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Melina Kalem

# #Fridaysforfuture. Beyond the Hashtag on Youth Activism for Climate Justice

A Case Study of Slovenia's Youth for  
Climate Justice (Mladi Za Podnebno  
Pravičnost, MZZP)

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BEYOND THE HASHTAG ON YOUTH ACTIVISM  
FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE: A CASE STUDY OF SLOVENIA'S  
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- Yuthaworakool, Saittawut, *Understanding the Right to Change Legal Gender: A Case Study of Trans Women in Sri Lanka*, Supervisor: Kokila Lankathilake Konasinghe, University of Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Mike Hayes, Mahidol University. Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Asia Pacific (APMA), coordinated by Mahidol University (Thailand).

This publication includes the thesis *#Fridaysforfuture. Beyond the Hashtag on Youth Activism for Climate Justice: A Case Study of Slovenia's Youth for Climate Justice (Mladi Za Podnebno Pravičnost, MZZP)*, written by Melina Kalem and supervised by Mladen Domazet, Institute for Political Ecology (IPE, Croatia).

#### BIOGRAPHY

Melina Kalem is an English language teacher from Bosnia and Herzegovina. She holds a master's degree in TEFL from the University of Sarajevo and in 2020 she graduated from the ERMA program. Melina's research interests involve environmental and children's rights, climate justice and youth activism.

#### ABSTRACT

The Anthropocene logic of the 'faster-higher-further' perpetuates the continuous human wish and grind for more, constructing a chain of production and consumption that in reality ends up being detrimental to our living environment, also risking our health and lifestyles. The current approach to stop or minimise the effects of one of the most pronounced environmental issues, climate change, also generates a global justice problem whereby those who have done the least to cause it suffer the most from the impacts of the status quo. Young people, who are likely to bear the brunt of current inaction, are at the forefront of the recent massive mobilisation for climate justice that did not circumvent the region of South-East Europe, demanding a just transition towards a new development paradigm that would be beneficial for all. The aim of this thesis was to investigate the existence of sustainability-oriented attitudes in the lives of young activists from the Mladi za podnebno pravičnost (MZPP) movement in Slovenia, thereby inspecting the motivations behind and the aim of taking part in the strikes, as well as their perception of the obstacles that hinder the movement's progress. In order to achieve this, a series of both structured and semi-structured interviews were used. The findings suggest a spectrum of climate change information-gathering channels that influence activists' climate awareness and generate their action within the activist group. Moreover, the findings also reveal instances of liberal theory comeback in the form of vivid discontent with and distrust towards the current political establishment in Slovenia, demanding equal and fair representation and participation in decision-making processes, encasing the equity aspect of climate change issue.

*Key words: environmental thought development, climate change, climate justice, Slovenia, MZPP*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my MA thesis supervisor Prof Mladen Domazet and my academic tutor Marija Ivanović for their selfless time investment into reading my thesis, insightful comments and suggestions, encouragement and reflective questions, and, above all, their belief in me and my ideas.*

*My sincere thanks also goes to the MZPP activists who expressed their wish to participate in this research, their enthusiasm, immense knowledge and time invested in helping me carry out this research. I also thank my WWF Adria summer internship team, ERMA tutors, my fellow colleagues, friends and everybody who, one way or another, encouraged me to maintain motivation and consistency in the writing process.*

*Of course, a huge thanks to my family and their immense support, having been so patient with me throughout this process and making sure I do not neglect my MA thesis obligations.*

## TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

Aarhus Convention	Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
CCA	Climate change awareness
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
DEMOS	Democratic Opposition of Slovenia
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ENGOS	Environmental non-governmental organisations
EPA	Environment Protection Act
ETD	Environmental thought development
FFF	Fridays for Future
IEL	International environmental law
ILI	International legal instruments
MESP	Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning
MZPP	Youth for Climate Justice
NEPN	Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEE	South-East Europe
UN	United Nations
ZVOS	Environment Protection Alliance

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## INTRODUCTION

The Anthropocene logic of the ‘faster-higher-further’ brings to the front the continuous human wish and grind for more, constructing a chain of production and consumption that in reality ends up being detrimental to our living environment. The Paris Agreement, Rio Principles and Kyoto Protocol,<sup>1</sup> the international community’s acknowledgement of changing climate patterns, officially affirmed the importance of urgent action in ensuring a sustainable and liveable future. Governments around the world were expected to reconsider current economic policies and goals in order to minimise the effects of climate change, ensuring basic human rights for its citizens. Scientists agreed that humanity is facing a climate emergency that threatens their present and future. Fortunately, this emergency was not left unanswered as a large number of people, especially young ones, rose against it.

The culture of activism in this field, although moderate in comparison to other social movements, brought about one extremely positive story on the stage. An increased number of young people started showing up for protests, exhibiting an envious awareness of the changing environment and the overtly instrumental use of nature, making a plea for action. In September 2019, inspired by a Swedish pupil Greta Thunberg, young people gathered every Friday on the streets or in front of government

<sup>1</sup> The Paris Agreement (adopted 12 December 2015, entered into force 4 November 2016) UN Doc. FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1 Decision 1/CP.21 <[https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english\\_paris\\_agreement.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf)> accessed 12 April 2020; Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (adopted 16 June 1992) 31 ILM 874 <[www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_CONF.151\\_26\\_Vol.I\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.151_26_Vol.I_Declaration.pdf)> accessed 12 April 2020; Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (adopted 10 December 1997, entered into force 16 February 2005) 37 I.L.M. 22 (1998); 2303 U.N.T.S. 148; U.N. Doc FCCC/CP/1997/7/Add.1 <[https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/08\\_unfccc\\_kp\\_ref\\_manual.pdf](https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/publications/08_unfccc_kp_ref_manual.pdf)> accessed 12 April 2020.

buildings to demand action on climate change in a series of weekly events that came to be known as Fridays for Future (FFF), standing in solidarity with portions of our society mostly affected by the changing climate patterns. South-East Europe (SEE) did not stay immune to these protests. In Europe's Green Capital of 2016, Ljubljana, a grassroots movement is quickly spreading to other Slovenian cities joining the FFF global movement, instigating the government's response in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Mladi za podnebno pravičnost (Youth for Climate Justice – MZPP), one of the rare movement of this kind in SEE, was born in Slovenia as young people took to the streets calling for climate justice and instigating a political response on securing the right to a healthy environment. Predominantly a youth led movement, it seized social media platforms to mobilise support throughout the country, customising FFF to local context and laying out demands to the government. The FFF, especially MZPP and their activism rationale, will be the focus of this research. The circular activism of hashtag-street-hashtag dimensions has gone beyond writing demands and showing up for strikes. The activists call it a revolution.

This research contributes to limited but relevant literature on youth climate activism, especially in the SEE region that is not usually considered a hotbed of environmental thought. It provides valuable insights into the personal lives and struggles of young green activists coming from the global periphery, their drives and motivations, understanding of power relations within society, as well as opinion on and trust in international human rights instruments. Besides providing more insight into what can potentially be done in other countries of SEE, this research puts into spotlight a region that is usually neglected for green politics on the global level and is not on the primary research agenda.

The findings of the research can serve as an instrument of further analysis of the youth climate activism with implications for the future in terms of discourse and practices change, revision of political and economic policy, and above all, the global attitude shift, incorporating climate change education into curricula etc. The starting point of understanding young activists' motivations to join the climate strikes in their local community and actively participate in society and politics might instigate policy makers to start giving young people a voice in matters directly concerning them, allowing them to be agents of change. Lastly, another dimension of exploring activists' understanding of the perceived obstacles for achieving their goals will draw attention to phenomena the activism is directed against.

## AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to track the shift of values and ideologies related to climate change discourse and draw attention to the significance of youth climate activism for broader social issues, this research aims to investigate the existence of ecosophical and sustainability-oriented motivations in the lives of young MZPP activists, exploring the influence of different socio-cultural and structural factors on awareness formation. The focal point are the narratives of a novel subgroup of active citizens that address their understanding of climate change and ideas of how to respond to it. Contributing to the limited but pertinent literature on youth climate activism, the research aims to identify motivations and goals of their activism, as well as their views on international and national legal instruments and their usefulness in the struggle for a healthier environment. Thus, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do young activists develop climate emergency awareness?
2. Why did they decide to become active for this cause and what is their aim?
3. What are the perceived obstacles that impeded the realisation of activists' goals?
  - 3.1 What are the activists' views of international legal instruments (ILI) in environment protection and the effectiveness of their application?
  - 3.2 Following the Urgenda case,<sup>2</sup> are there legal and human rights-based instruments that they could envisage using in Slovenia and if not, why not?

Here, the researcher claims three things. First, information availability and circulation, the increasing presence of climate change discourse and influential role models who follow sustainable lifestyles (social media influencers, parents or peers) have a significant role in awareness shaping and change of lifestyle practices. Furthermore, driven by the wish of being

<sup>2</sup> *Urgenda Foundation (on behalf of 886 individuals) v The State of the Netherlands* (Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment) First instance decision HA ZA 13-1396, C/09/456689, ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2015:7145, ILDC 2456 (NL 2015) <<http://climatecasechart.com/non-us-case/urgenda-foundation-v-kingdom-of-the-netherlands/>> accessed 15 May 2020.

part of a like-minded community and the fear of climate change effects on our future, young activists joined the movement demanding action on the part of decision-makers. Lastly, some structural (government policies) and emotional (government policies infringing on people's way of life and preventing them to form nominal environmental support or taking action) obstacles prevent activists from realising their goals in entirety.

The findings show a spectrum of climate emergency information-gathering channels, such as parents, education and teachers, knowledgeable MZPP peers, and ultimately the media, helping the activists realise the importance of the issue. Moreover, the analysis reveals a vivid discontent with the current political establishment in Slovenia and the feeling of inadequate representation and participation in the decision-making process, which is one of the major drivers of their activism aiming to exert pressure on the government to act urgently in mitigating the effects of climate change. Another aim is simply to achieve climate justice, because there is no global justice if some parts of our society are left behind in the process of transition towards a more sustainable development path. The activists also share a deep distrust towards ILI in the domain of environment protection, such as those used in the *Urgenda* case, for their perceived inadequate implementation and inefficiency in Slovenia. This makes them reluctant to bring any rights violation matters to the court because they believe that the current right-wing government would see this enterprise as anything else other than an attempt to make them accountable for protecting the lives of their citizens.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is positioned primarily within the interdisciplinary field of social movements, mainly exploring theories of environmentalism, environmental thought development (ETD), climate change and justice, and youth activism when providing a theoretical overview of the topic. This is a case study of Slovenia, focusing on the MZPP's activism assuming the interpretivist approach of understanding human perceptions and behaviour by applying qualitative data gathering techniques of both structured and semi-structured interviews. The FFF protests were held in a number of cities across SEE, but it was in Slovenia, Europe's Green Capital from 2016, that the movement gained momentum drawing the attention of the wider public and quickly establishing a noteworthy locus of action. The research is based on extensive literature overview about

ETD both globally and in Slovenia from English Romanticism to FFF movement and analyses of environmental youth activism with specific focus on climate activism, FFF and MZPP strikes. The findings are based on three structured and two semi-structured, experience-focused epistolary and Skype interviews conducted during July and August 2020.

The interview consists of 11 questions designed to explore the life trajectories of young activists, interpreting their motivation and commitment to climate activism and discovering their views on the obstacles preventing them from achieving the strike goals. Moreover, the *Urgenda* case, which represents the victory of the Dutch rule of law and the citizens who campaigned for climate justice over the state in environmental matters, was used as a vignette to examine participants' views on using the human rights instruments. The profile of the interviewees is the following: young activists from Ljubljana and Pomurje region, with the age span of 18-30, encompassing university age students. All of them are members of the MZPP, with two of them participating in the MZPP formation. The informants were recruited via social media and by snowball sampling, where some of the already interviewed activists acted as gatekeepers and helped to recruit others. The information was gathered via internet-based methods through structured epistolary interviews mediated by email and semi-structured Skype interviews. It is relevant to note that the activists were given two options of conducting the interviews, either via video platforms or email. Due to the sensitive nature of this issue, the researcher has changed the interviewees' names to protect their privacy.

The research was subject to several limitations. Primarily, the overwhelming lack of research on youth environmental/climate activism, which the researcher tried to surpass by reviewing the most up to date documents available when building up the discussion and drawing conclusions. Second, due to the unpredictable Covid19 quarantine measures, the research was done via internet-based methods, which excluded the lively dimension of in-person conversation due to different time and space constraints. Moreover, the small sample size likelihood of Type II errors the researcher tried to surpass by primarily examining the individual motivation and behaviour of activists, avoiding spillover and generalisation on the rest of the group's supporters, thus considering the results as less conclusive. Therefore, this research should be seen as a starting point of exploring the life trajectories of young activists in order to track the shift of values and ideologies related to climate change

discourse. In order to avoid additional limitations of this study and endless administrative procedures, legal minors were not interviewed even though a large number of them are part of the MZPP and some of them were interested in this research.

The body of this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter sets the theoretical foundations of the very thesis, exploring the concepts of ETD, environmentalism, the right to a healthy environment, climate change and climate justice, as well as youth climate activism. The second chapter provides an analysis of ETD in Slovenia, within and outside Yugoslavia, discussing different types of environmental activism that emerged from the end of World War Two (WW2) until nowadays and providing a national legal framework on the right to a healthy environment. It furthermore explores the FFF local level group by introducing the MZPP. The last chapter provides answers to the research questions by analysing the interviews and synthesising the core findings relevant to this and future research.

As a person who considers herself a part of the FFF movement and one who supports the ideology their cause rests on, the researcher understands the aim of the activism and is aware of the factors that activism, online or offline, is directed against. The researcher is constantly familiarising herself with FFF activist enterprises across the world that aim to draw attention to burning climate issues. Nevertheless, she lacks understanding of how FFF ideologies translate onto local levels that are largely context-dependent, and into the agendas of subgroups that emerged in the past two to three years. Coming from the region of SEE that to her knowledge is not excessively environmentally aware in terms of not having large-scale movements and littering whenever possible, and having visited Slovenia, she was very much interested into the source of their exhibitable pro-environmental context and its effects in socio-cultural lives. Her intention was to gain insights that might prove a valuable starting point in examining other countries in the region, primarily her homeland. She is not part of the MZPP, however, she understands their concerns and motivation of joining FFF.

1.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ENVIRONMENTALISM,  
ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT DEVELOPMENT, CLIMATE  
CHANGE AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

The economic growth imperative, as the dominant socio-economic model of developed countries, is paving an unsustainable development path characterised by unlimited use of natural and human resources in order to meet the expectations of modern production-utilisation societies.<sup>3</sup> Having its roots in the First Industrial Revolution from the 18th century and amplifications in WW2 aftermath, this model proves highly detrimental to the environment disregarding the recognition that nature itself, as a resource provider, has limits. Ignoring these limits, mainly due to survival, the Anthropocene<sup>4</sup> man and woman continues to deteriorate not only the living environment as a source of its health and wellbeing, but also the future of next generations. Thankfully enough, contemporary history delivered people who recognised these dangers, actively drawing attention to changing environmental patterns caused by human activity and their negative effects on people's health. Sowing the seeds of modern day environmentalism, these people contributed to the shift of values and narrative related to the relationship between human beings and their surroundings. In that sentiment, this chapter sets out theoretical foundations of major thesis concepts: environmentalism, ETD, climate change and climate justice, sustainability and youth climate activism.

