Chapter 3: The Foundations

November – December 2018:
The (climate-)scientific background

The first speech in Sweden – the evening at Oscarsteatern

And so, at the end of November, two of the most important weeks in the history of Fridays for Future begin.

It is a mild Monday evening, the 26th of November, and Greta stands on the stage of the theatre, in the centre of Stockholm. The room is full; more than 800 people have come to "An evening for the climate" with music and talks. Before and after Greta's appearance, there are speeches by Archbishop Antje Ackelen, former president of the Club of Rome Anders Wijkman, and Greta's father. In between, her mother sings Swedish songs, accompanied by her own chamber orchestra. This is the only time when the family can be seen all together in all these months. The project of the strike movement belongs to Greta, and she is careful to ensure that it does not become mixed up with her parents' activism; for years, they have been active in the cause of refugees, for example, and in Sweden they are well-known people.

"Hej," says Greta. "Hej," says the whole audience. The speech is about eight minutes long and packed with information, biographical descriptions of her Asperger syndrome, the depression she has overcome, and the connection of that with the climate crisis. For many children across the world, talking openly about an Asperger's diagnosis is liberating; it is not only an obstacle but can also be a superpower. And so Greta comes to the most important facts: the average Swede causes emissions of ten to eleven tons of CO_2 per year; that should be less than two. Emissions must sink by more than ten percent per year, because we can only emit a small CO_2 budget, otherwise the earth will become hotter by more than 1.5 degrees, and in just a few years this budget will be used

up (Thunberg 2019). Humans have exterminated about 80 percent of mammals on land and water. Every year, billions of euros are still invested in fossil fuels.

The atmosphere in the theatre is concentrated. Gradually, images and numbers transform themselves into a clearer awareness. Ah, that's how things look and that's where our planet is now. Even for those who knew about the climate emergency and the ecological crisis, and after all that is the majority of these grey-haired theatregoers, something peculiar happens during these minutes. Knowledge changes from something abstract to something clearly seen and felt. It becomes so clear that it's as if there's no way back. Greta gave the same speech in English the previous day, and she posts it online as a Ted Talk a few weeks later.

The basic principles

Fridays for Future could never have grown so quickly if there had not been a centre from which, in these first months, no one deviates. This includes: no specific demands beyond the reference to the Paris Agreement and the 1.5-degree reference point of the IPCC report SR1.5; taking account of Anderson and Rahmstorf's calculations of the emissions budget, meaning zero emissions within the next twelve or so years in European countries; nonviolence; a holistic approach: we need a systemic transformation, a new way of thinking, including social justice and equality.

In Mynttorget, the only question which is really controversial, especially among the students, is whether they can and should present more concrete political demands and suggestions too. This will soon become the great (productive) dispute within the movement. But the cluster of principles is clear and radical enough to hold the whole movement together for months – discussions follow it consistently, as well as all decisions, placards, interviews. The young people of Mynttorget do everything to emphasise it and protect it.

The scientists' task

And so, climate and environmental sciences take centre stage. The young people refer to them in all their interviews. And soon, the first researchers can be found who take the side of the children and young people.

Whether we have to remake our society sustainably without emissions within twelve or within thirty years is an important question, these researchers say. Either we are forced to pull ourselves together for a joint effort, or we're not. If there were no tipping points – such as the loss of the Arctic ice – or negative self-reinforcing effects such as the melting of the permafrost, probably nothing would be half as bad. There would be the certainty of linear developments. But that is not the case. There is a real danger that the whole system collapses and the planet heats up by several degrees, becoming uninhabitable for us (Lynas 2020; Rockström et al. 2009). The course we set in the next years decides what will happen in the next century.

On the one hand, we know that stopping CO_2 emissions has direct consequences and will slow down the rise in temperatures. We are not simply at the mercy of natural processes. We can take responsibility, say the scientists, and stop digging up and burning fossil fuels.

At the beginning, it is only Maria Johansson who joins the group in the square. She goes there and takes a stand, as an environmental scientist at Stockholm University. Otherwise, things are quiet for a long time. For months. Half a year. Maria works on her colleagues in the climate sciences, but they generally don't want to appear in the square as university researchers; at most, they are prepared to go there as private individuals. They agree with

the movement. In private conversations, they confirm Greta's numbers, one by one. But it's not possible to take a position openly. Scientists are supposed to be neutral. Is that true? What is the task of those who are employed by the state to conduct research, and who see that this state is not acting adequately, to the disadvantage of the children? Should they just watch? Intervene?

