

LOVE AND RAGE

How Extinction Rebellion's approach to navigating tensions can advance the co-creation of sustainability transitions



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“There is this realisation that tensions are not bad things. And we actually want to actively engage with tensions - that's what moves the debate forward.

A lot of parties, companies, environmental NGO's try their best to find a way to relate to each other and cooperate. And then you have XR, saying 'this is also something we should talk about'. And we will just occupy your lobbies, we will come by your ministry. We'll do everything. We are creating this tension because we need this. We need to do something about it, we need to feel the tension.

*XR is very much aware that the tactics they use might be very annoying, and that people have an opinion about it. But it's exactly out of this discomfort, out of this fury, out of this rage that you feel with the system...
that's when you're going to act.*

Love and rage.”

Abstract

Introduction Sustainability transitions require stakeholders of all areas to collaborate and co-create. Doing so, they are faced with tensions through conflicting ideas. While previous research has highlighted the productive and democratic potential that lies in tensions, little academic work has been done towards the practicalities of navigating tensions in complex transitions. **Theory** Using a narrative lens, this research therefore examines how people active in the climate movement Extinction Rebellion Netherlands engage with tensions productively, and where they still struggle. **Methods** Data was gained through an in-depth literature and document review, as well as 12 semi-structured interviews with rebels of XRNL. Transcripts and relevant literature were then coded inductively using NVivo. **Results** The data analysis shows that XRNL makes use of four interrelated approaches when navigating tensions, being: 1) Relativising perspectives, being aware of the limits and subjectivity of one's own narrative; 2) Speaking up, having multiple and diverse spaces to voice issues (and feeling safe to do so); 3) Sociocratic decision-making, making decisions in small circles at low levels, holding rounds to hear every voice, while distinguishing between objections and concerns for consent; and 4) Giving autonomy, letting each rebel decide on the form and frequency of their involvement. The approaches are enabled and regulated by a shared baseline of core values, demands, and action consensuses. However, tensions that question the baseline quickly become polarising. Ongoing discussions on the interpretation of climate justice, as well as the justification for the use of violence pose significant challenges for the future of XR as a movement. **Discussion** The framework forms a start on the practicalities of navigating tensions in sustainability transitions, which has previously been theorised only on abstract levels. However, it needs to be tested and built further through other contexts and stakeholders. **Conclusion** The key takeaway of the research is that tensions are a crucial part of any transition that aims to be just and democratic, and therefore need to be embraced, not avoided. The approaches of Extinction Rebellion can support stakeholders across sustainability transitions in doing so, enabling collaborative efforts.

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01 Introduction

In the news, through books, in documentaries, even in music and art: the need for change to more sustainable lifestyles has become widely recognised. However, *how* this should be done is contested. Many ideas, stories, and pathways exist, proposing different solutions (Stefani et al., 2022). While sustainability academics have recognised that a complex problem does call for a plurality of solutions (Scoones et al., 2020), narratives are often opposing, inhibiting progress (Kalt, 2021; Lejano et al., 2020; Luederitz et al., 2017). Even more so, narratives can iteratively become more relative to each other, ultimately problematising the solution the other narrative suggests – therefore undermining the possibility of change by narrowing the solution space (Warner, 2019). This polarisation is not only an issue in sustainability-related transitions; the Covid-19 pandemic (Wansink & Timmer, 2020), Brexit (Duffy et al., 2019), and global migration movements (Stjepandić et al., 2022) are all examples of strong polarisation of narratives.

Therefore, a growing research body recognises the need not for new narratives, but to bridge existing narratives and the fragmented groups behind them. Often, commonalities are emphasised as a major approach to bridge gaps: finding shared ideas to establish joint action (Frank, 2017; Luederitz et al., 2017; Riedy, 2020). As a superlative of this commonalities approach, metanarratives are suggested to function as a grounding framework, connecting multiple existing narratives towards one overarching narrative (Bushell & Colley, 2016; Lejano et al., 2020). However, their possibility and desirability is disputed: agreement on everything seems a foolish goal, while ignoring disagreements erases valuable perspectives. Indeed, Vandepitte (2023) describes that *“creating common ground might still require sharp edges”* (Vandepitte, 2023, p. 1). These “sharp edges” are found in tensions.

Next to embracing commonalities, a strand of researchers raises attention to the potential in tensions: while academics have largely recognised the need for collaborative solutions, little is known about the role of narratives in *how* to navigate tensions and enable transitions (Chambers et al., 2022). For example, while Riedy (2020) recognises both the potential in commonalities as well as conflicts in sustainability transition narratives, they offer no advice on how to do the latter: *“While these conflicts may act as barriers to the formation of discourse coalitions, they can also act as generative sites for agonistic dialogue across discourses”* (Riedy, 2020, p. 108). Similarly, Vandepitte (2023) describes how tensions in opposing climate narratives can build ground for mutual learning, but offers little practical description to the matter.

This lack of (practical) understanding on how to navigate tensions shows a clear need to study cases where this has actively taken place: where and how actors have navigated tensions in ways that build collective movements, embracing rather than erasing differences, while still orienting people towards shared action. Looking at collective movements and shared action, the research field of social movements is particularly fitting. The emergence and mobilisation of social movements is able to tell researchers a great deal about the shifts in society (Polletta & Gardner, 2015). Especially in moments of challenge and transformation, social movements take in a space of “agents of interpretation” (Snow et al., 2018). Doing so, they are faced with tensions that need to be navigated in order to move towards their goal (Luederitz et al., 2017).

The Case of Extinction Rebellion

Considering the challenge that sustainability transitions entail, social movements are therefore an interesting example on how tensions are navigated. As one of the latest rises in social movements (Gardner et al., 2022), the climate activist movement *Extinction Rebellion* (XR) forms a suitable case study, as XR has built a global movement in an extraordinary amount of time. Started five years ago by 15 people in a small English town, XR is now active in every continent except Antarctica (Extinction Rebellion, 2019). After touring the country and holding talks focused on the science of climate change, the group announced a *Declaration of Rebellion* against the UK Government on 31 October 2018. One year later, the world saw an “unprecedented scale” in the coordination of climate protests: together with Fridays For Future (FFF), XR has mobilised a historically large number of people (de Moor et al., 2021).

Central to Extinction Rebellion are the concepts of civil disobedience and nonviolent direct action: through mobilisations such as roadblocks, protests, and gluing themselves to the ground, the group aims to cause “*as much economic and civil disruption as (they) possibly could*” (Extinction Rebellion, 2019, p. 15) – to shake the political system and raise awareness for the climate crisis, respectively. While this strategy of civil disobedience isn't new in activist movements, the emphasis that XR puts on it is much stronger and more central than before (de Moor et al., 2021).

With their mobilisations XR wants to “*force governments all over the world to act*” (Extinction Rebellion, 2019, p. 14). Unlike previous climate movements that focused on corporate and individual change, XR redirects focus to the state-level: local and national governments are the ones responsible for implementing solutions (de Moor et al., 2021). Those solutions are summarised in three key demands to the government: 1) “tell the truth”, by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, 2) “act now”, by reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025, and 3) “go beyond politics”, by creating a Citizen's Assembly. Recently, a fourth demand was added: Demand 0, asking for “climate justice for all”, therefore centring the voices of those most affected by climate change, and holding those responsible for it accountable. As the movement aims to implement the demand from the bottom up, it is not fully integrated yet. Described more in depth later on, Zantvoort (2021) formed an excellent review over the controversies of this demand, describing the tension that rebels experienced in relation to the urgency with which actions need to be taken, and the justice that the actions need to represent.

THIS IS WHAT WE'RE FIGHTING FOR

OUR DEMANDS

0. CLIMATE JUSTICE FOR ALL: We demand a just transition that centres the needs and voices of those on the environmental frontline and holds to account those most responsible for ecological breakdown.*

1. WEES EERLIJK over de klimaatcrisis en de ecologische ramp die ons voortbestaan bedreigen. Maak mensen bewust van de noodzaak voor grootschalige verandering.

2. DOE WAT NODIG IS om biodiversiteitsverlies te stoppen en verminder de uitstoot van broeikasgassen naar netto nul in 2025. Doe dit op een rechtvaardige manier.

3. LAAT BURGERS BESLISSEN over een rechtvaardige transitie door het oprichten van een Burgerberaad dat een leidende rol speelt in de besluitvorming.

* We are in the process of implementing 'Demand 0: Climate Justice for All' in our movement. This summer, a national People's Assembly organised by Extinction Rebellion supported implementing this demand. However, we recognize the mistakes XR has made on this topic in the past. That's why in a ground-up process, we want to go through all local groups as well so we don't only officially implement this demand, but really integrate it. You can read more on demand 0 on demand0.nl.

Figure 1 Key demands of XRNL (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023c)

The demands are enacted through ten basic principles and core values. Next to nonviolence, the values emphasise the reflective character of the movement, its inclusivity, as well as its decentralisation, to name a few (see Figure 2). Importantly, anyone that adheres to these principles is allowed to act in the name of Extinction Rebellion (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023c), making it very simple to replicate the movement in different spaces and through different actions.

- 1 WE HAVE A SHARED VISION OF CHANGE**
a world that is fit for generations to come.
- 2 WE SET OUR MISSION ON WHAT IS NECESSARY**
Mobilising a significant part of the population to achieve system change.
- 3 WE NEED A REGENERATIVE CULTURE**
Creating a culture which is healthy, resilient and adaptable.
- 4 WE OPENLY CHALLENGE OURSELVES AND THIS TOXIC SYSTEM**
Leaving our comfort zones to take action for change.
- 5 WE VALUE REFLECTING AND LEARNING**
Following a cycle of action, reflection, learning, and planning for more action. Learning from other movements and contexts as well as our own experiences.
- 6 WE WELCOME EVERYONE AND EVERY PART OF EVERYONE**
Working actively to create safer and more accessible spaces.
- 7 WE ACTIVELY MITIGATE FOR POWER**
Breaking down hierarchies of power for more equitable participation.
- 8 WE AVOID BLAMING AND SHAMING**
We live in a toxic system, but no one individual is to blame.
- 9 WE ARE A NON-VIOLENT NETWORK**
Using non-violent strategy and tactics as the most effective way to bring about change.
- 10 WE ARE BASED ON AUTONOMY AND DECENTRALISATION**
We collectively create the structures we need to challenge power. Anyone who follows these core principles and values can take action in the name of Extinction Rebellion.

Figure 2 Core demands of XNRL (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023c)

Indeed, Zantvoort (2021) accounts the rapid growth of XR to the high level of replicability of the movement. The sudden rise of the group has also been of interest to other researchers - previous research has mostly looked into the movement's spread: Gardner et al. (2022) analysed the transnational diffusion of XR, finding that major protest events were instrumental to the spreading of the movement. De Moor et al. (2021) has tried to understand XR's spread by comparing their characteristics to earlier activist groups. Next to the previously mentioned differences, they found that XR is novel in its ability to mobilise newcomers; especially students and women constitute a strong increase of participants.

Other social groups such as scientists, health practitioners, or the disabled community have joined the movement, too (Rebellion Global, 2023). However, biases in participant's educational background remain: while XR has the clear aim to reach a broad audience, the majority of protesters have a connection to university-level education (de Moor et al., 2021) and are white and wealthy (Zantvoort, 2021). Indeed, XR's culture (Bell & Bevan, 2021; Westwell & Bunting, 2020), use of science (Matthews, 2020; Rödder & Pavenstädt, 2022), and social composition (Saunders et al., 2020) have all been subject to critical examination.

Furthermore, de Moor et al. (2021)'s research finds ambiguity in XR's rationale for participation: the group simultaneously tells an apocalyptic narrative of future catastrophes, as well as using post-apocalyptic elements – arguing that climate change is already happening. While this ambiguity seems to “resonate with the activists’ mixed feelings of hope and despair”, de Moor et al. (2021) suggest more research is needed on how the contradicting time frames can be managed in the long run.

These contradictions and criticisms indicate that there are interesting tensions to be studied in the movement. Berglund & Schmidt (2020) have formed an excellent review, exploring some key strategic tensions of the group. For example, the authors found that XR is simultaneously reformist as well as revolutionary, meaning it is unclear whether they want to simply adapt or completely replace state structures. Next to that, Berglund & Schmidt (2020) question to what extent XR can afford to be solution agnostic; simply leaving solutions to a future citizen's assembly but not making strong demands themselves. This point was also raised by de Moor et al. (2021), questioning whether the movement needs to create a stronger vision to create a long-term mobilisation.

Another tension, perhaps the furthest reaching, is XR's reluctance to make statements on the political-economic context – in particular capitalism. Berglund & Schmidt (2020) recognise that it's not uncommon for social movements to not declare themselves anti-capitalist, as to not alienate any potential supporters that don't see themselves as such. However, while XR describes anti-capitalism as “lefty language” (XR, 2020) outside of their framing, the group does engage with key aspects of capitalism: from their book “This is not a drill” (Extinction Rebellion, 2019), Berglund & Schmidt (2020) point out statements such as:

our government has shattered meaningful democracy and cast aside the common interest in favour of short-term gain and private profit. (XR 2019, p. 2)

There are better ways to live, produce and to consume. (Shiva 2019)

The problem is Capitalism. The problem is Colonialism. The problem is Power. The problem is inequality. The problem is greed, and corruption, and money, and this tired, broken system. (Knights 2019, p. 12)

Figure 3 Anti-capitalist statements of XR (Berglund & Schmidt, 2020)

XR thus shows tension in how to position themselves: believing in the climate science that questions capitalism, but also being an outspoken activist group that aims to create mobilisation and thus needs to appeal to a broader audience. Relating to this tension in positionality, Stuart (2022) examines the tension between individual and systems change that people in XR experience. While climate change activists ask for systems change, they are often subject to accusations of hypocrisy based on their personal choices. Simultaneously, despite the conviction that systems change is necessary to address climate change, activists often do change their personal lifestyles. This tension between hypocrisy and justification of individual change creates conflicting positions for the activists.

As mentioned earlier, a particularly relevant paper on the topic was written by Zantvoort (2021). Employing action research in the Dutch branch of XR (XRNL), Zantvoort (2021) found a strong tension on the overarching mobilisation narrative of the group. While the core of the group highlighted the urgency of climate change as the main reason to act, rebels on the margins framed climate change as a social justice issue that needed addressing for a long time. In their research, Zantvoort (2021) explored how the Covid-19 pandemic functioned as a turning point to bring this justice narrative closer to the core of XRNL. Having to pause any direct actions such as protests during the pandemic meant that the activists were missing their major mobilisation narrative. Next to that, the pandemic brought a strong need to focus on mental health with it. Suddenly, the justice narrative and its regenerative aspects became much more important to rebels. This change in mindset manifested itself into the new “Demand 0”.

