a green recovery and it mentioned several times the “ecological transition”, sustainability, the threat represented by “climate change”, “gender, generational and geographical inequalities” while young people were even classified as a priority with women and the South of Italy. In February 2021, former Prime Minister Draghi created the Ministry of the Ecological Transition, a reconfiguration of the Ministry of the Environment which assumed the jurisdiction on energy (previously managed by another Ministry). In the UN General Assembly on the 24th of September 2021, Draghi mentioned that climate is an “emergency”, that the use of coal must be stopped “as fast as possible” and subsidies to fossil fuels must be substituted by incentives to renewable energies. During the COP26 in Glasgow in October-November 2021, he even praised climate activists. Overall, I believe the climate had a moderate space in the agenda of the Draghi

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<sup>50</sup> The “Arma dei Carabinieri” is a military force whose functions are related to inland public order and security.

government but with a lower priority and visibility than other issues such as COVID, social and health measures for the recovery, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, inflation, the energy crisis and the 2022 electoral campaign.

Climalteranti & Italian Climate Network (2022) conducted an independent evaluation of the electoral programmes and declarations on climate change during the 2022 political campaign. If climate negationism was not so much frequent, the centrality of the issue and the ambition were judged insufficient for all right-wing parties while the centre-left received a better evaluation. In the centrality score, Brother of Italy (far right) received a mark of 3.6, the Democratic Party (centre-left) 8.7, the 5 Star Movement (populist) 6.5, the League (far right) 3.8, and Forza Italia (centre-right) 3.2. In the ambition mark, they respectively received a mark of 3, 8.4, 6.2, 3.4, and 2.7. The issue of equity and inequalities is very important for FFF. Here again, the scores were very low (except for the Democratic Party): 2.1, 8.2, 5.9, 2.8 and 2.2, respectively. The same happened with the evaluation of the exit from fossil fuels: 1.8, 7.6, 5.6, 2.2 and 1.7. The green-red list “Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra” received the best evaluation in all aspects but its political weight is quite lower than the above-mentioned parties. In 2022’s elections, it gained approximately 3.5% of the votes.

To sum up, between 2019 and 2022 the climate agenda of FFF somehow entered into governments’ agendas but with a low priority. In the political agenda of the parties that sustain Giorgia Meloni’s cabinet (the League, Forza Italia and Brother of Italy), the climate crisis does not seem to be central.

### Policy responsiveness

Schumaker (1975) conceptualizes policy responsiveness as the adoption of desired policies. In this case, the expectations raised by FFF have been largely deluded. In terms of targets, Italy contributes to the European Union's goal of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 below 1990 levels, part of the European Climate Law approved in 2021. However, in 2020, four activists from the movement (Luisa Neubauer, Greta Thunberg, Adélaïde Charlier, and Anuna de Wever van der Heyden) published a statement with the title “The EU is cheating with numbers — and stealing our future” in which they criticized the European targets. FFF Italy reported a translated version of the statement on its website and social media. Among the key points of the declaration: the use of a very favourable baseline (1990), the fact that imported manufactured goods, international aviation and shipping are always excluded in the official reporting of emissions, and the excuse of carbon sinks to justify lower reductions in the emissions. An evaluation made by the Climate Action Tracker

in June 2022 also considers the EU's climate targets, policies, and finance as insufficient to be consistent with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C temperature limit. The target should increase to at least 62%.

At the national level, the Integrated National and Energy Climate Plan (INEC) was approved at the end of 2019, mandated by the European Union to each of its member states. The plan was labelled as “insufficient” by Greenpeace, for WWF it lacked “bravery and a long-term strategic vision” and for FFF Italy it was even “embarrassing” for the target of reducing by 37% the greenhouse emissions while the European Union set it at 55%.

Aside from the issue of targets, the concrete policies adopted are also insufficient. The “Climate Decree” of 2019 was explicitly adopted to address the demands of the first climate strikes. However, more than a turning point, the Climate Decree was an example of the political opportunism of the Conte II cabinet and the parties that were supporting it. The government attempted at getting on the green wagon during the momentum of FFF with declarations of support, the justification of the school strike and selling the Climate Decree as a turning point. The policy introduced a mobility bonus of 255 million, a fund for preferential bike lanes of 40 million, a fund for forestation of 30 million, another for eco-compactors of 27 million, and another for school transportation of 20 million plus other marginal measures. The overall amount was 450 million for three years while the Ministry of the Ecological Transitions estimated for 2019 that the environmentally harmful subsidies were 24.5 billion (Ministero della Transizione Ecologica, 2021). It is clear, hence, that the Climate Decree was a drop in the ocean. Fridays for Future criticized its very low ambitions in a public statement in which it asked: “don't call it <Climate Decree>”.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan was also quite disappointing for FFF Italy. After an evaluation made with the think tank ECCO, the movement labelled it as “far from being defined as green” for its low ambition, ambiguities (regarding hydrogen for instance) and top-down elaboration. A report of the Green Recovery Tracker, a joint project by the Wuppertal Institute and the think tank E3G - Third Generation Environmentalism, declared that the measures “fall short of the green transition of the recovery funds available”. Moreover, the Green Recovery Tracker classified as “green” only 16% of the billions assigned to Italy criticizing the little funding for industrial decarbonization, electrification, renewables energies and the risk that some measures potentially benefit the gas sector and fossil gas vehicles.

Italy is the only big European country without a Framework Climate Law that could set ambitious and legally binding targets, a path to reduce greenhouse emissions, an independent advisory body and a monitoring system. Moreover, the National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change was finalized in 2018 but approved only in December 2022 without any funding nor clear priority. The plan is supposed to be the implementation tool of the National Adaptation Strategy to Climate Change, approved in 2015.

Moreover, several controversial projects, plants and policies have continued despite FFF's protests, for instance environmentally harmful subsidies, the Turin-Lyon high-speed train, the destruction of the Bassini Park in Milan, the construction of a new breakwater in Genoa, the European Common Agricultural Policy and Taranto steel plant. The coal phase-out before 2025 that was announced in 2017 is also in doubt as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the current coal power plants have even increased their activity. The inclusion of nuclear energy and gas activities in the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities, with the support of Italy, was surely a defeat for Fridays for Future. A positive exception to these trends was the exclusion of the controversial Carbon Capture and Storage project by Eni from the Recovery Plan, after the mobilization of environmental movements.

