

What's Holding up the Climate Movement? A Look at Germany

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Abstract: *The climate issue has become significantly more important over the last ten years in view of growing global warming. At the same time climate protection has remained a domain of fairly low political involvement on the part of the population. Similarly, people's knowledge about the causes and effects of global climate change is rudimentary. Differing interests seem to make it difficult to create general acceptance and compliance for political decisions in the field of climate protection. This is all the more surprising since Germany looks back on several decades of a strong environmental movement. So why don't more people get involved in climate protection activities? And who are the people who do get involved? Taking a look at ecological awareness and at what the environmental movement actually strives for provides what may be the key answer to this question.*

Keywords: climate policy, environmental movement, public awareness, low emission lifestyle, climate debate, citizen activities, effective climate protection

1. What's Holding up the Climate Movement?

We didn't really need to wait for the Nobel Prize being awarded to former US vice president and currently probably the most well-known environmentalist Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC¹ for us to know that rapid climate change is one of the most serious problems facing us today.

Since the first World Climate Conference held in Geneva in 1979, international studies and conferences regularly point to the fact of man-made (anthropogenic) climate change (IPCC 2007a, IPCC 2007b). At the same time, the rising sea level, extreme weather events and desertification, to name just the most obvious signs, are clearly indicating

the growing extent of the threat (Schellnhuber et al. 2006).

And yet environmental policies have not fundamentally changed to this day. This is not surprising if you take a closer look at the relevant political and economic power structures. The findings of scientific research are opposed by powerful economic and political interests that play a key part in the fact that measures and initiatives taken so far have remained largely ineffective. While, on the one hand, enormously bureaucratic emissions trading schemes are being established (Lohmann 2006) and massive funds are being spent on research into CO₂ filter systems and the underground storage of CO₂, the money allocated to information campaigns on initiatives, activities and how to protect the climate have remained negligible.

This focus, which plays down the actual drama of the situation, has devastating consequences: firstly, it supports a lifestyle of consuming vast amounts of resources which prevails in industrialized countries. And secondly, it prevents citizens from participating in climate protection measures on a broad scale.

Climate protection² has remained a domain of fairly low political involvement on the part of the population. Similarly, people's knowledge about the causes and effects of global climate change is rudimentary (Weber 2006). This is all the more surprising since especially Germany looks back on several decades of a strong environmental movement. In the 1970s and 80s social groups in particular exerted pressure on politicians and economic players, making them consider environmental aspects to a greater extent. This makes the question of what has become of this influential movement all the more intriguing. Why are we not experiencing the emergence (or a comeback) of citizen activities in the current boom of climate discussions? And what can be done to revive the movement?

2. On the Current Climate Debate

The climate issue has become significantly more important over the last ten years in view of growing global warming. Current research and increasingly reliable computer simulations are not only substantiating the fact that climate change is already taking place but also that it is progressing much faster than assumed. The IPCC predicts the average global temperature to rise by up to 5.8 degrees Celsius by the year 2100. The most recent study, published in early 2007, forecasts additional serious climate changes in many parts of the world for the next hundred years that will be much more dramatic than imagined so far (IPCC 2007a).

Meanwhile measured data shows that overall emissions rates of GHG are still increasing (International Energy Agency 2008). The German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) referred to the fact that GHG emissions of the industrial countries from 1990 to 2000 showed an overall increase of 8% (German Institute for Economic Research 2004). Furthermore, a comprehensive study which was commissioned by the bureau of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), collected the official available GHG data

of 40 industrial and 121 developing states in a trend analysis from 1990 to 2003. This study does not suggest a decrease of emissions either- on the contrary, the UNFCCC-survey forecasts an increase as well (UNFCCC 2005). The rapidly rising emission rates of transition and developing states will only accelerate this development (IPCC 2007). These results show that neither a stabilization of GHG nor a convergence towards the objectives of the Kyoto protocol are currently expected. Additionally, climate change does not indicate a simple logic between causes and impacts. Rather it represents a complex spatiotemporal interrelation. Contemporary CO₂-emissions affect the atmosphere not immediately, but in a delayed manner. And the effects of climate change are not the same for all countries and populations worldwide but differ among them and have variable time spans.