What Maria Johansson does with her daily conversations with colleagues will show results over the months. At first, two or three will join, including Douglas Nilsson, who will play a central role in the founding of Scientists for Future. And finally, from March onward, all of us in Mynttorget will be joined by almost the whole of the Bolin Centre, which brings together climate researchers from universities across the city. They will come to the square with great enthusiasm and a giant placard: "Questions about the climate? Ask us." Among them are some of the most well-known researchers in the world. They feel that they must act and support the strikers, officially, because politicians are operating with "incorrect", misleading numbers and parameters, or ignoring the real facts entirely: the Swedish goal of zero emissions by 2045 does not tally with the Paris Agreement, they say, and above all, Sweden is not even on the way to this distorted goal (see Urisman Otto 2022).

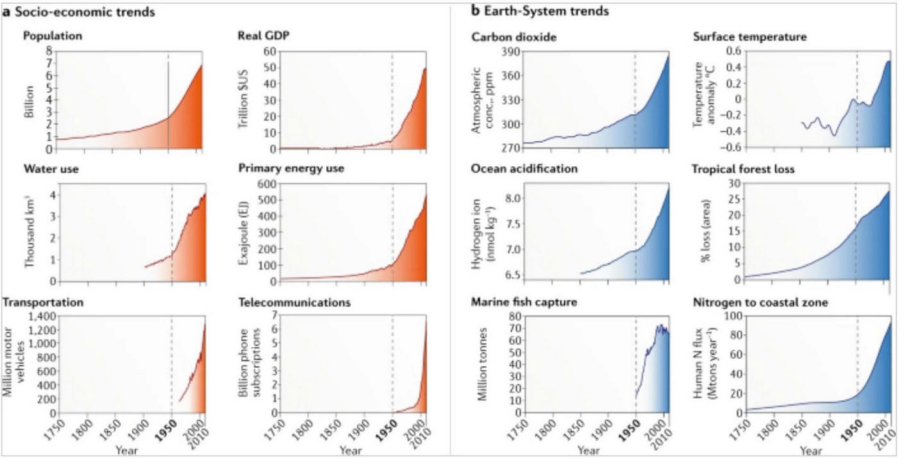
The strikers have suddenly opened up a space for them. Some of researchers have been cursing privately in their offices for decades, but haven't dared to do anything. Now they can, with the protection of the ten young people. They say: what the politicians are doing, and in fact all the parties, is risking a rise in temperatures of two or three degrees within the next seventy years which will make nightmares come true; and the floods and droughts are already happening now, everywhere. Food and water supplies for all people are threatened (Wallace-Wells 2019).

They see the whole picture, what researchers call the "great acceleration" (see Raworth 2018): how all the curves develop in parallel and continue upwards ever more steeply, like hockey sticks. That's the acceleration: CO_2 emissions are accelerating, as is the rise in temperatures through the fossil society, the production of waste, the consumption of water, the eradication of animal species; the increase in gross national product through the fossil economy; the acidification and over-fishing of the oceans – this is how the "earth system" is reacting to socio-economic factors and becoming feverish. This "acceleration" must be stopped; that is our task.

Particularly in the early months, I am not quite sure of myself during these discussions of scientific details, and that is why I gradually build up a network. From late September, I introduce the concept of #ScientistsForFuture (much

later, S4F will be "properly" founded in Germany), and sometimes I stand in the square with a Scientists for Future sign. We form study groups and read research by Schellnhuber (2015), Rahmstorf (2019), Anderson (2019), and Rockström (2019), but also work which is more critical of the emerging movement. We talk to colleagues at Stockholm University such as Frida Bender and Douglas Nilsson, and with Line Gordon at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, one of the most renowned institutions in sustainability research worldwide, and they also stand together with the young people on the stage during the second and third global strikes in May and September. In the night before a strike, they phone us: we have made a giant snowball and we need a freezer behind the stage – where can we get one? They appear with the 1000-page IPCC report and wave it at the 10 000 young people in the audience. All of them agree: most politicians distort the picture of the state of the earth and the reaction that would be needed.