On the positive side of public policies, the "Decreto Rilancio" (Revival Decree), approved in 2020, included a sustainable mobility bonus (also called bike bonus) and the so-called "superbonus 110%" to improve the energy efficiency of the residential and non-residential units. FFF Italy celebrated the extension of the superbonus to 2022 but criticized its inequality: many families are penalized since they cannot anticipate the expense, or they do not possess a house while second homes and villas are financed too. Another positive political step of 2022 was the modification of the Constitution, which introduced the "protection of the environment, biodiversity and ecosystems, even in the interest of future generations" (articles 9) and modified article 41, stating that private economic initiatives shall not be carried out "in such a way as to damage health and the environment". FFF Italy praised this milestone with a post under the hashtag #ActivismWork.

To sum up, the climate targets and policies of the last years do not satisfy the demands raised by Fridays for Future Italy. Some positive steps can be identified and, even if we cannot entirely attribute these outcomes to FFF, we can at least say that its mobilization contributed to obtaining them.

### Output and impact responsiveness

The output responsiveness is the implementation of the desired policies. The most appreciated measures by FFF, the sustainable mobility bonus and the “Superbonus 110%”, were both a success in terms of implementation (even though I have already mentioned the inequality of the latter). With the first version of the mobility bonus, 215 million were spent on buying more than 600.000 bikes and scooters (Rinnovabili.it, 2021). The "Superbonus 110%" subsidised the energy efficiency improvement of 243.907 buildings between July 2020 and August 2021, with 43 billion spent (Agenzia nazionale per le nuove tecnologie & Ministero della Transizione Ecologica, 2022). It is still early to evaluate the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan while the National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change has not entered into force yet.

Finally, impact responsiveness is the substantial improvement of the existing situation. In this case, it is hard to evaluate since FFF is quite a new phenomenon and data is not always available. However, we can make some considerations by analysing two key indicators such as the trend of greenhouse gas emissions and the rate of renewable energies, perhaps the main priorities of the just transition. We can make a general affirmation that Italian climate policies are insufficient so far. The Superior Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) affirm that in 2019 the greenhouse emissions declined by 2% and in 2020 by 9.8% for the lockdowns. However, with the economic recovery of 2021 (+8.9% of Gross Domestic Product) they increased by 6.8%, and in 2022 by 0.9% (+2.6% of GDP), a sign we are far from a scenario of absolute decoupling between growth and emissions<sup>51</sup>. From a longer perspective, the Polytechnic University of Milan estimates that the business-as-usual scenario will lead to cutting only a quarter of the emissions required to reach 2030's European goals (which is -55%), 44 tonnes of carbon dioxide versus the 154 required (Eco dalle Città, 2022).

If we look at the data provided by Terna, the electricity transmission grid operator, the electricity provided by renewable energies in 2018, the first year of the new wave of climate mobilization, was 35% (on average). In 2019 it kept the same level, in 2020 it rose to 38%, in 2021 it reduced to 36% and in 2022 to 31.1%. In short, the paradox is that in concomitance with the rise of FFF, the national production of renewable energy has entered a crisis.

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<sup>51</sup> The hypothesis of absolute decoupling is at the core of the European Green Deal.



To sum up, Italy is totally out of track in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the increase of renewable production. It does not seem that FFF Italy was able to cause the beginning of a new green era.

## 8.6 Discussion

Fridays for Future Italy has changed a lot in a relatively short period. If at the beginning its demands were mainly to “listen to science” and declare the climate emergency, with time more radical claims such as system change and climate justice have emerged. The campaign “Ritorno al Futuro” was a key moment that set and specified the goal of an ecological transition based not only on science but also on justice. The concept of “ecological transitions” has become mainstream but it is far from being consensual. The countercultural struggle of FFF is also aimed at refuting the hegemonic discourses that legitimize solutions to the climate crisis based on the market, individualism and fossil fuels.

Science is still strategically used to legitimate the movement’s claims and delegitimize others’, but its idealized representation is distant from reality. First, even if there is a scientific consensus on the reality of the climate crisis, its attribution is still disputable. Colonialism, capitalism, industrialization, neoliberalism, the elite, fossil fuels companies, the ideology of growth, and human development have all been accused and the answer is not easy. The same is true for the prognosis. For instance, there is no consensus in the scientific community on the potential role of nuclear power, carbon and capture technologies, and degrowth as solutions. The reason is that the ideal of an objective, value-free science is simply not true. The work of scientists is influenced by ideologies, values, and economic and political interests, as for all humans. As Evensen (2019, p. 428) affirms:

Instead of science providing a single objective answer, the scientific process generates numerous socially-constructed truths that are products of the questions asked, the people doing the science, values of funding organisations and epistemological commitments about methodological appropriateness. It goes too far to state that no objective knowledge exists or that any scientific finding is entirely constrained by cultural context. Nonetheless, it behoves all scientists and decision-makers using science to understand and acknowledge the role of values in shaping scientific findings as well as the different roles that science and value-based reasoning can and should play in political decisions.

In practice, authorities always need to mediate between the opinion of scientists and other counsellors, the worries of entrepreneurs, the economic situation and the risk of social unrest, all factors that could make them lose or win the elections. For instance, virology was never the only base of political decisions during the pandemic since public order and economic interests clearly played a role as well. For instance, the employers' federation of Lombardy (Confindustria Lombardia) is under

investigation for alleged pressures on the government and the regional administration to avoid a lockdown in Nembro and Alzano<sup>52</sup> from which the Coronavirus massively spread to Italy and Europe in 2020.

We also need to recognize that many scientists are the backbone of the fossil-fuels capitalist system. The historical and contemporary extraction of fossil fuels and other natural resources are based on the work of scientists and highly advanced technologies<sup>53</sup>. Historically, environmentalism can be seen as a revolt of science against science on behalf of life (Castells, 2010). Hence, the appeal of Fridays for Future to “listen to science” must be understood at least as “listen to climate science”, not to science in all its disciplines and applications.

