Fridays in Corona Crisis: Protest for a "Feverish" Earth in "Feverish" Times.

A Case Study: The Possibilities of the Fridays for Future Movement to Influence Politics in Times of Crisis.

Bachelor Thesis

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Abstract

Social movements are one of the principal social forms through which grievances and concerns are articulated. The movement of Fridays for Future (FFF) has developed into one of the most important vehicles for pressing climate-related interests and claims to all governments across the globe. While defining itself as a global movement, FFF is decentralized into respective local groups operating at the municipal level of government. By means of a case study of one local group of FFF, this thesis examines why social movements with global concerns address certain political levels to achieve their goals. Additionally, given the topicality, the analysis will further address the Covid-19 pandemic that in March 2020 has put a halt to mass protests. However, far from disappearing, social movements in general have adapted to the volatile context as this examination will show. Hence, the first section of this thesis provides an overview on the political opportunity and strategies of the grassroot movement FFF. The second section then focusses on the impact of the Covid-19 related restrictions on the possibilities of influencing politics at the local level and how the movement has adapted its strategies to deal with the new circumstances.

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Affidavit

for the Bachelor Thesis

I, Nele Eggelsmann, certify that I have written this paper independently, using only the sources and aids indicated.

I further declare that the present work has not yet been submitted within the scope of any other examination procedure.

Münster, the 30th of June 2021

1. Introduction

2019 is considered to be one of the most active years in terms of social movement protests around the world (Pleyers, 2020). In Germany, the protest movement *Fridays for Future* (FFF) has followed the example of the Swedish student Greta Thunberg who has started the campaign "school strikes for climate" in August 2018 when refusing to go to school on Fridays. In March 2019, on the first official protest day of the movement 300.000 people joined protests all across the republic. Only half a year later, on September 20, the day that was declared as the Global Climate Strike Day*,* the number of protesters has quadrupled. According to data provided by the movement, 1.4 million people joined different protests in 575 cities across the country, eventually making such protest event the largest globally coordinated climate protest to date (Fridays for Future, 2021; de Moor et al., 2020). Thus, 2019 has indeed been a very active and successful year for the group.

Then it is March 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic broke the global wave of protest and brought mass demonstrations to an abrupt halt. Crowds of people with signs and banners stridently demanding for climate protection have been eradicated from the landscape. The related restrictions that the German government has adopted have eliminated mass protests, namely by restricting the right to assembly. National governments faced an urgent state of emergency and the virus spread became the most important political issue attracting all attention (cf. Pleyers, 2020).

However, one after the other: Although FFF defines itself as a global movement, it is structured into decentralized local groups each operating on the respective municipal level of government in order to contribute to the transnational battle for climate justice. With their local contribution to the Global Climate Strike in 2019, FFF Münster has mobilized an amount of people that has never been done before in Münster. Only recently, they have been rewarded with the *Umweltpreis* by the city of Münster for this event with which they inter alia have persuaded the *Stadtrat* [city council] to adopt the goal of climate neutrality by 2030 (Westfälische Nachrichten, 2021). In order to understand such domestication of transnationally focused social movements (della Porta & Tarrow, 2005), the case of the local group of FFF in Münster will be examined. Given the overarching factor of the Covid-19 situation, this paper is generally subdivided into two parts: a pre-pandemic and a pandemic section. Preliminary, a short background chapter on the political circumstances in Münster, a characterization of Fridays for Future Münster (Chapter 2) and the most relevant milestones and measures related to the Covid-19 pandemic (Chapter 2.1) will be given. The theoretical core of this thesis is built

upon the concepts of a) political opportunity structures (Chapter 3.1) and b) strategic action repertoires of social movements (Chapter 3.2.). The first part of the analysis aims to describe the political opportunity structures of FFF in Münster and examines the responding strategies of the movement. Respectively, this part is guided by the research question:

RQ1*: What are the political opportunities of FFF in Münster and with which strategies are they approaching them?*