Figure 1: "The great acceleration" – the background of the climate crisis



From: Steffen, W. et al. (2015)

So what is at stake? What is certain is the connection between the emission of greenhouse gases and the rise in temperatures. This correlation can be estimated very well by the scientific community, and already has been for 40 years. That means we can calculate how much CO_2 (and equivalents) can be emitted

if the earth is not to become more than 0.4 degrees warmer than the 1.1 degrees that have already been caused. In 2018, this budget is around 420 Gt, if we follow the scenario in the IPCC 1.5 Special Report (as explained in a more profound way in the chapter on the Smile meeting).

Why is the talk of "net zero emissions in 2050" so unfortunate, then? Zero emissions of greenhouse gases would mean that we can no longer breathe out. That is obviously a nonsensical goal. The zero emissions which we need would mean that the carbon dioxide and methane we emit are so small in quantity that they can be reabsorbed by forests and other natural processes. Then the goal would be met, meaning that no extra CO_2 would reach the atmosphere and trap warmth. The Keeling curve, which shows the rise in CO_2 concentration in the air, would no longer rise, for the first time in decades. This concentration must be pushed down below 350 ppm again; it is currently higher than 417 ppm, probably higher than it has ever been in the history of humanity. In the last millennia, CO_2 concentration was always at around 280 ppm. In a century, we have changed the whole system radically, the entire composition of the air. The heat is being trapped. So far, so uncontroversial, so disastrous.

The problem is that it is no longer about not looking for more oil, coal and gas, as the GAP report by the UN shows (GAP 2019). Already with the existing infrastructure (coal power plants, oil refineries etc.), more greenhouse gases are emitted than is possible if we want to avoid heating the earth by more than 1.5 to 2 degrees in comparison with pre-industrial times, adhering to the Paris Agreement. And that is where the politicians – including those who otherwise avoid risks – start their Russian roulette. Many of them say that we should reach "net zero" by 2050, and that afterwards we will have to make use of significant negative emissions through which carbon dioxide will be sucked out of the air and stored in the ground (even though it is entirely unclear how that is possible with such quantities). In principle, all the scenarios imagined by European governments assume that there will be enormous technological negative emissions (see Thunberg 2022). Gigantic quantities of CO_2 will have to be stored underground. Most people have no idea about that. A few researchers describe this as a declaration of war by the generation of fifty-year-old politicians against their own children (Stiegler 2020). No scalable technology exists, and plans for "solar geoengineering" sound disastrous to most of us, since they could put the whole "earth system" in danger. It would be sensible not to chop down any more forests (on all these problems, see the chapter on "many fights").

Apart from that, governments which are supposedly some of the most progressive in the world want to take a fifty-percent risk that the goal will not be reached. And they ignore the fact that through air pollution (aerosols), up to 0.6 degrees of global heating may already be built into the system (see Rahmstorf 2020).

What does that mean for policies? By around 2030 or a few years later, there shouldn't really be any larger sources of emissions anymore, according to Stefan Rahmstorf and Kevin Anderson, who are also two of the most important scientists for the Fridays For Future movement; not in Europe or the richer countries, for reasons of justice. Schellnhuber (2015) says in his monumental work that by 2040 the whole world must leave fossil energy behind. No quantities of coal, oil or gas should be burned anymore. Not for heating, for cars, for planes or for the steel or cement industries, and hardly any methane from the animals we eat.

That is – as I see it – why the young people are sitting in front of the parliament. That parliament decided on 2045 as its zero emissions goal. Such a goal takes no account of tipping points, feedback loops, or social justice and fairness, equity; it relies on problematic technologies and takes an enormous risk that everything will go wrong. The wealthier western countries must, according to the Paris Agreement, switch more quickly to a sustainable economy than the poorer ones. They must also help poorer countries massively to finance their transformation, the Agreement says (Thanki 2019). Even some environmental and climate scientists hardly take that on board; and so many politicians ignore it. A public debate must begin, looking at what justice could mean, I say to myself in these days of autumn 2018.