<sup>3</sup> Branko Ančić and Mladen Domazet, 'How far for the money?: affluence and democratic degrowth potential in Europe' in In Audrone Telesiene and Matthias Gross (eds.), *Green European: Environmental Behaviour and Attitudes in Europe in a Historical and Cross-Cultural Comparative Perspective* (Routledge 2017) 157 See also Katarina Polajnar Horvat, Aleš Smrekar and Matija Zorn, 'The development of environmental thought in Slovenia: A short overview' (2014) 10(1) *Ekonomika i ekohistorija* 16.

<sup>4</sup> The word was coined by a Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen, denoting a geological age within which human activities act as geological forces in exerting increasing impacts on the environment, and, in many ways, outcompeting natural processes. Thus, an Anthropocene man is one whose actions have a massive impact on the planet, in most cases detrimental. Paul J Crutzen, 'The Anthropocene' in Eckhart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft (eds), *The Earth System Science in the Anthropocene* (Springer 2006) 13.



## 1.1 ENVIRONMENTALISM: DEFINITION, SHORT HISTORY AND CONCEPTS

The global challenges of widespread water and air pollution, biodiversity loss, wildlife habitat destruction and global warming, today referred to as environmental problems, are usually traced back to the Industrial Revolution.<sup>5</sup> Romanticists and Transcendentalist philosophies of nature reverence and protection against men set the foundation for what people call today the ETD. Environmental thought emerged primarily due to growing economic development paradigms that enabled the destruction of habitat and ecosystems historically relevant for people's survival, only to grow in the aftermath of WW2 where countries concentrated on industrialisation as an economic recovery model, and culminate with growing environmental activity of organising into movements. Environmental thought entails reasoning about environmental welfare in terms of its conservation and protection from resource over-extraction and agro-industrial pollution, among other things. At its inception, the environmental thought missed a relevant component of today's environmentalism, i.e. the political and ethical lenses through which environmental degradation becomes a matter of global affairs, intersecting inter- and intra-state socio-economic relations. Nevertheless, its development announced the establishment of modern environmentalism, a movement concerned with the wellbeing of our surrounding.

It can be argued that today environmentalism is primarily a political and ethical movement seeking to minimise environmentally harmful activities through political, economic and social organisation.<sup>6</sup> The movement is exceptionally revisionist for it entails a reconsideration of humanity's relationship towards nature, considering it when devising socio-economic and political policies. It furthermore encompasses a wide web of concerns, the most prominent being biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change. Luigi Piccioni, an economic historian and researcher from the University of Calabria, deconstructs environmentalism into the following components: a rationally justified positive attitude towards nature preservation, concrete objectives turned

<sup>5</sup> Lorraine Elliott, 'Environmentalism', (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Summer edn 2020) <[www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism](http://www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism)> accessed 5 May 2020.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

into wide-range protection and conservation programmes, and desire and capacity to form associations or organise to achieve these goals.<sup>7</sup> In short, the existence of a preservationist attitude based on scientific facts and organising to initiate programmes of collective action on the environment is what constitutes the present day environmentalism.

Beside Piccioni's universal features it is possible to recognise several national or regional specificities resulting from the peculiar mix of cultural traditions, political strategies and socio-economic situations each country or region produced and faces throughout history.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, several pages will be devoted to exploring the genesis of environmentalism and ETD on the global level, from the explosion of concern for the apparent threat to the planet in the 1960s, to its subsequent evolution as an ideological force and political movement, in Kevin Harrison's and Toni Boyd's words.<sup>9</sup>

The discussion about the beginning of environmentalism is still ongoing with no actual consensus on its birth. The stance that large-scale environmental movements came about as a result of the Industrial Revolution, and the setup of modern economic systems when nature's role and place within the universe was shrunk to the point of representing a mere commodity envisioned to keep the economy afloat, is widely adopted, yet not entirely assumed. Piccioni, for instance, takes the sophisticated reflections about nature-man relationship in the writings of Romanticists and Transcendentalists as starting points in a new and stronger appreciation and protection of nature in the Western world. Nevertheless, for William Cronon, an environmental historian from the University of Wisconsin, it would be an oversimplification to say that modern environmentalism began with Rachel Carson's (some would say revolutionary) *Silent Spring* in the 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Luigi Piccioni, 'The rise of European environmentalism: Cosmopolitan wave 1865-1914' (2014) 10(1) *Ekonomika i ekohistorija* 8.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* 13.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd, 'Environmentalism and ecologism' in Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd, *Understanding political ideas and movements* (Manchester UP 2003) 274.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas R Dunlap and William Cronon, *DDT, Silent Spring, and the Rise of Environmentalism: Classic Texts* (University of Washington Press 2008).

### 1.1.1 *Environmentalism advocacy attempts: Silent Spring and environmental thought development*

One of the most influential books on environmentalism, *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, vividly describes the rich American landscape, where every creature, animate or inanimate is in harmony with each other and the surrounding nature. However, the time came when a 'strange blight' disturbed this equilibrium bringing about serious maladies, destroying vegetation and ecosystems, threatening the life of every living creature on earth.<sup>11</sup> This metaphorical description of pesticide pollution warned against the possible implications of their imprudent usage and the effects on both the ecology of the world and ecology of our bodies, for the most part irrecoverable.<sup>12</sup> Carson described here a life cycle that does not give precedence to one part of the universe, but rather sees it as an interconnected and interdependent unit, where the health of one link depends on the health of others.

This enterprise established Carson as one of the first noted activists for the environment by means of scientific research and advocacy and catapulted her into a political firestorm, as Cronon put it. By describing the 1960s as an era dominated by industry, she does not refute the right to make and earn money, but is definitely against the unlimited usage of means of achieving it, for 'man's war against nature' writes records of its own habitat destruction.<sup>13</sup> For that reason, Carson tried to set out a possible future in this book from her current standpoint, presented evidence for disaster and gave ways to avoid it, which was quite intriguing at a time when the majority of people did not question the use of substances made in laboratories.<sup>14</sup>

Carson's enterprise might be dismissed for structural reasons, but two key points emerge that reflect the present-day environmentalism concerns. First, her published and scientifically backed discovery put Carson in a political firestorm, finding opposition within the pesticide beneficiaries' circles (corporations, economists and even some scientists) who accused her of fear mongering, whilst gaining support from some

<sup>11</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Fawcett Publications 1964) 10.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* 10, 101.

<sup>13</sup> Carson (n 11) 13,16.

<sup>14</sup> Dunlap (n 10) 7.

fellow scientists and trained ecologists.<sup>15</sup> The challenge to sustain attacks of opposite mindsets, educate and convince the public about possible harms of certain human actions on the environment is an issue contemporary activism also deals with. Second, Carson's discussion on the incoherent information flow from experts and scientists on one side, and governments and corporations on the other, greatly resembles the situation in public discourse nowadays.<sup>16</sup> That was how two currents in modern day environmentalism were created, the rivalry of which nowadays contributes to incoherent information flow and widespread public confusion about environment protection.

### *1.1.2 Institutionalising environmentalism: international legal framework*

The development of environmental thought that one sees expand in the 1960s with the activism of Carson reached even greater importance once its codification was done in international law. Environmental organisations that emerged around the world built their agendas on Carson's advocacy, but the challenge, besides awareness raising, was how to give a character to this new movement. The answer came from the international community, the United Nations (UN) with its engagement at the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s, initiating a series of conferences acknowledging environmental degradation and states' responsibilities to stop or minimise it, followed by the recognition of environmental organisations as legitimate partners in decision-making processes. Probably, the most significant contribution of the international community lied in announcing a new development paradigm that would not compromise the environment.

The report on 'Our Common Future' in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) mentioned for the first time the term 'sustainable development', defined as a new development paradigm that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations

<sup>15</sup> Dunlap (n 10) 7. The chemical corporations producing pesticides, governments financing the production and economists who saw it as an attack on their expertise all criticised Carson, as well as some scientists who believed pesticide benefits outweighed their harms. Even the wider public saw pesticides as a saviour for their crops and lives.

<sup>16</sup> The scientific locus of control urges decision makers to follow scientific investigations and facts, whereas some governmental bodies try to sugar-coat the situation by claiming some industrial chemicals are not lethal for human beings, using euphemist names to sell them.

to meet their own needs.<sup>17</sup> A more comprehensive definition would be a new approach to economic planning, fostering economic growth while preserving the quality of environment for future generations.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda in 2015, reflecting the importance of global partnership in addressing global challenges, not just of environmental, but also socio-political nature. Thus, sustainability became a word used too often but never entirely understood. Mladen Domazet and others attribute this shortcoming to the evolving capacity of the sustainable development definition. For them defining the term means actually implementing it, and being very much context dependent, the interpretation of sustainability changes across contexts, perspectives and ideological systems, as new knowledge emerges.<sup>19</sup> The context dependent sustainability, as a working definition, shows how some countries need to invest more effort than others in the transition process, which immediately compromises the UN's end goal of global partnership because few countries are ready to sacrifice financial gains for others.

So far, the researcher provided information on how ETD moved across different stages, from being an attitude of a particular individual based on the love and appreciation for nature, to the scientific advocacy attempts to explain why such a preservationist attitude needs to be assumed. ETD's recognition by the international community and its inscription into international law provided evidence of growing institutional foundations of environmental concern. The relevant wording of a right to healthy environment in legal frameworks necessitated a protection of that right because framing something as a right, inherent and inalienable,

<sup>17</sup> World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 'Our Common Future' (OUP 1987) <<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>> accessed 5 May 2020. See also Simon Dresner, *Principles of Sustainability* (Routledge 2008) 1-3.

<sup>18</sup> Celia Campbell-Mohn and Federico Cheever, 'Environmental Law: Sustainable development' (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2016) <[www.britannica.com/topic/environmental-law](http://www.britannica.com/topic/environmental-law)> accessed 20 August 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Mladen Domazet and others, *Civil rights and obligations are connected to the environmental issues in the curriculum? A comparative analysis of the ESD in 9 European countries* (Network of Education Policy Centres 2012) 27-30. Domazet and others provide an adapted figure of the sustainable development ladder first proposed by Baker and others (Susan Baker, Maria Kousis, Dick Richardson and Stephen Young (eds), *Politics of Sustainable Development* (Routledge 1997)) further nuancing between the broad scope of sustainability taking into considerations contextual and ideological differences. The ladder can be used as a navigator or position setting in terms of economic development paths assumed by countries, divided into four steps: treadmill, weak sustainability, strong sustainability and ideal model.

immediately entails action on the duty bearers to ensure the exercise of this right. However, sometimes, the enforcement of a certain right proves inadequate and even though it exists as a right, one cannot make claims to it.

#### 1.1.2.1 *The right to a healthy environment*

While it is true that the right to a healthy environment is recognised as a norm in both international and regional conventions, however, it is not universally acknowledged as a right for the right holders are not humans or human groups.<sup>20</sup> The ongoing debate around the non-recognition further fuels the aggravating circumstances hindering the enforcement of this right. Nevertheless, the very wording used in the international environmental body of law (IEL), such as the right to a dignified life of all people resting on environmental hygiene, shows the importance of the environmental dimension of ensuring and protecting human rights. By the IEL, one refers to different regulations and aspects of law related to the environment, covering topics such as biodiversity, climate change and pollution, all within a framework of sustainable development.<sup>21</sup>

Driven by environmental scientific evidence and the need for a multinational solution to environmental problems, the IEL produced a number of declarations and especially treaties, collection of soft and hard legal instruments, governing different actors in ecological protection, all of which gave environmentalism the desired character envisioned by the first environmental groups. However, despite the existence of such legal instruments, the right to a healthy environment proves hard to enforce in practice, which is also confirmed by the fact that a very small number of case law (both UN and EU level) on this right exists.

The importance of the right to a healthy environment lies in its encasement of the environmental dimensions of *inter alia* the right to life, health, adequate housing, water and sanitation, bringing together dimensions of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> James Nickel, 'Human Rights', (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring edn 2019) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rights-human/>> accessed 15 September 2020.

<sup>21</sup> University of Melbourne, 'What is International Environmental Law?' (*University of Melbourne*) <<https://unimelb.libguides.com/internationallaw/environmental/>> accessed 24 September 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Marcos A Orellana, 'The Case for a Right to a Healthy Environment' (*Human Rights Watch*, 19 September 2020) <[www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/01/case-right-healthy-environment](https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/03/01/case-right-healthy-environment)> accessed 25 September 2020.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as part of the international bill of rights, acknowledges states' duty to improve 'all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene' ensuring a life of dignity to all citizens.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, some regional documents also recognise and state the right to a healthy environment favourable for human beings' development.<sup>24</sup> The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union went even further in recognising the dimension of sustainability in ensuring environment protection: 'A high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union and ensured in accordance with the principle of sustainable development'.<sup>25</sup>

Other relevant documents on environment protection include the 1972 Stockholm Declaration<sup>26</sup> containing objectives in conserving and protecting the environment and emphasising the human-centric approach by incorporating the right to a healthy environment in states' legal frameworks. Twenty years later, in 1992, the Rio Declaration prescribed 27 principles of global cooperation that guide the future sustainable development, designating, *inter alia*, children and youth as a channel of achieving them.<sup>27</sup> However, these declarations only act as guidance setting foundational principles, and do not legally bind states into action. Documents such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Aarhus Convention tackle specific issues. The Kyoto Protocol, as the only legally binding treaty, addresses climate change, industrial pollution and government requirements to minimise the effects of environmental degradation. Lastly, the Aarhus Convention, as the only legally binding document in

<sup>23</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 3 January 1976) 993 UNTS 3 (ICESCR) art 12(2)(b) <[https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtldsg\\_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtldsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&clang=en)> accessed 25 August 2020.

<sup>24</sup> African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (adopted 27 June 1981, entered into force 21 October 1986) (1982) 21 ILM 58 (African Charter) 1986 art 24 <<https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights>> accessed 25 August 2020; Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Protocol of San Salvador) (entered into force 16 November 1999) OAS Treaty Series No 69 (1988) reprinted in Basic Documents Pertaining to Human Rights in the InterAmerican System OEA/Ser L V/II.82 Doc 6 Rev 1 at 67 (1992) art 11 <[www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-52.html](http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-52.html)> accessed 25 August 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Nickel (n 20). Population, biodiversity, climate change, toxic and hazardous substances, pollution, conservation, desertification and nuclear damage are all covered by the IEL.

<sup>26</sup> Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (adopted 16 June 1972) UN Doc. A/CONF. 48/14, at 2 and Corr. 1 <[www.ipcc.ch/apps/nj-lite/srex/nj-lite\\_download.php?id=6471](http://www.ipcc.ch/apps/nj-lite/srex/nj-lite_download.php?id=6471)> accessed 12 April 2020)

<sup>27</sup> University of Melbourne (n 21).

environmental democracy, gives the public the right to seek and obtain information, encasing the participatory human right.<sup>28</sup> States that have ratified these legally binding instruments can be held accountable for not complying with the adopted provisions from the treaties.