The second part scrutinizes the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for social movement mobilization and political impact. Thereby this paper covers the period from March 2020 when the World Health Organization declared the new coronavirus as a pandemic, until May 2021 when the interviews for this thesis were conducted. Since the pandemic is unique in its restraints on social life, the argument is that Covid-19 has affected the modus operandi of social movements (cf. Zajak et al., 2021). Therefore, the case of FFF in Münster is used to carve out specific pandemic-related challenges for social movements and how movements developed strategies to creatively adapt to the crisis. The second part of the analysis will be guided by two explanatory sub-questions:

RQ2: *What impact has had the Covid-19 pandemic on the possibilities for FFF of influencing politics in Münster?*

RQ3: *How did FFF react to the new circumstances during the pandemic?*

Although there is a relatively huge density on research and literature on social movements and how they influence politics (Snow et al., 2004), the unprecedented case of the Covid-19 crisis has created a novel research gap for the study of social movements. What this study aims to examine is twofold: Firstly, it tries to explain why social movements with global concerns address certain political levels to achieve their goals and secondly, how social movements behave in times of crisis. Secondly, given the topicality, the analysis will further address how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted social movements in their being and action.

2.   Mapping the Terrain: The Political Context and Fridays for Future in Münster

With the following chapter it is aimed to briefly contextualize the setting and the unit of this case study. As indicated above, the case study is set to the city of Münster in North Rhine-

Westphalia (NRW), Germany. The unit of analysis is the local group of the social movement Fridays for Future. Furthermore, it is aimed to outline the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic by reviewing relevant measures and legislation that were in force for the period under study.

To start with, the *kreisfreie Stadt* [independent town] Münster is the urban municipality, thus the seat of the *Regierungsbezirk* [administrative district] and has administrative capacity over more than 315.000 inhabitants (Stadtplanungsamt Münster, 2020). The most recent local election was held in September 2020 which the candidate of the "Christian Democratic Union" (CDU) has won and was therefore re-elected mayor for the second time. Alongside the mayor, the city is governed by the city council which was elected as well in September 2020. According to the Local Elections Act of NRW, the council has sixty-six seats of which one half is directly elected in the constituencies whereas the other thirty-three seats are filled by party lists according to the election results of the whole city. The current allocation of seats within the council is as follows: the CDU is the strongest group with 22 seats, followed by "the Alliance 90/the Greens" (Greens) with 20 seats. The "Social Democratic Party" (SPD) has 19 seats, the "Free Democratic Party" (FDP) and "the Left" have three seats each. The group "Die Partei/ÖDP" and the group "Volt" both have gained two seats each in the council. The "Alternative für Deutschland" (AfD) is entitled to one seat. Further, there is one non-partisan member. The Greens, SDP and Volt are forming the current governing coalition. In general, all council groups have information, initiative and active participation rights which allow them to request from the mayor that the council be convened, that an issue is to be included in the agenda or that an opinion is to be expressed on an issue of such agenda. Further, the council has a controlling function as for example granted by the right of access to documents (Amt für Bürger- und Ratsservice Stadt Münster [1], n.d.). The council is structured into several (sub-)committees that each have specific professions in which the issues to be decided by the council are discussed in an upstream process (Amt für Bürger- und Ratsservice Stadt Münster [2], n.d.).

The unit of this study is the local group of the global environmental movement Fridays for Future. FFF defines itself as a grassroot movement that arose from the feeling of powerlessness concerning the government's inertia in climate policy. From primary to high schools and even beyond, young people have walked out of school every Friday to pressure their respective governments into taking more assertive climate action (Fridays for Future Münster, n.d.; de Moor et al., 2020). The global movement is structured into several local groups who all organize themselves democratically, autonomously and decentralized. In Germany, in line with the Paris Climate Agreement and the 1.5 degrees target, the group demands for climate neutrality until 2035. For the city of Münster, the local group specifies such demands into a more sharpened

goal: they demand that given its good initial situation, the city of Münster should achieve climate neutrality already by the year 2030 (Fridays for Future Münster, 2019). In a comprehensive paper, they have concretized such overall goal with several sub-demands which they have then addressed to the council. In December 2019, the council has accepted the demand and adopted climate neutrality until 2030.