Global perspectives and the unjust classroom

At this time, young people in the so-called Global South are also starting to take notice of the movement. There are messages on Twitter from Vanessa, Leah and Hilda in Uganda, a few children in Nigeria and Kenya, and several groups of students from Bangladesh, Mexico, Brazil and Pakistan.

The global structure of the economic system, which many researchers regard as unjust (see e.g. Hickel 2018) is often the subject of the sustainability lectures which my colleagues and I give at the university. You could say that the struggle of the politicians in Sweden, Switzerland and the US to preserve the "fossil order" is directed not just against the generation of young people in

those politicians' own countries, but above all against the children in the most affected areas (Margolin 2020). They have made the smallest contribution by far to CO_2 emissions, and they are already feeling the consequences of global warming much more severely, the droughts, the floods, but also the results of deforestation.

For that reason, the young people chant at all the strikes everywhere in the world – and it is perhaps the only universal concept in these months – "We want climate justice." What goes for the situation within the individual countries also goes for the global situation: a small proportion of people – the richest ten percent – are responsible for emitting more than 50 percent of greenhouse gasses (Anderson 2019), and those same people own more than 80 percent of wealth, even in seemingly democratic countries such as Sweden and Switzerland (Cervenka 2022). That would be, I say to my twenty students in the university classroom, as if two of you were to own more or less everything, an enormous concentration of power would emerge – and those two simultaneously blighted or even destroyed everyone else's lives with their emissions. The question is then – why should anyone accept that? This injustice is also the reason why many young people take to the streets. That makes sense to most of the students; they already react strongly to the smallest sign of injustice when we work together. What is still missing is the determination to stand up and put an end to it; what researchers call "agency".

Historically, the piling up of enormous wealth by the richest section of western society is directly connected with extracting fossil fuels such as coal from countries in the Global South, I go on to explain in my lectures on sustainability – and with the exploitation of the people who live there (Malm 2017; Bellamy Foster 2010; Fraser 2022). The uprising which is starting to develop through Greta's work in these months also becomes an uprising by the children of those countries which are most disadvantaged by the fossil society. At the university, we agree that it is about thinking of democracy in a new way and making this new way a reality, not just within individual nations or within local economic systems, but also globally.

The climate scientist who emphasises this perspective on social justice and global fairness, again and again, is Kevin Anderson.

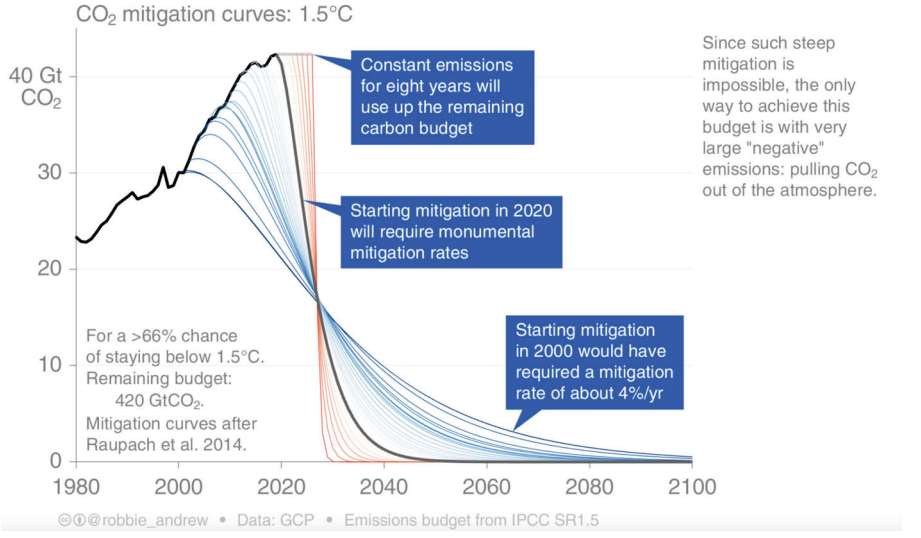
The idea of the emissions budget

Of all the scientists who were important for these first six months of FFF, Kevin Anderson stands out. A professor in Manchester, he is employed at the University of Uppsala in the crucial years for Fridays for Future. That is where I visit him, as do other climate activists, including Greta and her parents. The university centre where he works, CEMUS (founded by two students, Niclas Hällström and Magnus Tuvendal, and student-led as well as transdisciplinary), generally plays a central role in the spread of the climate movements. Kevin has the personality of a character in a play; wiry and equipped with a warm sense of justice, not prepared to make bad compromises just to impress colleagues, with a dry British sense of humour, and not one to avoid productive conflict, even on Twitter, with a concise, clear style. His speciality is calculating emissions budgets, meaning the piece of the pie of carbon dioxide emissions which we can still have if we want to hold up the process of global heating. Without him, the movement would have been missing an important piece of the puzzle.