Irrespective of these scientific findings, publications of so-called "climate sceptics" are thoroughly confusing the population with respect to global climate change and its effects³. Evidently interested newspapers, such as "Die Welt" and "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung", regularly report on studies that refer to global warming as a natural process without furnishing sufficient evidence for this. Nigel Calder, for instance, is of the opinion that the sun alone is causing the climate to change (Calder 1997). Statements of this kind are printed regularly although the respective data does not stand any of the scientific tests. Consequently, renowned climate researcher Stefan Rahmsdorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) recently asked why German media deliberately spread misinformation instead of following the top principles of the press code of practice, i.e. the obligation of truthfulness and accurate investigation⁴. There has been no reply from the relevant editorial offices to this date.

In this, the empirical findings have in fact been overly evident for a long time not only to experts and journalists but also to sensitised individuals. In our everyday lives, too, the effects of climate change can hardly be ignored any longer (Graßl et al. 2003). 2005 for instance was a record year of extreme natural phenomena: the hurricanes 'Katrina' and 'Wilma' alone caused damage amounting to millions of dollars, and there were extreme draughts in the Sahel, the Amazon Basin and in south western Europe. The re-insurer Swiss Re calculated that natural

disasters in 2005 had caused damage amounting to 225 billion dollars of which a sum of only 80 billion dollars had been insured. A current study of the World Health Organization estimates global climate change currently to be responsible for an approximate 150,000 additional deaths each year, mainly in Africa⁵. The most popular report by Sir Nicolas Stern suggests that global warming could shrink the global economy by 20%⁶.

Without rapid counter-measures, this will only be the beginning of a climate change several times greater (Pachauri 2004). In its most recent report, the German Advisory Council on Global Change pointed out that many societies will not be able to cope with the effects of climate change even over the next few decades if it is not decisively counteracted (WGBU 2007). The results will be violence and destabilisation, posing a greater threat to national and international security than so far anticipated. Hence, there is no doubt that the way in which the climate issue is dealt with today is instrumental in future questions of war and peace.

3. Climate Change as a Matter of Personal Perception

To the population, climate change and the greenhouse effect seem to be predominately a matter of what they perceive. People are alerted to the problem only when they feel threatened or “too hot”. Only when people can actually “feel” the change in climate, does it seem to encourage them to think about it. Even the fact that the situation is escalating has so far not had any sustainable effect on the degree of civic involvement. Current surveys are suggesting that people are attaching increasing importance to the issue of climate change. At the same time, though, individual action is thought to be of marginal impact. Instead, public opinion is that those responsible for mitigating climate change are mainly companies and the government (Weber 2008).

Opinion polls continuously survey environmental consciousness measuring people’s concern about the environment. One of the largest contemporary opinion polls on ecological awareness in the European Union is the Eurobarometer of the year 2008 (European Commission 2008). The Eurobarometer is one of the biggest internationally comparative surveys focusing on ecological awareness which gives insight into people’s

awareness, attitudes and status of information on the issue in general. Nevertheless, it lacks survey questions which go more in depth, especially with regard to the knowledge base (causes and impacts) of climate change.

Considering the mean values of the European Union, in both old and new member states (and Germany in particular), the environmental poll shows that populations of western industrialized countries regard climate change as one of the most dangerous environmental problems today. Returning to the mean values of the European poll, nearly half the respondents (41%) feel badly informed about different aspects of climate change. With regard to individual action, the majority of respondents to the Eurobarometer poll describe themselves as environmentally conscious citizens. However, most do not believe that this has much of an influence on the overall environmental situation as they do not ascribe the same attitude to other people or to industry as main polluters.

Although deficits in understanding are not measured in the poll, information deficits about global warming could possibly be a hint for knowledge deficits (instead of desire of additional knowledge) that might be due to the issue’s complexity (Weber 2008). Compared to locatable environmental issues like deforestation or air pollution the discovery of the greenhouse effect is possibly more difficult to understand for citizens due to its complex characteristics. Direct local consequences of changes in the climate system cannot be predicted with certainty. This influences individual environmental awareness as well as attitudes and the translation into action. Therefore, climate change can be summarized under the overall issue of environmental consciousness on the one hand, and on the other hand, the issue of climate change is much more complex in comparison to other environmental issues. Weber (2006) assumes that climate consciousness and effective climate protection of the general public is expected to be much more difficult to provoke than for those environmental issues which are more easily understood, affect individuals more directly, or are highly apparent visually.