If we want to keep science as the key source of legitimation of climate activism (as it should be) we should not fall into the trap of giving inaccurate portrayals of it, as Ozden (2022) notices. For instance, the attribution of the COVID-19 pandemic to the climate crisis is supported by a study carried on by Beyer et al. (2021) but other scientists are much more sceptic about the connection (Tandon, 2021). Science is a social process so we should avoid the temptation to jump to conclusions before reaching a consensus.

If the government does not listen to climate science, we need to mobilize to guarantee a safe future for all. This is the essence of FFF’s motivational framing. The question is how. In 2019, the strategy of FFF Italy consisted in combining an innovative, relatively disruptive and delightful tactic such as the march-strike with a narrative of urgency, a wise use of social media, the global leadership of Greta Thunberg and a collective identity based on a youth climate resistance against the gerontocratic elite. These factors allowed the movement to gain favourable public attention and media coverage. The political system seemed to open to the demands of climate activists but in the end, the Climate Decree was a very unambitious policy. The literature has identified plenty of factors related to movement success which can be aggregated into three categories: movement strategy factors, external allies/coalitions, and political environment factors (Almeida, 2019). During its momentum, FFF Italy had an effective framing strategy, a disruptive and novel tactic, a large size of demonstrations, plenty of allies (scientists, celebrities, environmental organizations, other movements, social centres...), good media coverage, a sympathetic government, and an aligned public opinion. Likely, there was also an elite conflict in the Conte II cabinet regarding which climate measures should be included in

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<sup>52</sup> Two municipalities in Bergamo province, in the East of Lombardy.

<sup>53</sup> And even more for unconventional fossil fuel technologies such as the controversial hydraulic fracturing or “fracking”.

the "Climate Decree", in the Budget Law and other measures. This list of factors is quite impressive, what was lacking was mainly an elite ally (Minister Fioramonti was in charge for a very short period), and major mistakes from the political elite.

The pandemic came as a tsunami, resetting large climate protests. The movement was forced to recur to digital tactics, bike-strikes, socially distant rallies, and advocacy but the participation dropped as well as the overall media coverage and its political influence. The counterframing of the pandemic as the consequence of the environmental devastation combined with a responsible attitude and other strategic choices were courageous attempts by FFF Italy to maintain mobilizations in a moment of declining media attention and without being stigmatized. The movement demonstrated impressive resilience and capacity to adapt to the context, but it could not avoid a dramatic decline in participation.

Since September 2021 mass mobilizations are back but the impression is that we are not living the second momentum of FFF Italy, in terms of participation, media coverage and relevance of the climate crisis in the political agenda. In specific, there is an abyss between announcements and concrete policies. Italy is the only big European country without a Climate Law, its Integrated National and Energy Climate Plan is not even aligned with the European Green Deal and the Recovery and Resilience Plan is unlikely to be a turning point for the just ecological transition. The current trends in renewable energy production and greenhouse gas emissions are disappointing while environmentally harmful projects and policies continue undisturbed. Climate denialism and tacit climate delayism, a general underevaluation of the climate risks, the interests of fossil fuel lobbies and entrepreneurs, the ideology of economic expansion, and the fear of destroying jobs and producing social unrest appear to be significant barriers to the adoption of ambitious climate policies. Positive exceptions to this general negative trend are the sustainable mobility bonus, the "superbonus 110%" and the modification of the Constitution.

In general, we could not say that the pandemic worked as an environmental wake-up call as many hoped (see for instance Hood, 2020; Wright, 2020). On one hand, there is a growing consensus on the necessity of the return of public funding and investments and universal, public and well-funded health systems<sup>54</sup>. Gerbaudo (2021) affirms that this neo-statism is on the verge of displacing neoliberalism. On the other, the discussion on the health consequences of habitat destruction,

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<sup>54</sup> Even though for this last point there is also an abyss between announcements and funding.

intensive breeding and agriculture and air pollution is extremely marginal in the political agenda. Economic concerns seem to prevail on social, health and environmental consequences. Finally, it does not seem that the pandemic has been the turning point of the ecological transition in Italy. The climate crisis is still not seen as “the biggest threat to security that modern humans have ever faced” as the naturalist David Attenborough declared or “the defining issue of our time”, in the words of the UN Secretary António Guterres. It seems much more like a flag that is temporarily raised for propagandistic reasons (in a word, greenwashing).

Inside the movement, there is a crystal-clear awareness of the limited outcomes obtained so far but it is not clear yet which strategic decisions must be taken to address it. An important debate in social movements is the incremental use of more disruptive tactics in moments of political frustration, with some activists believing that they could be more effective than conventional protests and others worried by the potential boomerang effect on their reputation. In 2022, the new Italian movement *Ultima Generazione*, deriving from *Extinction Rebellion*, started conducting disruptive actions such as road blockades, hunger strikes and spectacular protests in museums, glueing themselves to sculptures or throwing paint on art objects and buildings (without damage)<sup>55</sup>. Similar actions are carried on by *Just Stop Oil* in the United Kingdom, *Dernière Rénovation* in France, and *Futuro Vegetal* in Spain. Overall, those actions are attracting enormous media attention but the debate on their backlash is open. According to a recent literature review (Glover & Ozden, 2022), the evidence supports, on average, the idea that a nonviolent radical flank increases the salience of an issue, the support for more moderate flanks (who will appear less radical even without changing characteristics) and the overall movement’s likelihood of success. Hence, the radicalization of some parts of FFF (by converging into *Ultima Generazione*, for instance) is likely to produce positive effects for the broad climate movement. However, the repression against *Ultima Generazione* and *Extinction Rebellion* as well as the search of the three activists of FFF Milan in May 2022 demonstrates that the tolerance of Italian authorities toward more disruptive actions is low. The risks for activists in those actions are incomparably higher than more conventional protests and there are legitimate worries about the reputation of the movement.

During the 2022’s electoral campaign, FFF Italy spent considerable energy in elaborating and promoting a new set of political proposals under the campaign “*Agenda Climatica*” (Climate

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<sup>55</sup> The attacks against works of art have broken a tabu and provoked discomfort and even indignation which was exactly the aim of those activists.