The crucial insight is this: it is not even about setting goals like "We want net zero in 2050," as we hear from the EU, Switzerland and Sweden (in Sweden's case: 2045). It is only the absolute figures that count, the levels of gases being emitted. That's what it's about. The fact that governments pay no attention to these "budgets", but only talk about abstract goals, comes across as a deliberate piece of deception.

What our governments ought to decide would be to make real emissions transparent and show whether we are keeping to our budget. This is what all ministers explicitly refuse to do (including the German minister Svenja Schulze, who refused to answer several times when asked by ZDF). Probably because then most people would realise that the policy currently established in Europe does not in any way reduce emissions by more than ten percent per year. We really need plans for how that reduction could happen, sector by sector, and in a systemic, just way. That is the main job of the ministries right now, according to many researchers (Anderson et al. 2020). But even at universities, barely anyone dares to say that. Anderson also points that out, criticising the academy at least as much as he criticises policies (on possible transformations of schools and universities: see the chapter on education).

Figure 2: The required reduction in emissions (with a budget of 420 Gt)



Graph: Robbie Andrew

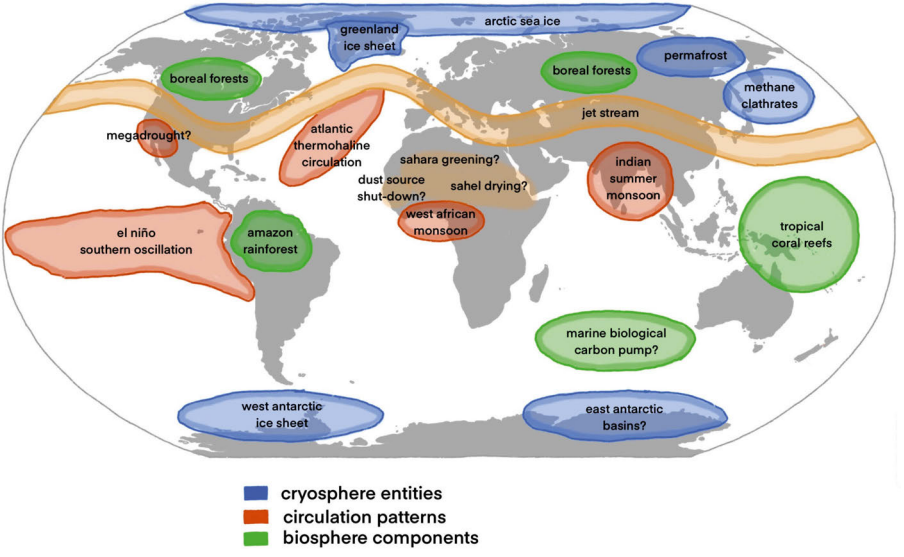
Anderson's companion in this struggle to push through emissions budgets rather than abstract net zero goals is Stefan Rahmstorf, who visits the children in Mynttorget, a central figure at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research together with Joachim Schellnhuber, who officially advises the government, and Johan Rockström, the Swede who previously drew attention to the climate crisis here in Stockholm. Like Anderson, Rahmstorf often uses Twitter as his political megaphone and is not shy about approaching the German government directly. He reacts vehemently to Angela Merkel's first longer comment on Fridays for Future. At the world security conference in Munich, the German prime minister seems to imply that Fridays for Future is actually an initiative controlled by Russian internet trolls. But it is not Russian trolls, but Greta, Isabelle and Loukina who are working on this.