2.1.   *Protest under Lockdown: The Covid-19 Pandemic*

This chapter aims to compile a brief chronology of the Covid-19 pandemic and the measures it has called into force. For the city of Münster, the main legislation is the NRW-*Coronaschutzverordnung (CoronaSchVO)* [Corona Protection Regulation] which was firstly enacted on the March 22, 2020 and is subject to continuous modification. The regulation in force at the time this paper was written (May and June 2021) entered into force on May 28 and is the twenty-fifth revised version (Landesregierung NRW, 2021).

The first case of Covid-19 in Münster has been reported on the February 29. Until March 11, the number of infections increased only to eight people. From then on and within less than seven days, the number increased tenfold with a continuing upward trend. The enactment of restriction measures started with the prohibition of major events with more than 1000 participants on March 10 (Zajak et al., 2021). As of March 16, all schools in Münster were closed as well as public events and cultural sites were cancelled (Stadt Münster, n.d.). In the following weeks, the national government has gradually implemented stricter mobility restrictions culminating in a partial lockdown until the 5th of April whereas inter alia gatherings of more than two people were prohibited (Bönisch, et al., 2020; WDR, 2020). Hence, fundamental democratic and civil rights – and especially crucial for social movements the right to assembly – were temporarily suspended (Pleyers, 2020). The peak of infected people in the city area in the first "wave" of the virus was recorded on March 30 with 350 cases. As of then, the value has decreased to only one infected case in the beginning of July, whereas during May and June the number has been fluctuating however not exceeded 60 reported cases. Within the process of relaxations of restrictions, the state of NRW has decided on a *Obergrenze* [upper limit]. If a certain limit is exceeded, relaxations are withdrawn. Such regulation is valid until today and is the decisive factor for the resurrection of public life. While the numbers of infection were relatively low during summer months in Münster, they started to rise again in September introducing the second "wave" of the virus (Stadt Münster, n.d.). A second "partial lockdown" was implemented as of the November 2, which was transferred into a complete lockdown from mid-December and perpetually extended until mid-April demarking the third "wave" in 2021

(MDR, 2020; Kodzo & Imöhl, 2021). The current *CoronaSchVO* is staggered into three caps on incidences ranging from 50.1 to 100, 35.1 to 50 and less than 35. For a municipality with an incidence value below 35, major events with up to 1.000 paricipants will be permitted as of September 2021 (Landesregierung NRW, 2021). The incidence value of Münster during the research process for this paper was at 16.8. The most recent update that informs this thesis shows a incidence value of 1.9 on June 24, 2021 (Landeszentrum Gesundheit NRW, 2021). Accordingly, since the beginning of May 2021, Münster has been constantly below the 35 incidence cap.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1. *Political Opportunity Structures*

Social movements operate in a broader political context in which they seek to influence institutions of various kinds. The presumption of the 'political process' approach to social movements is that such contextual factors have an impact on social protest (Kriesi et al., 1992). For the systemic analysis of the political context, the concept of political opportunity structure (POS) has been developed. The basic assumption of this framework is that POS influences the choice of strategies and the impact of social movements on policy making (Kitschelt, 1986). This sub-chapter aims to conceptualize POS by reviewing relevant literature in the field of social movement research. It is aimed to extract variables that can be used for the analysis of the case study.

The first notion of a political contextual framework for investigating social movements was developed by Peter Eisinger (1973) who deployed the concept of POS in order to account for variation in riot behavior in American cities. The notion that Eisinger has firstly illuminated has been developed into a systematic analytics framework "emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between social movements and systems of institutionalized politics" (McAdam & Tarrow, 2019, p. 20). More specifically, the concept of POS has been developed in order to explain both levels of mobilization as well as the action repertoire used across different countries and types of movements. POS are composed of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization and hence offer a set of independent variables that can explain the political behavior of social movements (Kitschelt, 1986; Rucht, 1998; Strijbis, 2015). In general, especially in Western democracies, non-violent resources are crucial in order to gain access to the public sphere and political decision-making which is governed by institutional rules. Thereby, POS are relatively inert over time since they respond to the political regime prevailing in the respective country during a specific period (Kitschelt, 1986).