Agenda), an updated and expanded version of “Ritorno al Futuro”. The Agenda Climatica is a very well-documented proposal, though I have not analysed it in detail for my fieldwork ended in April. However, its political echo was very limited so the question remains open of whether those energies could have been spent in more disruptive ways.

The issue of alliances remains open as well. Mainstream trade unions have disappointed FFF so far. The alliance with radical vanguards such as the Collettivo di Fabbrica is producing a powerful narrative that overcomes the environmental job blackmail. However, the mobilizing potential of mainstream unions is still much higher than theirs. Tenacious and constant work with mainstream unions is still required and the concepts of just transition, wealth redistribution and reduction of working hours have the potential to create bridges. What is lacking is perhaps a greater presence of “brokers”, individuals with simultaneous membership in FFF and unions who could foster communication and trust. This absence is a symptom of the limited diffusion of Fridays for Future among the working class.

FFF Italy lacks a strong elite ally which for Giugni & Passy (1998) is essential to produce significant political outcomes, though according to the literature review conducted by Glover & Ozden (2022) the evidence is fairly mixed. The electoral campaign of 2022 was not at all centred on the climate crisis. Right-wing parties and politicians are hostile to, indifferent or not engaged in ambitious climate policies, as detected also by the study conducted by Climalteranti & Italian Climate Network (2022). It seems that the new cabinet led by Giorgia Meloni will not shift from these positions, as the stigmatization and repression against Ultima Generazione demonstrate. Politicians from the 5 Star Movement and the centre-left recognize the claims of the movement and are open to dialogue. However, their attitude is frequently paternalistic and opportunistic, and their behaviour is inconsistent with their words. No significant electoral “green wave” has been produced in Italy, unlike countries such as Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Ireland and Belgium. In the 2022’s elections, the Green and Left Alliance (Europa Verde plus other parties) got a disappointing 3.5% at the Senate and the 3.6% at the Chamber of Deputies, just above the 3% threshold. The debate is also open on whether FFF should promote the creation of another party, integrates more activists into the existing ones or keeps on pressuring from the outside. Even if this last option has been the majoritarian so far, the next years could produce something new.

The literature on social movements has demonstrated the positive functions that leadership can play. Even though some scepticism toward hierarchies can be understood, it is debatable if pure

horizontalism is feasible on a large scale and especially given the urgency of the climate crisis. Leaders have the potential to make social movements more mediatic, galvanize activists, and build alliances, even though internal mechanisms that limit their power are certainly required.

Another point of reflection is the issue of individual lifestyle change and systemic change. Some activists are not satisfied with the tendency inside the movement to put the two in juxtaposition and to see individual action as a distraction. They believe this juxtaposition could dissuade people from changing their lifestyles. Moreover, the minimization of the weight of individual behaviours is not always supported by evidence. Six key lifestyle changes could cut global emissions by between 25% and 27% (C40 Cities et al., 2019), a percentage that cannot be neglected. These changes are, in order of impact: reduction in the number of new clothing items; dietary change; reduction of flights; improved materials efficiency and building utilisation; reduction of car ownership; and optimization of the lifetime of IT equipment. Individual actions have also the potential to foster social changes (new habitus and hexis) and political change such as the adoption of a law that can, in turn, sensitize people. Hence, I believe the challenge is one hand continue refuting individualism and the manufactured invisibility of systemic responsibilities but also to build a narrative that could avoid the individual/collective divide and instead forge synergies between them.

The narrative of urgency is also a crucial point. Though it is an important resource to mobilize, attract media attention and put pressure on politicians, it risks becoming unsustainable after years. The main problem is how to sustain activism and keep alive hope when we will likely overtake the deadlines and crossroads to which FFF refers. Resignation and despair are likely to occur in that scenario. The point is, as Ozden (2022) suggests, that every 0.1°C of mitigation is crucial, even if it becomes unfeasible to keep global warming below 1.5°C or 2°C. There is a huge difference between 2°C, 3°C and 4°C. The challenge, not at all easy, is to build a mobilising narrative that could keep hope alive, together with indignation and rage, even in difficult times.

The other problem of the sense of urgency is to overcharge activists with responsibility. The regenerative culture by Extinction Rebellion that is mentioned in the chapter on the structure of FFF could help. In practice, this means taking care of other activists through peer-to-peer support groups and buddies as well as building messages that could relieve the extreme sense of responsibility that activists feel. As Chen & Gorski (2015, p. 370) affirm, "the burnout hurt them [the activists] individually, but also hurt the sustainability of the movement". The recent creation (2022) of the Associazione Italiana Ansia da Cambiamento Climatico (AIACC) (Climate Change Anxiety Italian

Association), composed of specialized psychologists in climate change anxiety, prefigures an interesting support and partner for climate movements.

Two final remarks to conclude this chapter. First, further studies should analyse more in detail the European level. As I have already said, FFF contributed to the birth of the European Green Deal but could not stop the new Common Agricultural Policy and the inclusion of nuclear energy and gas activities in the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities. Since Italian policies are supposed to be aligned with the European frameworks, it is very important to shift the attention to this level. Second, the issue of temporality is crucial. Many times even social movements with widespread support fail to achieve the policy changes they seek but they can have an indirect impact in the long term (Rochon & Mazmanian, 1993). This opens the door to continue deepening the study of climate activism in the next years.

## Conclusions

Fridays for Future is one of the most important actors of the new wave of climate justice movements that emerged between the end of the 2010s and the beginning of the 2020s in the Global North, a wave that also includes Ende Gelände, the Sunrise Movement, Extinction Rebellion, Scientist Rebellion, Ultima Generazione, Just Stop Oil and Dernière Rénovation, just to mention few of them. These movements are very diverse but they are united by a sense of dissatisfaction with the political system and past environmental struggles and by the demand for climate justice.

This dissertation represents the first study on Fridays for Future Italy that attempts at bringing together its history, structure, identity and strategy, without weighting them *a priori*. The longitudinality of the fieldwork allowed me to witness the evolutions of each one of these aspects under the powerful influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, instead of simply suffering the pandemic, this was taken as a research opportunity.