One might argue that the international community's engagement rarely goes beyond document drafting and awareness raising, but as long as people have to deal with environmental degradation denialists and the status quo on current economic development, they need to raise awareness and establish obligations on the part of duty bearers. Over time, many states have ratified different agreements, recognising a variety of environmental issues that emerged over time, incorporating them in their national legal frameworks. The latest was the Paris Agreement from 2015, a breakthrough in climate change mitigation, where 195 members of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change<sup>29</sup> agreed to 'limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels'.<sup>30</sup> Climate change, as the most widespread environmental problem, turned into an emergency, threatening all living creatures on the planet.

## 1.2 ENVIRONMENTALISM TODAY: CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Over the years, scientists have managed to identify and define a variety of environmental problems that present major global threats to our planet, and they include, *inter alia*, global warming, air pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation and overpopulation,<sup>31</sup> which, of course, vary in presence across different regions. As it was

<sup>28</sup> Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (adopted 25 June 1998, entered into force 30 October 2001) 2161 UNTS 447

<<https://unece.org/environment-policy/public-participation/aarhus-convention/text>> accessed 25 August 2020.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (adopted 9 May 1992, entered into force 21 March 1994) 1771 U.N.T.S. 107 <[https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004-56%20AM/Ch\\_XXVII\\_07p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1994/03/19940321%2004-56%20AM/Ch_XXVII_07p.pdf)> accessed 12 April 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Nicolas Kayser-Bril, 'Europe is getting warm, and it's not looking like it's going to cool down anytime soon' (*European Data Journalism Network*, 24 September 2018) <[www.europeandatajournalism.eu/News/Data-news/Europe-is-getting-warmer-and-it-s-not-looking-like-it-s-going-to-cool-down-anytime-soon](http://www.europeandatajournalism.eu/News/Data-news/Europe-is-getting-warmer-and-it-s-not-looking-like-it-s-going-to-cool-down-anytime-soon)> accessed 5 September 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Niels Zimmermann, 'Five of the world's biggest environmental problems' (*Deutsche Welle*, 11 October 2016) <[www.dw.com/en/five-of-the-worlds-biggest-environmental-problems/a-35915705/](http://www.dw.com/en/five-of-the-worlds-biggest-environmental-problems/a-35915705/)> accessed 9 September 2020.



reflected in the international documents, one of the widespread concerns of current environmentalism is climate change. The climate started altering long before the climate change issue was mainstreamed, and nowadays humanity has reached the breaking point where it is not just about that change, but also its inevitable effect on people's lives, especially the lives of the most vulnerable portions of our societies.

Aside from many natural variations in temperatures, the majority of scientists agree that human activity is the major cause of climate change, sending a warning message to the public that the earth is warming.<sup>32</sup> The change in climate patterns (either natural or artificial) over the course of months, caused by overt burning of fossil fuels from the agro-industrial activity and waste disposal inhibit human life, safety and well-being.<sup>33</sup> The industrial activities of the global North, where competitive models of economic development is a norm, have greatly influenced the climate patterns.<sup>34</sup> Naomi Klein, Canadian author and a social activist, says that if people allow the emissions to raise annually, they are risking their habitats to change drastically with major cities drowned, ancient worlds and cultures swallowed by the rising seas and their offspring most likely spending a great deal of their lives migrating and fleeing the adverse climate circumstances.<sup>35</sup> However, years of denial and inaction have just worsened the issue, and each time people do not do anything on minimising carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, they risk its growing congestion in the atmosphere, because the gas is not disappearing. This

<sup>32</sup> National Research Council (NRC), *Climate Change: Evidence, Impacts, and Choices* (The National Academies Press 2012) 2-4, 12 <<https://doi.org/10.17226/14673>> accessed 14 August 2020.

<sup>33</sup> The work of natural greenhouse gases which help keep the earth warm is accelerated by the overproduction of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), or other greenhouse gas emissions, from industrial, residential, commercial and transportation sources. Unable to reduce naturally such a high concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, the greenhouse effect increases the amount of heat retained in the atmosphere and the oceans, thus warming all biomes and melting the frozen polar regions. It is unfathomable how this event affects every ecosystem on the planet thereby finding its way (by gas exchange or photosynthesis) into the earth life cycle and making irreversible changes. The change in climate patterns (either natural or artificial) over the course of months or years is what we know today as climate change.

<sup>34</sup> Higher temperatures and frequent heat waves, rising sea levels and floods; changed ocean chemistry and the disruption of sea life and ecosystems; timing of different seasonal activities; quantity of precipitations and droughts all amount to the consequences of changing climate patterns. Thus, we witness intense winter warming across parts of Canada, Alaska, and northern Europe and Asia, while summer warming was particularly strong across the Mediterranean and Middle East and some other places, including parts of the US west coast. See NRC (n 32) 15-17.

<sup>35</sup> Naomi Klein, *This changes everything* (Alfred E Knopf Toronto 2015) 11.

set of events has disturbed the world's ecosystems that in turn reflected on the way and quality of our lives.

The impacts that climate change will have on different socioeconomic, technological and policy factors, such as population growth, economic activity, energy technologies and land use are still unfathomable by many people primarily due to their concern for other structural issues, but also the denialism and conflicting opinion on climate change. Klein calls this denial a perfectly rational ecological amnesia, because people are afraid of delving deeply into climate change effects for the fear of everything changing, and they are right.<sup>36</sup> For Klein, there are ways of dealing with this crisis, but they involve changing everything from our lifestyles, over economic practices to redefining our relation to the environment.<sup>37</sup> Abandoning the consumer practices people have grown up with seems almost unquestionable, for the tendency of human beings to attach emotional value to material things.

Understanding the limbo in which the 'health of the planet' found itself in, scientists around the world, precisely 11,000 of them, declared the world is facing a climate emergency.<sup>38</sup> Climate emergency is simply defined as 'a situation in which immediate action is needed to reduce or stop climate change and prevent serious and permanent damage to the environment'.<sup>39</sup> Soon after, many cities and countries started declaring climate emergencies, as another way of urging policy makers to act, not just in mitigating and adapting to climate change, but also putting financial and political pressure on 'big polluters', transforming the way our global society works. Yet, despite the declarations, many countries continue to finance extractive corporations and industries, clearly indicating that declarations at times stem from either growing public pressure or wish to maintain a good image in the international arena.

<sup>36</sup> Klein (n 35) 11.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid* 12.

<sup>38</sup> William J Ripple and others, 'World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency' (2020) 70(1) *BioScience* 8, 8-12 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biz088>> accessed 15 September 2020. The very term emerged towards the end of the 2000s used in protests against climate change in Australia 2009, according to Takver, 'Climate Emergency: Thousands March for Action across Australia' (*Indymedia*, 14 June 2009). <<https://indymedia.org.au/2009/06/14/climate-emergency-thousands-march-for-action-across-australia>> accessed 28 September 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 'Climate emergency' <[www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/climate-emergency?q=climate+emergency](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/climate-emergency?q=climate+emergency)> accessed 12 September 2020.

For the context here, the definition above is incomplete, missing the effect the climate change will have, or more accurately, is having on people across the globe, not just the environment. The gap between rich and poor is becoming more pronounced as the communities of the global south struggle with climate change conditioned poverty, migrations, and food and water shortages. Thus, scientists and researchers went further in trying to devise a holistic approach to climate emergency by framing it as a matter of global justice.

### *1.2.1 Climate change as a matter of global justice*

This subchapter explores the question of why climate change is a matter of equity and justice. For Harriet Thew, an environmental social scientist at the University of Leeds, framing climate change as a matter of global justice is more powerful than sending tree-hugging environmental messages that the earlier environmental activism was characterised by.<sup>40</sup> The very phrase ‘global justice’ concerns all living creatures on the planet and entails responsibility on the part of entities or agents who need to secure this justice. It calls for responsibility, action and answers. Elisa Peter, from the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service, assumes a somewhat Kantian position in calling climate justice an ethical, social and economic imperative.<sup>41</sup> As stated above, in an attempt to devise a comprehensive approach in addressing it, numerous organisations, bodies and experts have tried to frame climate change as a matter of justice, be it social, environmental or climate.<sup>42</sup>

The concept of climate justice is a very broad one, and in order to define it, one shall begin by looking into its antonym – climate injustice. As the impacts of climate change are spreading faster than anticipated, it is a challenge to safeguard communities and people who are at the forefront of this battle. The effects of climate change are felt worldwide, but it is a common knowledge that its effects are disproportionate for the poor people who already live in perilous conditions. The rich

<sup>40</sup> Ema Marris, ‘Why young climate activists have captured the world’s attention’ (*Nature*, 18 September 2019) [www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02696-0](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-02696-0) accessed 20 April 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Barbara Adams and Gretchen Luchsinger, *Climate Justice for a Changing Planet: A Primer for Policy Makers and NGOs* (UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service Cm 9789211012088 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Global Justice Ecology Project, ‘Climate Justice’ (*Global Justice Ecology Project*, 2020) <<https://globaljusticeecology.org/?s=climate+justice>> accessed 25 September 2020.

windustrialised countries, deemed responsible for climate change, retain the production and consumption habits detrimental to our living environment. Communities in the global South, already affected by systemic poverty and inequalities that put them in the position of vulnerability, live the effects of climate change, further contributing to the inequalities faced by these vulnerable groups, preventing the full realisation of their fundamental rights.<sup>43</sup> Extreme weather events, shifting weather patterns affecting food production, structural damage to development infrastructure and spread of vector-borne diseases all hit the more vulnerable people harder. The effects of climatic change interact with existing inequalities and vulnerability, producing what Robin Leichenko and Karen O'Brien called the 'double exposures'.<sup>44</sup>

It is a global justice concern that those who suffer most from climate change have done the least to cause it.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the concept of climate justice acknowledges and reveals the existence of deep inequalities within the world and current economic systems. It furthermore entails a moral obligation on the part of the 'big polluters' to help the poorer, underdeveloped countries or the 'climate creditors'<sup>46</sup> in the just transition to low carbon economies, thus putting equity at the core of the climate change solution. Angelica Navarro Llanos, Bolivian diplomat and environmentalist, sees the climate crisis as an opportunity for a wealth transfer between big polluters and climate creditors, whereby the latter have a chance to own technology and finances from the big polluters in mitigating the effects.<sup>47</sup> This shift of resources would greatly improve the status of the impoverished and vulnerable, bringing water and electricity to many places. However, the question of whether the big polluters would risk sacrificing national interests (high gross domestic product) for global equality remains.

The climate emergency leaves space for an equitable approach to the burdens of climate change and many scholars tackled these issues.

<sup>43</sup> Adams and Luchsinger (n 41). See also United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Goal 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts' (*United Nations Sustainable development goals*, 31 May 2019) <<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13>> accessed 12 September 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Caney, 'Climate Justice' (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer edn 2020) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/justice-climate/>> accessed 10 August 2020.

<sup>45</sup> Adams and Luchsinger (n 41).

<sup>46</sup> Terms borrowed from Angelica Navarro Llanos, a Bolivian diplomat and climate negotiator. Klein (n 35) 12.

<sup>47</sup> Angelica Navarro Llanos cited in Klein (n 35) 11.

John Rawls,<sup>48</sup> for instance, proposed the idea of intergenerational equity underlined by the veil of ignorance principle that teaches us above all empathy and ensures a just world based on the principle of equity. Another philosopher who tackled the issue of climate justice was Henry Shue, who touched upon an integral part of today's fight for climate justice – moral integrity. In his views, wealthy countries like the United States have a moral obligation to help other countries adapt to a changing climate and a financial responsibility to assure development that meets the needs of developing countries.<sup>49</sup> The reluctance to embark on this journey comes from the need to address the four concepts underlying the climate change discourse: development disparities, vulnerable groups, governance and the equitable distribution of resources, involving substantial shifts in current political dynamics and economic equations states are not ready to alter.<sup>50</sup>

In short, the term climate justice is used to encase the equity aspect of climate change, acting to reduce inequalities and disparities in development, questioning power relations and raising voice by demanding political participation when it comes to climate change issues.<sup>51</sup> In addition, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens of climate change equitably and fairly is what the world needs to take seriously into account.<sup>52</sup> Mitigating the effects of climate change involves the participation of all in reducing the CO2 emission and shared global redistribution of excesses across societies, which would also entail the contraction of certain economic systems. However, the only kind of contraction our current system can manage is a brutal crash, in which the most vulnerable will suffer most of all.<sup>53</sup> The term climate justice was put under the microscope with the emergence of movements such as Extinct Rebellion and FFF, a new generation of young environmentalists, who put social justice at the forefront of the climate emergency agendas.

<sup>48</sup> Simon Dresner, *Principles of Sustainability* (Routledge 2008) 130.

<sup>49</sup> Marion Hourdequin, 'Youth climate movement puts ethics at the center of the global debate' (*The Conversation* 18 September 2019) <<https://theconversation.com/youth-climate-movement-puts-ethics-at-the-center-of-the-global-debate-123746>> accessed 15 June 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Adams and Luchsinger (n 41) 19.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid* Introduction.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice, 'Principles of Climate Justice' (*Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice*) <[www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/](http://www.mrfcj.org/principles-of-climate-justice/)> accessed 15 September 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Klein (n 35) 24.

### 1.2.2 Exploring youth awareness and attitudes on climate change

One of the most prominent ways in which environmental attitudes are mostly researched is through youth's perception of climate change, as one of the biggest environmental emergencies of our time. The recent growing climate activism with FFF brings me to the topic of this thesis, namely, to youth activism in this field and the way in which young people internalise this issue. As a starting point of this discussion, the researcher will take the dual identity of today's youth in the matters of climate change: vulnerability and agency. Since young people are often seen as key actors in various social movements that transform the course of human history, this subchapter explores how this identity influences climate awareness formation, and how and through what sources climate change is communicated to the youth.

Maria Ojala and Yuliya Lakew deem young people an important group to understand and to target when it comes to communication about climate change because, *inter alia*, they are the future laypeople and the ones bearing the burden of present inaction on climate change, but also today's consumers and part of the climate problem.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, this group has still not yet reached the level of cognitive development to internalise certain social constructs, making them more open to new ways of responding to this issue. The environment in which they coexist plays a major role in shaping climate change awareness (CCA), besides the internally cognitive and psychological factors. Research has shown that young people themselves think that new generations are more environmentally aware, with a commitment to environmental causes becoming a part of the global identity of young people,<sup>55</sup> considering the fact that they grow up listening to how climate change is bad for them and how they need to become more 'green'. Moreover, studies show that prior beliefs and personal relevance of information influence youth's reasoning and position taking.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Maria Ojala and Yuliya Lakew, 'Young People and Climate Change Communication' (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science 2017) 2 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.408>> accessed 25 August 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Estévez, Marta Díaz, Ruth de Frutos García and Jesús Peña Moya, 'Communication of the scientific consensus on climate change to the citizenship: Knowledge and perception of young university students from five countries regarding the media treatment of global warming' (2014) 5 *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture* cited in *ibid* 3.

<sup>56</sup> Troy D Sadler, F William Chambers and Diana L Zeidler, 'Student conceptualizations of the nature of science in response to a socioscientific issue' (2004) 26 *International Journal of Science Education* cited in *ibid* 7.