Zantvoort (2021) explained that two online *People's Assemblies* (PAs) played a large role in facilitating this process. Being one of the first times that PAs were used in XRNL, the assemblies brought together “a few dozen people from across the movement to deliberate on a particular set of questions” (Zantvoort, 2021, p. 9). While rebels noted that regular meetings didn't give enough space to discuss wider narratives such as social justice, the PAs opened up a dialogical space. During the first assembly, many rebels reflected for the first time on the interconnectedness of social justice and climate change, ultimately resulting in a strategy shift and the creation of a new working group focused on collaboration with other social movements. This showcases an approach of how XRNL navigated a tension. However, some questions remain: it is unclear, for example, whether PAs are still being used now, how they came to be, or how exactly they were structured and lead.

Furthermore, tensions around Demand 0 and climate justice in general remain. The recent escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict made this especially salient: during a climate march in Amsterdam, a Palestinian speaker's microphone was silenced as they did not stick to the agreed-upon script. When Greta Thunberg used her speech-time to offer the microphone back to the Palestinian speaker, a member of the crowd took over the stage to declare that they “*came here for a climate protest, not politics*” (Huisman, 2023). This incident shows how divided climate activists are on the topic: while to some, pro-Palestinian statements are directly related to, and a necessary part of, climate justice, to others the conflict stretches the idea too far, losing focus on the environmental issues at hand.

Next to these People's Assemblies, few papers have brought forth practical approaches on navigating tensions. While the papers of Berglund & Schmidt (2020), de Moor et al. (2021), Matthews (2020), Stuart (2022), and Zantvoort (2021) clearly show the presence of tensions within the movement, they have not yet situated them in a narrative context and connected them to narrative shifts. Tracing the social processes and reactions to these tensions in connection to the mobilising efforts of the group can create valuable new insights into the tools and approaches needed to co-create sustainability transitions, harnessing the power of tensions.

Extinction Rebellion Netherlands (XRNL), as highlighted by Zantvoort (2021), is an interesting case study: the country's situation means that the people are particularly vulnerable to rising sea levels as a result of climate change. Simultaneously, the Netherlands are at the “*heart of modern colonial power structures (...) and a major node in extractive agricultural industries*” (Zantvoort, 2021, p. 2) - thus constituting a significant part of the problem. Studying the resistance of XRNL to the local socio-economic systems, and the approaches to navigating emergent tensions, can result in relevant wider insights on how to navigate sustainability transitions. Next to that, being situated in the Netherlands and connected to other students in the sustainability realm, personal connections to people participating in XRNL are a relevant point for the choice of this case study. Therefore, the main question of this research is:

How does XRNL navigate tensions to develop mobilising narrative(s) for climate action?

Relevance

The papers above have shown that it is not necessarily more narratives on sustainability transitions that we need, but to bridge existing ones. While previous work has gone into the relevance of finding commonalities in these narratives, newer research also highlights the productive potential of tensions. However, we lack practical understanding in *how* to harness this potential. Creating a better conceptualisation of tensions in social movements is thus a highly relevant research addition. Next to that, it can show how a pluralism of narratives around sustainability transitions might exist, and even advance each other.

On a practical side, exploring approaches to the navigation of tensions can advance Extinction Rebellion's engagement with them, highlighting successful practices and simultaneously pointing out potential struggles of polarisation. The better the movement manages to navigate tensions productively, the more perspectives it can represent. This diversity would make the movement less alienating to specific groups. Therefore, improving the navigation of tensions can result in a more mobilising narrative, shaping the opinions on actions of more people, ultimately resulting in stronger climate action. The insights of this research to the productive navigation of tensions can further be applied to any setting where tensions are found; within social movements but also in broader organisational forms.

02 Theory & Concepts

In the following section I will outline the three key theories and concepts that shaped this research. First, a narrative analysis approach served as the grounding theory for the analysis, enabling the understanding of teller's subjective perspectives, and how they shape actions and ideas. Second, academic papers on tensions facilitated an understanding of the research content, predominantly structured around the conceptualisation of the agonistic struggle. Third, the concept of Sociocracy is highlighted. Throughout the research, it became clear that Extinction Rebellion utilises large parts of this organisational method. Therefore, supplying background information on the concept is crucial to the interpretation of the results chapter.

Narratives

Narrative analysis, originally from the social science realm, is used by scientists from all kinds of academic fields by now - from geology and chemistry to botany and psychology (Morgan et al., 2022). Since it is so universally applicable, definitions, assumptions, concerns, and foci vary across and even within the different sciences (Mazur, 2018), resulting in terms such as narrative, discourse, story, plot, and meme. This research focuses on the term *narrative* as an understanding, due to its subjective, performative and formative character. Explored more in the following bit, narratives build pathways that represent the teller's reality, while simultaneously shaping it. Due to their formative character, they can be intentionally crafted. When investigating collective action and mobilisation, narratives thus hold a lot of potential that is worth exploring - especially in a sustainability context.

Most of the academic approaches generally see narrative as a way to *"use stories and storytelling as a source of knowledge"* (Morgan et al., 2022), focusing on the structure, content, and context of written and spoken communication. Narratives have been generally defined as a sequence of events in the past (Franzosi, 1998). By now, scientists are aware that a narrative is not only a sequence of events; it consists of sequence and consequence: *"events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience"* (Riessman, 2005). This characteristic of selection, organisation and evaluation highlights the subjective nature of narratives. A narrative is the storyteller's representation of reality: it unveils opinions and perceptions on culture and humankind (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019). We understand that people and their surroundings are not fixed, there is not one "true" representation of reality (Mazur, 2018).

These opinions that shape a teller's reality then translate into actions (Fløttum & Gjerstad, 2017). However, scholars argue that beliefs and behaviour stand in an exchange relationship: not only do beliefs influence behaviour, behaviour also changes beliefs. In a process of self-persuasion and -justification, one action leads to another, therefore deepening the engagement with the topic and developing agency (De Meyer et al., 2021). Hence, narratives simultaneously make sense of- and shape the reality of the storyteller. As Luederitz et al. (2017) state: *"narratives are not merely stories, but they function as justification for particular interventions, essentially creating (pathways of) change"* (Luederitz et al., 2017, p. 394). This means that narratives hold strong power in guiding people's actions, and also that people's actions in turn hold the potential to reinforce or challenge particular narratives. This gives narratives the potential to be intentionally formed in order to achieve a desired outcome.

Lejano et al. (2020) show a great example of this power using the case of climate-sceptics in America. Albeit the inherently scientific character of climate change, the climate-sceptic narrative managed to construct a counter-narrative to the one held by the majority of the scientific community. This counter-narrative is so convincing that 28% of the American public support it – of those, half even believe climate scientists to be part of a grand conspiracy (Lejano et al., 2020). The movement was thus able to completely uproot the climate change narrative from its scientific background, and place it in an anti-science narrative so successfully that more than a quarter of the American public believe it.

The example of Lejano et al. (2020) shows that narratives hold strong mobilising power: they can move people towards certain beliefs and actions, uniting under a shared vision. Essentially, the more mobilising a narrative is, the more people find themselves in it, supporting the content or goal. Jerneck (2014) argues that a mobilising narrative on climate change “*must include direction (toward sustainability), distribution (global inclusiveness), and diversity (multiple approaches, methods, and solutions)*” (Jerneck, 2014, p. 2). However, they argue that such a narrative is to be created through synergising existing ones. In the context of this research, it therefore becomes interesting to examine whether mobilising narratives can also be formed through tensions, essentially contrasting existing narratives, and what that process could look like.

Tensions

The example of the climate-sceptics highlights the ability of narratives to unify people behind a certain belief (Bevan et al., 2020; Bushell & Colley, 2016; Lejano et al., 2020). However, that simultaneously means that narratives can have a disconnecting effect, polarising and dividing individuals and groups (Luederitz et al., 2017; Riedy, 2020; Warner, 2019). Whereas commonly, research and practice tries to erase or solve such tensions (e.g. Bushell & Colley, 2016; Luederitz et al., 2017), other research sees the potential source of productivity and creativity in tensions.

This idea is captured in *agonistics*, a concept popularised by Laclau & Mouffe (2001). Arguing that differences inherently need to exist in order to define ourselves, wanting to erase them is unproductive: “*agreement on everything is unattainable and undesirable – it would flatten plurality and remove productive tensions (...)*” (Riedy, 2020, p. 105). The *agonistic struggle* then describes the process of using these inherent differences productively, rather than letting them become antagonisms. Through agonistic struggles, we can achieve *agonistic pluralism*: where differing views are a necessary part of progress, rather than a barrier to it.

Verloo (2018b) makes use of Mouffe’s agonistic approach but argues that it lacks practice-based knowledge on the mechanisms of its implementation. Looking at its application at an urban policy level, they define *critical moments*, which “*shift the meaning and sequence of events (Cobb, 2006) and function as a lens to interpret meaning and action as a conflict unfolds*” (Verloo, 2018b). Considering this focus on the practical application of the concept, using Verloo’s idea of defining critical moments can be a useful tool in understanding the tensions found in this research.

One research that applies a practical lens to tensions in a social movement context is Zantvoort (2021). They see tensions as resistance to, and contestation of, dominant narratives.

Tensions are critiques that surface through discussions. Zantvoort (2021) found that tensions arise between the margins and core narratives of movements. Having followed the process of such a tension moving from the margins to the core, they were able to explain a major shift in Extinction Rebellion NL's strategy and overarching narrative, making it more inclusive to a broader set of people. As Zantvoort (2021) points out, a set of People's Assemblies were an important tool in this process.

Sociocracy

Throughout the research it became clear that the concept of Sociocracy forms significant input to the organisational structure of Extinction Rebellion. After a brief historic background on the concept, tracing its development, its application within XR will be explored. Sociocracy - not to be confused with the similar sounding *Socratic method*, a form of argumentative dialogue named after the philosopher Socrates - is a concept first coined by Auguste Comte in 1851. The term derives from the Latin word "socius", for companion, and the Ancient Greek "krátos", for power, thus translating into "the rule of the companions". While Comte originally used the term to describe his idea of a state governed by a body of sociologists, the concept, influenced by various developments over the years, was developed into an organisational method (Figure 4). In its latest format, Sociocracy 3.0, the concept is now defined as "An approach for organising together where people affected by decisions can influence them on the basis of reasons to do so." (Bockelbrink et al., 2022, p. 271). Its aim is to develop agile, decentralised organisations that focus on collaboration and the navigation of complexity. To do so, the concept presents various principles and practices, that stakeholders can combine as needed.

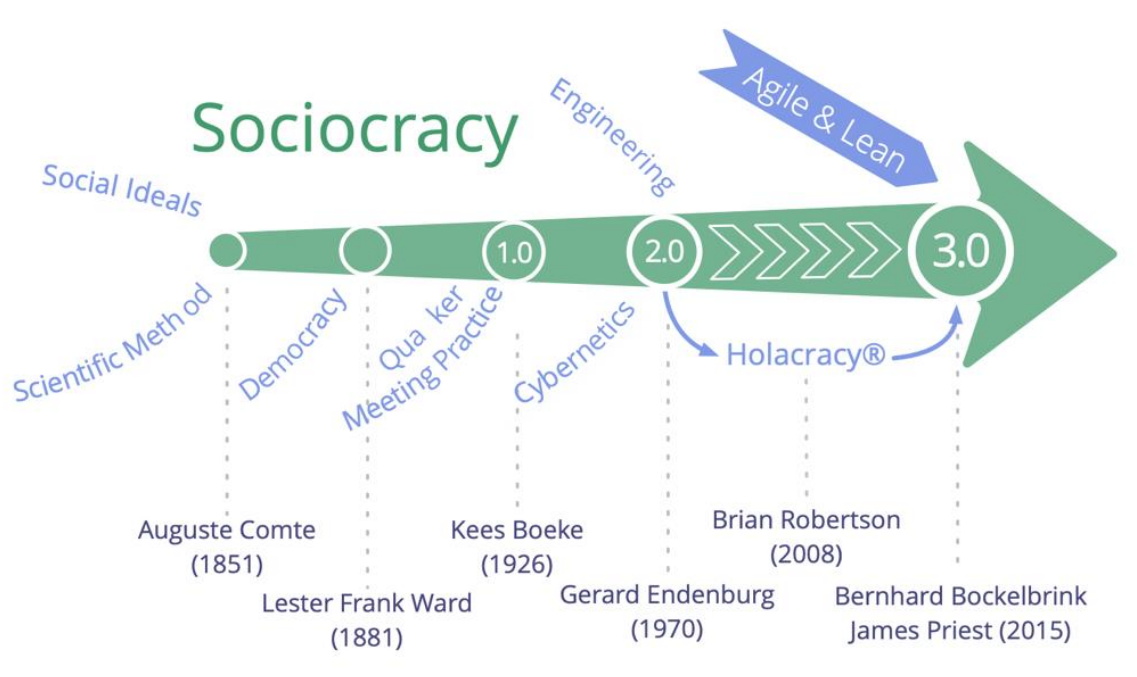


Figure 4 Influences and history of Sociocracy 3.0 (Bockelbrink et al., 2022)

One of the key practices of Sociocracy 3.0 is a circle structure, where an organisation groups employees into a "self-governing and semi-autonomous team of equivalent people who collaborate to account for a domain" (Bockelbrink et al., 2022, p. 154). The definition thus emphasises three criteria: self-governing, semi-autonomous, and the equivalence of circle members. Simply put, this means that within their domain (semi-autonomous), circle

members are free to decide what, how, and when it will be done (self-governing), with every member being equally accountable for its governance (equivalence). Furthermore, members can be given roles, delegating responsibility for a sub-domain to that individual. Like circles, roles are semi-autonomous and self-governing.

Extinction Rebellion Netherlands uses the Sociocratic circle structure and translates this into national, local, and community circles. Circles on the national level are tasked with matters that concern the whole movement, such as the management of the national website, or collaboration with other movements. Local circles are defined by location, thus creating groups in, for example, Utrecht, Rotterdam, or Amsterdam. Community circles are bound by shared interests or identity, such as XR Scientists or XR Agriculture. Each circle differs in size and activity, and rebels are free to decide which circle(s) they want to join. Furthermore, each circle is given a mandate (domain) that allows them to make decisions independently of other circles.

XRNL also makes use of the role division that Bockelbrink et al. (2022) suggest. While circles can decide themselves which roles they need, most have at least the following four (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023c):

- **Facilitator:** enables efficient and pleasant meetings by making room for everyone, ensuring the agenda is followed and managing the decision-making process.
- **Coordinator (internal coordinator):** ensures that the group works well by keeping track of the goals and proposing an agenda for each meeting.
- **Representative (external coordinator):** represents the group when decisions need to be made with other groups and brings back input from other groups.
- **Integrator:** welcomes, informs and supports new rebels.

The roles are divided on a nomination basis, meaning that rebels cannot put themselves up for a role. Once nominated, all circle members need to consent to the rebel taking in a role. Furthermore, the roles rotate every few months, meaning that no rebel has a stronger influence over others for too long. Throughout the research, interviewees have pointed out the importance of this division of power multiple times.