In terms of methodology, the main contribution of this study has been the participatory and reflexive approach implemented in each phase, especially research design, fieldwork and respondent validation. The main idea of the approach is to find a middle-ground between the interests of the researcher and those of the activists. By taking inspiration from the movement-relevant theory by Bevington & Dixon (2005), the assumption is that knowledge must be co-constructed with social movement instead of simply extracting it from them without any accountability and by reinforcing the unequal balance of power. The co-constructed knowledge aspires to be relevant for the academic community but also for the movement itself since it could become a mirror in which activists look at themselves and individually and collectively reflect. Moreover, the participatory approach is intrinsically ethical since it reduces power asymmetries between the researcher and the participants, even though these can never be fully erased. At the same time, some detachment has been maintained as well as a critical attitude that does not hide the contradictions and limitations of social movements.

In terms of empirical results, the dissertation started with a reconstruction of the history of Fridays for Future Italy in the period 2018-2022 embedded in the global context. Fridays for Future first emerged as a hashtag in 2018 from the rage and indignation of Greta Thunberg against the climate inaction of the policy-makers. Thanks to favourable media coverage, clever use of social media the exceptional trajectory of Thunberg and the support offered by older environmental actors, the climate



mobilisations quickly spread to almost all countries in the world. At the same time, the organisers of those protests were committed to building local, national and international groups, leading rise to a decentralised, grassroots global movement.

Fridays for Future brought many innovative elements: the school strike, the emphasis on the sense of urgency, its politicized youth identity within a broad politicization of the climate crisis that rejects technocracy and green capitalism, identifies antagonists and claims justice (even if with the ambiguities that have already been underlined). On the other hand, at least for FFF Italy, the continuity with past struggles embodied by student movements, political ecology and the Global Justice Movement is also quite evident, in terms of tactics, claims, antagonists, values and organizational models. This is an excellent example of “constrained learning” (della Porta, 2005), a term that denotes how movements critically adapt previous models.

In 2019, the movement organised massive, multiple and simultaneous public demonstrations, probably the greatest in the history of environmentalism. In that year, the Italian section emerged as the most vigorous after the German. While its national structure slowly grew, its climate strikes exercised important political pressure thanks to its elements of novelty and the large size of demonstrations. Under the pressure of the movement and the public opinion aligned with it, the Conte II government showed a sympathetic attitude and justified the school absence just before the third global strike. That sudden opening of the political opportunity structure helped the movement reach its historical peak in Italy, with more than a million people mobilised in the third Global Strike. However, the sympathetic attitude of the government seemed mere political opportunism since it was not converted into ambitious policies.

Then, COVID-19 irrupted and triggered a dramatic spiral of declining participation, media coverage and political influence. However, the first biennium was also an important period of tactical experimentation and diversification and frame-bridging between health and climate. Large mobilisations finally came back in September 2021 but the hope to build a “new normality” through a green recovery seems deluded, also as the consequence of the energy crisis provoked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine which has been taken by Big Oil as an opportunity for new massive investments in fossil fuels.

This research has cast a light on different untrivial aspects that have academic and social relevance. First, I believe that one of the key factors of mobilisation has been the politicized identity of Fridays for Future Italy as the true representative of a group (youths and children) that is the victim of climate

injustice and political exclusion. This framing has resonated in Italy, which has been defined as “no country for young people” for their structural exclusion (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). The role of antagonists in the social construction of identities has emerged with clarity. In specific, the antagonist images and the dichotomies FFF/gerontocratic elite and FFF/Eni are strategically used to produce internal cohesion and mobilising emotions such as solidarity, rage and indignation and to justify more disruptive actions. Moreover, these emotions serve to create bridges with other civil society actors as in the paradigmatic campaigns against Eni, the most powerful Italian fossil corporation. This politicized identity is accompanied by a broad politicization of the climate crisis, not only seen as a technical-scientific problem to be fixed with technology and market-based solutions but as a political-ethical issue with precisely blamed antagonists and socio-political claims that we can summarize with the slogans “system change” and “climate justice” and that in concrete terms mean just ecological transition. However, this politicization coexists with the strategic use of depoliticization and exaltation of science that is meant to present the movement as responsible in specific arenas such as the institutional. This makes clear that collective identity is a social construct and resource that can be instrumentally shaped by prominent activists in different forms, for different purposes and in different arenas.

Another element of interest that has emerged through the fieldwork is that the organisational structure of movements is still very relevant even in the digital era. Fridays for Future is heavily based on digital technologies and it assumes horizontalism as an ideal but it is far from the logic of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) that implies that collective identification and organizational control are no longer required. On the contrary, since the beginning, local structures and then a national one have emerged in parallel with a collective identity. The crucial point is that structures and collective identity are not prescriptive. None of the decisions taken at the national level can be imposed on local groups while the collective identity of the movement exercises an influence on individual identities but it preserves their diversity. The non-prescriptive national structure is the consequence of the aspiration to be as horizontal as possible, one of the most noticeable values of FFF Italy. However, this ideal inevitably creates conflicts in a movement based on the logic of numbers and that aspires to produce a radical change in a relatively small period. The decision of creating a charge such as the spokesperson exemplifies the compromise between the ideal of horizontalism and pragmatism. On one hand, they speak in the name of the movement and they de facto exercise some functions of leadership. On the other, they are eight people who are not entitled to take decisions. The articulated process of the creation of the charge exemplifies that the evolution

of the structure of movements is based on a process of trial and error and experimentation, and nothing is written in stone. The greatest challenges are perhaps to make the structure transparent to everybody inside the movement, to reduce the phenomenon of drop-outs and to harness the benefits of leadership without leading to the concentration of power in a few hands.

This research has cast a different light on social media. For authors such as Castells (2015) the internet allows the construction of autonomous communication free from the control of power. However, mainstream social media controlled by corporations such as Meta and plutocrats such as Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk are far from that ideal model since what we see is selected by nonneutral algorithms and subjected to censure. The alternative social media used by the movement prefigure a more sustainable, decentralized, democratic and ethical web. They have the potential to build this autonomous capacity but only if they substantially increase their now limited audience. The combined use of mainstream and alternative social media by FFF Italy is again a compromise between its ideals and the pragmatic necessity to foster a radical change in a relatively short period of time.