Gradually, a network of the most well-known and important climate scientists emerges, supporting the group in Mynttorget: Douglas Nilsson from Stockholm, Michael Mann from Philadelphia, Julia Steinberger from Leeds, Kathryn Hayhoe and Reto Knutti from Zurich, and so on. Twenty of the most renowned institutes worldwide are represented. Already early on, Rahmstorf

tweets a graph which Greta retweets several times, showing how emissions have to "peak" in 2020, before drastically declining.

As we can all see, because the temperature difference between the last ice age and our current Holocene is only four degrees, rises in temperature by two degrees or even by four are associated with far-reaching changes to the conditions in which so many of us creatures live. If nature has a thousand years to adapt, it can do so. We are provoking such a change within a period of one hundred years. This means that the danger is very real that we will pass – or have already passed – tipping points in the climate system from which we can no longer come back.

Figure 3: Tipping points in the climate system



Graph: According to PIK-Potsdam

But, as argued by many in the FFF and XR movement, this approach and the whole concept of emission budgets is really almost cynical in itself. Already in the last hundred years, burning coal and oil has caused a drastic rise in the global temperature of around one degree. Hundreds of thousands of people

have lost and are losing their homes due to drought and floods (Wallace-Wells 2019).

Natural scientists are not the only kind

But in these winter days at the universities, it is not only natural scientists who are waking up. Mynttorget is regularly visited by the educationalists and sustainability researchers Isabelle Letellier, Leif Dahlberg and Kristin Persson. And from November, a small circle of researchers gather almost every Wednesday evening in a dark room at our small institute at Stockholm University: "Blackbox humanities" is the name of the project.

Outside it is already dark, early now, the snowflakes whirling through the air. All different departments of Stockholm University are represented, including education and psychology, but also the Karolinska Institute for Medicine, specifically neurology and psychophysiology. Now we want to develop a new centre where Stockholm children would be able to play not just with science experiments but also with the social sciences and the humanities. The topic: how would a sustainable democracy look, one which would pay attention to their perspective and get children involved. That reminds me of quite a similar small group of researchers who pursued this question a century earlier, looking intensively for a more adequate image of humanity. From this group came parts of modern psychology (Köhler), biology (Goldstein), education theory (Wertheimer), and philosophy (Merleau-Ponty), gestalt theorists, as they are called, because they focus on holistic connections, on the whole picture, on systemic changes (Fopp 2016). And if they had not been scattered across the world due to the political contempt for humanity that prevailed before the Second World War, many of them being Jewish citizens in Europe, perhaps the university as an institution would have developed differently. The central theme of all this research: what does it mean to be truly in democratic contact with oneself and with others? How can we make this non-alienated exchange possible?

We are searching for a new concept of humanity – humans have bodies, social interactions, compassion and imagination, and are connected to their environments, including at the university and as researchers (see the chapter about education towards the end of the book). If we do not let ourselves be touched existentially by our research, and take action in society accordingly, we are not taking our research seriously; this is one of the claims made by the "transformative" tradition of research (Leavy 2009). It is about connecting re-

search and teaching with the experiences of those affected; but also with being able to act and wanting to act. That is what we are trying out as we develop the new courses. How can this ability called "agency" be taught? A possible answer would be: through a combination of explaining facts, being playful so as to awaken the desire to act, and creating concrete possibilities. And by making sure that we teachers are setting an example. After all, students do notice if we don't take our own research seriously and behave inconsistently outside of the lecture hall.

Thinking about being in contact on equal terms – that is my actual field of research, a mixture of neurophysiology, psychology, education theory and political science. It is about understanding how we can shape our everyday world, our work, play and life in such a way – globally, too – that we don't cut ourselves and others off from ourselves unnecessarily by relations and structures of domination, becoming "alienated", but instead enter into a good form of democratic exchange. If there is a centre or a core of the future zero emissions society, a compass guiding the general talk about "respect for the limits of the planet and the basic needs of all people", then it is precisely that, I argue in my lectures: creating circumstances beyond domination in which this doubly good humane contact to ourselves and to others is possible, for everyone.