A number of studies have explored the role of different factors in the awareness formation. Studies have shown how media, both online and offline, has an influence on youth's understanding and evaluation of climate change, by not only providing factual scientific information, but also influencing their sense of capacity and willingness to engage.<sup>57</sup> The digital media nowadays offers more opportunities for engagement, from showing support to leading discussions and projects. However, media input is not the sole projector of pro-environmental behaviour, for students' engagement largely depends on discussions with parents and friends about the climate change news. According to Ojala and Lakew's synthesis of various studies, young people's general environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviour are influenced largely by the communication with immediate family, i.e. parents.<sup>58</sup> Beside parents, the peer-pressure and behaviour mirroring coupled with the social norms of what is 'cool' and 'in' might significantly influence behaviour and attitude formation.

The role of education and teachers extends beyond the mere obligation to teach and transfer knowledge. Maria Ojala's study on student's perception of teachers showed that the way teachers communicate, whether more solution-oriented or passive, influences information evaluation.<sup>59</sup> The fact that climate change education is still not a curricular subject across the globe makes students exposed to varying degrees of climate change education. However, internal experience of natural sights might either be a beautiful memory or have an opposite effect on young people, forcing them to distance themselves from climate change situations into denial of the reality and externalisation of its responsibility to older people.<sup>60</sup> Laura Wray-Lake,

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* 5.

<sup>58</sup> Myria Allen, Robert H Wicks and Stephanie Schulte, 'Online environmental engagement among youth: Influence of parents, attitudes, and demographics' (2013) 16 *Mass Communication and Society*; Alice Grønhøj, 'Green girls and bored boys? Adolescents' environmental consumer socialization' in Karin M Ekström and Brigitte Tufte (Eds.), *Children, Media, and Consumption: On the Front Edge* (Nordicom 2004) cited in *ibid* 15.

<sup>59</sup> Maria Ojala, 'Hope in the Face of Climate Change: Associations with Environmental Engagement and Student Perceptions of Teachers' Emotion Communication Style and Future Orientation' (2015) 46 *Journal of Environmental Education* 133, 133-48. The study showed how those who perceived their teachers as communicating in a more solution-oriented and positive way were more inclined to feel constructive hope, based on trust and positive reappraisal about climate change; a hope that was positively related to perceived efficacy and pro-environmental behaviour.

<sup>60</sup> Ojala and Lakew (n 54) 5-6.



Constance Flanagan and Wayne Osgood confirm the tendency of youth to assign environmental responsibility to older people or government, rather than accept their personal responsibility.<sup>61</sup> This study also found a correlation between growing or declining government responsibility and personal action. In essence, in Karen O'Brien, Erin Selboe and Bronwyn Hayward's view, the way climate change is framed might have either a positive or a negative influence on the youth.<sup>62</sup>

The factors discussed above influence awareness and behaviour both individually, but more often, in totality. The social milieu, within which youth coexist, interact, learn, share and do, certainly has a kind of influence on awareness and behaviour. When it comes to CCA, Alina Kuthe and others do not consider it uniform and they suggest further levelling into different subgroups of people pursuant to their knowledge, level of concern and action related to climate change.<sup>63</sup> Thus, they distinguish among the following: concerned activists (the most concerned about climate change, trying to convince friends and family to do the same); the charitables (best informed; know more than the others about the causes and effects of climate change); the paralysed (they feel very concerned; neither engage in climate-friendly behaviour nor in multiplicative actions; question their ability to have an impact); and the disengaged (lowest level of CCA).<sup>64</sup>

### *1.2.3 Activism on the ground: enacting the environmental thought*

The interaction with parents, teachers and peers, as well as the acquisition of scientific information and appropriation of different media tools, have exposed young people to possible negative consequences and the incongruence between deepening climate crisis and global inaction,

<sup>61</sup> Laura Wray-Lake, Constance A Flanagan and D Wayne Osgood, 'Examining Trends in Adolescent Environmental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Across Three Decades' (2010) 42(1) *Environmental Behaviour* 61 <[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790169/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790169/)> accessed 15 September 2020.

<sup>62</sup> Karen O'Brien, Erin Selboe and Bronwyn Hayward, 'Exploring youth activism on climate change: Dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent' (2018) 23(3) *Ecology and Science* 42, 43 <[www.researchgate.net/publication/327810673\\_Exploring\\_youth\\_activism\\_on\\_climate\\_change\\_Dutiful\\_disruptive\\_and\\_dangerous\\_dissent](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/327810673_Exploring_youth_activism_on_climate_change_Dutiful_disruptive_and_dangerous_dissent)> accessed 5 May 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Alina Kuthe and others, 'How many Young Generations are there? – A Typology of Teenagers' Climate Change Awareness in Germany and Austria' (2019) 50(3) *Journal of Environmental Education* 172, 172-182 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2019.1598927>> accessed 15 September 2020.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*



contributing to the mobilisation on the topic of climate justice.<sup>65</sup> Young people have played important roles in various movements, but this time, within the FFF, they emphasised their agency, and, adopting the language of justice, they are determined to stop inaction on climate change.<sup>66</sup>

What did actually make FFF mobilisation stand out? First, experienced activists and other civil society members and environmental non-governmental organisations (ENGOS) joined the biggest climate mobilisation in recent years spearheaded by children, teenagers and young adults. Second, driven by scientific evidence young people did not refute the fact that humanity is facing an unprecedented crisis in the sense of its effects on our lives. Third, they revealed the inadequacy of existing approaches to climate change mitigation.<sup>67</sup> Lastly, the most important characteristics, beside the scale of the movement, was its framing of climate change as a matter of justice, understood from the interstate and intergenerational perspective. Even though the youth succeeded in initiating some kind of action and commitment on the part of duty bearers, Heejin Han and Sang Wuk Ahn argue that they failed in offering concrete solutions to the problems, urging older generations to do so, which gave material to leading politicians, brushing the young off as immature.<sup>68</sup> While they portrayed themselves as heroes in their narrative, they fell short in translating this moral authority and legitimacy into power offering solutions.<sup>69</sup>

Underlying their activism is a fear and concern for the future and thus, many young climate activists express dissent by challenging business-as-usual economic and social policies, including the emphasis on economic growth.<sup>70</sup> In engaging with these issues, young people implicitly or explicitly dissent from prevalent norms, beliefs and practices, the act of which would make Thoreau happy for his value of own moral judgement in directing behaviour. But, this dissent, similar to CCA, is also not uniform, as claimed by O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward, who distinguish among dutiful, disruptive and dangerous dissent. They recognise the

<sup>65</sup> Heejin Han and Sang Wuk Ahn, 'Youth Mobilization to Stop Global Climate Change: Narratives and Impact' (2020) 128(10) Sustainability 4127 <<https://doi.org/10.3390/su12104127>> accessed 6 September 2020.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* 2.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid* 12-13.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid* 16.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid* 17.

<sup>70</sup> Arturo Escobar, 'Degrowth, post development, and transitions: a preliminary conversation' (2015) 10(3) Sustainability Science cited in O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward (n 62) 43.

fluidity and evolving capacity of its expression, as well as sequential or simultaneous engagement on behalf of these young people.<sup>71</sup>

Dutiful dissent engages activists with existing institutional structures and social norms, expressing resistance to dominant practices, while disruptive activism expresses dissent towards existing economic and political structures, and social norms, through protests or collective organisations.<sup>72</sup> Both types challenge dominant practices and norms that need to be modified or entirely changed. Dangerous dissent, besides challenging existing socio-political structures, has the power to change the existing power relations entirely by encompassing a wide range of actions, ideas, discourses, practices, alliances and technologies that form a seedbed for a new solidarity among people and a common 'enemy'.<sup>73</sup> These types are definitely not mutually exclusive, but a level of awareness and engagement with climate change, as well as possible advancements and setbacks in the cause, decide which type is assumed and when.

The question arises of whether these young activists will find time to pursue their ideals once they start pursuing employment and financial security. Nevertheless, having in mind that some of the activists are as young as ten, the future might see a cohort of activists ready to step in. Dana Fisher, environmental researcher, deems the power of these young people as overlooked and underestimated by politicians, invoking research that has shown the likelihood of a person engaged in activism in younger years to do it again in adulthood.<sup>74</sup> From the tree-hugging images of indigenous peoples, over building tree houses in the Hambach forest to the Greta generation, environmentalism and ETD have gone through various phases, each of which somehow contributed to keeping the cause alive.

This chapter provided definitions and summaries of key theoretical concepts in this paper, outlining their major components. It also showed how environmental protection advocacy attempts stirred a cauldron of discussion on humanity's environmental impact, paying homage to scientists who questioned the notion of blind progress. From literary activism to scientific evidence, environmentalism was slowly

<sup>71</sup> Escobar (n 70) 42.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid* 45-47.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>74</sup> Sara Gavin, 'Eyeing the Long Game on Climate Change' (*Maryland Today*, 2019). <<https://today.umd.edu/articles/eyeing-long-game-climate-change-4c1112fc-278c-4769-9751-cc4b121cda9a>> accessed 8 May 2020.

entering the public discourse, from the *Silent Spring*, usually regarded as an environmental manifesto, and the international community's acknowledgements of man-initiated environmental degradation, to the emergence of ENGOs and youth mobilisations, as champions of this cause. Over the years, environmentalism, as a movement that tends to protect people's surroundings from degradation, branched into a variety of issues that were affected by not only natural causes of events, but also man's action of plundering nature, and endangering its own existence.

Climate change, as one of the key environmental problems, would have not probably come to the spotlight had it not exposed the malfunctions of our current development agendas. The developing countries, contributing the least to changing climate patterns, were hit by it the most, finding themselves at the forefront of this battle, without any financial and political support to carry it out. Prompted into action by the fear for future and global injustice issues, young people worldwide built a momentum and initiated the FFF movement urgent action on climate change by applying the principle of climate justice, i.e. a just transition towards sustainable models of development without anybody left behind or marginalised. How the movement mobilisations quickly spread throughout Slovenia, known as the 'the greenest country' of SEE, will be the topic of the next chapter.

2.

ON SLOVENIA: ENVIRONMENTALISM, CLIMATE CHANGE  
AND YOUTH FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

The ETD spurred a worldwide interest into the topic of nature protection and conservation, and the ones who had already felt such thoughts and attitude without being able to name it or without feeling any support to carry them out saw a way of recognising their struggles through environmentalism. Yugoslavia was no exception. Even though it was neglected in the environmental discourse at that time, it can commend its dedication to both institutional and civil enterprise in environmental protection and conservation. Yugoslav republics in the aftermath of WW2, despite sharing the same legal and constitutional context, differed greatly in the application of the dominant ideology due to different factors such as political and cultural traditions and the level of industrial development.<sup>75</sup> Slovenia, seen as the most permissive republic building ties and seeking inspiration in the Western world, somehow managed to establish a collective identity outside the constitutional framework, part of which was the growing activism and support for environment protection.<sup>76</sup> This chapter looks into the ‘most permissive Yugoslav republic’ that gave rise to environmentalism, from individual activism, over emerging environmental organisations, to the institutionalisation of environmentalism and present-day struggles in enviro matters.

<sup>75</sup> Inga Tomić-Koludrović, ‘Alternativna kultura kao oblik otpora u samoupravnom socijalizmu’ (Alternative culture as a form of resistance in self-managing socialism) (1993) 2(4-5) Društvena istraživanja 835, 846 <<https://hrcak.srce.hr/33214>> accessed 4 July 2020.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid* 853.

## 2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT AND ATTITUDES IN SLOVENIA FROM THE 1960S TO THE 1990S

Given that the environmental consciousness was awakening on the global level in the 1960s, the story about Slovenia begins there. Post WW2 saw the creation of the Republic of Slovenia, as part of the federal Yugoslavia where the country remained until 1991. In a constant dichotomy between the West and the East, Yugoslavia, even though adopting the model of Soviet post war industrialisation, was emphasising the ethos of self-sufficiency and a reliance on heavy industry. The prevailing mentality of urbanisation, industry and raw material exhaustion, which brought employment opportunities and thus higher living standards, has long contained environmental thought on the margins. Therefore, it should come as a no surprise that the environment had an economic and material value back then, and its degradation was seen just as a side effect of economic development.<sup>77</sup> Discussion on minimising environmental degradation, when it took place, mostly involved finding remedies that would not compromise economic development. It was not until the 1960s and the *Silent Spring* that attention was given to environmental thought, both in private and public spheres, because people identified with Carson's call for engagement in providing one another with a healthy and quality life.<sup>78</sup>

At that time, the Yugoslav state has also taken steps to protect the environment through the institutional framework. First, in 1971, when the power was still centralised, the Yugoslav five-year action plan on development incorporated environment protection in terms of using environmental friendly technology while paying attention to the quality of human lives.<sup>79</sup> Second, in order to bring the already existing or emerging environmental organisations, associations and councils together, the state founded the Assembly of the Yugoslav Council for environment protection and advancement in 1973. The assembly's

<sup>77</sup> Polajnar Horvat K, Smrekar A and Zorn M, 'The development of environmental thought in Slovenia: A short overview' (2014) 1081) *Ekonomika i ekohistorija* 17 <<https://hrcak.srce.hr/135211>> accessed 23 May 2020 17.

<sup>78</sup> France Avčin, 'Predgovor k prevodu knjige Rachel Carson Nema pomlad iz leta 1972' (1972) cited in *ibid*.

<sup>79</sup> Zoran Oštrić, 'Ekološki pokreti u Jugoslaviji: Građa za proučavanje razdoblja 1971-1991' (1992) 1(1) *Socijalna Ekologija : časopis za ekološku misao i sociološka istraživanja okoline* 83, 84 <<https://hrcak.srce.hr/136632>> accessed 4 July 2020.

major breakthrough was the initiative for the incorporation of the right to a healthy environment in the Yugoslav constitution from 1974, giving people the right to enjoy their lives in healthy environments, but also noting that society has an obligation to ensure this right by using natural riches in a way that does not compromise other people's lives.<sup>80</sup> With this new constitution, Yugoslavia became decentralised, which meant that its republics now had more authority over their institutional framework and its application.

In Slovenia, the Environmental Commission of the Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia was established, as well as various environmental communities and committees, such as Environment Protection Alliance (SLO: *Zveza društev za varstvo okolja v Sloveniji* (ZVOS)) with its main purpose to gather expert opinion and reports on the state of environment in industrial Slovenia.<sup>81</sup> The ZVOS was an umbrella community for all of the environment initiatives and social subjects, acting within the institutional framework. However, the organisations emerging outside of it sometimes had difficulties in mainstreaming their cause, but, in conclusion, the evidence presented here shows early stages of a growing institutional concern and foundations for protecting the environment.

## 2.2 GROWING PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE

Departing from rather discursive than practical environmental protection in Yugoslavia, the independence of Slovenia brought on a strengthened concern for the environment. This subchapter discusses the outset of new constitutional structure in Slovenia from its independence in 1991 and the ways of institutionalising environmental or 'green' discourse into mainstream political life. The momentum, which had been building for years, culminated with a new political,

<sup>80</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia Nos 33/91-I, 42/97, 66/2000, 24/03, 69/04, 68/06 and 47/13 23 December 1991). Art 192 states 'Man shall have the right to a healthy environment. Conditions for the realization of this right shall be ensured by the social community'. Art 193 states 'anyone who utilizes land, water or other natural goods shall be bound to do so in a way which ensure conditions for man's work and life in a healthy environment. Everyone shall be bound to preserve nature and its goods, natural landmarks and rarities, and cultural monuments'.