Moreover, climate change in the public discourse is perceived as a so called ‘global’ problem. The underlying argument is that anthropogenic climate change affects populations worldwide. It is argued that greenhouse gas emissions worldwide contribute to

the global nature of the problem - the perception of global climate change in this respect is of course not wrong, but it needs modification in order to explain the complex structure of the problem more clearly. This has an effect onto the public's perception, for example, it could evoke only minor individual responsibility given internationally binding objectives of mitigation of the Kyoto protocol. The symbolism of the Kyoto protocol represents a global consensus about climate protection which is not scrutinized by the majority of the general public. Thus existing agreements may contribute to the perception that they represent sufficient problem solving strategies on the international level (Weber 2006).

Nevertheless, the Eurobarometer and various surveys on environmental awareness⁷ clearly show that people are in fact willing to get involved, but that this potential is not being used. When asked whether they could imagine getting involved in environmental activities, up to 33 percent of the interviewees in Germany said they could (Umweltbundesamt 2008). Even if these statistics leave a lot of scope for interpretation, they provide an idea of the potential that could be activated. At the moment, according to the "Freiwilligensurvey" (survey on civic activities)⁸, civic activities in the field of climate and environmental politics are insignificant, with only 2.5 percent of the German population being active in environmental or animal protection (in contrast to 11 percent involved in voluntary work in the fields of "sports and movement") (Gensicke 2006).

In the past, on the other hand, citizen activities proved extremely successful precisely in the field of environmental politics (Rootes 2007; Della Porta/Rucht 2002). Numerous political and economic innovations were promoted as the result of citizen activities and initiatives. The founding of the German Federal Environment Agency, for instance, was brought about by the environmental movement of the late 1970s.

4. Climate Activities in the Generation and the Professionalization Trap

Who are the people who do get involved? The organizers of climate projects and initiatives have little information about their members or what motivates citizens to become active. If there were more information about these aspects, environmen-

tal organizations could recruit new members in a more targeted manner. The results of the survey on civic activities (Freiwilligensurvey) at least revealed that individuals in Germany aged 40 to 50 and over 60 get involved in environmental matters most of all, while young people only account for 2 percent (Gensicke 2006). This result is alarming in view of the fact that today's youth will be affected by the impact of climate change most of all. Effective climate protection in fact requires the cooperation of as many and different players as possible; moreover, this kind of cooperation implies being aware of the necessity of personal and everyday involvement as well as knowing what can be done. These are two prerequisites for success that seem to be vanishing (specifically with regard to young people).

Members of environmental organisations can be divided into formal or more or less passive members and active members. The number of formal members or supporters has increased, above all in big organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. Medium-sized and small national organisations were also able to improve their numbers, but the latter had smaller growth rates (Roose/Rucht 2002). The German League for Nature and Environment (DNR), the umbrella organization of nearly a hundred German conservation and environmental protection organizations, estimates the number of its individual members to be over five million⁹. However, the number of active members paints a different picture, with a general decline of activists being observed (Gensicke 2006), even though these figures are based on far less reliable data.

The 2004 survey on civic activities indicates that associations and organisations are the most frequently chosen form of organisation, while the less institutionalised form of initiatives or self-organised groups are found to a much lesser degree. In comparison to the 1999 survey on civic activities, there has been a change in trend towards institutionalisation and especially towards governmental and municipal institutions. The driving force for environmental engagement is altruistic motives and a great sense of responsibility for nature and the environment (Mitlacher/Schulte 2005). Besides the motives of the activists, the general conditions of civic activities are important, as most associations at the local level do unsalaried, honorary work.

At the same time, studies about environmental organisations revealed that the larger organisations have undergone a significant professionalization process, which has been followed by an increase in public attention (Leif/ Speth 2003). While in the 1970s and 1980s most initiatives and groups of the environmental movement propagated grassroots democracy with low hierarchical structures, this orientation changed in the 1990s with the development of institutionalised and sometimes hierarchically structured organisations. On the basis of increasing governmental subsidies and grants, a host of well paid experts were able to establish themselves and professionalize organisations by preparing studies or cooperating with special governmental working groups. Professionalization was implemented with the help of marketing methods (Klein/ Löw 2006).

The successes in the environmental field are partially linked to high demands on the part of the volunteers – among other things because of the legal participation rights. The Federal Nature Conservation Act, for example, stipulates and widely applies the participation of environmental groups and organisations. Yet in most cases, activists need expertise and a lot of time. This applies in particular when organisations want to work at the European and international level, where they need to cooperate with governmental bodies and are consulted as experts.