The embedding of the sense of urgency is certainly one of the most typical aspects of climate movements such as Fridays for Future. It is a powerful emotional resource that is used for internal and external purposes such as recruiting and mobilising activists, attracting media attention, and pressuring policy-makers. However, its prolonged use in the medium-long period risks becoming unsustainable and ineffective. This also brings to the table the invisibilized and under-discussed issue of the self-sacrifice of climate activists that hurts both them and the movement. The debate on the necessity to find more balanced and healthy forms of activism is open and it assumes a central position whenever more disruptive direct actions are contemplated.

One of the most powerful resources to balance that kind of sacrifice, tackle frustration and prevent burnout is pleasure, a neglected dimension in social movement studies. Pleasure is also a resource and incentive used to sustain commitment, galvanize and recruit activists, reinvent tactics and garner media attention. If the activities carried on by movements were unpleasant, only very motivated and engaged activists would likely continue to struggle. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic brought a sense of insufficient gratification that demotivated many activists and sympathisers until the phase that I call “rebound”, which started in September 2021. This integration of pleasure inside political activities is in a way anti-hegemonic. In the liquid modernity, individuals believe that satisfaction of desires happens through the instantaneous consumption of market goods, but this becomes a compulsive and never-ending activity (Bauman, 2007). Hence, pleasure is commodified and

subjected to the logic of consumerism, individualism and capitalism. At the same, I add, the expectation is that political activity must be super-serious, institutional and even a bit boring and unpleasant. The embodiment of irony, provocation, and pleasure in activities outside the logic of the market and politically oriented breaks with this hegemony and prefigure a world in which politics is still passionate, joyful and pleasant. Finally, pleasure is not only a resource but also a goal per se. The reduction of working hours and the redistribution advocated by the movement form part of a vision of a future not only based on equality, sobriety, harmony with nature and solidarity but also on free time, creativity, social relations and pleasure, the contrary to our productivist, competitive and consumerist society.

One of the crucial benefits of the dimension of pleasure is that it helps recruit activists and mobilise demonstrators potentially even beyond the classic environmentalism constituencies, as also sustained by Martiskainen et al. (2020). This makes the issue of individual motivations more complex. During the fieldwork, it emerged that instrumental and expressive motivations can coexist and activists may try to pursue their personal ends and the group ends at the same time. This is not meant to delegitimise the movement or activists but to show the complexity and plurality of motivations.

The anti-hegemonic nature of the pleasure of activism brings us to the countercultural dimension of Fridays for Future and its relation with the political struggle. One of the classic dichotomies of social movement studies is between old social movements, supposed to be focused on political struggles and material claims, and new social movements, centred on the cultural arena and post-material claims. I do not want to enter into this outdated discussion if the two assumptions are true but only to notice the absence of this kind of juxtaposition in FFF Italy. First, Fridays for Future frames the climate crisis and our potential future not only as an injustice but also as a threat to all our human rights and even as an existential threat. Holmberg & Alvinus (2020) convincingly affirm that FFF has explicitly securitized the climate crisis. Also, while its practices embody a political-cultural claim for more participation and revindication of difference, when we look at its demands, the redistribution of wealth is one of the priorities. It is clear then, that the old view of environmentalism as a post-material movement does not apply to Fridays for Future. Second, the movement's strategy mainly combines political pressure on policy-makers through climate strikes and advocacy but also countercultural fights that challenge hegemonic discourses based on individualism, market-based and fossil-fuels solutionism as well as the destructive practices that form part of our imperial mode of living. Hence, culturally oriented and politically oriented actions must not be seen in juxtaposition but as complementary and synergic. These reflections are in line with the hypothesis by Caruso (2010)

that contemporary movements synthesize the material dimension of the workers' movement and the construction of cultural codes by New Social Movements. Teani (2018) also validated this hypothesis in his work on the movements for the right to live in Milan and Barcelona.

One of the key components of the countercultural struggle is the modification of individual identities and the acquisition of a radical ecological habitus that could predispose people to understand and interpret the world differently and become transformative forces in every aspect of their lives, including the private sphere and starting with their families. Through this subpoliticization of daily life, social movements such as FFF have the potential to produce a stratum of more active participants in democracy whose consequences go beyond the short-term political outcomes, as Fisher (2019) also suggests. Moreover, the newly acquired habitus prefigures another way of living on the planet, based on bikes and public transport, alternative social media, plant-based diets, solidarity and participatory democracy. Brand & Wissen (2021) would call it a solidary mode of living in juxtaposition with the imperial mode of living that hegemonizes our societies.

### Limitations and further studies

In each chapter, I have already discussed some of the limitations of the study. Here, it is important to recall them and make some considerations about potential further studies that could address these limitations.

Semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation always imply the selection of a nonrepresentative sample of people, time and place (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Inside Fridays for Future, there are around 40 working and discussion groups active at the national level and more than 160 local groups. During the fieldwork, I had the opportunity of observing and analyse a part of them in a specific period (November 2020-April 2022). Thanks to the feedback received from some of the activists, it was possible to generalize some of the conclusions but not necessarily all. Whenever possible, it has been underlined that a finding is specific to the group of Milan or others but that it cannot be generalised. In any case, as Schofield (2002) notices, generalizability is frequently considered irrelevant or barely important in qualitative research and alternative concepts have been used, such as fittingness (the degree to which the situation studied matches other similar), comparability (the use of the results of the study for comparison), and naturalistic generalization (the use of the results to understand another similar situation).

One of the recurrent points that emerged in the fieldwork was the weakness of Southern local groups (compared to Northern) and in general the difficulties they experiment in mobilising in their cities. This is likely to be the partial consequence of the South-North migration of university students, but other factors may be involved too. In general, civil society is traditionally weaker in Southern regions than in Northern (Ginsborg, 2013; Moro & Vannini, 2006; Putnam, 1993). According to the famous and controversial thesis by Robert Putnam (1993), this gap has roots in the history of communes in the North of Italy that fostered mutual trust, political participation and a horizontal system of governing while in the same period, the South was experiencing a more feudal and autocratic system. On the other hand, civil society in the South is at the forefront of the struggle against the mafia (Moro & Vannini, 2006) so it is also possible that this factor takes many youths away from climate activism.