<sup>81</sup> Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 19.

or should one say, democratic awakening in the wake of geo-political changes in the 1990s. At the outset of the decade, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe experienced large-scale geopolitical changes after the demise of communism, and the pressure of political liberalisation entailed that the countries devise new systems of governance. As for Yugoslavia, that pressure came from Slovenia, a more liberal republic with a well-developed civil society and critical public by the late 1980s,<sup>82</sup> and it should not be surprising that Slovenia was the first republic to part from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Seeing an opportunity to mainstream the environmental matters while Slovenia devised new constitutional structure, Dušan Plut, an environmental activist in the 1980s, published the green manifesto, calling democracy as the new system for the integration of environmental protection and for the right to a healthy living environment to be in the Slovenian constitution. Plut also emphasised the need for a green party in order to fight the multi-layered crises that befell the Slovenian society. He created the Greens of Slovenia (*Zeleni Slovenije*) becoming its first president. The party was elected to the Parliament, in coalition with DEMOS, the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia, winning 8.8% of vote, gaining an epithet of the relatively strongest green party in Europe.<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, partisan attempts to establish a solid political participatory basis were shattered mainly due to the common issue of party fragmentation and weakness, as well as its political classification of leftism.<sup>84</sup> This is when they parted with the ZVOS, because many of its members do not want to be categorised politically.

### 2.3 ENACTING THE ENVIRONMENTAL THOUGHT: ACTIVISM AND AWARENESS RAISING

Besides the growing pro-environmental institutional structure, this subchapter will also look outside the constitutional framework, into society as a whole, exploring its role in and contribution to ETD and awareness raising. The environmental awakening on the global level did

<sup>82</sup> Florian Bieber, *Belated Transitions in South Eastern Europe* (Routledge Handbook of Eastern European Studies 2017) 29.

<sup>83</sup> Rosvita Pesek, 'Stranka zelenih Slovenije' (Ljubljana 2009) cited in Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 98.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*

not circumvent Slovenia, where one records awareness raising enterprises of common people living near the factories and plants, as well as instances of non-violent activism with first papers and movies about local factory waste disposal pollution and its effect on surrounding ecosystems. At that time, the newspapers and magazines were widely spread, reaching a bigger number of people, unlike the TV, which in the 1950s and 1960s was a commodity not every household could afford. Drago Kralj, from *Tovariš* magazine, said people welcomed these papers for they loved to read about the events in their local environment.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Mako Sajko's attempts to disclose water pollution from a local power plant, with the first European ecological movie of *Strupi* in 1964, showed tacit resistance towards the dominant socio-economic system.<sup>86</sup> These people stirred up the discourse on industrial pollution of the ecosystems, also indirectly contributing to the rise of environmentalism in Slovenia.

In the 1970s, environmental conditions hit the bottom, for, according to Zoran Oštrič, the tendency to define the self-regulating socialist system has totally 'eaten up' the movement, making its demise as abrupt as its rise.<sup>87</sup> There were instances of institutional concern for environmental issues in the 1970s with the Yugoslav Assembly for Environment Protection that championed the integration of the right to healthy environment in the 1974 Constitution, the Environmental Commission and the ZVOS that carried out environmental agendas in Slovenia. Nevertheless, it might be that the government(s) wanted to appease the rising movement and give it some kind of recognition while continuing to work on defining their socio-political and economic system within the global developments. This resulted in parts of society opening up and questioning the paradigm of permanent progress and the quality of their living standard. Influenced by both global and local environmental protection waves, most Slovenes aspire for the integration of environmental protection in its social system in order to address environmental issues accordingly.<sup>88</sup>

However, nothing was as devastating as the Chernobyl nuclear crisis in 1986 and the cognisance that there was something wrong with the dominant way of living and reasoning. Those who did not entirely

<sup>85</sup> Drago Kralj, 'Vse več strupa v ozračju' *Tovariš* (1964) cited in ibid 18.

<sup>86</sup> Slovenian movies database <<https://bsf.si/sl/ime/mako-sajko/>> accessed 5 May 2020.

<sup>87</sup> Oštrič (n 79) 58-86.

<sup>88</sup> Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 18.



abandon the environmental awakening from the 1960s and continued with a taciturn activism of protecting its natural riches gained attention after the Chernobyl crisis, when the nuclear energy danger hype gave way to an unexpectedly strong anti-nuclear movement. Thus, environmentalism in Slovenia besides being anti-industrial now became anti-nuclear. Individuals, communities, civil society organisations and opposition media spread liberal thoughts calling for a transformation of the social mindset.<sup>89</sup> There are even recorded instances of environmental gatherings of grass-root environmentalists, who were already campaigning against state negligence of toxic waste disposal, now warning about nuclear waste in some areas of the country.<sup>90</sup>

According to Željko Oset, a professor from Nova Gorica University, the Chernobyl crisis strengthened the role of grass-root environmentalists.<sup>91</sup> This was indeed a turning point because environmentalists succeeded in establishing a far-reaching platform for awareness raising about environmental issues. These people would later become an integral part of what Hubert Požarnik called the economy of nature – as the only alternative to environmental problems – emphasising the idea of Plut's awakening democracy and tackling environmental problems in the political arena.<sup>92</sup> In his article 'Ecological movements in Yugoslavia 1971-1991', Zoran Oštrić,<sup>93</sup> a Croatian author, (besides media, ENGOS and individuals' engagement) draws attention to youth initiatives, non-formal and spontaneous gatherings emerging in the 1980s, having a strong role as well in redefining the cultural society.

<sup>89</sup> Razmerja, the *Mladina* magazine and Radio Študent, besides spreading their ideology of liberty and equality, supported common people in awareness raising campaigns about environmental disasters unfolding in industrial and power/nuclear plants and its effects on local ecosystems and inhabitants. Radio Študent organised nuclear talks with both enviro supporters and opposition spurring media activity throughout Yugoslavia. See Darko Štrajn, Andrej Klemenc, Leo Šeferko 'Energija in ekologija' *Mladina* (1985) cited in Oštrić (n 78) 87. See also Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 21-22.

<sup>90</sup> Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 89.

<sup>91</sup> Željko Oset, 'Environmental Activism during Communist Era in Slovenia' (2019) 15(1) *Review of Croatian History* 3, 73 <<https://doi.org/10.22586/review.v15i1.9740>> accessed 15 April 2020.

<sup>92</sup> Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 21.

<sup>93</sup> Oštrić (n 79) 93.

## 2.4 NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK: ESTABLISHING THE PRO-ENVIRONMENTAL INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE 1990-2020

The general trend of almost all Slovenian governments has been to endorse green politics. They have been committed to implementing certain eco-friendly policies, but with tech development, resources for growth became limitless, having a more negative than positive impact on the environment. The newly devised constitution in 1991 contained the right of citizens to a healthy living environment, obliging the state to ensure that right by devising wholesome and inclusive social, economic and environmental policies.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, a change of political and economic context of addressing the environment brought about the first framework Environmental Protection Act in 1993, only a year after the Rio Conference, aiming to address environmental concerns from a sustainability perspective.<sup>95</sup> The act necessitated strengthening the preventive and deliberation capacities of political bodies in addressing environmental degradation, emphasising cooperation and consensus in joint future enterprises.

Several other acts followed suit, further rising in number when Slovenia joined the EU in 2004, with greater pressure to integrate environmental principles into politics, economy and everyday life.<sup>96</sup> From the green manifesto onwards, Slovenia has established a comprehensive environmental body of law. The legislation on environment protection and nature conservation is quite abundant, as presented on the official web page of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP). The Constitution of Slovenia (*Ustava Republike Slovenije*) from 1991, the Environment Protection Act (EPA) (*Zakon o varstvu okolja* ZVO) from 2004 and the Nature Conservation Act (*Zakon o ohranjanju narave* ZON) from 1999 incorporate many EU directives and together are the national bill of rights when it comes guaranteeing the right to a healthy environment to all Slovenian citizens.

<sup>94</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (n 80) arts 72 and 73. Art 72 explicitly states that everyone has the right to a healthy environment, which the state shall promote. Art 73 goes further in obliging the state and individuals to protect and preserve natural sights and cultural monuments.

<sup>95</sup> Polajnar Horvat (n 77) 16-23.

<sup>96</sup> Dušan Plut, Bostjan Rogelj and Andrej Herakovič, *Zeleni planet?: prebivalstvo, energija in okolje v 21. stoletju* (Didaktika 2004) cited in ibid 16.

In an attempt to create the basic conditions for sustainable development, the EPA outlines principles and measures ensuring 'long-term conditions for human health, well-being and quality of life, and conservation of biological diversity'.<sup>97</sup> Probably the most relevant provision of the EPA mirroring the Aarhus Convention is the right of the citizens to free access to public environmental information and participation in different procedural tasks related to the environment, for instance, adopting certain regulation. This has been a burning topic in Slovenia recently, for the new political establishment (as of March 2020) has made legal amendments to restrict the access to public participation of ENGOs.<sup>98</sup> The NGO network Justice and Environment claims that the government, taking advantage in anti-corona provisions, is taking away the rights of ENGOs to participate in the process of obtaining building permits by allowing only organisations with at least 50 members and assets around €10,000 euros to do so.<sup>99</sup> The case has been taken to the Constitutional Court, but as with the new laws the ENGOs lose certain legal rights, the issue remains open.

Different stakeholders, both within and outside the constitution framework, deal with issues of environment degradation. The government, non-governmental institutions (NGOs and ENGOs) and international organisations are all involved in awareness-raising campaigns on environmental issues. The MESP is in charge of ensuring the state's compliance with ratified international and European legal instruments. Its offshoots, the Slovenian Environmental Agency, is involved in expert, analytical, regulatory and administrative tasks, an inspectorate for environment and spatial planning, to carry out the provisions of EPA and supervise the implementation of regulations in the field of environment protection and nature conservation.<sup>100</sup> There are other bodies as well with authority over specific issues, such as nature conservation and forest protection.

<sup>97</sup> Environment Protection Act (*Zakon o varstvu okolja*) 2004 art 2.

<sup>98</sup> Slovenian Times, 'Environmental protection act to limit involvement of NGOs' (*Slovenian Times*, 28 May 2020) <<https://sloveniatimes.com/environmental-protection-act-to-limit-involvement-of-ngos/>> (accessed 3 August 2020).

<sup>99</sup> Vladimir Spasić, 'Slovenian government is taking rights from environmental NGOs' (*Balkan Green Energy News*, 25 May 2020) <<https://balkangreenenergynews.com/slovenian-government-is-taking-rights-from-environmental-ngos/>> accessed 3 August 2020.

<sup>100</sup> Vesna Ložak Polance and Domen Neffat, 'Slovenia: Environment and Climate change laws and regulations 2020' (*ICLG*, 12 February 2020) <<https://iclg.com/practice-areas/environment-and-climate-change-laws-and-regulations/slovenia>> accessed 3 August 2020.

There is no specific climate regulation act; nevertheless, the issues of climate change are regulated by certain environmental protection and emissions trading measures, such as regulations on the use of greenhouse gases and tax on air pollution by CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>101</sup> In February 2020, Slovenia adopted the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan (NEPN) until 2030 with the objective to enhance sustainability measures and, *inter alia*, reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 36%.<sup>102</sup> The long-term climate strategy (until 2050), which is also a legal obligation of Slovenia as a member of the EU, is currently being prepared and it will include the net zero emissions goal by 2050.<sup>103</sup> But since the current government is showing reluctance to deal with environmental and, in specific, climate issues, it is a question of time, will, urgency and even also legal obligations coming from the EU whether any kind of climate change acts will be passed. Overall, Slovenian environmental conditions have improved with regards to resource productivity, minimising ecosystems pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, with many conservation sectors devoting attention to climate change adaptation action.<sup>104</sup> However, many polluting practices resumed, which shows that there is still a place for improvement, which cannot be said about time.

## 2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN'S REFLECTION IN SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE NOWADAYS

Slovenia joined the EU in 2004. This meant, *inter alia*, adjusting its legislation to EU legal requirements. For a period, environmental issues came to the forefront of socio-political life, and coupled with the open

<sup>101</sup> Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning legislation (*Zakonodaja Ministrstva za okolje in prostor*) <[www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/ministrstva/ministrstvo-za-okolje-in-prostor/zakonodaja-ministrstva-za-okolje-in-prostor/#c44883/](http://www.gov.si/drzavni-organi/ministrstva/ministrstvo-za-okolje-in-prostor/zakonodaja-ministrstva-za-okolje-in-prostor/#c44883/)> accessed 3 August 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Government of Slovenia, 'The Government adopts the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan of the Republic of Slovenia' (*Government of Slovenia*, 27 February 2020) <[www.gov.si/en/news/2020-02-27-the-government-adopts-the-integrated-national-energy-and-climate-plan-of-the-republic-of-slovenia/](http://www.gov.si/en/news/2020-02-27-the-government-adopts-the-integrated-national-energy-and-climate-plan-of-the-republic-of-slovenia/)> accessed 3 August 2020.

<sup>103</sup> Reuters, 'Slovenia latest nation to seek carbon neutrality by 2050' (*Reuters*, 14 January 2020) <[www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-slovenia/slovenia-latest-nation-to-seek-carbon-neutrality-by-2050-idUSKBN1ZD1X8/](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-slovenia/slovenia-latest-nation-to-seek-carbon-neutrality-by-2050-idUSKBN1ZD1X8/)> accessed 5 August 2020.

<sup>104</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, 'Sustainable Governance Indicators 2017: Slovenia: Environmental Policies' (*Bertelsmann Stiftung*, 2017) <[www.sgi-network.org/2017/Slovenia/Environmental\\_Policies/](http://www.sgi-network.org/2017/Slovenia/Environmental_Policies/)> accessed 2 August 2020.

society shift and differentiation of values and ideologies, they became an integral part of the Slovenian image of somewhat postmodern values, as stated by Danica Fink-Hafner and others.<sup>105</sup> To care about the environment was considered a new positive value, even though it remained on the declaratory level, showing that nominal support is not reflected in actual behaviour for people's enthusiasm fades when certain social factors infringe on their daily lives.<sup>106</sup> The structural problem of poverty, for instance, infringes on people's lives in the way that ensuring survival or financial stability for the family becomes the paramount concern. Nevertheless, the Eurobarometer's 2014 report on environmental attitudes showed that at least some type of environmental awareness and concern exists, with Slovenians thinking that individual protection of the environment is still highly important (99% respectively).<sup>107</sup>

In fact, Eurobarometer conducted another survey in 2017, on the attitudes of Europeans towards the environment. In general, the survey showed a high level of awareness and concern for environmental problems, as well as the need for a stricter and more enforceable environmental legislation. Specifically, ensuring better enforcement of legislation is the most effective way of tackling environmental problems for Slovenians, together with introducing stricter environmental legislation and providing more information.<sup>108</sup> There is also a substantive support for joint-decision making with the EU, as well as continuous check-ups and improvement of environmental standards within the EU, whereby 90% of Slovenians agree (39% totally agree) that EU environmental legislation is necessary for environment protection in their country.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Danica Fink-Hafner and others, 'The Slovenian Greens: From Early Success to Long-term Failure' in Alenka Krašovec (ed), *Politika* (Faculty of Social Sciences Ljubljana 2015) 3.