Consequently, nearly all major environmental NGOs have institutionalized their activities at the EU level by setting up offices. The expertise is a kind of strategic resource when organisations want their opinions and claims to be included in the decision-making process. In international climate policy, the Climate Action Network (CAN), which comprises nearly 300 NGOs worldwide, is a very important actor – the European equivalent is the Climate Network Europe (CNE). The Climate Network is a kind of watchdog for the governmental negotiation process, and networking is a prerequisite for coping with the task of monitoring the negotiations and identifying relevant problems.

At the EU level, environmental NGOs are mainly consulted by the European Commission and its several working groups and committees (Roose 2003). In trying to *enhance its legitimacy*, the Commission has allowed a wider NGO-consultation practice. The Commission itself has acknowledged that NGOs

help to reduce the gap between the governing and the governed by raising public awareness about the purposes, policies and activities of the European Union. Moreover, NGOs also act to set an example of best practices in their specific fields, developing standard indicators and targets (Bongardt 2007). Within the wide debate about governance and democracy, NGOs play a pivotal role, for example in the White Paper on Governance published by the European Commission¹⁰.

Until now the crucial point in the EU-NGO relation is that there is no development of a mechanism that would allow the organised civil society to contribute at all stages of policy-making and to do so based on different forms of consultation. The variation of this kind could help prevent the dialog between civil society and European institutions from depending on the goodwill of individuals within the process. Moreover, different forms of consultation could avoid cooperation taking place based on high *selective* benefits for individual *environmental organisations only*. The fact that selectivity occurs was proven by Swyngedouw and his colleagues in a study on the participation of environmental NGOs in the water sector: “The new ‘gestalt of scale’ of water governance has undoubtedly given a greater voice and power to environmental organisations ... It has consolidated and enhanced the power of groups associated with the drive towards marketisation, and diminished the participatory status of groups associated with social democratic or antiprivatisation strategies” (Swyngedouw et al. 2002:128).

Furthermore, the Committee of Inquiry “Protection of man and the environment” of the German Federal Government regards participation and self-organization as two mutually reinforcing elements that need to be the focus of a successful policy of sustainability (Enquete-Kommission 1998). However, international comparison clearly shows that the definition of participation differs largely from country to country. A survey carried out as part of a research project of the German Research Foundation (DFG) and conducted in more than 1,500 German cities and communities showed that individual climate protection programmes and activities are performed in almost every municipality, but that hardly any of them has taken stock of the situation or drawn up a concept for political action (Gruber 2000). In addition, bureaucratic and departmentalized think-

ing frequently prevents the establishment of cross-departmental project teams encompassing administrative staff and citizens. Yet successful local climate protection projects are characterized especially by the broad participation of various social groups and businesses – ranging from Local Agenda 21 projects over *Energie-Tische* (energy round tables) right up to *Bürgersolaranlagen* (citizens' solar systems).

5. New types of activities

While lobbying and expertise are demanded at the international and the European level, public information and project work in associations and protest groups and in the Local Agenda 21 process prevail at the local level. Especially the Local Agenda 21 projects differ from the others in their cooperative and integrating form of participation (Brand and Fürst et al. 2002). If administrative authorities are involved in Agenda activities, they often have a central position and act as community facilitator. The sustainable development work of successful cities like Heidelberg, for example, is carried out due to the enthusiasm of individual politicians, whereas the unsuccessful Agenda 21 process in Berlin is the result of governmental bodies being unwilling or unable to accept responsibility (Schophaus 2001).

In comparison with other European countries, especially the UK, Germany established Local Agenda 21 processes quite late. Most municipalities started activities at the end of the 1990s. More than 2600 municipalities passed a resolution for 2007 – that is nearly 20 percent of all German cities and villages¹¹. All in all, there is a plain difference between local Agenda processes that are organized top-down and those that are planned bottom-up. While the top-down projects lack sustainable support from the public and face acceptance problems, the bottom-up projects often lack support from the governmental bodies, which means that they are not taken into account in political decisions or, even worse, sometimes get blocked by the politicians. This led to lot of frustration and activists retreating (Schophaus 2001). In contrast to the environmental movement of the 1970s and 1980s, which followed a confrontational behavioral pattern and tried to change the capitalist political system (Amery, Mayer-Tasch und Meyer-Abich 1978), the Local Agenda 21 activists prefer to set up sustainable political institutions.