Conceptual framework

Combining the three concepts, a nested relationship becomes apparent (Figure 5). Represented in the outermost circle, narratives form the overarching understanding for this research. Seeing interviewee's perspectives as subjective representations of their reality

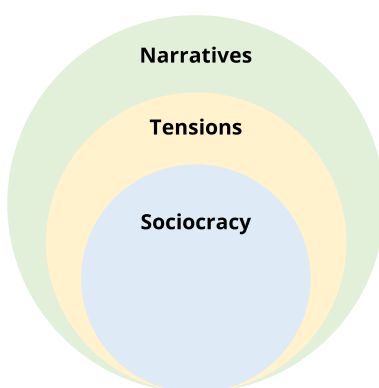


Figure 5 Nested relationship of key concepts

enables insights on how their actions and ideas are shaped through Extinction Rebellion, and how that, in turn, shapes the movement's narrative. Eventually, a more mobilising narrative can shape the actions and ideas of more people, contributing to stronger sustainability transitions. This research specifically focuses on the role of tensions in their ability to push dialogues forward, thereby creating more inclusive and diverse narratives. Tensions are therefore nested within and between narratives, forming the second circle in Figure 5. Finally, sociocracy is a key concept that enables XR's navigation of tensions, as became clear throughout the research. It is therefore the innermost circle, as an approach within tensions.

03 Methodology

In order to answer the proposed research question, research was conducted through three major steps. First, the tensions that XRNL currently faces and has faced in the past were identified. Here, particular interest was given to exploring the process under which tensions develop and unfold, and the future implications they might hold. After having selected the most relevant tensions, their process of how they have been, or are currently being, navigated was examined. In a final step, these findings were analysed and placed back in the context of current research. Doing so opened up insights on larger themes on the role of tensions in sustainability transitions, and how their productive potential can be harnessed. In the following, each step is elaborated further.

Step 1: Identifying and selecting tensions

Tensions were identified through data collected from academic, as well as grey literature. The previous chapters already outlined some academic literature on tensions in social movements, as well as XR(NL) in particular. Further literature was found through a keyword search on Google Scholar using the terms *“sustainability”, “narrative”, “narrative analysis”, “Extinction Rebellion”, “social movement”, “tensions”, “conflicts”, “polarisation”* and *“agonistic pluralism”* in various combinations. From there, further literature was found through a snowball search, using citations from literature, and narrowing the search terms on relevance. The literature search was completed when the most relevant cited papers started to repeat each other. This literature review resulted in a primary list of previously identified tensions.

Grey literature was then used to examine potential gaps in this primary list of tensions. Rupert Read's book *“Extinction Rebellion: Insights from the inside”* examines XR from his perspective as an academic that was involved with the formation of the movement from the start (Read & Alexander, 2020). Next to that, the documentary *“Rebellion”*, published in 2021 looked at the *“human drama at the heart of social change”* (Kenworthy & Sanchez Bellot, 2021). Furthermore, news articles of national newspapers, such as *‘de Volkskrant’*, were useful to understand conflicts in the movement. Next to that, sources by Extinction Rebellion themselves formed an important addition to the review, such as a handbook (Extinction Rebellion, 2019), the XR Global and XRNL websites, as well as any links and documents they contain, an XR newsletter, the XRNL Instagram account (@extinctionrebellionnl) and a local XRNL Telegram chat. These numerous forms of grey literature confirmed tensions identified by academics, but also raised new ones, which were subsequently added to the list. Next to that, any documents that contained relevant insights for the analyses in Steps 2 and 3 were flagged.

Once the full list of tensions was compiled, it was sorted and arranged into a nexus (Appendix 1). This nexus enabled understanding which tensions are most central to the movement. Furthermore, criteria such as timing (when did this tension unfold?) and recognition (was this tension mentioned frequently? Has it been taken up broadly?) were applied to reduce the number of tensions. Next to that, the researcher's positionality influenced the selection process; what tensions were considered relevant? Interesting to explore further? What is even considered as a tension, and what not? While the theoretic definitions in the section above helped answer these questions, a certain subjectivity therefore remained. The selection led to a list of central tensions supporting and guiding the interviews (Appendix 2).

Step 2: Understand how tensions are navigated

After the selection of the tensions, the next step was to understand how they were navigated. Previously identified academic and grey sources already gave some primary insight to this, answering questions such as: What was the process of the tension arising? What was important in navigating the tension? Was a specific approach used? Did the narrative change after? How? How did this shape decisions and actions?

However, the main data for this step stemmed from 12 interviews conducted with rebels participating in XRNL (Appendix 3). To preserve anonymity, the interviewees were given identification numbers that were used to refer to throughout the research. Appendix 3 summarises the interviews and gives contextual information, insofar possible. As the exact content of the interviews only became clear throughout the research, semi-structured interviews gave the necessary guidance while remaining flexible to new content (Clark et al., 2021). An interview guide (Appendix 4) was structured according to the handbook of Clark et al. (2021) and lists potential questions. Not only did these interviews confirm or contest previous interpretations of tensions (points 5 and 7 in the interview guide, Appendix 4), but they also elaborated on the practical details of the processes (point 6 in the interview guide, Appendix 4). While the interviews were mostly held in English, some interviewees preferred the option to hold the conversation in Dutch as it significantly increased their ability to express themselves.

Selection

Due to the researcher's connection to the sustainability sciences, early interviewees were personal or secondary contacts. Further interviewees were then found through snowballing, as well as attending an event of a local circle, and a social media post. Next to that, the positionality of the interviewees was paid attention to. This includes rebels of different activity and centrality levels, as well as different forms of involvement. Representatives of community circles added depth to the insights, including rebels of Scientist Rebellion, Disabled Rebels, and XR Agriculture. Generally, a diverse socio-economic and gender background was aimed for, emphasising diverse perspectives. Given the civil disobedience character of the group, the Dutch police formed a particularly interesting interview subject, too. Unfortunately, any attempts to establish contact were not returned.

Step 3: Analysing and contextualising the findings

Finally, the interviews and flagged documents were analysed in order to draw more generalisable findings on approaches toward navigating tensions. To do so, the interview recordings, from Microsoft Teams or the researcher's personal phone, were transcribed using the transcription function of Microsoft Word, ensuring data privacy in line with the University's standards (Utrecht University, 2023). Together with the documents flagged in Step 1, the transcripts were then analysed using NVivo, as this gives the necessary support in processing and structuring the findings.

As the research utilised grounded theory, codes for the analysis cannot be known beforehand (Clark et al., 2021). For the first round of analysis, open coding was used to ensure capturing all interesting and potentially unexpected aspects. This first round resulted in a set of 145 codes. After a primary sorting, where similar codes were merged, about 122 codes remained. Although this is an unusually large number of codes (Clark et al., 2021), it gave enough

structuring for some early insights, which was used to build a framework. After three iterations of building the framework, a second round of analysis was conducted. Here, thematic coding was employed, using the framework as guidance to make sure that the aspects were captured cohesively throughout the sources.

Reliability and validity

Like all research, this research is subject to the researcher's partial and socially situated perspectives. The very purpose of this research, navigating tensions to create more mobilising narratives, is biased towards sustainability transitions. Next to that, my position towards XR is necessary to consider. Although not participating in XRNL, I am in a "sustainability bubble" of young people, being in daily contact with activists and supporters. This creates a positive bias towards XRNL: I am more likely to interpret findings in a way that benefits XRNL, as I want the movement to continue to mobilise. The theory presented in the sections above can help to counter some of this positionality. Next to that, seeking informal discussions with non-supporters of XRNL can give critical perspectives from the outside. I will be as transparent as possible on my methods, assumptions and findings, staying within ethical boundaries of privacy issues and data handling.

04 Results

From the interviews, a set of three key instrumental tensions emerged. Although the content of the tensions was not the main focus of this research, it is helpful to briefly outline these key tensions here, as this supports the reader in following the quotes and arguments presented in the remainder of this chapter. Notably, all tensions are internal to the movement. Although interviews were open to internal as well as external tensions, interviewees tended to discuss and share stories on tensions within the movement.

Primarily, as one of the most regularly discussed topics, is the tension of inclusivity. Academics from different backgrounds have engaged with this tension, and what it can say about the movement (e.g. Bell & Bevan (2021); de Moor et al. (2021); Read & Kenner (2020); Taylor (2020)). However, the topic is not just prominent in the academic realm – also in XRNL it still lives as an ongoing discussion with various facets, revolving around the dominant presence of white, theoretically educated, and able-bodied people in the movement. While XRNL strongly aims for inclusion and diversity, as stated in the core values, the reality often still looks less ideal. Interviewee ID12 recalls: *“When I first saw an action by Extinction Rebellion I immediately thought ‘yes, this is necessary’ (...) but I thought I can’t join, because I have a disability. (...) And I only saw people that had no disability and were white... so I thought ‘probably it won’t be an inclusive movement.’ (...) Well, in the end I did attend an action, and indeed, it was not very accessible. (...) But well, I kept going, and now I work towards more accessibility in the movement”* (ID12).

As a second key tension, discussing questions on (non)violence was also part of almost every interview. This tension is two-fold, involving aspects of a) what is to be considered violence, and b) when violence could be justified. While the movement aims to be nonviolent, different rebels have different interpretations of violence. Interviewee ID2 explains: *“All of us agree that, for example, we don’t hurt people. But what about stuff, materials? When sticking a poster on a wall, you do damage the wall... is that then violence?”* (ID2). As there is no objective answer to this, it is a constant discussion in the movement. However, much more challenging is the latter question, asking when violence can be justified. Interviewee ID2 elaborates: *“(When you blow up a pipeline), that is pretty violent, of course. But you can also argument that now, in that place, they won't be burning oil anymore, which causes violence somewhere else, because it pollutes and puts CO2 in the air. So you prevent that”* (ID2). Here, opinions are much more divided in the movement, making it a substantial tension.

Finally, the new demand “Demand 0” causes ongoing tensions. As explored by Zantvoort (2021), the demand was developed to bring a climate justice perspective into the movement, adding more socio-historical aspects to the environmental concerns of XRNL. Many rebels originally struggled to adopt a justice perspective, as it stood in conflict with the urgency that many rebels experienced: wanting to take quick actions for the climate, rather than waiting for regenerative and just deliberations on systems. Interviewee ID2 captures this as: *“when I started, I thought ‘I’m coming here for the climate, not for all the other stuff’. And then at a certain moment, you learn their connections. It’s possible to be climate neutral and still be colonialist and racist, so the justice part makes a difference”*. (ID2) While most rebels now understand and support climate justice, discussions center around what is to be considered part of climate justice. The most salient example of this is shown by the escalation of the Palestine-Israel conflict, dividing rebel’s opinions on whether XRNL should enable pro-

Palestine statements during, for example, protests. To some, the conflict is a direct manifestation of climate justice, and not making any statements would prove that the movement has not truly committed to the new demand. To others, the conflict stretches the movements' cause. Like the (non)violence discussion, there is no objective answer to this question, making it an ongoing tension.

Process of a tension

Throughout the document research and the interviews, it became clear that XRNL is employing multiple tools to navigate these tensions. While of course overlapping at times, analysis of the data showed that tensions often go through a process that can broadly be conceptualised into a framework (Figure 6), consisting of four approaches: 1) Relativisation of the perspective or issue, 2) Speaking up about it, 3) Making decisions sociocratically, and 4) having the autonomy to step away from a decision. These approaches (shown purple in the framework) are productively reinforcing each other, supported by a shared baseline (blue) consisting of XR's 10 core values, core demands, and action consensuses. In the following, each approach will be explained in detail, using tensions that interviewees have experienced to illustrate the points. Specific practices (green) that facilitate the cultivation of an approach are highlighted in bold throughout the text.

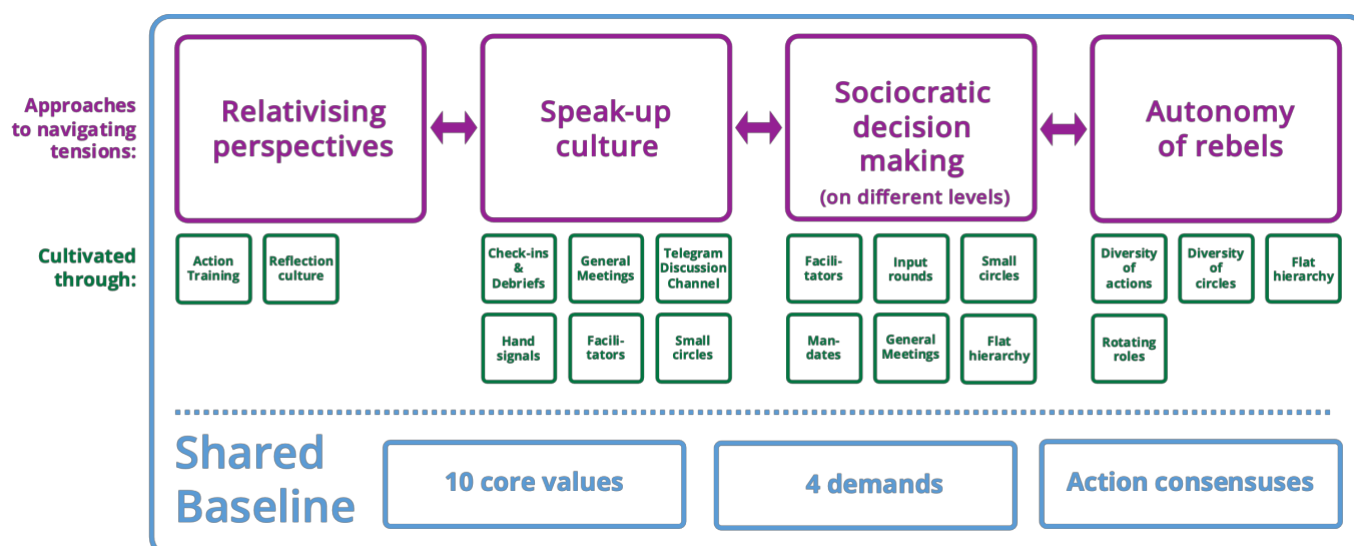


Figure 6 Tension framework (own data and XR's core values, demands, action consensus)

1 Relativising perspectives

Perhaps one of the most interesting insights that arose from the interviews is that people participating in Extinction Rebellion Netherlands are highly aware that their narratives are just that – narratives, shaping their subjective perception of reality. Noticeable from the start, every interviewee was keen to point out the limits of their insights, and the subjectivity of their experiences, through short phrases as:

"But maybe it's different. I mean this is my perspective, of course" (ID1)

"I can't say, because I only know what's happening around me, you know?" (ID3)

"But maybe I'm completely wrong, or maybe it's also personal because again, I have some observations (but) on the global XR perspective I don't have the insights." (ID5)

"I have a lot of experience on all kinds of areas (of activism). But that is my personal view, that doesn't mean it's better or something" (ID11)

This is interesting considering that the picture that is often painted of activists is much more absolutist; they are expected to have a strong opinion on, and a strongly dominating perception of, reality for which they advocate and protest (Bashir et al., 2013). Rebels of XRNL, while still being clear on their demands, are aware that their experiences are part of a reality that's bigger than theirs, and that their understanding of reality is not the only one. They are therefore able to also be more understanding of other people's perceptions of reality. This relativisation of XRNL's rebels therefore breaks away from the stereotypical activist image.