The transnationalization of collective actions and the supranational structure of the movement are other aspects that would require specific studies. It would be especially interesting to study how the global level of the movement plays an influence on FFF's narratives, frames, tactics, ideological influences, and identity and how these are adapted to the national context. Further studies could also deepen the communicative strategy of the movement and cast a light on the similarities and differences between local groups, taking into account internal and external factors such as the local Political Opportunities Structures.

This research was qualitative and focused on the meso-level (the movement). A quantitative survey on activists with socio-demographic, cognitive and motivational aspects could be conducted to complement it. Another quantitative method that could be used in further studies is the Protest Event Analysis (PEA) which systematically analyzes protest events over time and space, generally using mass media as the data source. In this way, it could be possible to compare the evolution of the tactics adopted by Fridays for Future and the Climate Justice Movement in general.

The issue of the outcomes of climate activism assumes special importance since without a quick decarbonisation of our economies we risk reaching some of the climate tipping points that could trigger a cascade of devastating and irreversible changes on the global level. In this case, too, we would need a specific study of the outcomes of FFF. I believe one of the most important points to be studied is the absence of an electoral push for Europa Verde while the green parties of Germany, Austria, Belgium, and Ireland have considerably increased their votes thanks to climate protests, and they form part of their national governments. For instance, Faber et al. (2022) found evidence that FFF influenced parents' political behaviour, politicians' public position toward climate change, and

the intensity of media reports. In quantitative terms, the authors argue that local FFF engagement can explain 13% of the Greens' average vote gain over previous elections. Methodologically, a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) could be conducted to evaluate the different impacts of FFF's national sections. We also need to take into account that the lack of a strong green party is historically shared also by other Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece.

These considerations on the limited short-term political outcomes of the movement, however, do not enclose the broad issue of its impact. Even if further studies are needed, it is possible that Fridays for Future “is creating a cohort of citizens who will be active participants in democracy” (Fisher, 2009, p. 430). The impact on public opinion is another aspect that requires further research as well as the cultural impact. Pigni & Raffini (2022) affirm that even if the student movement of 1968 produced a limited political impact, it greatly influenced the cultural sphere. All these last potential studies would require a longitudinal research design.

### The legacy of the movement and future perspectives

It is important to end this chapter by highlighting the potential legacy of the movement and some future perspectives that go beyond it. The approval and implementation of effective climate policies and the acceleration of the ecological transition in Italy seem to clash with a plethora of barriers represented by the polluter elite, the fear of destroying jobs, producing social unrest and losing consensus, the ideology of economic growth and a general undervaluation of the risks of the climate crisis, that include complex cognitive and psychological factors. Besides it does not seem that FFF Italy could radically change this scenario, some potential legacies can still be identified.

To begin, Fridays for Future Italy has brought new energies to the Italian environmental movement which has not been able to conduct wide national mobilisations for a long period, with some exceptions such as the referendum against nuclear power and for public water in 2011. FFF Italy has emerged and developed by absorbing and adapting claims, values, frames, tactics, and forms of organization from past and contemporary movements, in Italy and abroad. In specific, FFF Italy is not only the new vanguard of Italian environmentalism but somehow the heir of the Italian student movements and the Global Justice Movement. In this sense, the movement can be seen as a sponge that selectively absorbs inputs but that also releases outputs that influence political and social actors. For instance, in the last years, not only the European Union but also mainstream environmental

NGOs, Locally Unwanted Land Use movements, Amnesty International and even United Nations agencies such as UNICEF have put the climate crisis at the centre of their actions and programmes.

It is also important to say that climate movements such as FFF are performing an essential intergenerational and pan-species democratic function since they are bringing an unattended issue to the public that risks having a dramatic impact on those who are more vulnerable and have no voice in the political system, among them children, youths, future generations and non-human species. FFF claims to represent all of them and especially those youths from the Z Generation whose present and future are at stake because the political system is not acting to solve its problems, including the climate crisis and the other succession of multiple economic, social, political, environmental and health crises. Facing a political system they perceive as gerontocratic and post-democratic, many youths choose abstention and de-politicization or anti-systemic and populist parties that challenge the liberal democracy, the European Union and scapegoat migrants (Pirni & Raffini, 2022).

On the other hand, FFF represents an alternative source of politicization and re-socialization and a real school of democracy and empowerment for youths. Fridays for Future blames too a system that it accuses of being hijacked by private and elite interests and that systemically excludes the agenda of youths. This blaming frequently assumes the form of monitoring policy-makers and unveiling greenwashing and other forms of climate delayism, an essential democratic function. On the other hand, the movement rejects populist solutions and claims that the solution to unblock the climate impasse is a massive social mobilisation through its democratic channels. This activism is stratified among different geographic levels (local, national, European and global) and it erases the distinction between the private and the public sphere, politicizing and subpoliticizing the daily lives of activists and their social networks. Through this broad mobilisation, FFF affirms that the future can be “opened” in the sense that it can be subjected to a positive human and democratic dominion, like what the movements of the late 1960s claimed to do (Leccardi, 2012). The movement’s ambitious political proposals for a just ecological transition (*Ritorno Al Futuro* and *Agenda Climatica*) imagine a responsible utopia centred on hope and justice, rather than despair and fear, as in the tradition of doomist environmentalism. The message that there is still time to change, that change is possible by mobilising and the effort of ecotopic imagination is highly relevant for a generation raised among multiple crises and catastrophist narratives. Moreover, the message sent by the movement is that the “new normality” is not necessarily a drastic reduction of the quality of life and pleasure. On the contrary, through the reduction of traffic, pollution and working hours, and a process of redistribution we have the opportunity to live a better life and be in harmony with nature (to which we belong even



though we have neglected it). This re-opening of the future or effort of imagination of an alternative is also an essential democratic function and an important legacy of Fridays for Future.