This practical knowledge is often lacking at universities (see McGeown/Barry 2023) – for example, knowledge of how easily children can become tense and cut off contact to themselves and to others, as analysed by the Alexander technique, for instance, as well as Bowlby's (2010) attachment theory and the developmental psychology of Winnicott (2005) and Daniel Stern (Fopp 2016). This means that we lack the practical, democratic knowledge to create humane social spaces, and that there is no basis for the foundations of many subjects with regard to their content (from architecture and economics to history, law, philosophy and education), or for the approach to teaching methods. These could – in sustainability studies, too – take their cue from the fact that we are social, creative, interactive creatures who can dominate each other or enter into a caring exchange (see the chapter about education).

This is also noticed by many of the students who go on strike: even courses focusing on environmental sciences seem not to have any existential anchoring in the current political situation or in the natural surroundings. But this makes it very difficult to gain a real understanding of the context. That is why the courses at the advanced CEMUS institute in Uppsala combine aspects of climate research with philosophy (see Raffoul 2022).

If we share this idea, it becomes clear that we would need a new wave of enlightenment, a really new way of thinking and of seeing ourselves as living creatures on a living planet. As long as tutors are neither able to analyse their own behaviour in the spaces of the university in terms of intersectional power relations (see e.g. Carbin/Edenheim 2013), nor knowledgeable in practical terms about how they can see through these power relations and reshape them by creating democratic spaces (Johnstone 1987), nor able to understand when real contact breaks off and how it is created physiologically, barely any

real education can take place – the social sciences and the humanities, including economics, are training people up who do not defend themselves against the climate crisis, because they lack this fundamental democratic dimension in their education. Such is the claim of this tradition of research. They only possess abstract knowledge.

That could change quickly, according to my plan. The disciplines could be joined together in new sustainability centres, by a grassroots movement such as #ScientistsForFuture, with teachers from all fields. This is not just about introducing ethics, empathy and compassion in schools and universities, but about making forms of domination visible, playing with the circumstances in which they occur, and creating the opposite: making the dignity of everyone visible so that we can feel and see it. Being at the centre of the concept of human rights, this "dignity" belongs to everyone and is not linked to (good or bad) actions and deeds – as philosophers stress (Menke/Pollmann 2017); no one has to deserve or earn their dignity, and no one can lose their right to it, even if they go against ethics and damage the common fabric of integrity.

These are some themes we talk about long into night at our Wednesday evening group in the university. We've even been joined by artists such as Mats Bigert, who sketches ideas about how this "democratic materiality" can be explored. One day during these weeks, he creates (with Lars, Åsa, Michael, and many more) Artists For Future, who join the young ones in front of the parliament. And soon, their ranks are swelled by psychologists, teachers, nurses, parents, grandparents, doctors and writers, a whole society… for future.

Winter sets in and the Mynttorget group doubles in size

Then something radical happens. Mynttorget changes. The ice-cream stall has disappeared. And early on a Friday morning, a truck comes rolling up. It is the almond man. In the Swedish winter, small stalls appear everywhere in the cities, where passers-by can buy mulled wine and roasted almonds – if they think they are capable of stuffing the little sweets into their mouths without getting them stuck to their thick gloves. The almond truck stops at precisely the place in the square (this part is called Tage Erlander Square) where Greta and the other young people have police clearance for their strike. The band of rebels positions itself distrustfully. They are not looking for competition. Half an hour later they are all sitting on their yoga mats and stuffing tons of roasted almonds into their mouths.

But someone else appears in the square during these days. And this will have much bigger consequences. Isabelle and Ell, both of them seventeen years old, join the core group, and soon they are also joined by others who are the same age – Simon, Vega, Ebba, Astrid, Anton, Linna, Minna, Edward, Sophia, Johanna, and many more. With this arrival of the slightly older second half of the rebel group, Mynttorget definitively becomes the hub of the global FFF network. Many of the newcomers quickly make contact with the international movement which they themselves are helping to invent.

Isabelle and Ell often come at the same time to the strike place. They have been worrying about the climate crisis for a long time and privately following the strike from home. "I've been keeping updated since September, via Facebook." "Same here." "But why did you choose this moment?", I ask the two of them during an interview for my research, who have known each other for a long time, since they met four years ago at an animal club and environment centre.

They gained an awareness of the idea of a general strike from the context of the EarthStrike. At that time, they saw the climate crisis as a threat to the animal world, "and I watched countless documentaries about the environment." "In December, I thought: that's enough." "Enough is enough. I can't just sit at home, and I feel bad because the world is ending, something like that. And when we came, the people here were really friendly. We had really good conversations and met great people. That's why I carried on."