<sup>106</sup> Polajnar Horvat, Smrekar and Zorn (n 77) 23.

<sup>107</sup> European Commission (EC), 'Special Eurobarometer 416: Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment' (Cm 416 2014) 10 <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c138fd8e-d160-4218-bbd5-ecc2e0305d29/language-en>> accessed 26 July 2020.

<sup>108</sup> EC, 'Special Eurobarometer 468: Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment, Factsheet on Slovenia (Cm 468, 2017) 2. <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/018fcb9-e6d6-11e7-9749-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>> accessed 26 July 2020.

<sup>109</sup> EC, 'Special Eurobarometer 468: Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment' (Cm 468 2017) 95 <<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/018fcb9-e6d6-11e7-9749-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>> accessed 26 July 2020.

The factsheet on Slovenia shows a small discrepancy between the role of EU and national governments in environment decision making. While 52% of Slovenians favour joint SI-EU decision-making, 45% leave the process to national governments.<sup>110</sup> On the other side, Slovenians expect more action from their national government in approaching the environmental degradation issue with 78% of Slovenians thinking that their national government is not doing enough to protect the environment.<sup>111</sup> When it comes to the information provision, even though the use of TV has declined in the past years, it was still the main source of information in 2017 for respondents regarding environmental issues, followed by online social networks and traditional TV and radio.<sup>112</sup>

Such a notably higher environmental awareness might be partly explained by using useful findings from Mladen Domazet and Branko Ančić's 2014 comparative study on environmental sustainability and education in Croatia and Slovenia, exploring whether and to what extent education influences the formation of pro-environmental attitudes. The analyses of curricula content related to environmental protection suggests that Slovenians emphasise the role of human beings as critical thinkers of the global and regional ecosystem with the potential of tackling environmental issues by assuming a holistic approach to the humanity-environment-economy triad.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, the study shows how the Slovenian curricular content puts emphasis on individual responsibility in humanity-environment interaction,<sup>114</sup> with the most prominent environmental elements in the framework curricula in Slovenia being biodiversity, human beings and natural resources.<sup>115</sup>

Even though environmental education *per se* as an obligatory subject does not exist, it emerges in the cross-curricular form, and there is reference to it, as Domazet and Ančić summarise, in the form

<sup>110</sup> EC, 'Factsheet on Slovenia' (n 108) 1.

<sup>111</sup> EC, 'Special Eurobarometer 468' (n 109) 73.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid* 19-22. In Slovenia, 63% turn to TV as the biggest source of information, while 49% gather information through social media, and 23% via newspapers and radio.

<sup>113</sup> Mladen Domazet and Branko Ančić, 'Environmental sustainability and education: The case of Croatia and Slovenia' in Mladen Domazet and Dinka Marinović Jerolimov (eds.), *Sustainability Perspectives from the European Semi-periphery* (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Hrvatska 2017) 339-343.

<sup>114</sup> Mladen Domazet and others, *Civil rights and obligations are connected to the environmental issues in the curriculum. A comparative analysis of the ESD in 9 European countries* (Network of Education Policy Centers 2012) 80.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid* 75.

of an ‘interpretational reflection of content’ of the modern capitalist system as a base point of understanding environmental degradation.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, the education experience varies from one city to another, one region to another, and the content shared largely depends on the teachers. It is important to note that the topic of sustainable development exists on various levels of Slovenian education debate, but its practical implementation and documentation are still at early stages.<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, sustainable development takes up large portions of economic elements in the national framework curriculum.<sup>118</sup>

At the outset of the 21st century and when joining the EU, Slovenia was hit by a global economic financial crisis and recession resulting in the crisis of values. Adapting to the needs of the alterable world, thereby taking into consideration a wide web of socio-economic and cultural values and ensuring social justice, was a new *credo* for the Slovenes, determined to champion this new frontier of environmental rights. Environmentalism gained supporters throughout history but never before was it led by so many young people still in education, seeking opportunities to be heard and considering themselves relevant actors in driving changes. Digital natives, as they are sometimes called, construct new means of raising awareness about climate change specifically, reaching out to different corners of earth, their activism covered substantially by online media.

## 2.6 ENVIRONMENTAL YOUTH ACTIVISM: CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE RISE OF YOUTH FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Continuing its practices from the time of Yugoslavia, it comes as no wonder that out of six republics, Slovenia has a very vibrant movement for environmentalism. Coming to trends that are more recent in environmental activism, one notably strong movement for the most pronounced environmental concern nowadays, i.e. climate change and justice, is spreading through the country. In this regard, this chapter delves into the MZPP movement, putting them in the context of the FFF and giving a brief summary from their outset and throughout,

<sup>116</sup> Domazet and Ančič (n 113) 331.

<sup>117</sup> Domazet and others (n 114) 48.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid* 82.

until the present moment and due consideration of the movement's interesting popularity and strength.

FFF was officially initiated in September 2019 with an estimated turnout number of four million participants and around six million people showing up during the whole week's gatherings.<sup>119</sup> In an outburst of chants and banners, the activists demanded a declaration of a climate emergency and political response on stopping environmental degradation. The strikes were simultaneously conducted online by appropriating new media tools of navigating and effectively juggling different online platforms, where activists engaged in the so-called hashtag activism enabling such a wide outreach.<sup>120</sup> Soon after, local activist groups emerged with locally personalised goals closely tied to environmental issues in their habitats, publishing demands, writing open letters to governments and staging strikes. In Slovenia, the MZPP carried out this kind of activism.

MZPP, literally translated as Youth for Climate Justice, present themselves as a self-organised and diverse movement committed to both environmental and social justice and mobilised around the idea of a decent life for everybody on the planet. A decent life is understood as an integral part of broader environmental justice aiming to assure a preserved planet for every next generation. Nevertheless, one cannot regard the MZPP solely as a typical climate-defending organisation for their field of action also involves fighting social injustice and inequality and threats to democracy, assuming a holistic approach in tackling these issues.<sup>121</sup>

The group fights for both human and environmental justice, following the principles of non-violent resistance, with the aim of creating an alternative to the system of nature and man exploitation that was discussed in the previous chapters.<sup>122</sup> This interdisciplinary

<sup>119</sup> Somini Sengupta, 'Protesting Climate Change, Young People Take to Streets in a Global Strike' (*New York Times*, 21 September 2019) <[www.nytimes.com/2019/09/20/climate/global-climate-strike.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/20/climate/global-climate-strike.html)> accessed 29 April 2020.

<sup>120</sup> The hashtag symbol (#) precedes a word or phrase classifying or categorising the accompanying text making it easily visible and available once you click on the hashtag phrase. For instance, whatever post we write on Twitter or Facebook about climate issues and categorise it with #savetheplanet, any further click on the hashtag will instantly lead us to a plethora of posts categorised under the same hashtag.

<sup>121</sup> Official web page of the MZPP group: 'Podenbni štrajk, Za podnebno pravičnost' <[www.zapodnebnopraviconost.si/](http://www.zapodnebnopraviconost.si/)> accessed 6 May 2020.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*



approach is summarised in the MZPP's ten demands for the government, brought together under umbrella aims of eliminating economic and social injustices, as well as systems creating them, and standing together in justice and solidarity to tackle the climate crisis both locally and globally. In more detail, the creators of the demands address the government, seeking the recognition of climate crisis as an emergency, immediately transitioning to a circular economy model in order to minimise CO2 emissions, maximise energy-efficient housing, increase the offer of green jobs and a four-day work week, as well as an accelerated transition to a sustainable agriculture.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the activists demand the inclusion of a holistic approach to environmental education in curricula, coupled with more narrow demands related to the Slovenian context of biodiversity protection, and the prevention of thermal plant and mines construction.

The MZPP story began in March 2019, with the first staged strikes in ten Slovenian cities and an amazing turnout of 12,000 people. One of the MZPP members and co-founders, Viktorija Kos, says the movement can even be traced back to 2017, advocating for climate justice as a response to unsustainable energy policies of the Slovenian government, but with a significantly lower turnout.<sup>124</sup> The essence of the movement function is the engagement in different ways to show support for climate justice, from showing nominal support on social media through the hashtag activism, over joining the strikes and taking action, to donations and direct communication with the government. This hashtag activism quickly attracted the attention of young people who, driven by Thunberg's example, replicated the behaviour of their peers in the dominant youth culture, saw a way for their voices to be heard and discovered a sense of belonging to something bigger than them.

Every Friday, on the dates of probable strike staging, the MZPP would come up with a strike theme, usually related to a specific human rights and democracy topic that particular week, come up with a hashtag (for instance #defendthedefenders) and ask people to show support by publishing pictures or statuses under this hashtag. Beyond

<sup>123</sup> Official web page of the MZPP group (n 121).

<sup>124</sup> Mlad.si, Interview with Viktorija Kos (Ljubljana, 18 April 2019) <<https://mlad.si/blog/intervju-viktorija-kos-clanica-gibanja-mladi-za-okoljsko-pravicnost/>> accessed 16 June 2020.

the hashtag, one encounters the inclusive arena of activists, i.e. people of different ages (grandmas and grandchildren) holding banners with drawings and messages, connecting with others and creating a sense of togetherness in the difficult pandemic times. Furthermore, under their self-imposed obligation to educate and empower individuals, the MZPP has organised webinars, reading circles and workshops with some of the resonant names in eco- and human rights activism. The MZPP and the whole FFF movement have continuously shown support to human right defenders globally, drawing attention to their work and the danger they are exposed to in their daily work.

From Ljubljana to a pan-Slovenian movement, the MZPP nowadays enjoys the status of a serious and persistent movement determined to keep their cause afloat. Exchanging their free time and obligatory school hours for engagement in the movement activities shows that many young people are not that passive and disinterested, as they are usually considered. They do not dance as the older generation plays, which makes them 'passive'. With the Covid19 pandemic turning the world upside down, new circumstances have demanded more adaptable life routines. The MZPP's influence did not stop here, instead, a horde of digital natives<sup>125</sup> (as they are sometimes called) used all of the advantages of social media to continue spreading the cause and engaging youth in hashtag activism. Nevertheless, the pandemic has killed the momentum that was building, as one activist put it.<sup>126</sup>

This chapter delved into ETD and environmental activism in Slovenia, with specific emphasis on youth activism for climate justice. Moreover, it summarised the key national legal instruments used in Slovenia to protect the environment and ensure public participation in environmental matters. Post WW2 Slovenia followed the socialist self-sufficiency and global economic development model with attendant environmental impact. The attention was drawn to degrading the environment as a result of its industrial activity only when instances of individual environmental activism took ground near the factories and power plants. The Yugoslav government tried to devise provisions of

<sup>125</sup> A phrase taken from Ofer Zur, *On Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives: How the Digital Divide Affects Families, Educational Institutions, and the Workplace* (Zur Institute 2011) <[www.researchgate.net/publication/267213208\\_On\\_Digital\\_Immigrants\\_and\\_Digital\\_Natives\\_How\\_the\\_Digital\\_Divide\\_Affects\\_Families\\_Educational\\_Institutions\\_and\\_the\\_Workplace](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/267213208_On_Digital_Immigrants_and_Digital_Natives_How_the_Digital_Divide_Affects_Families_Educational_Institutions_and_the_Workplace)> accessed 9 September 2020.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Vita, activist from Slovenia (Skype, 7 August 2020).

protecting the environment; however, it was all done within upholding the economic development paradigm.

Developments on the global level in the area of environment protection and the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl prompted Slovenians to reason seriously about the quality of their lives and the opposition media at that time played an important role in awareness raising and information dissemination. Creating a huge body of environmental actors and stakeholders, i.e. agencies, committees, NGOs, media, scientists and groups or individuals, indirectly put the foundation for creating a movement that would politically champion the demands of our living environments. The youth-led MZPP has taken climate change seriously and is determined to champion this just transition as soon as possible for the time is running out. Staging school strikes, engaging in awareness raising and online activism, the group established itself as an attention-worthy movement which seeks political participation in environmental and social matters.

3.

## RESEARCH ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the researcher answers the research questions by analysing MZPP activists' narratives to address their understanding of climate change and ideas of how to respond to it. The researcher will primarily concentrate on individual stories and experiences of the climate emergency and activism thereby searching for recurring patterns in activists' responses when answering research questions. The objective of this study was to investigate the existence of sustainability-oriented motivations and worldviews in the young activists that influence their decisions of joining the movement for climate justice. Another aim was to explore the activists' perception of the obstacles that prevent them from realising the movement goals, thereby inspecting their understanding of the ILI that can be used to help their cause. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section seeks to answer the questions of how young activists develop climate emergency awareness. The second section explores activists' motivations for joining the movement and the aim of their activism. The last section serves into investigating activists' perception of both international and national legal instruments in human rights protection and the effectiveness of their application.

### 3.1. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS: CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The major aim in exploring the source of climate emergency awareness was to observe the factors that contribute to climate awareness shaping and to the change of respondents' lifestyle practices. In the first chapter, attention has been drawn to some of the most prominent factors that influence environmental and, more specifically, climate emergency

awareness, both individually and in totality. Here, the researcher wants to see if these activists have the same sources of inspiration to act. Previous research has shown how parents, education, teachers and peers, as well as media, have an influence on awareness shaping, depending on the context within which young people grow up and act. Therefore, the aim of this part is to identify the source of climate change and emergency awareness in young MZPP activists.

The theoretical part of this paper explored how the care and love of nature is present in the Slovenian public discourse, almost to the point of being woven into the public presentation of their national identity, thus making the younger generations being brought up in such a nature-appreciating environment. That being said, four of the respondents cultivate a deep appreciation towards nature and the fascination with natural sights, reflected in their family outings, article readings, documentary watching and activities such as hiking or mushroom picking. These attitudes are connected primarily to the early memories of family outings where nature represents a kind of an escape from stressful city dynamics and the return to the pristine shapes of people's surroundings. Nika has an almost poetic recount of what the environment and all its integral parts mean to her, where she says:

I have always had this sentiment of caring for the environment, which probably sprouts from my upbringing. I think I've always felt great empathy towards all living things, be it humans, animals or trees and rivers. I feel that as someone living on planet Earth I have an automatic and unquestionable responsibility to respect and 'protect/care for' my home. Partly to benefit myself and other humans, but mostly because it just seems like the obvious thing to do - a no-brainer.<sup>127</sup>

Interestingly enough, Nika brings up the role of her upbringing in shaping her relationship towards the environment. Whether it was the frequent family outings in nature or stories about nature in education, the care for all living beings for Nika goes way back to her early childhood.

Another interesting observation lies in the usage of the 'no-brainer' phrase, that another activist also used in explaining how loving nature 'is a no-brainer for most Slovenes because we are quite proud of our environment', and just the normal thing to do or feel.<sup>128</sup> It seems that

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Nika, activist from Slovenia (email, 3 August 2020).

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Jan, activist from Slovenia (Skype, 2 August 2020).

attitudes towards nature shaped in early childhood are ingrained into the multiple identities these young activists assume, be it Slovene, youth or an activist. A pro-environmental attitude is primarily a result of positive and preservationist attitudes towards the nature of not polluting the environment and paying weekend homages to nature outings, as a runaway from the usual city hubbub. Forming such views of nature in early childhood by either replicating parents behaviour or being told to listen to teachers' advice in school bears a strong possibility of developing pro-environmental attitudes later on in life.