Upon deeper engagement, interviewees have repeatedly credited XRNL's **Action Training** with this drive to relativise their perspectives (ID3, ID4, ID9, ID10, ID11). The Action Training is a three-hour workshop that each new rebel is encouraged to follow. While its main purpose is to prepare rebels for actions involving civil disobedience and its consequences, the training also includes a standard discussion on violence: *"Also a very important part of the training was about nonviolence. What do you think about nonviolence? And it was interesting because I was (...) convinced that it was clear, but everybody had another boundary or something- Another definition of what's nonviolence. If you stick a poster to a lamp post, is that aggression? Is it violence? Some people find it violent. So it was quite different, but it was very good (to discuss)"* (ID3)

The training thus confronts new rebels with the subjectivity of their ideas on nonviolence, encouraging them to **reflect** on them: *"It's not about 'raise your hand if you think this is violence' and then if three-quarters raises their hand, it is. No, it is about asking the people why they think it is or isn't, and then you don't have to agree, but you can think 'oh yes if you look at it this way' and that's how you get smarter, more experienced, if you can see these kind of dilemmas"* (ID11). Indeed, when asked whether the goal of the nonviolence discussion is to find an answer or solution, Interviewee 10 responded: *"I think (the goal is) to exchange viewpoints because the idea that you can kind of get an answer on that is... we don't - or at least myself, and I think many people that I know as well - don't really feel like you can expect each other to have the same opinion on this topic, so it's just like we have divergent views"* (ID10)

Having normalised the exchange of perspectives in the Action training (ID4), This exposure to different perspectives continues beyond the nonviolence discussion and the Action Training, continuously building the rebel's awareness of other people's narratives, and how they are formed through different experiences and privileges: *"I think a lot of times it is about recognising that your experience is not the only one. So you can really only talk from yourself, but I think that in no means should be the truth. And I think in discussion that's very much recognised. So when people do have an interaction, it's much more personal."* (ID10)

"If people say things, I'll just try to take them in and then see what it does (...) Just listening without having an opinion. You don't know what it brings you. You don't know what it does to you later, so just listen. Take it in, yeah." (ID1)

"We are not separate of our culture, and that culture is not sustainable, not environmentally friendly, or not even human friendly. So if people have ideas that are in my view wrong, I can't blame them for it. I'm tolerant, not towards their actions, but towards their emotions. It's logical. If you don't know each other, you clash. So, how do you solve this? By talking to each other first." (ID11)

However, due to the autonomous character of XRNL (explained in depth in approach 4), the action training is voluntary to follow. Although new rebels are strongly encouraged to do so, not every rebel will have done the training. Especially in light of the current growth of the movement, rebels have mentioned that it becomes more difficult to pass on values and cultures consistently (ID1, ID11, see also Figure 8). Seeing the power of the Action Training in its ability to teach people to become aware of their own narratives, it is important that more experienced rebels in XRNL continue to emphasise this training to new rebels, not letting it slip into the background.

Therefore, disagreeing ideas have much less potential to become a conflicting tension in the first place, as the rebels are used to exchanging perspectives in a non-confrontative and non-defensive way, aware that their own narrative is subjective and understanding the value of different views. This reflective and learning culture goes hand in hand with a speaking up culture, where disagreements receive space to exist and be discussed.

2 Speak-up culture

Having normalised the exchange of viewpoints, rebels explained that they find it easy to speak up about issues they are experiencing. This is further enabled by multiple moments to do so, such as check-ins, debriefs, general meetings, or in the local Telegram Discussions Channel.

Check-ins and debriefs

There are regular moments where rebels can share their thoughts or worries. Check-ins can be held before any action or meeting, while debriefs are a standard part after any action. Interviewees highlighted the value of both check-ins and debriefs, as they create an open environment to discuss, initiating a moment for people to share their experiences without judgement or need for validation (ID1, ID5, ID9).

As such, the purpose of **debriefs** is to *“take care of each other and learn from our experiences”*, as XRNL's Action Guide explains. *“Actions can cause a lot of emotions and it is good to discuss those with rebels that went through the same, so that you're not alone with your thoughts”* (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023a, p. 33). Suggested questions are: How did I feel during the action? How do I feel now? What do I need? How are we doing as a group? How can we make our group stronger? (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023a). Here, rebels also have the opportunity to discuss issues that were encountered during the action, allowing them to reassess the situation and gain a better understanding. Interviewee 10 recalls such a situation:

“This (issue) happened during the action, but then it's spoken about in the debrief. Also as a way to kind of navigate and talk about these tensions, and to deescalate them, (...) So they had some strong feelings about that (issue), which they then voiced again in the debrief. And then we had some discussion about it. But you could see that it really had touched them (...). Yeah, well, it was good, actually. I think it was good because in the end I think we gained a better understanding.” (ID10)

Next to creating a space to share experiences, **check-ins** allow rebels to account for somebody else's feelings during a meeting: *“a good example on how to avoid tensions (is) that during our meetings we do check-ins to take into account how somebody's feeling and to set a more personal vibe where things can be shared, and I think that makes it very different from other movements. And I think that also helps in avoiding tension, because you know that somebody*

might be triggered during the meeting somewhere. So you understand where their emotions are coming from” (ID9). Furthermore, check-ins give the opportunity for rebels to help each other guard personal boundaries, as Interviewee ID1 explains: *“I was struggling with wanting to do more, but I knew I really couldn't. I think I was kind of scared to make the decision myself to not do things, or I felt guilty not to do things. But then you talk about it with a check-in before a meeting. (...) And then people are saying to you, like, ‘Hey, great that you're here, (...) but you were overwhelmed, right? Maybe you shouldn't take on any task’ (...) so people try to encourage each other to not take on too much.”* (ID1)

General Meetings

Another space for rebels to voice tensions are **General Meetings**. Each circle can decide when and how often they want to hold them, usually every half year (ID7). The General Meeting forms the moment to discuss larger, more strategic, or circle-wide issues. The agenda is shared beforehand, giving everyone the opportunity to bring in issues (ID3).

During the meeting, a **facilitator** makes sure everyone gets a turn to speak, and no one is dominating the discussion: *“We have this structure where we make rounds, so everybody gets the opportunity to say something. And even if somebody has difficulties speaking because of their nature, there's a lot of attention for this person. We are waiting until they're ready to say something, maybe very few words, but we wait for them.”* (ID3)

“It's your job as a facilitator to make space for the people that would not take up so easily the word. That's really something we try to do within, for example meetings. (...) And sometimes it also means that you distribute time unevenly. For example, some topics do not really involve me, and if I take up a lot of space on that topic - and then sometimes you need the facilitator to guide that - ideally people whom it doesn't involve too much take a step back and they try to listen.” (ID9) Next to that, the facilitator needs to keep track of time and people's energy, making sure discussions do not continue for too long and rescheduling a separate time for a certain discussion if necessary (ID9&10).

Furthermore, all interviewees expressed their support for the **hand signals** (Figure 7) that are used during meetings, but also during, for example, check-ins and debriefs. XR has established a set of signs for different needs, for example ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, and ‘unsure’ for quick opinion or mood checks; raising a ‘Technical point’ such as difficulties hearing; indicating people's turns to speak; and the ‘Silent Giraffe’, where rebels stop all conversations to listen. While they might remind some people of their time in school, Interviewee ID11 shares how the signals are actually helpful to nonviolence: *“When one person does the Silent Giraffe, everyone is quiet, whereas earlier someone would have to shout ‘be quiet, we have to listen’. Doing (the hand signal) is much more relaxed, much less invasive”* (ID11).

Another aspect to the facilitation of XR's speak-up culture are the **small circle sizes**, as not as many opinions have to be accounted for (ID6), and timid or new people find it easier to speak up: *“when we discuss the smaller groups and there are new people there, they are much more confident to speak up.”* (ID7). Additionally, organisers of actions or more coordinating people are easy through the communication channels Telegram and Mattermost, meaning that issues can be addressed directly to the concerning people.

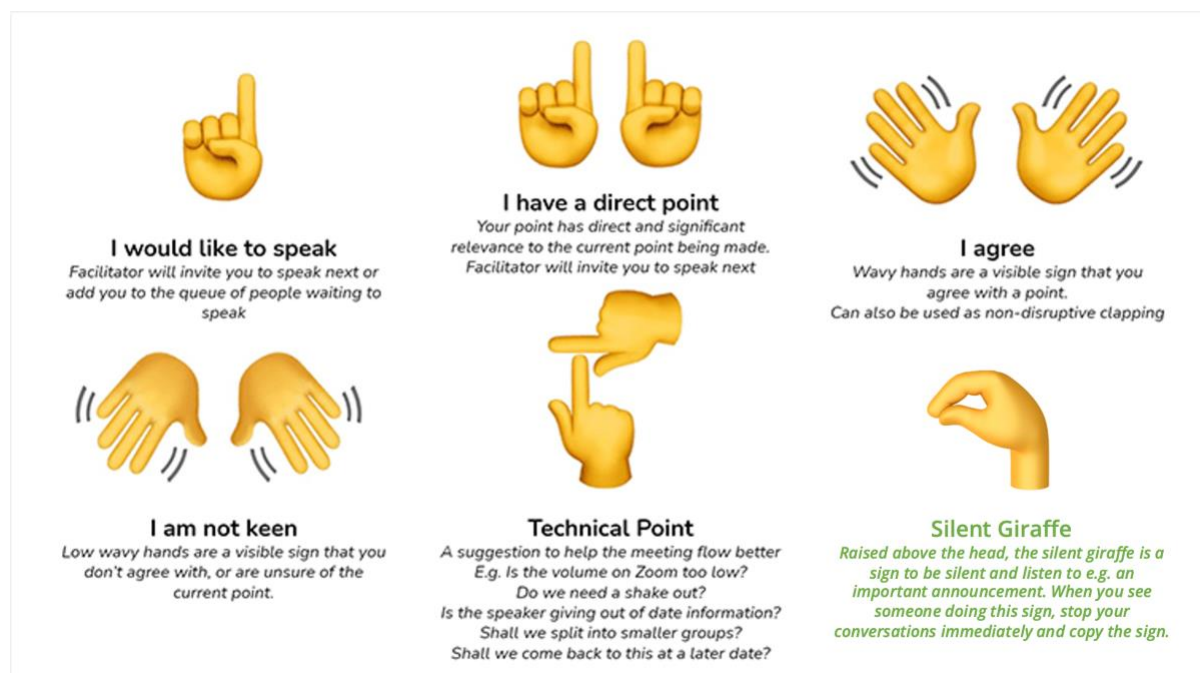


Figure 7 Some of the hand signals in XRNL (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023c, edited to include a sign (green font))

Telegram Discussions Channel

Interviewees explained that their local Telegram group has a separate **channel dedicated to discussions**, building another space to address tensions. However, the interviewed rebels had varying opinions on its usefulness in doing so. Interviewee ID4 was very positive about the channel: *“I think (the Telegram channel) is making discussions very easy actually, and also, I think because of those kinds of things, everybody's feeling really free to discuss. (...) (And) it goes very well. Yeah. People are sometimes discussing with, like, whole essays, but still it's always very peaceful and very friendly to each other and just giving their opinion without judging or something.”* (ID4) The interviewee gave an example: *“Then one person said in a group in a group chat like ‘hey, there isn't any woman in the group organising the action it's like made of like 6 men’ or something. But then they also said, like ‘yeah, you're very right. For next time we will for sure search for someone to help us’ (...) But it also wasn't a call-out, it was just like. Hey, I see you don't have any woman in your group. May be nice to have one for the next time. And yeah, since they more or less share the same values they were just like. Yeah, you're right. True. That's stupid of us. We didn't think about it.”* (ID4)

Indeed, looking through the Telegram chat, one can find examples of these respectful discussions, such as in Figure 8 below. Here, a new rebel pointed out that they weren't aware that wearing clothes with logos of political parties was not welcomed at XR protests. A more experienced rebel took up this feedback, and traced the lack of awareness back to the fast growth of the movement, encouraging their co-rebels to keep explaining “known” things to newcomers and approach each other gently.

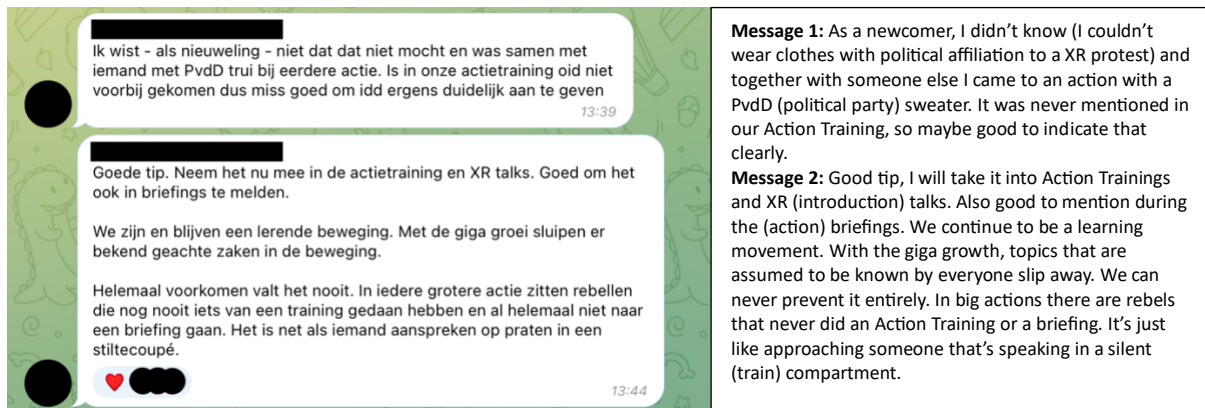


Figure 8 Screenshot of a constructive discussion in a publicly accessible local circle's Telegram channel (08/09/2023)

Thus, the channel can indeed form an approachable format for small discussions like the ones mentioned above. Next to that, the Telegram channel can be more accessible to certain people, as interviewee ID12 explains: *“I’m autistic, and for me it can be a lot nicer to hold discussions via text. Conversations (in real life) can become quite tiring at times because I have to react quicker. I process things slowly and my brain quickly fills up because I notice things in such detail. So using Telegram I have time to react, I can think about my words. But I do think it is best in combination with meeting each other in person, because you do understand much better who is in front of you.”* (ID12)

However, other rebels are less fond of the format. Interviewee ID5, for example, finds that *“everything stays superficial. You don't solve (it) (...) Some people say something, other people react, and then other topics pop up”* (ID5), indicating that it is difficult to have content-rich discussions, going in depth and finding answers. Indeed, Figure 9 below shows a local chat, where the safety of spraying a XR logo on a traffic light was discussed. In line with Interviewee ID5's statement, no conclusion was drawn. However, Interviewee ID3 explains that this might be intentional; letting some topics go in order to keep things manageable: *“you can't have a discussion on everything. Well, you can but then you don't do anything anymore, or you end up fighting. So I also often let things go, even if I don't agree with them. (...) (Of course), if it really matters for the strategy or policy of the group, then it's something else.”* (ID3). Indeed, Interviewee ID2 agrees, saying that *“for discussions (that) are really difficult things, or important things, (the Telegram chat) is not the place to discuss. (...) So for really important things, we will just have a General Meeting”* (ID2)



Person 1: (image of a traffic light with XR logo on the green light) I don't know if this is the right channel, but I just saw this? I mean, I like the idea of spraying lights, but are traffic lights such a good idea? To me that seems a traffic sign should always be as clear and undistracting as possible for safety. (Not against the rebel who did this, but I wanted to discuss this)

Person 2: Seems green to me.