For the concrete conceptualization of POS, Kriesi et al. (1992) offer a comprehensive summary of approaches by scholars according to the motto "politics matter" (ibid., p. 239), therefore stressing the importance of conventional politics for social movements. In general, POS condense three properties of a political system: the *formal institutional structure, informal procedures and prevailing* strategies of the political elite with regard to challengers and the *configuration of power* within political institutions (Kriesi et al., 1992). For this study, only the former two will be of importance.

3.1.1. Formal Institutional Structures

The formal institutional structures can be described in terms of their *openness* in the political input phase and *strength/ weakness* in the political output phase (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi et al., 1992). Kitschelt (1986) argues that the openness of POS can limit the "responsiveness that movements can expect" (ibid., p. 62). Openness of political structures in the input phase offers points of access for social movements to policy making, whereas in the output phase, openness determines the capacity of the political system to convert societal demands into public policy (Kitschelt, 1986; Kriesi, 2004). Kitschelt (1986) further distinguishes between *weak* and *strong* political systems to summarize the degree of accessibility of political systems. The former is characterized by their openness on the input side however it lacks the capacity to impose itself in the output phase. A *strong* political system is defined by institutional structures that limit their accessibility for outside actors which on the other hand enlarges the capacity to impose public policies (Kriesi et al., 1992, 2004). Furthermore, scholars have argued that the degree of openness and strength of the political system "is a function of its (territorial) centralization and the degree of its (functional) separation of power" (Kriesi, 2004, p. 70). A positive relationship between the degree of (vertical and horizontal) decentralization and points of formal access to political institutions and decision-making is assumed. Internally, the openness of the political system is determined by the (functional) separation of power whereby it is assumed that the greater the separation of power between the three branches (legislature, executive and judiciary on the state level), the greater the degree of formal access and the more limited the capacity of the state to act (Kriesi, 2004). Concerning the vertical territorial decentralization, Van der Heijden (1997) finds that in federal states such as Germany "many actions take place at the regional and local level" (ibid., p. 29). Furthermore, he adds that the nature of the electoral system also contributes to the number of points of access for social movements. Especially the availability of an "'own' political party" (Van der Heijden, 1997, p. 30), as for example a green political party for environmental movements, simplifies the exertion of influence of social movements on the political system. In general, there is a consensus that new social movements have much more affinity with left-wing political parties (Kriesi et al., 1992; Van der Heijden, 1997).

3.1.2. Prevailing Strategies and Informal Procedures

Beyond the formal institutional structures, opportunities for influencing the political decision-making depend on the *prevailing strategies and informal procedures* of the political

establishment that the social movements try to challenge with their demands (Kriesi et al., 1992; Van der Heijden, 1997). Kriesi et al. (1992) have categorized such strategies of the political system into either *exclusive,* that are repressive, confrontative and polarizing or *integrative*, that are facilitative, cooperative and assimilative strategies. Such strategies have a strong historical background in a given country. In their study, Kriesi et al. (1992) investigate four Western countries of which the Germany legacy is "typically one of exclusion and repression" (ibid., p. 222). The authors further combined the distinction of Kitschelt (1986) of strong and weak political systems with the distinction between exclusive and integrative dominant strategies in order to develop a typology of four distinct general settings for dealing with challengers. In a strong political system where the dominant strategy is exclusive, social movements neither have formal nor informal access to political decision-making (*full exclusion)*. Given the strength and centralization of the system, demands by challengers are often merely ignored or if any, confronted with repression. One of the intermediate cases is that of *formalistic inclusion* which is, relevant for this study, represented by Germany (Kriesi et al., 1992). In such setting, the POS allow for formal however, no informal access for social movements. Once the political decision-making sphere has been accessed, social movements usually are met with strong repression whereby they may have the possibility of veto, but no concrete concessions can be expected. In Germany, the federal structure allows for multiple access points for social movements ranging from the local to the subnational level whereby McAdam and Tarrow (2019) argue that "most episodes of contention begin locally" (p. 21). In contrast to formalistic inclusion, the second intermediary case of *informal cooptation* offers no formal, but informal facilitation for social movements. This includes public recognition and consultation on issues whereby substantive concessions can be made from the political system however, the challenger has no possibility of veto. On the other extreme of the continuum stands the setting of *full procedural integration* in which social movements can count on formal as well as informal access to the decision-making process. Since the political system is rather weak and has an inclusive strategy, challengers have the possibility of veto however, they cannot count on substantive concessions granted by the political sphere. Kriesi et al. (1992) conclude that the four settings have a country-specific impact on social movements with respect to their general level of mobilization, their form and strategy and the system level at which they are oriented.