The networking realized by FFF Italy between workers, scientists, environmentalists and other forms of activism is also a legacy that has potential implications for the future. I believe that the just ecological transition could be effectively pushed by a great popular movement that can raise only by breaking down the barriers between generations, between science and activism, between environmentalism and labour and between social movements (feminism, ecologism, anti-racism, pacifism and so on). The alliance with the *Collettivo di Fabbrica* has historical importance because it erases the barriers between environmentalism and labour, and it reinforces the social justice claims of FFF Italy and, consequently, its credibility and reputation. The case of Civitavecchia is also highly relevant since for one time environmentalists and workers are on the same side against fossil fuels and pro-renewable energies. On the other hand, the direct participation of the working-class in the ecological movement is still limited as well as mainstream unions' engagement in the climate struggle. The road to convergence between labour and ecologism is still long.

After four years of mobilisation, the delusion inside Fridays for Future Italy is palpable. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic is surely less threatening and the conditions of mobilisation are more favourable, the novelty effect of FFF is over. At the European level, the climate ambitions are higher thanks to the movement but still insufficient and debatable, starting with the concept of “green growth”. The Italian ecological transition is not on a satisfactory track while the right-wing government led by Giorgia Meloni is at the antipodes of climate justice movements. It is quite likely that in the next years the national Political Opportunity Structure will be more closed than in the past ones. Advocacy could find significant barriers while marches-strikes need to reinvent themselves to avoid the sensation of déjà vu that could reduce their potential. On the other hand, tactical radicalization is already an ongoing process for several activists and the definition of the relationship between FFF Italy and this kind of struggle is essential.

The issue of direct political participation remains open as well. The absence of a strong ally in the Parliament or at least a strong sympathetic party such as the Greens is surely one of the main differences with countries such as Germany, Austria and Belgium. For the 2022's elections, few activists were candidates but not in the name of the movement. The “electoral” strategy and in more in general the relationship with parties is likely to become a key topic in the movement, with potential new outcomes such as the creation of an ad hoc party as some advocate for.

We live in times of quick and unexpected changes, with the manifestations of the climate crisis becoming more severe and widespread year after year. The more we wait, the more radical become the measures that must be taken to mitigate its effects and adapt to the new scenario. The more we wait, the more the worst scenarios depicted by climate science become likely, until putting in danger the permanence of life on Earth. Climate activism is an essential battle for our human rights and democracy and to limit the massive extinctions that are already occurring. Unless governments will drastically decarbonize our economies in the next years, climate protests are destined to multiply and even radicalize as the current scenario is prefiguring. Once more, the environment confirms to be a battlefield. I believe all this will be a crucial sociological issue in the next years. The history of social movements suggests a dynamic of waves and common tendencies to disappear or institutionalize. The future of FFF is unknown and perhaps this is not even the most important question since what really counts is which forms climate activism will assume and how much it will be able to shape our societies in the proximate future.

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## Annexe 1: interview guide for semi-structured interviews

**I would like to start by asking for some information on you and your family.**

Age:

Gender:

Profession:

City of residence:

Profession of your father:

Title of study of your father:

Profession of your mother:

Title of study of your mother:

### **Adhesion to FFF**

To begin with, I'd like to tell me how you became a Fridays for Future activist.

Which are the reasons that motivated you to become an activist?

Can I ask you why you decided to become a Fridays for Future activist instead of joining other groups, associations or ecological parties?

Is there any emotion that pushed you to become an activist?

### **Activism in the past and present**

Have you ever belonged, or do you currently belong, to other social movements, associations, parties, groups, social centres or similar?

### **Actions**

To which actions by Fridays for Future have you participated so far?

How has your activism changed with the arrival of the pandemic?

Now, I'd like to ask you a more sensitive question. I'd like to know if, to achieve the movement's goals, you consider that is right to take nonviolent actions that disobey the law. And if yes, which ones?

### **Impact**

Has joining Fridays for Future changed your life in some way?

According to you, what is the impact of Fridays for Future in Italy so far?

### **Vision of the world**

Is there any value, ideology, religion or idea that guides you or inspires you as an activist?

Which are the responsible for the climate crisis, according to you?

Which ones do you consider to be the main solutions to the climate crisis?

Now I'd like to ask you a final question: how do you imagine the future of this planet?

I've finished with the questions, do you want to add anything?



## Annexe 2: semi-structured interviews with activists

N	Macro-region	Age	Gender	Profession	Pseudonym	Identification code
1	Centre	20	Female	Student	Agnese	C20F
2	Centre	21	Female	Student	Marta	C21F
3	South and islands	15	Female	Student	Sara	S15F
4	South and islands	24	Female	Student	Antonia	S24F
5	South and islands	34	Male	Engineer	Marco	S34M
6	South and islands	18	Male	Student	Luca	S18M
7	South and islands	21	Non-binary	Student	Andrea	S21N
8	South and islands	17	Female	Student	Maria	S17F
9	North-East	23	Female	Student	Rita	NE23F
10	North-East	18	Male	Student	Roberto	NE18M
11	North-East	18	Female	Student	Carla	NE18F
12	North-West	18	Female	Student	Chiara	NW18Fa
13	North-West	18	Female	Student	Carola	NW18Fb
14	North-West	26	Non-binary	Student	Alex	NW26N
15	North-West	19	Male	Student	Matteo	NW19M

## Annexe 3: semi-structured interviews with key informant activists

N	Role of interest	Topic	Pseudonym
1	Gatekeeper	Introduction to Fridays for Future, local and national structures, adaptation to the pandemic, political strategy	Marcello
2	Activist from Pisa	Foundation of Pisa's local group	Giada
3	Activist from the working group "Politica"	Political strategy and relations	Leonardo
4	Activist from several international working groups	Trans-national relations and campaigns	Ludovico
5	Activist from Milan	Foundation of Milan's local group and creation of the national structure	Camilla
6	Activist from the working group "Local groups support"	The problem of defections and strategies to tackle it	Enzo
7	Activist from the working group "Politics"	Political strategy and relations	Gioele
8	Activist from the working group "Relations with schools"	Activities in schools	Michele
9	Activist from the working group "Trade unions"	Relations with trade unions	Giovanni
10	National spokesperson	History and future of the movement	Agata