Person 3: I don't think this is okay. Remove! Don't give someone a stick to hit with.

Person 4: Remove the logo or the message?

Person 3: Sticker

Person 5: It's not a sticker, probably sprayed on.

Person 3: Even worse! That's destruction and not a protest right. We don't know if it's done by a rebel. XR logos have been misused in the past.

Person 1: (explaining the location of the traffic light)

Person 6: If I remember correctly, there is also one at (location). I found it a "nice" surprise. Luckily green is the safest out of the three colours to partially cover. In the past, people did however use paint instead of chalk spray for "decorative" actions with stencils. But if people wanted to use graffiti at their own risk we didn't stop them. But it is a public object, if you see this as destruction, where is the boundary? Stickers and posters on traffic light pillars, yes or no? It all leads back to the discussion of nonviolence. There's still announcements on the street of the rebellion in October 2019 to be found. That was clearly no chalk spray ;)

Person 1: I don't mind the paint so much, to me it was about that it was on a traffic light.

Person 7: The Nijntje traffic light (decorative light) removes more green than this. I personally don't see the problem here.

Person 5: True. But it's better to be "beyond reproach"

Person 3: (responding to person 1) To me too. This is an official traffic sign. You put a sticker on the pillar. Not more.

Person 8: I honestly do think it's cool, brave that someone dared to do it on such a location. I don't see the danger of it, green is green and according to me that's still visible. It is precisely the location where it stands out. But probably I am ignorant. It's also the question if XR wants to be related to traffic light vandalism.

Person 9: I think it's beautiful and still clearly green.

Figure 9 Open-ended discussion relating the safety of a sprayed XR logo on a traffic light in a publicly accessible local circle's Telegram channel (08/09/2023)

No matter in which of these presented spaces rebels choose to speak up, it is crucial that any speak-up is met with understanding and perspective. Interviewee ID12 shares a story of when their concerns were not taken seriously: *“We made a list of our concerns and for some of those added our own ideas for solutions, and we sent that to the person of the campaign group. And they reacted quite defensive, saying that they knew most of it wasn't going to succeed anyways. (...) But if we, as a minority group indicate that something is important, and it is waved off like this... that's just not okay. You at least have to react to it seriously, and then the result can still be the same, but at least take it seriously, like, yes, this is an inclusion problem.”* (ID12). The example of Interviewee ID12 thus highlights the importance of the exchange relationship between the speak-up culture and the relativisation of perspectives: when pointing out potential accessibility issues of an action (thus speaking up), they received no understanding (perspective) for their concerns. As a result, the issue required multiple instances of discussion, making it much bigger than originally. The interviewee pointed out that they understood that it simply might not be possible for the action to be inclusive, what they were still looking to receive was the understanding of the organiser, recognising the concerns that were raised.

3 Sociocratic Decision-making

If an issue that is brought forth requires a decision, rebels can refer to the Sociocratic consent method that stems from the wider Sociocracy concept by Bockelbrink et al. (2022) (see Theory section). Under this method, decision-making follows a specific structure (see Figure 10) consisting of at least one round of sharing opinions, forming a proposal, answering questions, and hearing comments (Figure 10: red rectangle). Having these **input rounds** *“gives a lot of opportunity to listen to each other. And not by just saying ‘who agrees or not’ (and) you put up your hand and then it's over. Now you have to discuss longer, so it takes a lot of time. But its advantage is that everybody is involved. (...) And even if somebody has difficulties speaking because of their nature, there's a lot of attention for this person. We are waiting until they are ready to say something, even if it's only a few words.”* (ID3) Here, Interviewee ID3 highlights how the different rounds can facilitate the inclusion of, in this case, people that need more time to formulate their thoughts, therefore navigating tensions that could rise up from people feeling unheard, or not included in the topic.

In this context, the **facilitator** once again plays an important role: they are making sure that everyone is heard, as shown in the previous quote. Next to that, they pay attention that participants stick to the rounds: *«We try to give everyone the chance to say something. (...) But if somebody then in the clarification rounds has a question that's not about clarification, but about opinion, then it's the job of the facilitator to say ‘we are going to treat this in another round’. So there's space for everything at a certain time.”* (ID9) This facilitation is especially important in the context of the tensions that are presented in this research. Considering the complexity and subjectivity of (non)violence and Demand 0 discussions, it is crucial that the discussion keeps moving forward, while still giving space for everyone's perspective to be heard.

After the input rounds, rebels are asked whether they consent to the proposed decision. Important here is the difference between a concern and an objection (Figure 10: green rectangle), as the former does not necessarily require an action. Interviewee ID2 explains: *“if there is somebody who has an objection, the proposal is rejected, (we) think together, (and)*

change the proposal until there are no objections, but everyone can live with it. (It's not about) completely agreeing, but that everyone can at least live with it, and you go around a few times until you reach that state" (ID2). Thus, in the Sociocratic method, a concern is something that can be addressed if there is time and that can build better understanding for future decisions, but that shouldn't obstruct a decision (Bockelbrink et al., 2022). Through this distinction, rebels have to reflect on the weight of their disagreements more; whether they see it as an actual objection or just a concern. This again helps to keep the discussion moving forward.

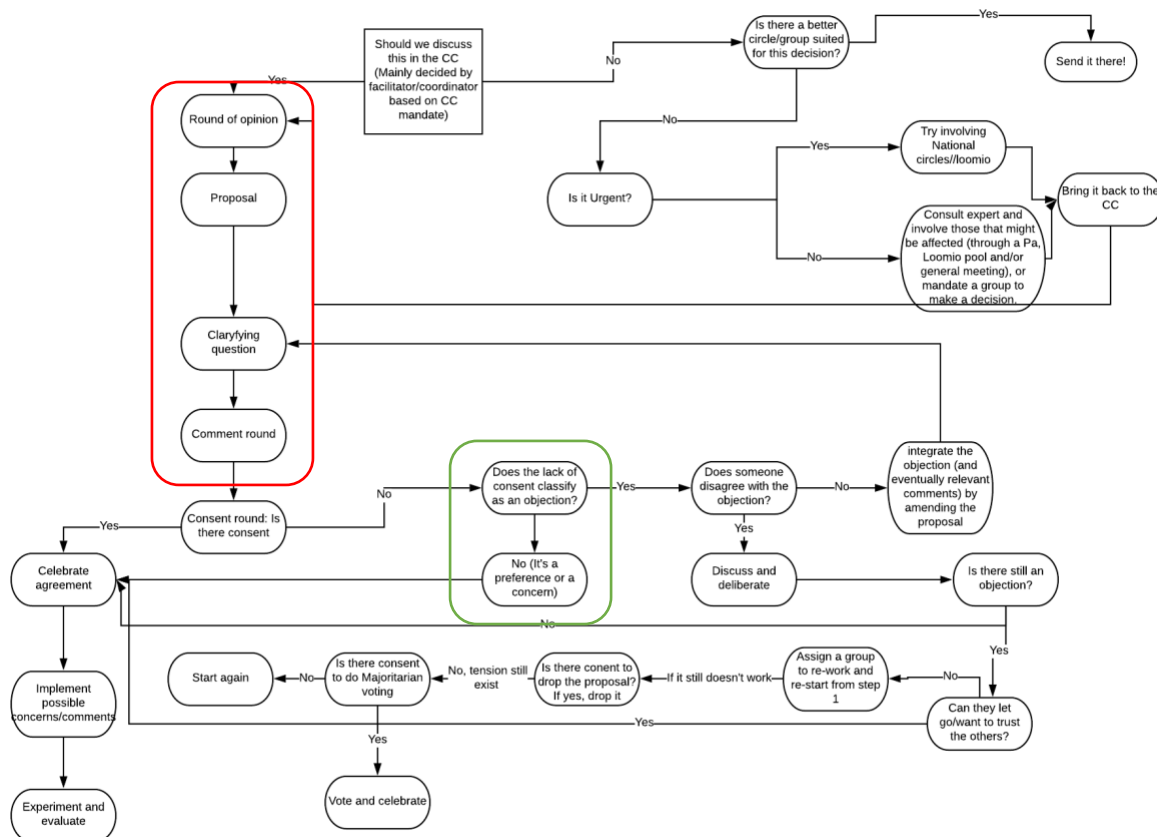


Figure 10 Decision-making in XRNL (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023b), based on (Bockelbrink et al., 2022)

This decision-making method, or parts of it, can be employed at different levels of the organisation. As explained earlier, XR works with **small, self-organised circles with mandates**. Therefore, decisions can be taken quickly and on a low, applied level. Interviewee ID1 explains that not every decision needs to be discussed with everyone at a General Meeting: *“our group is pretty small, so we don't always have a lot of general meetings. So often it just kind of happens in those kind of small circles (that) we just really quickly make a decision like, OK, we saw that last time we had a long (introduction) presentation and then there was less space for people to really talk about it. So next time we just do a really short (presentation). And we just try it and I think that enables us to learn quickly.”* (ID1). Thus, by having the mandate, the group was able to make quick decisions and adjustments to the needs of the situation. Furthermore, the interviewee indicated that not every decision needs the full Sociocratic process; for smaller decisions such as shortening a presentation, certain parts are enough, such as rounds of opinions and clarifications, or distinguishing between concerns and objections.

If decisions go beyond a circle's mandate, they are brought to the **general meeting**: *"There are of course things which are more than a circle, which are really for the whole movement. If it is really important, you want to have the input from everyone."* (ID2). Interviewee ID13 adds that *"some topics are discussed in a general meeting because we as a circle, think that everyone should have a voice in that. But then it's still the circle deciding if it should be discussed in a general meeting. So that's a bit of a vague area I think."* (ID13). Here, the interviewee points out that the circles could, technically, go beyond their mandate and make decisions without the consideration of the other circles. However, in practice, this is not possible: *"Everything is quite well entangled, so I think that if someone wants to make a really weird decision, it's just not possible because there are other people around being like 'Hey, but this is not XR, this is not what we want to be'"* (ID1). Therefore, while the circles are autonomous, they are not detached from the movement, meaning that no person or circle can make a decision that doesn't fit with the larger frame of XRNL.

However, the interviewees pointed out some drawbacks of the Sociocratic decision-making method: the meetings are rather slow and cumbersome. Interviewee ID3, who is in a community circle, explained that *"having meetings like this is not really nice. They take a toll on you, yeah. So now since shortly we stopped having general meetings because they are too fatiguing, too boring, too difficult."* (ID3). Especially with the recent addition of Demand 0, the slowness becomes apparent. Each local and community circle should accept the new demand, rephrasing it to their needs and context. However, as the discussion on climate justice is quite complex, this is not an easy task: *"we go back and forth and (...) it is not so easy to reach any agreement. And sometimes we just don't reach an agreement and then we're like, 'OK, let's reconsider this in like half a year time again', and just leave it hanging. (...) While we are in support of Demand 0, we haven't actually made a final decision of exactly our demands. That's something that keeps coming back at those meetings."* (ID7). Also Interviewee ID2, in a different circle, recognises the slowness of the process: *"For our Demand 0 we had such a long process, we didn't finish it yet. We need to change this and that. And then we were out of time to go another round, or at least we had all the input, the objections. And then, you need to change things and that will take some time. So we didn't do that during the meeting."* (ID2)

However, Interviewee ID2 also explains that this is intentional: *"It really has to come from below and not from above. In the beginning, it was forced a bit from above... that is exactly what you don't want with Demand zero, it is about climate justice."* (ID2) Here, the interviewee highlights that it is crucial to the just nature of Demand 0 to be implemented bottom-up, rather than top-down. Indeed, Interviewee ID9 points out that this method of continuously asking for consent on decisions, while slow, is crucial to XRNL's ambition to reduce power structures: *"What's interesting about this consent decision making is that you know at the end of the day you want to work it out together. So there's not really a quick way, you need to communicate very clearly and very openly and vulnerable as well, and nonviolent. Because you are going to have to do it together. That's why this non-hierarchical part is really important, because the moment you create a hierarchy, people will stop speaking out. Because you are dependent upon this other person, because you want to have this promotion or... Yeah, the consent system doesn't work anymore if you have a hierarchy."* (ID9). Therefore, a **flat hierarchy**, enabled by this consent decision making method, encourages people to speak up, actively navigating tensions.

4 Autonomy of rebels

Another approach in the navigation of tensions is the autonomy that is given to each rebel to direct their own actions. Therefore, when rebels don't agree with a decision such as a specific action, they can step away from it. Interviewee ID4 explains how some rebels might not be comfortable participating in an action, but still support the cause behind it: *“So in the end, for example, many people joining a road blockade or something. I think all of them, or like many of them, have a different opinion if it's violence or not, but nevertheless, they will choose to attend the blockade. And also people who are not joining actions because they think it's violence. I think many of them still think, OK, I'm not joining because it's violence, but I don't think it's wrong because of the size of the climate crisis. So I don't disagree with it, but I just don't want to join.”* (ID4). Other times, stepping away can help rebels regain energy and focus: *“one of the main persons in the demand zero group, stepped back for a (while)... I don't know if he is back again, but at least gave it away for other people to work further on it because yeah, he was really not happy with this, how this was going. (...) he had more often that he just says ‘OK, I need to do step back and maybe let it chill a bit and then go back again’”* (ID2)

However, that also raises the question whether the option to step away at any time means that tensions are avoided: *“I have the impression for the majority when they don't agree, they just leave. They don't come back. It's not that you need to be accountable”* (ID7). Therefore, discussions that should take place might not, leaving the tension hanging in the air. This could result in a meta-level tension that the autonomy of rebels, intended as a tool to navigate tensions, builds. However, few interviewees recognised this concern. While some rebels might leave the movement entirely, most just redirect their energy to different actions or activities.