Another form of “top-down” engagement is the German Voluntary Ecological Year¹². This Year was established by the German Government in 1993 and is enforced by the federal states in cooperation with special unions and associations. The German Voluntary Ecological Year is a special offer for young people (aged 16 to 27) to get some work experience. It offers young people a 6-18 month full time job in environmental or nature conservation projects. This form of engagement is exceptional in that the young activists sign a contract saying that they will do the entire Ecological Year. For the commitment they get different kinds of training courses, insurance, monthly pocket money (between 184€ and 370€), board and lodging. In 2006 more than 1,800 young people took the opportunity of doing an Ecological Year (Haack 2006). A research study about the motives and impacts of the engagement confirmed that the aim of the programme to sensitize people to environmental topics and to commit young people to an engagement was successful. Most volunteers continued to engage themselves in different environmental projects after their specified time was over (Haack 2006).

For some years, new forms of activities have been observed which are more critical and bottom up, and organized in different European countries: the climate action camps. In 2006, for example, 600 people gathered in West Yorkshire, UK, for ten days, and in 2007 more than 2,000 people came to a week-long camp a few hundred meters away from Heathrow Airport. In Germany, more than 2,000 people came together for a climate action camp in Hamburg last summer. They discussed climate issues, capitalist power structures and sustainable living patterns in more than 60 workshops. The activists described the climate camp as a place for them of education, “and to talk about different relationships between society and nature. They want to develop positions and strategies for an emerging climate movement”¹³.

6. Consensus or Conflict?

Successful cooperations for local climate protection projects¹⁴ are either performed by groups and organisations with similar interests, values and attitudes or by project teams that consciously represent the perspectives of various players, e.g. NGOs, the economic sector and administrative bodies. In contrast to this, the economic sector and govern-

ment agencies selectively run initiatives, such as in the field of emissions trading, that include certain carefully selected environmental groups (Braun/Santarius 2007). Usually certain businesses hope to establish a profitable market in these domains. A broader, environmentally informed public would only “interfere” in this case. Involving citizen groups for merely strategic or tactical reasons may enhance the outcome of policy decisions in exceptional cases, but it will never promote large-scale participation of the public in climate protection activities.

Differing interests seem to make it difficult to create general acceptance and compliance for political decisions in the field of climate protection. At the same time Germany still has a close network of civic initiatives and organizations whose members have broad veto and protesting potential and demand participation in policy shaping. The question is if involving the groups and NGOs in cooperative political structures to a greater extent or listening to the discussions and ideas of the critical activists would be a more viable strategy for a future-capable climate policy (Geißel 2003).

Today environmental science emphasizes both consensus-based and conflict-based activities as a means of successful environmental protection. While in certain situations consensus-based groups were very successful with their policy of alliances, in the past it was mainly conflict-based groups that were able to exert public pressure and push drastic decisions. An example of this is the successful Brent Spar campaign organized by Greenpeace, which motivated thousands of people to boycott Shell petrol stations within only a few weeks, thus making the oil group abandon its plans to dispose of the oil platform at sea. This unexpected wave of protest from consumers and broad political support are an expression of the (potential) power of the consumers, even though, they are far from being a sign of an upcoming new movement.

However, there are also a lot of good examples of the consensus-based strategy: a number of towns, communities and districts in Germany have won awards in the context of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. One of them is Heidelberg, a city that has dedicated itself predominately to “education for sustainable development” in the fields of energy-saving, public

transport, “One World” work, and further education for teachers and pupils. In this, it attaches great importance to public relations work designed to explain projects to the public and to promote both the networking of players and the pooling of their activities.

Yet this consensus-based approach has one serious shortcoming: many institutions still refuse to pursue a cooperative style of politics. The numerous Agenda 21 activities, for instance¹⁵, that were initiated by individual citizens in their communities, reveal mainly how difficult it is for citizens to push through their own ideas and suggestions in the political decision-making process (Kern et al. 2001). A key obstacle in this is the power and departmental divide in local government bodies. Moreover, the departmental structure of these local administrations favours isolated decisions and prevents integrated decisions (Schwalb/ Walk 2007). In many cases, implementation of the Local Agenda 21 lies with the departments of environment alone, yet these lack sufficient power.