Besides parental upbringing, the second source of environmentally friendly behaviour comes from education, specifically individual teachers. What stands out as a very interesting answer is that most of the activists mention schools as places where they learned about the issues of climate change. If you recall the brief synthesis of the Mladen Domazet and others research on environment and climate change educational curricula in Slovenia, there is no curricular subject teaching children about environmental degradation and climate change, but rather instances of cross-curricular education through specific subjects. Even though this is also laudable, one can only speculate what amount and kind of knowledge about climate change is transferred to children, or rather in what ways teachers transfer the knowledge and engage students, for the previous research has shown that the latter matters in attitude formation about climate emergency. Some activists even recall instances of child-friendly environmental teachings as early as in kindergarten:

I remember always being told to care for the environment when I was in kindergarten, even though at that point that just meant – don't litter, close the tap when you brush your teeth etc. Nevertheless I think that our generation, also due to this upbringing, already grew up with some degree of environmental awareness.<sup>129</sup>

Nika believes environmental awareness is part of the Slovene upbringing (family and school), the 'green' discourse within which young generations grow up learning how care for the environment is important. Ela, another activist from the Pomurje region, says the gymnasium provided her with some information about climate change.

<sup>129</sup> Nika (n 127).

Her high school teachers even supported the founding of the MZPP Pomurje offshoot group.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, as an architecture student, Jan got in touch with energy-efficient construction, ideas of which he wanted to explore further. One can see that environmental awareness comes and develops at different levels of education. For Aleš, education about climate change was ‘extensive and well done’,<sup>131</sup> while for Nika ‘school did a little’,<sup>132</sup> and for Ela and Jan it was a moderate provision of information.

Nevertheless, Aleš understands that education is ‘not a universal experience in Slovenia and depends strongly on schools and especially teachers’.<sup>133</sup> Every curriculum allows a certain percentage of the lessons to be altered upon the wish of the educator, which the researcher, while working as a teacher, found extremely helpful for she could introduce new topics or delve deeper into already suggested ones. In fact, it seems that curricular inadequacy did not prevent teachers to bring climate change issues closer to young generations, teaching them the importance of nature for human beings’ survival.

On the other hand, Aleš remembers not being a hardcore nature lover but by starting to tackle the topic of social justice, he realised ‘how dependent we are on a healthy environment, how important nature is and that environmental injustice doesn’t only happen through greenhouse gas emissions, but also through destruction and degradation of nature’.<sup>134</sup> His awareness comes from a utilitarian understating of nature, thus, the concern for nature, environmentally wise, for some respondents began when they actually joined the MZPP. Spending time around their peers, who know more about climate change and its effects, called the charitables by Alina Kuthe and others,<sup>135</sup> got them interested in the issue and prompted them to explore further, on either the internet and social media or the historically used media of the TV and radio.

In conclusion, for the majority of respondents, climate emergency

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Ela, activist from Slovenia (email, 4 August 2020).

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Aleš, activist from Slovenia (email, 13 July 2020).

<sup>132</sup> Nika (n 127).

<sup>133</sup> Aleš (n 131).

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Alina Kuthe and others, ‘How many Young Generations are there? – A Typology of Teenagers’ Climate Change Awareness in Germany and Austria’ (2019) 50(3) *Journal of Environmental Education* 172, 172-182 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2019.1598927>> accessed 15 September 2020.

attitudes and awareness came from parents, schools and teachers, the entities young people have first contacts with while growing up. The early memories of nature appreciation emanating from family outings and actions were replicated in young activists' attitudes and behaviour. Many dealt with certain aspects of climate change education, although to different degrees and at different levels. Having the opportunity to join the MZPP later these activists were exposed to a large web of information about the issue by primarily more knowledgeable peers and following 'the right people online',<sup>136</sup> although nowadays it is hard to discern credible information on the internet. Even though some factors were given precedence over others, one can conclude that attitude formation rests on a synthesis of all these factors coupled with socio-cultural values the person was exposed to growing up. For the respondents, climate emergency, as seen for what it actually is – an emergency – is a call for a fast, efficient and urgent action and reaction, or else catastrophe can happen and destroy life on earth.<sup>137</sup>

### 3.2 WHEN ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS TURNS INTO ACTION: THE WHAT AND WHY

Climate emergency awareness necessitates the wish to protect primarily one's own surroundings as the source of health and wellbeing, and then all of the people affected by climate change one way or another. Awareness is the first step, but when these individuals express concern by coming together in small groups or organisations, it is when the movement starts building momentum, committed to not only the protection and conservation of the environment but also the health and wellbeing of people. Historically, instances of environmental activism sparked by either intellectual movements of nature reverence; fear for living conditions of common people residing near the industrial sites, or the scientifically driven activism of experts and organisations with the intention to raise awareness about deterioration of living environments, showed how different environmental concerns brought people together.

<sup>136</sup> For Vita (Interview with Vita, activist from Slovenia (Skype, 7 August 2020)), the right people are the local and global activist groups who share scientifically credible links for further information.

<sup>137</sup> Ela (n 130) and Vita (n 136).



How much of it changed and what remained the same will be seen in this subchapter.

Departing from factors that influenced ETD in young activists, the researcher was interested in exploring the local narratives of motivation behind joining the MZPP and being active in the movement. Moreover, she wanted to see what the individual drivers were in being active for this cause and how they fit within the general ten demands the MZPP sent to the government of Slovenia. Lastly, since the PP in MZPP stands for climate justice, entailing the activism's major aim in this case, respondents' understanding and view of the term was also tested and the results are quite interesting.

When it comes to the driving forces behind their activism, the answers vary and at the same time are quite similar for many respondents. Recurring reasons for being active are the common fear for the future due to government inaction and a sense of community power and togetherness, strengthened further by the common aim among the activists and the knowledge transfer within the group. Specifically, Jan was primarily driven by the wish to be politically active which emerged around the same time as the FFF and the MZPP, and for him the next logical step was to join a movement, and since he liked their agenda, he joined and has been active ever since. Nevertheless, one answer was strikingly interesting and it came from Aleš, where he brings up the notion of privilege in having the time and money to be involved in similar events: 'I also believe I have a responsibility to be active, since I am privileged enough to have the time, resources and safety to do it. I believe climate change is the biggest threat to humanity ever and want to stop it from affecting the world too much'.<sup>138</sup>

Since he described his lifestyle as typically middle-class European, he believes his social status and time-money-resources privilege carry a great responsibility to be the voice of the ones who lack this privilege. He acknowledges that climate change has already affected people around the world, its effects being inevitable, which is why one cannot talk about stopping climate change, but rather the mitigation of its effects, so it does not affect the world 'too much'. For Vita, motivation comes from 'doing the right thing' in the sense of protecting the life on earth, without compromising anybody, which carries a real value in itself:

<sup>138</sup> Aleš (n 131).

Life in general is a value; it is almost like a miracle. It is something special. In a progressive society we take off our values and what's worthy, and we know that because of climate change there are millions of species going extinct, and a realistic threat to life of humans we know as well. Protecting that is the right thing! Not necessarily damage anyone personally, just shift our focus away from huge profits, which are not beneficial for society.<sup>139</sup>

Even though different things, reflecting their own personal belief and value systems, motivate activists, that variety underlines all of the aspects the movement stands for, without compromising the end-goal, which is achieving climate justice. Moreover, motivations ranging from the fear of future, over the sense of protection of life on earth, political activism and the middle-class privilege, to being the voice of the voiceless are surely seen as the right things to be done. But, where do these motivations take us and how do they influence the formation of the activism's aims? The purpose here is to see the major environmental concept of the respondents' individual concern, mapping the most relevant demands for the respondents out of the ten demands that the MZPP as a movement submitted to the government.

In general, the answers obtained from the respondents primarily suggest a distrust towards the current government in Slovenia, not just over environmental policy, but on its overall political agendas, which generates a fear of not being represented appropriately and proportionally. If one recalls the brief summary of the Eurobarometer analysis on environmental attitude in Europe 2017, one can confirm that there was a widespread popular distrust in the government's environmental protection efficacy, and it remained the same even today. This can be connected with the previous question of the activism motivation and say that the distrust toward the government indirectly prompts young people to take the matters in their own hands. What is striking here is the activists' belief that they can do better than the government, which might even be true, and is clearly in opposition to what Laura Wray-Lake, Constance Flanagan and Wayne Osgood have stated regarding the correlation of government responsibility and personal action,<sup>140</sup> for these activists rise when government action decreases.

<sup>139</sup> Vita (n 136).

<sup>140</sup> Laura Wray-Lake, Constance A Flanagan and D Wayne Osgood, 'Examining Trends in Adolescent Environmental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Behaviors Across Three Decades' (2010) 42(1) *Environmental Behaviour* 61 <[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790169/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790169/)> accessed 15 September 2020.

*Vis-à-vis* inadequate interest representation, Ela, as an 18-year-old activist, expresses her discontent towards the government, sharing deep personal reasons of being an activist: ‘as I know our current government is not environmental friendly, so therefore I protest for their resignation and even if that is not happening I just want for them to know that I oppose, and that I won’t be quiet, because I need my message to be heard’.<sup>141</sup> One can generalise here and argue that Ela’s wish of being heard and showing to the government that she opposes their (non)action can be found in the reasoning of the majority of activists not interviewed here. The activists are wary of institutional responses to environmental degradation, because in their view, the institutions are not doing enough.

Nika, Vita and Jan all stated their aim as being exerting continuous and organised pressure on the government to introduce change on the political and legislative level, thereby also revising the current climate policy and environmental plans.<sup>142</sup> When asked why putting pressure on governments and not big corporations, Vita says that putting responsibility on corporations just results in ‘green washing’, but the governments are the ones bringing educational programmes and corporate regulations, which is why the pressure needs to be directed towards them.<sup>143</sup> However, Jan is not optimistic about pressuring the government, for he thinks the MZPP does not have a legal ground, which means they act outside the system and the pressure they exert is purely informal.<sup>144</sup>

The second recurring answer would simply be the aim of achieving climate justice, the ultimate goal of the group, where Aleš concisely summarises the MZPP demands, acknowledging the social justice aspect of the movement. His views indirectly imply the wish for a systemic change, which could be classified as dangerous dissent in Karen O’Brien, Erin Selboe and Bronwyn Hayward’s views<sup>145</sup> for it has the possibility to achieve that systemic change by encompassing a wide range of actions, ideas, practices, and alliances: ‘Climate Justice! Net zero GHG emissions by 2030, green jobs and a just transition for affected workers, an economy

<sup>141</sup> Ela (n 130).

<sup>142</sup> Nika (n 127), Vita (n 136) and Jan (n 128).

<sup>143</sup> Vita (n 136).

<sup>144</sup> Jan (n 128).

<sup>145</sup> Karen O’Brien, Erin Selboe and Bronwyn Hayward, ‘Exploring youth activism on climate change: Dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent’ (2018) 23(3) *Ecology and Science* 42 <[www.researchgate.net/publication/327810673\\_Exploring\\_youth\\_activism\\_on\\_climate\\_change\\_Dutiful\\_disruptive\\_and\\_dangerous\\_dissent](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327810673_Exploring_youth_activism_on_climate_change_Dutiful_disruptive_and_dangerous_dissent)> accessed 5 May 2020.

based on degrowth and redistribution of wealth, community-owned and renewable sources of energy, complete equality and emancipation of all currently marginalised groups'.<sup>146</sup> But, to achieve this just transition activists talk about, there needs to be an equal participation in the transition discourse, since excluding portions of the population would just undermine the end-goal. Therefore, Jan says that 'what we need is not a revolution, but a gradual, pragmatic and practical evolution',<sup>147</sup> implying the need for deep-rooted socio-cultural and systemic changes.

One can see how Aleš and Jan's ways of achieving the essentially same things differs. One is more revolutionary and the other cautious. These different dynamics within a movement might either prove to be just an added value to the cause or hinder reaching consensus on action. These deviations might also stem from activists understanding of the very term climate justice, thus generating different means of achieving it. Therefore, the researcher will now look into their own comprehension of the very phrase.

As discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, the FFF stands in solidarity with the marginalised and vulnerable portions of our global society pushed further into poverty and inequality by standing on the frontline of experiencing the changing climate patterns. These people (climate creditors) are experiencing this bottom line injustice – bearing the effects of climate change whilst having done little (in comparison to the big polluters) to cause it. The movement demands a just and egalitarian transition to new economic models that benefit us all. Vita uses an example of an airline pilot to illustrate the just transition by ensuring that even though he or she is involved in a high emitting job, and in the tendency to reduce flying, one also needs to take care of the pilot so he or she does not lose his job and income.<sup>148</sup>

Jan sees climate justice as a historical concept, where the Western world's development accumulated over 200 years of emissions and has a historical debt towards the least developed countries in reaching at least some level of development by meeting each other halfway.<sup>149</sup> Both Vita and Jan acknowledge the social justice aspect of the phrase, while Ela understands it from an emotional perspective of committing injustice

<sup>146</sup> Aleš (n 131).

<sup>147</sup> Jan (n 128).

<sup>148</sup> Vita (n 136).

<sup>149</sup> Jan (n 128).

towards the planet: 'I understand climate justice as if the earth were a person and an injustice would be happening to it. I'm imagining this poor person that does not have its voice, so we have to help in this fight against the oppressor'.<sup>150</sup> Due to the exposure to MZPP's social media accounts and shareable links, as well as conversation with peers and knowledgeable activists, the majority of respondents understand the basic idea behind the climate justice concept, and the way it relates to their activist demands. Others have a more subjective and emotional understanding of injustices being committed against the planet by destroying its ecosystems. Understanding climate justice from different perspectives and angles that focus on factors the injustice is committed against might surely influence activists' view of how the justice can be achieved.

From the data obtained, it seems that the activists want primarily to reach out to the government by exerting pressure in demanding climate justice and active participation in political discourse, amounting to what O'Brien, Selboe and Hayward consider disruptive activism. Nevertheless, the movement's scale and support from outside actors such as scientists and even some politicians makes us speculate about calling the activism dangerous for its nature of challenging the global system and potentially leading to changes in market economies. This subchapter showed that MZPP's outreach is local, however, their demands and Aleš's aims are mostly in line with global trends, which make us speculate about how Slovenia would, as a small country in SEE, follow the principles of enviro/climate justice to fit in the global system which is currently 'unjust'.

### 3.3 WHEN ACTION ENCOUNTERS OBSTACLES

In this part of the research analysis, the researcher will look into perceived obstacles in the realisation of activists' goals, as well as their familiarity with and understanding of the ILI, envisioned to enable and protect human rights, and the way they could help or hinder their cause. Lastly, the researcher will comment on the *Urgenda* case, the victory of the Dutch rule of law and the citizens who organised for climate justice over the state in environmental matters and its possible application in Slovenian context. The researcher will first outline and comment on the perceived obstacles, and then approach the topic of ILI in the following subchapters.

<sup>150</sup> Ela (n 130).