This autonomy of the rebels is supported by the **diversity of involvement** that XRNL tries to enable. In essence, *“there's something to everyone's taste, so everyone can fulfil a role within the movement”* (ID9). For example, in terms of **actions**, most civil disobedient actions have a legal support demonstration next to it; there are community coffee and potluck dinner moments every other week; as well as trainings to attend. Furthermore, there are various **circles** a rebel can join: the arts circle focused on making banners and flyers, circles that try to understand sociocracy or citizen's assemblies better, circles that look into collaboration with other movements, etc.

Importantly, no involvement is seen as better or more important as another: *“when there's a (disobedient) protest, there is also a legal one most of the time. And then there was really a safe space to say I'm not... I'm not feeling comfortable doing the not legal one. So I felt no one was really pressured into being arrested if this person didn't want to.”* (ID6) Even more so, rebels value the different contributions: *“I noticed for myself (that) I don't really have energy to do everything. But if somebody else has the energy to do that part (then) that gives me space to do this. So it's kind of dynamic in that way. And (...) we need these different perspectives, these different ideas, these different ways of working.”* (ID10)

The diversity of involvements, and openness to them, has the added effect of creating a low threshold for new people to get active in the movement. Interviewee ID4 explains: *“There's such a strong culture of welcoming everybody and not judging people (...) if you want to do a little, it's good. If you want to do a lot, it's good. Starting from the minimum, you can always see how far you can get, or want to get, actually. And I think that's a very strong structure (...) and very “laagdremelig”... low entry barriers. I think that's also the reason why it's growing*

so quickly now” (ID4). Indeed, interviewee ID12 shares: *“I know a lot of people that first went to the support demo, and then they think ‘hey it doesn’t look so bad, maybe I can do this too’”* (ID12)

Even if a rebel holds a central role, they can step away. This is due to the **flat hierarchic structure** of XR: *“because you're so horizontal, normally everyone could do everyone's job. (...) So if you step back, (you know) people will take care and we'll be fine.”* (ID6) Interviewee ID11 credits this to the trainings, as well as the **rotation of roles**: *“changing the roles every 3 months is a way of creating a very strong (organisational) memory”* (ID11). However, this does not seem to be true for all circles: Interviewee ID12, who is part of the circle Disabled Rebels, shares: *“I am the motor behind everything concerning accessibility (...) people with a disability aren’t exactly waiting to put their time and energy into making things more accessible (...) that’s the issue, we all have quite low energy”* (ID12). Here, interviewee ID12 describes that in their circle, the limits to time and energy that people experience results in there not being someone who can readily take over necessary tasks.

The focus on autonomy can be traced to the high regard for personal boundaries that XRNL encourages: *“they spent a lot of time about being sensible to your own tensions: how far do you want to go if you attend an action of Extinction Rebellion? Do you want to be confronted by the police or not? Do you feel safe? I was very enthusiastic about this attention for your personal welfare. It is one of the key characteristics of XR.”* (ID3). Therefore, when rebels delineate their boundaries, other rebels are keen to support them. Interviewee ID1 explains how they struggled with a feeling of guilt for needing to do more: *“If the culture wouldn't have been so warm, then I wouldn't be active right now - I wouldn't be able to. But because I can set my own boundaries and they're really being respected by other people, and they're actively listening to me, and helping me if I need help... that makes me able to just contribute in a very small way and feel good about it, and not feel bad about the things I'm not doing.”* (ID1)

An experienced activist shared that they did not expect this autonomy of the rebels and regenerative activism: *“I often say how positively surprised I am that there is no pressure to do things within XR. Previously (in activism), it was more like ‘we need to make the revolution happen, we need to get better because of suppression, capitalism, and the dictatorship in South America and the climate (...) so you really need to come, and you need to do things’. And in XR it’s more like ‘you need to see for yourself what you want to and can do’. (...) Of course we want that the world takes action and that more people join our protests, but if you need to withdraw for some time then you should do that. (...) So if you’re at a protest and someone says they can’t continue then that’s no problem, because you have to take care of yourself. (...) And that’s really important. In the 70s and 80s it was more important to stay present with everyone.”* (ID11)

Interestingly, however, while the high level of autonomy enables rebels to guard their boundaries, it simultaneously makes it harder to do so: when any involvement is possible, everything is possible - especially in activism *“there is so much to be done, and there are so many ideas, and there are never enough people.”* (ID1, ID7). Indeed, almost every interviewee spoke about how easy it is to slip into more work, and get sucked up by it: *“slowly I get a bit more and more involved, like it's easy to take up stuff at some point (...) sometimes it happens that someone gets really enthusiastic and then there's a lot of stuff, but then it's too much and*

then all of a sudden there's nothing anymore. Like it's very easy. At some point, if you find your way within XR to just take up a lot of stuff” (ID13)

“I know how intense it is and how easily it can accumulate. Because the more you're in it, the more you want to do, and the more you feel you can do because you're more experienced and you have more connections, (...) once you get the ball rolling, it's really easy to do more and more and more” (ID1)

This struggle is intensified by the complexity of XR as an organisation. As explained earlier, the movement offers national, local, as well as community circles, each with their own sub-circles. It is hardly possible to gain an overview of everything that's happening, and trying to do so can be draining: *“in the beginning I was at least in every circle channel of (local region). I read even the minutes if they posted them there. And from national level, I'm following a few circles, a few channels. So you can just say, OK, I want to follow this, this and this channel. I want to keep updated about these and these things. (...) But we are a lot of people and there's just too much information, and still I also don't know of all the actions. (...) Yeah, it's hard to not get too involved too much.” (ID2)*

Moreso, multiple interviewees expressed that they found it difficult to find their way into the movement at first: *“when I joined, I expected that I would be guided a bit more into the organisation. So I felt (that) if I sent a text message that I'm interested in a circle, then I will get a reply and I can join, and they will guide me through what I can do and have specific tasks for me. And that didn't happen. It took me a long time to understand the organisation. And that was a bit of a struggle, not so much a tension between me and someone else, but more like it would have been nice if there was a clearer guidance. (...) I think a lot of people experience this and I don't know if you can call it a tension, but when they start with XR, they don't know what it is, there's so much information, they didn't know where to go to... So I'm doubting if everyone feels really welcomed just because you need to put a lot of initiative yourself.” (ID13)* Indeed, Interviewees ID9&10 highlight that new rebels need to be quite proactive: *“It's a decentralised movement and it makes it very hard to find your way in the beginning. You have to be really proactive. So you have to sort of step out there to see it (...) to sort of like “doorgronden” (dig through, explore) what the structure is.” (ID9&10)*

Furthermore, interviewee ID13 explains how this causes the movement to be transparent, but not very accessible: *“it was not very clear to me from the start when decisions happen. I only recently know what the coordination circle is, actually, and that there are general meetings every so often. (...) So it's not very clear, but I don't know if that's the same as it being not transparent. Like, who wants to have the information about this, you're able to find it (...) you can join every channel, everything is open in that sense. (...) It's something that goes together, right? You can make every communication channel available to everyone, which makes the organisation very transparent. But there are thousands of communication channels, so it's not so easy to get an overview of the main things that are happening in the organisation.” (ID13)*

However, relating back to the second approach, the speak-up culture of XR, rebels are aware of these struggles, and are trying to accommodate for them. For example, some local integration circles have released a “Rebel starter kit” (e.g. XR Utrecht, n.d.) to help new rebels orient in their first few weeks. Similarly, Interviewee ID1 explains how they try to help new rebels prevent burning out: *“when meeting new rebels (...), I really try to emphasise that the*

best thing you can do is just to find something that resonates with you. Because if you're new, you really want to help (...) but if you do too much, you're overwhelmed too quickly and you burn out. So I really try to stress with new people that they please just take it slow and find something that they like, and then just do a little bit less than they want to, because then you can grow into it. And I feel like that's a more healthy way. (...) We have the shared vision that we want change and we realise that it's not going to happen in one year, sadly. (...) So I feel like it also comes from a sense of necessity that we want to take care of each other. Otherwise there is no future for a big movement like this.” (ID1)

Therefore, the autonomy given to rebels simultaneously helps navigate tensions, while creating new ones around burn-out and accessibility. Those tensions then have to be taken up by the other approaches of the framework, such as the speak-up culture, to be navigated.

Shared Baseline

All four approaches are enabled by the baseline that every rebel shares, consisting of XR's **10 core values, 4 demands, and action consensuses** that are made before each action (blue parts in Figure 6). For example, the first approach, relativisation of perspectives, is only possible through the core value 'no blaming and shaming', enabling the rebels to share and discuss thoughts without judgement: *“I don't know any better environment than XR where people are so free to share all their worries, all their other things... like also, for example, if somebody would say like 'hey guys, I feel a bit ashamed because I took a flight this year', then I'm sure that everybody would say like 'oh, you're also just a human, don't be ashamed, we all take a plane sometimes in our lives'. Yeah, I don't know a place where these kind of things go better than XR.” (ID4)* The core values are thus crucial to letting the approaches work constructively. Likewise, if not respected, discussions quickly become tense. Interviewee ID3 remembers a situation surrounding the implementation of Demand 0, where the core value 'no blaming and shaming' was not respected: *“I think it was also a little bit of (an) accusation that we were not interested in, or not open for it (Demand 0) or something like that. (...) I found it a difficult discussion. There were some tensions between people because of the way of discussing. It was not very comfortable. (...) The issue of accusation is a difficult one.” (ID3)*

Next to enabling the approaches, the shared baseline also helps to regulate them. Interviewee ID1 shares a moment where the group considered a more destructive action: *“I'm thinking about a general meeting from a local group (where we were) brainstorming about actions. (...) And someone proposes a really cool idea. (But) it was something more destructive than generally happens, destroying some kind of infrastructure from some kind of oil company or something. And although I think many people at the meeting were like, 'oh, that would be actually a pretty cool idea' and it would like get a lot of, well, hopefully good attention... we also kind of started talking about... and I feel like that came from some people that are more connected to the core values or the action consensus than other people. But there always is someone who is saying like, 'OK, but does this fit in what we want as a bigger movement?'. So then we talked about it for a bit and we decided that it would be a really cool action, but maybe a bit more for a radical flank and maybe that should be a different group and it should not be named as XR. So we didn't do it. So when ideas arise that don't really resonate with the XR group, it doesn't happen. Because we do gather as XR and we do have this feeling that we want to do that under XR terms. If people want to do it, you do it under a different name, you don't claim to be XR.” (ID1)*

Another example of this regulation through the core values can be found in conversations in the Telegram Discussions channel. For example, in relation to an article by Hassouni (2023) that criticised the lack of inclusivity for- and representation of People of Colour in XRNL, the conversation in Figure 11 below discusses the rather upset reaction of a rebel to the article: “*what a tremendously hate-carrying and false article (...)*”, posted to Twitter (Markandu, 2023). Rebels argue that this reaction is unhelpful, as it is not in line with their core value ‘reflection & learning’ and shuts down the possibility for further discussion. The core value was thus used as a tool to regulate a tense situation, reminding people of the way discussions and confronting perspectives are handled in the movement.



Figure 11 Discussion in a publicly accessible local Telegram chat where the core values regulated a tension (08/09/2023)

Acting similar to the core values, the **action consensus** is another part of the shared baseline that helps rebels approach each other. The action consensus is a set of statements that each rebel agrees to when joining an action. It standard consists of six points (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023c) but can be adjusted as needed. Interviewee ID11 explains how the action consensus gives clear guidelines on how to act: “*If people use violence you have to say stop. That is easy within XR because you can say , this is clear on our action consensus (...) so you go there and say this is not what we agreed on, so either you stop or you leave. That's kind of the choice you get. And in my experience people do then make the choice, so they either stop or leave*” (ID11). The effect of the action consensus is thus two-fold: first, indicating the desired behaviour clearly, rebels do not need to enter into tense discussions with each other. Second, it gives a common starting ground to people that otherwise would not align easily: “*If I would talk with one of these persons, probably we wouldn't agree on many things, but I mean that's fine. We don't need to have all these theoretical discussions. We are aligned on our action, on what we want to see. We have the Action Consensus, so I know that this person is not going to violate somebody and the same goes the other way around.*” (ID10)

Of course, the interpretation of the shared baseline elements, especially the core values, can vary. Interviewees ID9&10 discuss how rebels try to test the boundaries of the core values: “*We have some things that we all subscribe to. And this forms the core and then of course within these points you have discussions. Like what is blaming and shaming? And then sometimes you notice that we have divergent views on that, but then, people would just kind of test the water. For example, people will feel like, well, if I call out a CEO, it's not blaming and shaming. Then you just do that, that's your own personal conviction and idea. But if you go too far with that. So for example, (...) I've had it happen in Group chats where (...) somebody has done something that's wrong and this is the person that is holding a certain important function, they post a picture of this person and then others many other people within XR said*

no, you can't post that. So this person had to delete it. So you have this group accountability, I guess. We all have divergent ideas and point of views, but some things are just simply not acceptable.” (ID9) Next to the discussion on ‘what is blaming and shaming’, the discussion of ‘what is (non)violence’ also returns frequently, as earlier quotes showed. However, while interpretations may vary, rebels can trust the intentions of their co-rebels: that they want to be nonviolent and inclusive.

Changing or questioning the baseline

However, when discussions talk about changing the baseline, they become more difficult to navigate. The primary example of this is the ongoing Demand 0 discussion, which aims to adjust the core demands of the movement. However, *“It's not that evident for everybody yet. (...) And there are efforts (of) the demand zero (circle) to have it as the demand, but also to have workshops, to try to make it more of a thing. It's not big yet. That's what I mean. It's not really being heard by the majority. As in, it's not really being seen as the necessity, because it doesn't seem to be a necessity because most people are white and privileged”* (ID1). Besides understanding climate justice, for many rebels this also relates to a question of what XR's role as a movement is: *“what happens a lot with climate movements, it seems, is that they become this umbrella left wing movement, and then people want to do everything. And it's not the issue that people actually don't agree with each other... so in XR there was this big conflict of Zwarte Piet (contested Dutch cultural figure wearing blackface) ... (whether) people endorse the Zwarte Piet protest (...) And then some people are really upset. But I mean on a personal level, we all agree. This is a racist tradition by all means, but this is not what our movement is about. And you cannot solve all of the world's problems. (...) And so then (people) got really upset, and they left the chat and they said, you are all terrible people. It was very dramatic. (...) So it's not even that people disagree with each other on values, or a fundamental level, but it's more like this is not strategic. This is not what the movement is about.”* (ID7)

Extinction Rebellion's struggle to navigate the interpretation and implementation of Demand 0 reflects on the mobilisation narrative of the movement. Especially People of Colour, whose experiences are so strongly shaped by struggles for social and climate justice, will not be taken along in the movement's narrative as long as Demand 0 remains questioned. This does not mean that there shouldn't be any discussions around it – the discussions are necessary to keep advancing the inclusivity of the movement. However, seeing the extent to which the movement struggles around climate justice, it becomes clearer why certain groups, such as People of Colour, do not feel called-upon by XRNL's mobilisation. This struggle is further intensified by the ongoing *“strong role of heroism found in civilly disobedient actions”* (ID3). Although XRNL consistently highlights that any form of involvement is welcome, it is the civil disobedient actions that receive most attention – from the media, but also from within the movement. Again, groups that face more struggle to join civilly disobedient actions, for example because they experience racial profiling and police violence, are therefore much less mobilised.