The public is in fact only involved in matters of climate protection if the administration’s staff is open-minded towards committed citizens – which unfortunately is not very often the case. Not much has changed here despite the environmental movement and clear-cut specifications outlined by international climate agreements over the last decades (Walk 2008).

7. The Sedated Public

The poor involvement of the public is surprising because much of the debate surrounding climate change concerns education, training and public awareness. Several major policy documents on climate change refer to ‘participation’, ‘stakeholder engagement’ and ‘bottom-up’ processes. For example, Article 6 of the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change calls for Governments to promote ‘public participation in addressing climate change and its effects and developing adequate responses’ (UNFCCC, 1992, p17). Both the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol obliged the nation states to take effective measures that will create awareness and involve the public. The states were last requested to present their relevant projects at the

2002 Climate Conference in New Delhi. Yet most of them have been extremely hesitant in complying with this request. The main reason for this is that no government wants to commit itself when it comes to the participation of NGOs.

To this day, Germany does not have a concept on this matter, and it remains unclear who is responsible for drawing up the respective work programme. "Everybody propagates and nods through the creation of public awareness, but nobody makes any suggestions on how to implement this idea", criticises Ministerialrat Franzjosef Schafhausen, *Head of Climate Protection Programme* of the Federal Ministry for the Environment. As a matter of fact, not much has happened at the Federal Environment Ministry over the last years. From time to time information on public relations work is compiled, and in 2006 the various existing NGO activities were summarized in a report. Compared to other EU countries, there are numerous campaigns and activities geared towards providing information and creating an awareness. Yet so far these have not been used strategically; the material is not used to draw up a concept (Walk 2008). This is not only inefficient especially in terms of public relations work, but may even have negative consequences, since the addressees are hardly capable of discerning or correctly evaluating the partially contradictory reports on climate change and the respective required measures.

Emissions trading schemes show that there is another way of dealing with this. In 2004 the Federal Government established the conditions required to start emissions trading within just one year and introduced a new environmental policy instrument for the market economy and an operative office (the "German Emissions Trading Office").

8. Geostrategic Resource Policy Instead of Effective Climate Protection

Also and especially in view of having badly neglected the creation of public awareness, the present official policy of the Federal Government can be interpreted more as a geostrategic resource policy rather than true climate policy. The structure of Germany's energy policy is still characterized by the use of fossil energy sources, such as coal, oil and gas. Hence, through a couple of achievements made by the coalition of Social Democrats and Greens includ-

ing the ecotax and the Renewable Energy Sources Act, Germany took some important steps towards climate-friendly technology but is still miles away from a serious climate protection policy, which requires tackling a fundamental realignment of the energy sector.

All this has not exactly pushed the population's political participation over the last years. Years of politically "processing" the climate problem at an international level has made many climate activists lose sight of where to tie in with their projects. Groups and initiatives have neither been able to resort to clearly defined local or national competencies and regulations, nor have they been able to make their interests heard at an international level (Kriesi/ Baglioni 2003). Only in isolated cases have their resources and technical expertise sufficed to have their voices heard at international climate negotiations (Dodds et al. 2007). This has resulted in economic interests being implemented to a significantly greater degree than environmental concerns, particularly at the European and international level. In the course of establishing the so-called flexible mechanisms (such as emissions trading), therefore, a lucrative market with new business segments for specialized companies is what has mainly been created. At the same time, some of the environmental groups themselves are embedded in a highly competitive energy market that seeks to combine environmental goals with economic goals.

Increasing power imbalances between experts and lay people are causing more and more conflict especially in the Agenda 21 process, since the citizens' needs are not inevitably reflected by the experts' opinions (Weber 2006, Reusswig/ Schwarzkopf 2004). On the one hand, Local Agenda 21 projects are important steps towards broad participation of the public, on the other hand citizens are increasingly being marginalized due to a lack of decision-making competencies (Caulfield/ Larsen 2002; Centre for Democracy and Governance 2000).

9. What's Holding up the Climate Movement?

So why, once more, is Germany not experiencing the (re-)emergence of an influential environmental movement that force not only politicians but also the population to act? This last part of the article tries to sum up some justifications which can be

drawn from the presented material and which are hopefully useful for further discussion.