Data obtained from activists' responses again suggests a distrust towards the governing political bodies and mechanisms, coupled with a strong global corporate lobbying that benefits from maintaining the status quo, fuelling the lack of political will. Even in the instances where political will is nominally present, Jan thinks 'the political debates are stupefying, (because) we are never addressing the real issues'.<sup>151</sup> These debates turn out being useless since they always coat or avoid the real issues, whereas Aleš draws attention to 'our growingly authoritarian alt-right government, which tries to get rid of any public discourse whatsoever'.<sup>152</sup>

Having in mind the substantially comprehensive institutional structure of pro-environmental legislation in Slovenia, the researcher could not help but wonder the source of such resentment towards the government, but she soon found answers by reading media coverage of the current political establishment's fluctuating attitudes towards environmental legislation. In comments about the current right-wing government, Jan realises now how the previous one was taken for granted in their attempts to propose environmental laws, national energy and climate development plans, and initiating talks with the public and activists. Now, with the government shift, the country is just moving in the wrong direction.<sup>153</sup> It is interesting how the activists show nominal distrust into the government, but at the same time, they want it to act. Yet again, they put more efficiency into the national government than ILI.

The public is not helping either, in Vita's thoughts. She thinks climate action is urgent and radical, and people are afraid of doing huge things and for some of them it is easier to believe that the system is working than having to think about its improvement.<sup>154</sup> Nevertheless, she acknowledges the structural barriers some people might be experiencing that prevent them from delving deeper into the topic of climate change. Ela, as well, sees the society as an obstacle in the realisation of activism goals, drawing attention to the lack of intergenerational equity, cooperation, and above all acknowledgement and understanding:

<sup>151</sup> Jan (n 128).

<sup>152</sup> Aleš (n 131).

<sup>153</sup> Jan (n 128).

<sup>154</sup> Vita (n 136).

The society, because it is our fault that these politicians are leading us. I see that not a lot of my peers care about politics or climate justice and therefore they do not go vote, so the democracy in Slovenia is more or less just what the older generations decide, what I think is really bad, because they are deciding about our future, but they are just watching on self-benefit.<sup>155</sup>

Ela feels a deep discontent with the way democracy works in Slovenia, where older people mostly decide leading political options. This would also mean that the majority of voters has opted for this right wing, growing authoritarianism, whereas the younger generations see themselves as more progressive. However, Ela also acknowledges the slight passivity of her generation in exploring burning socio-political issues. John Rawls' principle of intergenerational equity entails the recognition of every generation's importance within this world, acknowledging their potential, and Shue's moral integrity of equitable distribution of world's resources are reflected in what Ela is trying to tell us. Lastly, one of the activists drew attention to how the Covid19 pandemic 'killed the vibe and the momentum that was building on, because online and offline strikes do not carry the same weight'.<sup>156</sup>

The current political establishment in Slovenia with growing right-wing tendencies, their disinterest into environmental and, specifically climate issues, and the lack of intergenerational equity and understudying, as well as some emotional and structural barriers, somewhat hinder the realisation of the goals envisioned to mitigate climate change effects. The goal of better environmental legislation enforcement from the 2017 Eurobarometer survey still remains.

### *3.3.1 International legal instruments for environment protection within the Slovenian context*

Since the previous section showed a distrust towards the national government, here the researcher will explore activists' opinion on international standards and their effectiveness, given the recent proliferation of international instruments for environmental protection. In fact, few studies tell us about how ordinary people – in this case young activists – experience these instruments, and whether they see them as helpful in their struggle.

<sup>155</sup> Ela (n 130).

<sup>156</sup> Vita (n 136).

In general, the respondents do not see an efficient and effective application of ILI in the Slovenian context, considering them incomplete and non-ambitious. Jan says that they do not solve anything, but just raise awareness, and Aleš further deems that their inefficiency stems from the very outset of the instruments that ‘do not acknowledge the need to curb economic development’.<sup>157</sup> On the contrary, Nika and Jan also acknowledge the role of political will in mainstreaming and abiding to the agreements and protocols, regardless of their binding nature. ILI, that many people deem as the only way of achieving something, evoke scepticism in these young activists. Moreover, national government inefficiency in these matters adds up to their scepticism and the way the MZPP approached this issue might suggest how activists consider the street a place where progressive politics is made.

Surprisingly enough, all of the respondents were more eager to comment on the national legal instruments, i.e. laws and strategies, probably because they were more familiar with their instrumental nature and application. Ela explains her discontent with such instruments as follows:

I know that we have environmental laws, but they are the minimum of what our country can do to help the environment. I think they are beneficial, because our nature is still somehow protected, but on the other hand they give people false interpretations that everything is good in Slovenia and that it doesn't need improvement.<sup>158</sup>

Vita and Jan also think the new government could make more effort in enabling the new climate regulations, but the latest events of excluding the non-systemic stakeholders, including NGOs, from having a say in public matters by changing regulations, just undermines government credibility.<sup>159</sup>

Some of the activists also commented on the current burning issues in Slovenia when it comes to national climate strategies and plans. Aleš says ‘Slovenia has continuously had one of the worst rated NEPN’s in the EU, having to revise the last document after a negative response from the European Commission, which further deepens the distrust of the public towards the governing bodies for less effort that expected is

<sup>157</sup> Aleš (n 131).

<sup>158</sup> Ela (n 130).

<sup>159</sup> Vita (n 136); Jan (n 128).



being put in these issues'.<sup>160</sup> Even Nika says she became more sceptical of the government's wish to do anything relevant with the 'notoriously unambitious' NEPN that has been in the loop for the past two years and she encircles her stance by saying: 'I didn't think our previous government was doing enough to implement change and I certainly am not any more hopeful with the way the political climate has changed recently - not just in Slovenia, but globally'.<sup>161</sup> Contrary to Jan, who said that the previous government did something in the domain of environment protection, Vita is not that convinced.

Many participants showed a deep mistrust into the effectiveness of ILI, which consequently might turn their hopes into something they think they can directly influence, the national instruments. Nevertheless, as research findings show, neither spark any hope in bringing about positive changes, for little effort is put into their formation and application. Although the respondents are fighting for a change, they seem very sceptical into any change coming from legal bodies and instruments. This gives rise to the question of what kind of actors are to bring about the desired change. Could activists see their political activism as the only way to champion the cause?

### 3.3.2 *Urgenda case and the trust of international legal instruments*

In an attempt to see whether the activists would be ready to take legal steps against the government and state in climate matters, respondents were presented the *Urgenda* case and asked whether such an instrument could be used in Slovenia. Urgenda Foundation, a Dutch environmental group, and 900 Dutch citizens sued the government requiring it to do more in preventing global climate change based on the ILI it has agreed to and its obligations to safeguarding its own citizens. The court concluded that the state has a duty to take climate change mitigation measures due to the 'severity of the consequences of climate change and the great risk of climate change occurring'.<sup>162</sup> The *Urgenda* case was the first climate case in the world where the national court established that their government has a legal duty to tackle climate change and

<sup>160</sup> Aleš (n 131).

<sup>161</sup> Nika (n 127).

<sup>162</sup> *Urgenda Foundation (on behalf of 886 individuals) v The State of the Netherlands* (Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment) First instance decision HA ZA 13-1396, C/09/456689, ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2015:7145, ILDC 2456 (NL 2015) <<http://climatecasechart.com/non-us-case/urgenda-foundation-v-kingdom-of-the-netherlands/>> accessed 15 May 2020.

protect them from its adverse effects. In this subchapter the researcher explores activists' opinion on whether such an enterprise would work in Slovenia, and if not, why not.

Most would support similar action, but are reluctant about its outcome. Jan thinks it might help environment-wise, but otherwise it would be seen as a political move by the opposition that has two possible outcomes: either changing the current government or pushing them further to the right.<sup>163</sup> Nika has a similar view of it being 'more of a performative act or publicity stunt even, since the current Slovene government doesn't feel the need to adhere to any lawful obligations'.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, Vita fears such an attempt would be useless for the 'right-wing government brings their right-wing judges to the court, which is a constitutional court but still a subjective one'.<sup>165</sup> Constitutions are quite straightforward, yet sometimes it seems that they are written in a way that allows different interpretations, leaving space for manoeuvre. Yugoslavia's 1974 constitution contained the right of citizens to a healthy environment, yet the political establishment still allowed poorly regulated extractive and polluting expansion. The respondents do not see this as a possible solution right now for the reasons above and Aleš furthermore elaborates: 'We're currently not thinking of taking legal action against the state, as we do not believe there is enough legal precedent yet to win a court case'.<sup>166</sup>

The activists perceive the weak implementation of ILI in the national agendas or even the act of not abiding to it entirely, the corrupt right-wing government and its exclusion of environmental laws and agendas as an obstacle in taking any legal action against the state. The surprisingly few or non-existent case law from the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the quasi-judicial HR Committee could largely help the MZPP cause for ECtHR's decisions are legally binding, but still, the enforcement mechanisms are sometimes weak. As I am writing this right now, news is emerging of young activists filing a crowdfunded complaint to the ECtHR against 33 European countries in demanding more ambitious emission cuts.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Jan (n 128).

<sup>164</sup> Nika (n 127).

<sup>165</sup> Vita (n 136).

<sup>166</sup> Aleš (n 131).

<sup>167</sup> Jonathan Watts, 'Portuguese children sue 33 countries over climate change at European court' (The Guardian 3 September 2020) <[www.theguardian.com/law/2020/sep/03/portuguese-children-sue-33-countries-over-climate-change-at-european-court](https://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/sep/03/portuguese-children-sue-33-countries-over-climate-change-at-european-court)> accessed 12 September 2020

This chapter provided an analysis of the interviews done in July and August 2020 with five MZPP activists. The findings suggest a deep appreciation towards and concern for nature in both emotional and environmental sense, as ingrained in the respondents' upbringing that is influenced by primarily parents, secondly education and then the online and offline media. However, it is not one, but rather a synthesis of different factors contributing to climate change and emergency awareness formation. When this awareness starts influencing climate change attitudes in these young people raising questions of possible future impacts on both the planet and human beings, it is when climate change advocacy starts emerging. In the pursuit of similar mindsets, young people search for stronger identification and establishment within environmental movements that champion the cause they advocate.

When it comes to major drivers behind joining the movement, they range from the fear of future, over the protection of life on earth, political activism and the middle-class privilege, to being the voice of the voiceless and exerting continuous and organised pressure on the government in achieving their goals. The very goals fluctuate between political agency and social justice issues when it comes to climate change. Inappropriate representations in political life implying the distrust towards political establishments and the aim of achieving climate justice is what preoccupies the respondents. Nevertheless, an interesting choice of occupation to demonstrate what climate justice means by ensuring a pilot gets a new job when transition happens implies understanding of the concept from a rather global perspective.

Yet again, all of the activists deem the new right-wing government as an obstacle in reaching the climate goals and making progress in the more efficient environmental legislation implementation. Other obstacles named were society's disinterest in overarching global matters and fear of radical change that Naomi Klein drew attention to, saying that people are aware of how much their lives would change and because of that they are afraid. The Covid19 pandemic proved an obstacle in killing the momentum the movement was building. Moreover, the pandemic also revealed the malfunctions and shortcomings of the current systems, enabling us to consider seriously climate change agendas in the post-Covid19 recovery plans.

As for the international and national legal instruments envisioned to benefit the citizens and their surroundings from which they highly depend, the majority of respondents are familiar with their existence

but do not consider them helpful for they do not see an effective application of the ILI in the Slovenian context. The same happens with the application of national legal instruments that they consider corrupt. In the end, the ILI are there to help the human beings, and if these young people do not see them as serious and effective, that speaks volumes about the success or failure of these instruments. Lastly, the respondents also do not think that taking legal action against the state right now would help. It might even bring about some side effects, such as pushing the government further to the right. This shows a very sharp strategic political acumen in this novel subgroup of citizens championing this frontier of rights.

## CONCLUSION

The unprecedented youth mobilisation related to climate change that had been building momentum for the past two years finally culminated in 2019 exposing a variety of problems faced by our global society. The young activists mobilised around one common goal, which is climate justice, and soon found out that people cannot have any kind of justice while portions of our society are left alone in battling different environmental issues, the most pronounced being climate change. In the region of SEE, the context-dependency of the changing climate patterns already influences the quality of people's lives, and even the greenest country of all, Slovenia, is facing similar issues of ecosystem pollution. The rise of a FFF offshoot in Slovenia, the MZPP, makes us reconsider the 'green' epithet attached to the country and look deeper into the triggers of this mobilisation.

The aim of this study was to investigate the existence of ecosophical and sustainability-oriented motivations in young MZPP activists, with the purpose of mapping the shift of values and ideologies related to climate change discourse and drawing attention to the significance of youth climate activism for broader social issues. The research explored the influence of different socio-cultural and structural factors on climate change and emergency awareness formation, motivations and aims behind joining the movement, and the understanding of perceived obstacles preventing the realisation of the movement's goals. The findings suggest a spectrum of climate change and emergency information-gathering channels, such as parents, education and teachers, MZPP group and peers, and then the media, influencing the awareness shaping and attitude formation. Driven by the wish to be politically active and to voice the voiceless, the activists work on exerting continuous pressure on the government with the aim of ensuring adequate representation in decision-making processes of achieving climate justice.

Furthermore, the findings reveal a pronounced distrust towards not just the current political establishments in Slovenia, but also ILI for human,

and especially environmental rights, ultimately envisioned to benefit and safeguard human beings' wellbeing and dignity. These attitudes have greatly contributed to the restatement of activists' wish of being free and equal members of a cooperative social establishment, a pluralistic society, mitigating the growing powers of the right-wing state that deviates from the ethical argument of ensuring the rights of life, liberty and property to its citizens. The scepticism in the effectiveness and fairness of institutions, as the backbone of every democratic society, further fuels the wish for the ability to represent oneself in the political arena.

Even though climate change requires massive global governance and coordination, it seems that the inadequacy of the rule of law and perception of corruption is demoralising youth from a more serious legally coordinated action against the state. The case of MZPP, translated onto the regional context of SEE, teaches us how these insecurities might prove a great hindrance to the potential for necessary and radical socio-metabolic change due to an inability to perceive the desired outcomes in the long run. However, they might even prove a trigger of urgent action on the part of activists. The ability to resist compliance with desired international standards on the part of the growing right-wings authoritarian governments in the region lowers citizens' expectations of the state and their trust in steady operation of institutional structures. The view of these actors as being equal in the social establishment cooperative platform does not help either. Yet again, one can draw a clear line between the right-wing authoritarianism employed in the service of the dominant fossil capital and the liberal thought theory, seen by them as a threat to progress and pushed further into the left.

Whatever the discussion might be, one thing is for sure – the climate crisis is urgent and felt even by people reading this right now, although to varying degrees. Drawing attention to it and reminding ourselves that there is not enough for everybody's greed in nature (as Locke might have put it, had he read Gandhi) there are limits that need to be respected and resources to be equitably distributed if people want a just and fair world. As for the younger generations, FFF and its cause epitomise something bigger – a fight for the present and the future of every living creature on the planet. Together for the same cause, carried on the wings of scientific data and research, young people seek to give their individual contribution to a greater cause. The MZPP highlights this cooperation and group value as a way towards success in this common global struggle, claiming that MZPP clearly does not want a Slovenian Greta, but a horde ready to take the matter in their own hands when going gets tough.

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## INTERVIEWS

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- Interview with Ela, activist from Slovenia (email, 4 August 2020)
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