Furthermore, while discussions that try to change the baseline are difficult, discussions that question the baseline entirely can quickly become polarising. Here, the nonviolence discussion takes a new turn. While previously, the discussion was simply a question of interpretation, asking what is (non) violence, rebels could rely on each other to want to be nonviolent. Now, however, the discussion is when violence can be justified: *“(There is this)*

book about “How to blow up a pipeline”. That is pretty violent, of course. But you can also argue that now, in that place, they won't be burning oil anymore, which causes violence somewhere else, because it pollutes and puts CO2 in the air. So you prevent that.” (ID2) Of course, using violence goes strongly against the nonviolent core of XR, which interviewees have consistently mentioned as crucial for their support of the movement. Thus, questioning the baseline in this way means that the group could polarise and split: “There are people who think we need to have a radical group. But because as XR we are nonviolent, we cannot do it. (But) time is ticking, so the pressure will get higher and higher, and if companies are still polluting, then maybe a group will separate and do violent things. (...) If we still split on something it is on violence.” (ID2) Interviewee ID3 discussed with their local group how this kind of justified violence thinking can escalate: “I had a discussion recently about if you start with (violence)... where do you stop? If you demonstrate and there's no effect, what's your next step? So the escalation, if you start with violence against material, if that doesn't help, if there's no effect... what's the next step?” (ID3)

As mentioned by interviewee ID2, this polarisation around the justification for using violence has the potential to split the movement apart. This would significantly affect XRNL's mobilisation narrative, as many interviewees highlighted that “a very important part of the explanation (about the movement) was about the nonviolent character of Extinction Rebellion” (ID3). A form of XRNL that would use violence - while maybe mobilising some new people that share the reasoning - might see a large loss in the mobilisation of its current rebels. Next to that, it might also lead to a reduction in public support: “(when talking to outsiders) I always succeed to convince them of XR's actions, especially by saying that it nonviolent” (ID4)

No shared baseline

What discussions look like when there is no shared baseline at all becomes clear in more external tensions, one of the most prominent ones is with the police. Due to their civilly disobedient character, XRNL is naturally confronted with the police. However, rebels feel that the treatment by the police is often out of scale: “The police, sometimes they try to control the situation in a way that they don't have to. Like they have a choice. (...) You don't have to kick somebody when they're already in the (police) bus and you see them do it anyway. I mean, if you're an ally, if you want to be a police ally insofar as you can be, you can just pick people up, put them in the bus and respect them properly. And a lot of police officers do that, and that's fine. (...) But I see police violence, I see police go beyond what is necessary.” (ID10) Especially in comparison to other demonstrations, rebels feel treated harsher. This became even more apparent when Dutch farmers blocked the A12 (a central Dutch highway) in protest of a new nitrogen law (e.g. Poll & Belt, 2022). While no one was arrested, protests of XRNL that also blocked the A12 led to hundreds of arrests (e.g. Frijters, 2023). Interviewee ID3: “the difference in behaviour from the police with climate activists compared to other movements, it is definitely a point” (ID3).

In essence, that means that the rebels don't trust the shared baseline anymore; that the police is meant to protect them: “Hiding behind the ‘but this is my job and this is what I do and this is just what the law says’... I feel like that's such a weak argument. And it's like such a weak thing to hide behind because in the end you do have a choice. And that is what makes me even more mad. It's like, ‘yeah, I just want to protect the people’, like then protect the people because they're not being protected now! And I feel like they're not actively thinking, or

actively challenging the system. If you're a police officer you can also still do that. (Of course it's) difficult because you're part of that system, but it does not release you from your responsibility as a human being.” (ID9) Interviewee ID3 explains, that for some rebels that even leads to a distrust in the entire legal system: *“If you say the police as an apparatus is fascist, and some do that, then you reject the whole legal order here”* (ID3)

The result of this is hardened narratives and destructive discussions: *“no, no, you don't ought to speak to the police. At protests there's the police spokespeople that explain what we are going to do when the police asks. I don't know any other forms of conversation with them. Well, the police goes into conversation with us by interrogating us. And we go into conversation with the police by protesting against our treatment (...) but that's a very different form of conversation”* (ID3). When asked if they ever try to speak to the police, interviewee ID10 responded: *“sometimes yes, but it's always in the heat of the moment. That's quite difficult. For example, when they take you and they use violence, which is not necessary, you can say 'you're hurting me, why do you do that, you don't have to do this'. And then they will respond 'oh, but, you're not listening'. Yeah. So you (...) can try to have the conversation, but when they're also actively hurting you, that's quite difficult.”* (ID10) Even in a calmer setting, both sides hold on to their narratives: during a podcast that discussed the safety of children at XRNL protests, neither the rebel, a father who brought his daughter to a blockade, nor the police officer managed to understand the other's perspective (NPO Radio1, 2023). This example makes it clear that without a shared baseline, none of the other four approaches can effectively take place to navigate tensions.

05 Discussion

The framework constructed in this research is able to show how tensions can become productive sites of dialogue and understanding. It therefore starts to conceptualise the agonistic struggle, adding depth and practice-based knowledge to the rather abstract concept of agonistics popularised by Laclau & Mouffe (2001). They define the agonistic struggle as a process through which inherent differences are used productively, constituting a necessary part of progress. However, not much work has been done into what this process actually looks like. This shortcoming has previously been pointed out by Verloo (2018b). In their research, Verloo (2018b) therefore found that *critical moments*, where the meaning and interpretation of events shift as conflict unfolds, are part of an agonistic struggle. While this does build a more detailed understanding of the agonistic struggle, I argue that it does not actually contribute to the practical side of it; critical moments are not concrete practices that can be intentionally or actively created in order to have a productive agonistic struggle.

Similarly, Zantvoort (2021)'s research shows that during an agonistic struggle, tensions can move from the margins to the core of an organisation. Again, while this insight creates a more detailed understanding of the agonistic struggle, it does not prescribe specific practices. Therefore, the approaches presented in this research build the first truly practical understanding of the agonistic struggle, showing concrete practices that can be actively recreated: through trainings, small group sizes, regular discussion moments, and decentralised power structures, stakeholders are able to regulate their perspectives, speak up about issues, and can direct their actions autonomously and democratically. The research showed that these approaches influenced how tensions were navigated in the movement. These insights can form the start to understanding how the productive potential of tensions can be harnessed in practice, going beyond theoretical concepts.

As a second contribution, the framework shows how commonalities- and tension narratives can mutually reinforce each other, thereby connecting existing literature on sustainability transition narratives. Previous research has either emphasised the importance of finding commonalities in narratives to advance sustainability transitions (e.g. Bushell & Colley, 2016; Luederitz et al., 2017), or criticised the commonalities approach for being undesirable and unrealistic, instead emphasising the importance of tensions to advance sustainability transitions (Lejano et al., 2020; Riedy, 2020; Vandepitte, 2023). This research has shown that both sides are partially right: tensions are a necessary part of a transition, but cannot be productive without underlying commonalities. In the framework, a shared baseline enabled and regulated productive discussions. Equally, when the shared baseline was questioned or not present, tensions turned polarising. Shortly put, agreeing on everything is impossible, but agreeing on some things is necessary.

Beyond sustainability transitions, this research offers a more general novel perspective to the understanding of narratives. In contrast to previous research (e.g. Herman & Vervaeck, 2019), the findings of this research highlight that narratives are not necessarily to be understood as subconscious to the teller. Rebels showed that they were subjectively aware of their own narratives, understanding that there is a reality beyond their perception. This also means that rebels were able to offer understanding to other rebel's perceptions of reality, and how that shaped their actions and ideas differently to their own. For example, when a rebel started singing a chant that was deemed offensive to others, rebels first inquired about the motivation

to do so. Doing so, they could understand that the “offensive” rebel was trying to show they cared and could, in turn, explain how they perceived the action: *“you could see that it really had touched them (...). In the end I think we gained a better understanding.”* (ID10, elaborated in Section 2 of the Results chapter). While either party could have shamed the other for not understanding the action, digging their heels into the ground in order to convince the other of their “right” ideas (Warner, 2019), they were able to turn the discussions to be productive. The example shows how this subjective awareness of one’s narrative is therefore able to reduce polarisation. Considering the prominence of narratives in all kinds of areas, this insight is significant beyond the sustainability realm.

In the area of social movements research, the research presented novel insights to the mobilisation success of XR. While previous research attributed the quick growth of the movement to major protest events (Gardner et al., 2022), or the mobilisation of new audiences (de Moor et al., 2021), this research shows how the high level of autonomy might play a significant role in XR’s mobilisation. Enabling different forms of involvement, people are encouraged to participate in small ways, suiting their availability and emotional capacities. This is particularly interesting in light of XRNL’s goal to mobilise 3,5% of the population: while more rebels would help them achieve their goal sooner, XRNL actively encourages rebels to take breaks, not come to an action if they haven’t done a training, and generally protect their boundaries as needed. That, counter-intuitively, mobilises more people, thus contributing to their goal.

However, while XRNL has put effort into communicating this setting clearly (e.g. on their website: *“Whoever you are or however much time you have, there is a place for you within our movement”* (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023f)), it remains disputable how many people are aware of this - particularly People of Colour, practically educated people, as well as disabled people are still underrepresented in the movement (Bell & Bevan, 2021). A potential hypothesis could be that the general public still sees activists as having little autonomy, needing to submit themselves to the greater cause of the movement, as explained by Interviewee ID11 in Section 4 of the Results chapter. Future research could therefore examine how awareness on the level autonomy found in XR can be increased, and whether doing so would increase the participation of minority communities in the movement. Nonetheless, previous research on the inclusivity of the movement has pointed out that inclusion issues that keep minority communities from joining reach beyond autonomy, such as the ongoing discussions on the implementation of climate justice, or the strong focus on civil disobedience as action form (e.g. Zantvoort, 2021; Bell & Bevan, 2021).

Next to the new perspective on XR’s mobilisation success, the research also maps out new tensions that haven’t been described in XR(NL) yet. However, these tensions not only contribute to a more complete mapping of XR. Rather, they are particularly important to look at due to their potential to become polarising: the tensions that XR is in danger of not navigating well. For one, the two-folded discussion on a) “what is violence?” and b) “when is it justified?” forms a significant part of the ongoing discussions in the movement. While the former question is regularly discussed and well-navigated in XRNL, the same cannot be said for the latter. With ongoing climate destruction and deadlines closing in, some rebels in the movement are starting to question the core value of nonviolence. However, the majority of the interviewees expressed that the nonviolent character was a significant influence for them

to take part in the actions. Both, sticking to- or breaking away from nonviolence, could alienate either group, or even split the movement apart.

However, the question of justified violence isn't new to social movements. Especially the anarchist movement has been occupied with the topic (e.g. as early as Carter, 1978). It would thus be valuable for XRNL and academics alike to draw the connections to these previous social movements, understanding how the discussion was shaped in the past, and what these insights could mean for XRNL. Indeed, one interviewee already did this in their local group: by recalling how the extreme left movement Rote Armee Fraction (RAF) of the German 70s got gradually more violent, they were able to shift the perspective of the group: *“there was this example in Great Britain where XR hit the windows of the Barclays Bank. And we had this discussion (on violence). (And) in the beginning the people of the group tended to say it's not really violence. Violence is against (a) person. And I brought in the argument of the escalation (of the RAF) and then the opinion changed. I was surprised.”* (ID3).

Next to the discussion on violence, XRNL faces significant difficulty in navigating tensions surrounding Demand 0. Zantvoort (2021) previously described the tensions that preceded and eventually led to the development of Demand 0 in XRNL. Since then, new questions have arisen; how should climate justice be interpreted? When is an issue connected to climate justice? To what extent should climate justice reach? These questions have become particularly prominent in the last months, with the Israel-Palestine conflict unfolding. With official XRNL Instagram accounts posting pro-Palestine statements (@extinctionrebellionnl, 2023), with follow-up statement on the website (Extinction Rebellion Nederland, 2023e), rebels are discussing whether this is a wise choice. To supporters of the statements, it is a manifestation of Demand 0, and not voicing support with Palestine would show that XRNL has not succeeded in truly integrating the new demand into the movement yet. On the other hand, adversaries of the statements argue the issue goes beyond the purpose of the movement, as the conflict is not directly climate related.

Having observed discussions in a local Telegram chat over the past weeks, exchanges on the topic quickly turned heated and accusatory - far from the discussion habits described in the main body of this research. Some rebels have already left the movement, as they want to exclusively focus actions on climate change. Simultaneously, other rebels have left the movement out of frustration that the Palestine statements cause such discussion, stating that XRNL is not truly engaged on climate justice. The tension is evidently highly polarising, and significant effort is needed to navigate this tension well. On a positive note, a “sharing circle” has already been organised through the local Telegram chat, where these questions were discussed openly, and next questions raised.

Limitations

Next to the aforementioned avenues for future research, the limitations of this research form further starting points for academic work. Foremost, the framework of this research was built on the process that *internal* tensions go through within XRNL, therefore lacking aspects of *external* tensions. Understanding how these insights can be translated to external tensions of XRNL would not only add to the framework, but also support Extinction Rebellion Netherlands in navigating those external tensions. Using the tension with the police as an example, questions would form around whether, and how, a shared baseline between the two parties

could be established. Next to that, cultures would need to be bridged: how can the speaking, listening, and relativising practices of XRNL be brought to the police? Likewise, what does the communication style of the police mean to XRNL?

Furthermore, the framework was based on Extinction Rebellion in the Netherlands, therefore lacking insight on broader contexts. It would be interesting to examine the navigation of tensions in Extinction Rebellion in other countries, expanding the case cross-sectionally. Indeed, some interviewees suggested Dutch culture to play a factor in their discussion habits (ID2, ID5, ID6, ID11), explaining that it is common in the Netherlands to be “straight forward” and not easily offended by other people’s opinions. A cross-sectional study to XR in other countries could put this idea to the test. Moreso, a longitudinal study could follow the tensions as they unfold over time, rather than relying on a re-telling from the rebels. Doing so, the tensions could be traced more clearly, and thereby drawing more detailed insights into the effects of each approach, as well as XR’s attempts to broaden its social base.