Taking a look at what the environmental movement actually strives for provides what may be the key answer to this question. This, at least according to movement researchers, consists in “solving” environmental problems in a sustainable way, i.e. by fundamentally changing the relationship between man and nature. The above described projects of the Local Agenda 21 and the population’s rather low potential for support will hardly suffice to achieve this goal, despite the urgency for this kind of fundamental change in view of the threatening impact. This is different with regard to the climate action camps – organized since 2006 in different European countries – which can be identified as a first sign of an emerging climate movement because they have formulated a strong desire to change their existing consumption patterns and criticize the economy driven solutions to the climate problems. But so far the number of participants is still too small and the initiatives are too isolated that one could talk of a movement. According to Charles Tilly movements are a series of contentious performances, displays and campaigns by which ordinary people made collective claims on others (Tilly 2004).

Only sporadically one could read or hear critical positions of environmental scientists in the ongoing ecological modernisation discourse: for example Walden Bello, Nicola Bullard, Wolfgang Sachs and Vandana Shiva who wrote that the environment may be in the globalization trap (2003). These critical scholars are exceptional. Today most environmental scientists have become part of the political negotiation process as experts and political advisers and they don’t take fundamental positions. That means that an important accelerator of the climate movement is missing. Compared to the environmental movement in the 1970s, where science played an important role in providing the movements with a theoretical basis, in recent years scholars have become quite reluctant to take radical positions in the climate debate.

In fact the international climate negotiation process was an important step towards different countries dealing with the climate problem jointly but at the same time there was an inactivity at the national level discernable. The responsibility was for a long time pushed

off to the international level. The local groups and initiatives could neither fall back on competent local or national authorities nor could they introduce their positions in the international negotiation process because they simply lacked the resources and know how. On the other side the globalization process offered a big window of opportunity for many economical driven lobbyists of industries and big enterprises to influence the international policy on climate change. Their success can be seen in the introduction of the emission trade of carbon dioxide, the Clean Development Mechanism¹⁶ and Joint Implementation¹⁷. All three became important mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol and established a large market with new spheres of activities for specialized enterprises.

That could be another reason why no climate movement develops. There are a lot of governmental activities in the field of climate change and at first glance a lot of actors are involved in climate protection. There seems to be no need for public mobilisation, because the state, a lot of industries and big enterprises take steps towards climate protection.

Moreover, the working groups of the Agenda 21 process show that more and more energy saving projects, citizens’ solar systems and biogas plants are being set up in the ‘climate’ category, while there are less and less nature experiencing and sustainable living patterns projects. Yet energy saving projects are based predominately on economic criteria, such as profitability, rather than on processes of creating ecological awareness. Also, there are clearly less confrontational activities and initiatives, while cooperative styles of negotiation and joining the serried ranks of the private economy and government institutions clearly prevail. To put it differently, most of present climate initiatives are increasingly characterized by the fact that they regard economically driven innovation processes not only as the cause but also as the solution of environmental problems. Climate protection is thus progressively becoming part of a free-market reform strategy. Under this aspect, climate protection can be both close to the economy and socially reforming as well as critical of capitalism or industrialism. This dual approach may well be desirable in certain circumstances. Yet this kind of view will hardly lead to a “fundamental change in the relationship between man and nature”, which was and still is the environmental movement’s primary goal.

That could be a third reason for the population's lack of commitment in climate matters: the divergence of great environmentalist and sociopolitical ideas on the one hand and the modest reality of compliance with the free market economy on the other. At least this chasm was not quite as wide in the 1970s, which made it easier to define and convey the respective conflicts to the public. Today these real conflicts – between climate polluters and those affected by climate change – need to be re-defined and dealt with more clearly.

A fourth reason why no climate movement has developed could be the generation trap. The results of the survey on civic activities (Freiwilligensurvey) revealed that in Germany mainly individuals aged 40 to 50 and over 60 get involved in environmental matters. Young people only account for 2 percent (Gensicke 2006). This result is very surprising in view of the fact that today's youth will be affected by the impact of climate change most of all. History shows that social movements need the young generation, who wants to force radical changes. The middle aged and old generation usually tend to rely more on reforms than on radical change.

Moreover, in the last 30 years there has been a change in trend towards institutionalisation and especially towards governmental and municipal institutions. Nowadays associations and organisations are the most frequently chosen types, while less institutionalised initiatives or self-organised groups are found to a much lesser degree. While in the 1970s and 1980s most initiatives and groups of the environmental movement propagated grassroots democracy with low hierarchical structures, this orientation changed in the 1990s with the development of institutionalised and sometimes hierarchically structured organisations. Additionally, many environmental groups and organisations have tried to adjust to the ecological modernisation discourse and activities. This means that beside the generation trap there is also a professionalisation trap.