At first, striking felt very strange, particularly for Isabelle. "I'm always on time for every lesson at school, and then suddenly… I don't go. My teacher was confused. My parents were confused." But then everyone sees the seriousness behind her commitment.

Together with Vega, Simon and the others, they immerse themselves in the emerging international networks. They make connections with the Swiss, Jonas, Lena and Loukina, with David in Italy, Saoi in Ireland, later with Dylan in Scotland, Alejandro in Madrid, Mitzi in the Philippines, the Belgians, the Brazilians in Manaus, and on and on. Ell often runs global meetings together with Loukina and Saoi. And together with Vega and Edward, they work on building a new international Discord platform and continue the debate in the main Facebook chat. Simon increasingly becomes the internet specialist for the global movement, helping to build the new website and keeping an overview of all the different social media channels.

"We came along at the moment just before FFF exploded. Before Katowice and Davos." "Before that it was a bit strange. No one knew exactly what was

happening. There were still just ten of us here every week. And then suddenly we were part of an internationally established network – we were part of it and we were the centre of it. A global sensation. From the outside." In Mynttorget, the atmosphere changes mainly because of the new intensity of the connections. Like a brain in which the nerve cells suddenly build connections and exchange information with each other at a furious pace, the square is transformed into a busy centre.

They stay up to date and join forces with the old group: who is on strike where in the world. Who is taking which position. "Oh no, that's just greenwashing. And we don't even know if that's a real person or a fake account." Italy suddenly has all its passwords stolen for the social media accounts; India, too. "Oh, those people are coming up with whole catalogues of demands, that's rubbish." "Suddenly it's exploding everywhere." "In Belgium, Switzerland, Germany – and how we celebrated when 15 000 went on strike in Australia!" Such numbers are still unthinkable in Stockholm or Sweden. "And the media. At the beginning, no one was here." The atmosphere is changing. And making people start to dream. "I would like whole cities to join us." "It's enough. We're sick of it."

Tindra can only agree. She represents a part of the connection to the group of those regular strikers who sat down next to Greta in the first days. On Fridays she often comes to the square with a homemade cake or giant muffins for all the others, vegan, of course. She says that she knew that the environment and the climate were in a bad state, and then she saw: there is something the young people could do. As time goes by, she is also the one who appears at eight with a few others and begins the day; and she helps hold together the Swedish movement as a whole.

Many of the young people have a very broad interest in society; they are well read and are also committed to other causes. They learned to look at things in intersectional terms, seeing the connections between injustice and discrimination in relation to gender, class, ethnicity and so on.

Some of them soon take care of the Instagram account for the Swedish Fridays group and get involved in planning the larger strikes, but they are just as capable of leading the masses of tens of thousands of young people their age at a march, or answering questions in television studios. And Tindra joins Isabelle and Andreas and travels to the first international meeting in Strasbourg at the EU Parliament, where they meet 60 likeminded FFF activists.

The group in Mynttorget has become so varied that it is possible to form quite different constellations for different projects.

Some work with others to make contact with trade unions. Others go to schools and give talks. And someone else joins them. Isabelle suddenly has a double in Mynttorget when Sophia turns up, her twin sister, who had been striking on the west coast in the first months, near to the biggest oil refinery in Sweden. She quickly takes part of the responsibility for the FFF email accounts and for social media.

Another person who is really part of the Mynttorget group, but who lives and strikes in Falun, is Andreas. He is so active and so frequently part of digital exchanges that he is drawn into discussions. He reflects on what happens in poems and songs, and he often makes the three-hour train journey to Stockholm for the meeting with all the other strikers.

I see how they come back, every week, despite their anxiety and sadness. It is difficult to imagine how they feel when they see how their peers and friends all over the world are already suffering now. Some of them have nightmares about their lives in thirty years, the fights for water and food. This is not a game. It is reality, it is their life. And again: I feel I have to wake up my colleagues. How can we let them fight alone? Where is everyone? Where is everyone?

And still, nothing changes politically. Yet? The negotiations for a new government are still going on, and have been since the young people first developed the idea of Fridays for Future in September.

But then the young ones get a completely different kind of support.