Finally, it is of course interesting to see how the framework holds up in cases beyond Extinction Rebellion. Given the small extent to which practice-based research on the agonistic struggle is has been conducted so far, the framework forms a basis and starting point for necessary further research. Expanding it to other social movements, but also to even broader settings involving actors across sustainability transitions, would a) map out how other stakeholders currently navigate tensions, and b) test and reshape the framework, thus bringing deeper insights to how tensions in sustainability transitions can be navigated and used productively by all kinds of transition actors. Can the police offer trainings that teach officers to relativise their perspectives? Is it possible for a multinational company to establish such a central shared baseline? How can the Sociocratic method be used in a governmental organisation? What happens if paid employees are given the same amount of autonomy as rebels in Extinction Rebellion? And what do other transition actors do to navigate tensions, that XRNL could do, too?

06 Conclusion

Recent years of research and practice have made clear that sustainability transitions require actors of all areas to collaborate. Academics have discussed how this large-scale collaboration can take place, especially in a time where narratives of conflict and polarisation have taken over global news. Most prominently, a commonalities approach is emphasised to bridge gaps between narratives and groups. However, this neglects the productive potential found in tensions, which can even turn destructive if ignored or suppressed. This idea is most prominently captured in the concept of agonistics by Laclau & Mouffe (2001). However, the concept lacks practical knowledge, staying abstract in the “how” of embracing tensions. Therefore, the aim of this research was to bring novel insights to this practical side of the navigation of tensions, finding practices that can be used by the various actors in sustainability transitions. To do so, the case study of Extinction Rebellion Netherlands was used, understanding the central role that social movements (and their narratives) play in sustainability transitions.

The research resulted in a framework consisting of four approaches that stand in an exchange relationship with each other. In approach 1) Relativising perspectives, rebels showed great understanding for the perspectives of others, being aware that their own narrative is limited and subjective. Initiated through an introductory training, the simple exchange of viewpoints, without the need for answers or solutions, becomes normalised. This practice is held up by approach 2) Speaking up, where rebels address tensions as soon as they arise. Doing so means that tensions stay manageable and are heard quickly, enabling direct adjustments and learning. When a tension does require an answer or decision, they are taken sociocratically in approach 3) Sociocratic decision-making. Here, separate rounds of questions and comments enable everyone to be heard at the right time, while differing between concerns and objections allow decisions to be made. In approach 4) Autonomy, rebels receive full authority to direct actions freely and, importantly, without judgement. Therefore, no one is subjected to work on decisions they do not agree with, while being encouraged to work on the aspects they do support.

The four approaches are supported by a shared baseline, consisting of a set of core values, as well as agreements on actions and demands. This baseline *enables* the approaches, offering the supporting values to desired behaviours. For example, the baseline value ‘No blaming and shaming’ enables a free exchange of perspectives in approach 1) Relativising perspectives. Furthermore, the baseline helps *regulate* the approaches when needed. As an example, when someone displays an undesirable behaviour at a protest, rebels can refer to the action consensus to justify their intervention. The importance of this shared baseline becomes even more clear when it is questioned or challenged. Here, tensions turned destructive and potentially polarising, as shown through the discussion around the use of violence, or XRNL’s relation to the police.

This framework gives practical insights into how XRNL navigates tensions while using their productive potential. Furthermore, it shows how the navigation of tensions leads to mobilising narratives: through the normalised exchange of perspectives, there is space for different *opinions* to co-exist in the movement, while through the autonomy, there is space for different *actions* to co-exist in the movement. Therefore, many different people can find a role in Extinction Rebellion. However, it also shows that when tensions are not navigated as well,

they create limited narratives, leading to certain groups of people not feeling addressed by the mobilisation of the movement. Navigating those struggles better would thus likely lead to a larger mobilisation of diverse groups of people.

The insights of this research give a first practical approach to agonistics, which other actors in sustainability transitions can use to navigate tensions. Therefore, three main recommendations can be drawn:

1. Build a culture of reflection, learning, and speaking-up
2. Give autonomy and power in decision-making moments to employees
3. Create a strong shared baseline around values and goals

Of course, these recommendations aren't entirely new to organisations; many companies, for example, emphasise their learning culture and value-oriented business practice. However, XRNL manages to employ the approaches at a deeper level, supporting them in the navigation of tensions. Therefore, the practices through which XRNL cultivates the approaches are valuable to learn from, too. These include: small group sizes; flat hierarchies; rotating roles; dedicated and regular moments to address issues, such as e.g. check-ins and discussion channels, supported by facilitators and hand signals; as well as trainings to practice exchange of viewpoints. Employing these in other organisations might be able to support the navigation of tensions there.

To Extinction Rebellion Netherlands, this research can bring some confirmation as well as recommendations. Foremost, the highlighted approaches and how they are being cultivated are a valuable asset to XRNL that should be consciously continued and taught to new rebels. However, next to that, the framework also showed where tensions aren't navigated as successfully yet and have the potential to become polarising. Both the discussion on (the implementation of) Demand 0, as well as the discussion on justifying the use of violence are very present in the movement. It is important for XRNL to realise that these baseline-challenging tensions are different to other tensions, and therefore require more conscious effort in their navigation. Fortunately, questions around climate justice and violence aren't entirely new to social movements. XRNL can therefore learn from other movements and their ways of navigating these tensions and use those insights in their own discussions. Furthermore, older rebels are a valuable way to learn from previous movements in time. For example, by sharing their experiences connected to the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) of the German 70s, Interviewee ID3 was able to shift their group's perception on violence.

To conclude, Extinction Rebellion Netherlands is by far not perfect. While they have managed to build practices that navigate tensions and harness their productive potential, some discussions still turn unproductive, people still get upset sometimes, and the movement continuously needs to re-evaluate itself. However, rebels in the movement know that tensions aren't "bad things" to be avoided: they are a natural and necessary part of just sustainability transitions. Tensions are the discomfort that brings change, allowing society to become more inclusive, equal, and sustainable. Embracing tensions means trying to understand what shapes the opposite's reality, while looking for a shared baseline that you can agree on. In the words of interviewee ID9:

"The tension is exactly where you find the political."

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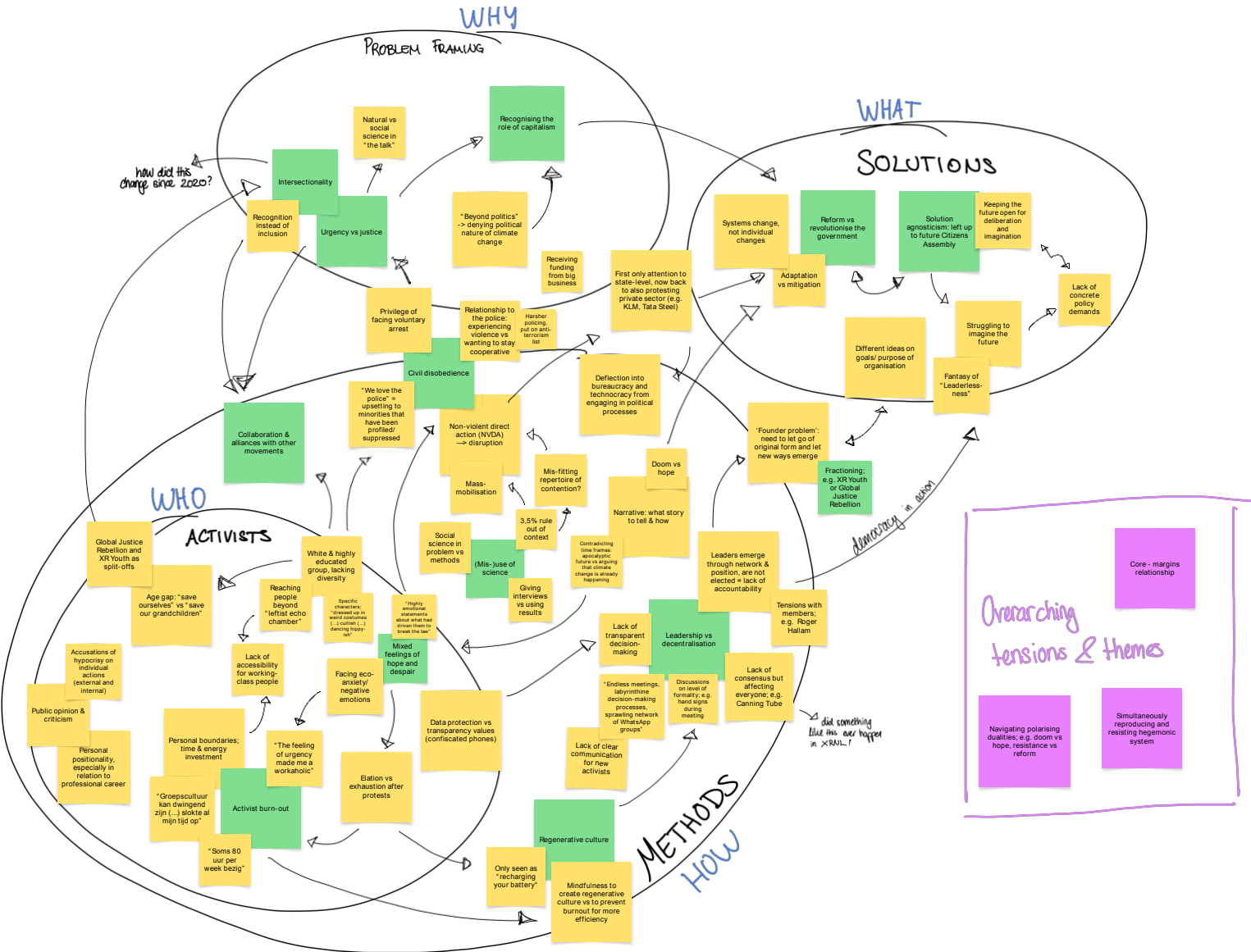
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Appendix

Appendix 1: Tension Nexus



Appendix 2: List of Selected Tensions

*additions made throughout the research process are indicated in green

Internal tensions

1. Leadership vs decentralisation
 - Multiple dimensions: transparency, accountability, independence
 - **Transparency:** How are decisions made? How does one keep overview of network of communication channels, meetings, processes?
 - **Accountability:** Are leaders elected? How?
Is connection in Network = power? “Fantasy of leaderless-ness”?
 - **Independence:** Lack of consensus affecting everyone → did something like the Canning Tube incident ever happen in XRNL? What do you do if there is a (group of) member(s) that “stick out” negatively?
2. Urgency vs justice
 - Intersectionality
 - Inclusion vs recognition of other contexts of life
 - Expressed as:
 - i. Collaboration with other movements?
 - ii. Prioritisation of direct action vs regeneration
 - Civil disobedience – using privilege vs keeping accessible?
3. Direct action vs regeneration
 - Activist burnout
 - Working insane hours per week
 - “Endless meetings, labyrinthine decision-making processes, sprawling network of WhatsApp groups”
 - Preventing burnout only to be more effective → essentially replicating neoliberal working environments
 - Emotional involvement
 - i. Hope vs despair
 - ii. Urgency justifying burnout/ workaholism?

External tensions

4. Civil disobedience
 - Using privilege vs keeping accessible
 - Relationship to the police
 - i. “We love the police” as upsetting to groups that faced violence
 - ii. Increasing violence/ harsh policing – how to react?
5. Use of science
 - To what extent does it inform approach?
 - Social vs natural science in “the talk”
 - Science out of context leading to a mis-fitting repertoire of contention?
 - Sustainability science & degrowth → represented in demands?
6. Attention to public vs private sector
 - “Beyond politics” vs political activity of members
 - Reform vs revolutionise the government?
 - Started with state-focus but now also direct action at e.g. KLM and Tata Steel

New tensions

- Violence vs non-violence → what is violence? To what extent should XR stick to it? More radical split-offs?
- (Potential) infiltration by national security/ right-wing people → suspicion among members

Appendix 3: Interviewee List

While no specific details can be given to preserve anonymity, the list below offers some context to facilitate interpretation and transparency insofar possible.

ID	Connection	Situation in XR	Interview	Notes
1	Secondary	Margins	Offline	-
2	Primary	Core	Offline	-
3	Primary	Core	Offline	-
4	Primary	Margins	Offline	-
5	Primary	Margins	Offline	-
6	Primary	Margins	Offline	-
7	Tertiary	Core	Online	-
8				Declined after IDs were appointed
9 & 10	Secondary	Core	Offline	Double interview
11	Tertiary	Core	Offline	-
12	Tertiary	Core	Online	-
13	Tertiary	Core	Online	-

- **ID:** To ensure anonymity, interviewees were given an identification number that was used to refer to throughout the research.
- **Connection:** First interviewees were found through personal connections (primary), as well as connections through friends and family (secondary). Other interviewees were found through connection from previous interviewees, as well as official contacting, such as info email addresses (tertiary).
- **Situation in XR:** Many interviewees found it difficult to situate themselves in the margins or the core, indicating that the space isn't as binary: due to the circle structure of XR, there are many cores. Therefore, the categorisation given here can only serve as a rough indicator, but does not stand as a definite situation.
- **Interview:** Most interviews were held in person (offline). If not possible or not desired, they were held through Microsoft Teams (online).
- **Notes:** Details to explain potential confusion.

Appendix 4: Interview Guide XRNL

*additions made throughout the research process are indicated in green

1. Opening
 2. Explanation of the research
 - Purpose
 - In a nutshell: how can tensions be productive rather than destructive/ polarising?
 - How does XR navigate tensions to develop (a) mobilising narrative(s)?
 3. Questions and consent to recording:
 - Signing informed consent form
 - Explain anonymity: no names and identifying characteristics
 - Ask for permission to record and use quotes

--- Start recording ---
 4. **Personal questions:**
 - Why did you join XR?
 - How long have you been involved with XR?
 - What is your involvement/role? *(As broad or detailed as desired; minimal level = indication of centre or margin in group; e.g. through level of connection in network)*
 5. After being introduced to the general idea of this research, are there **any tensions that come to your mind right away?**
 - If yes: Step 6
 - If no → some starting help to think about tensions:
 - Do people tend to agree on things?
 - Who plays a role in finding solutions? How?
 - What happens if people don't agree on things?
 6. Per tension:
 - What **happened**? Can you describe the tension to me? How are you experiencing it?
 - Do you know where the tension came from?
 - Did anything change for this tension to become more **prominent**?
 - Who was **involved**? In what way?
 - How did the tension **develop**?
 - How was it **navigated**?
 - Did it result in any **changes**? Which?
 - Does the tension still **exist**? How is it being treated?
 - How do you estimate the **influence** of this tension?
 7. **Moving to Tension Framework:** I have read or heard about ..., *do you recognise this? Has there been an instance where you have experienced this?*
 - If yes: Repeat Step 6
 - If no: Why not?
 8. If not mentioned yet: I've read about **People's Assemblies** having played an important part during the pandemic...
 - Are they still used?
 - How? How often?
 - Who initiates them?
 - What happens?
 9. Are there any tensions we haven't addressed yet that are important?
 10. *Has your own way of talking and listening changed since joining XR?*
 11. *If you could transfer one "way of doing things" from XR to another organisation, what would it be?*
 12. Who else should I talk to?
- Remaining comments and questions, Further process and contact, Closing