With regard to participation of the public, many institutions still refuse to pursue a cooperative style of politics. The numerous Agenda 21 activities, for instance, that were initiated by individual citizens in their communities, reveal mainly how difficult it is for citizens to push through their own ideas and suggestions in the political decision-making process.

A key obstacle in this is the power and departmental divide in local government bodies. Moreover, the departmental structure of these local administrations favours isolated decisions and prevents integrated decisions. The public is in fact only involved in matters of climate protection if the administration's staff is open-minded towards committed citizens – which unfortunately is not very often the case. If participation and self-organization are seen as two mutually reinforcing elements, then there is hope for overcoming the prevailing bureaucratic and departmental ways of thinking which frequently prevent the establishment of cross-departmental project teams encompassing administrative staff and citizens. There is hardly any programme that has taken stock of the situation or drawn up a concept for political action to raise public awareness. All in all, neither the top-down strategy nor bottom-up mobilisation have succeeded in developing a powerful climate movement so far. While the top-down initiatives lack participation opportunities, sustainable support from the public and face acceptance problems, the bottom-up initiatives are too isolated and lack the need and justifications for radical change.

The overall conclusions of the presented material regarding the reasons for fairly low political involvement on the part of the population is that a climate movement would require more critical scholars who could provide its members with a theoretical basis and some fundamental (radical) positions regarding the need to change the destructive capitalist production methods and energy-intensive lifestyles. That means that a controversial public debate is needed about conflicting opposites between economy-driven lobbyists of industries (or big enterprises) and environmentalist. There are many examples which show that it is not possible in all cases to reach a 'win-win' situation - especially between climate polluters and those affected by climate change. Climate protection cannot just become part of a free market reform strategy. Let's just face the truth: energy-saving projects which are based predominantly on economic criteria are not sufficient. What we need is a mass mobilisation for climate change, not only of old people who are getting involved in environmental issues but also of young people with the will for radical change of existing consumption patterns.

Notes:

- 1 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was founded at the initiative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in 1988. The panel's name indicates that it takes a position combining politics and science. The IPCC's task is to review the standard of knowledge concerning the greenhouse effect, its range of potential impacts and the possible political responses.
- 2 Climate protection in this article refers – mainly, but not exclusively – to climate mitigation activities. Climate mitigation is any action taken to permanently eliminate or reduce the long-term risk and hazards of climate change to human life and property. The terms “mitigation” and “adaptation” are two important terms that are fundamental in the climate change debate. While mitigation tackles the causes, adaptation tackles the effects of climate change. The idea that less mitigation means greater climatic change, and consequently requiring more adaptation is the basis for climate protection. Climate mitigation and adaptation should not be seen as alternatives to each other, but rather a combined set of actions in an overall strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 3 cf. Albrecht von Lucke, Oh, Cicero, in: “Blätter”, 9/2007, p. 1187 f.
- 4 cf. FAZ net, 31.8.2007.
- 5 The World Health Report 2007, A Safer Future: global public health security in the 21st century.
- 6 http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm. Revised february 2008
- 7 Commissioned by the Federal Ministry for the Environment and the Federal Environmental Agency, for example.
- 8 The “Freiwilligen survey” is a representative survey on civic activities commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, cf. www.bmfsfj.de.
- 9 www.dnr.de
- 10 http://ec.europa.eu/governance/white_paper
- 11 www.agenda-transfer.de
- 12 Freiwillige Ökologische Jahr (FÖJ)
- 13 <http://www.klimacamp08.net/idea>

- 14 Climate protection projects are to reduce the overall emission of carbon dioxide - with different approaches. Several projects deal with the establishment of renewable energy, others concentrate on energy saving or traffic reduction or on the compensation of CO₂.
- 15 In 2006 there were 2,603 local decisions on the Local Agenda 21, which amounts to 20.4% of all towns, communities and districts.
- 16 The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is an arrangement under the Kyoto Protocol allowing industrialised countries (Annex B Party) to invest in projects that reduce emissions in developing countries as an alternative to more expensive emission reductions in their own countries.
- 17 Joint implementation allows a country with an emission reduction or limitation commitment under the Kyoto Protocol to earn emission reduction units (ERUs) from an emission-reduction or emission removal project in another industrialised country (Annex B Party),

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