3.2. *Strategic Repertoires of Social Movements*

In order to put the strategic choices of social movements into context, the basic premise is that exogenous factors such as the POS impact the choice of strategy by social movements

(Kitschelt, 1986; Meyer & Minkhoff, 2004)[1]. In order to elaborate on this hypothesis in the analysis section of this paper, this chapter reviews relevant approaches to the analysis of social movement tactics and strategies.

What distinguishes social movements from other political actors is the strategic use of noninstitutionalized forms of political expression. Protest is the fundamental feature that is typical for social movements in order to persuade authorities to support a challenging group's aim (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004). The dominant approach to the study of the tactics and strategies of social movements is Tilly's (1978) "repertoire of contention" which subsumes the variety of actions that are considered as protest ranging from *conventional* or *nonconfrontational strategies, confrontational tactics* and *violent acts* to *cultural forms of expression* (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004; Doherty & Hayes, 2019; Tarrow, 1998). Conventional strategies of political persuasion include lobbying, voting and petitioning. Marches, demonstrations and strikes, actions that disrupt the day-to-day life are classified as confrontational tactics. More extreme, violent acts inflict material and economic damage as well as potential loss of life. Cultural forms of political expression include rituals, spectacles, music, art and poetry which are integrated in everyday life. In difference to other political actors such as lobby groups, social movements often lack formal access to political institutions forcing them to come up with "novel, dramatic, unorthodox and noninstitutionalized forms of political expression" (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, p. 263). Elaborating on the concept of Tilly, the term "repertoire" refers to a set of strategic performances available to an actor within a polity to interactively make claims on the respective antagonist (Tilly, 2003). Hence, the repertoire of social movements is routinized and institutionalized to the extent that tactics of protest used by them "are so integral to popular views […] that sometimes a movement is remembered more for its tactics than for its goals" (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, p. 263). Scholars even argue that social movements should be more understood as clusters of contentious performances and protest events rather than as groups or organizations. For example, Fridays for Future is uniquely known for their global school strikes becoming their main strategy and ultimately the very name of the movement (de Moor et al., 2020). Thus, protest repertoires are *historically specific* since they develop over time and are consolidated by learning and best practice. Additionally, the repertoires of strategies are *modular*, meaning that tactics are open to

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[1] Kriesi et al. (1995) additionally argue that the type of movement is a decisive factor for the repertoire of strategies that movements employ. However, given the narrow scope of this paper, in this study, the type of movement will only play a little role.

adaptation once they become recognized by the public. The process of tactic evolvement over a) time and b) adaption is labelled as *tactical innovation* (see Chapter 3.3) that social movements make use of (Doherty & Hayes, 2019; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004).

Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) summarize recent work that encompasses criteria defining a collective action event. A first set of criteria involves that a) the event must involve more than one person in order to be collective, b) the actors must be making a claim or expressing a grievance and c) the event must be public. Secondly, the authors propose three essential features of protest events: *contestation, intentionality* and the construction of *collective identity.* Contestation means the involvement of bodies, symbols and identities to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalized power relations. In order to influence decision-makers, social movements make use of tactics that draw media attention to their claims. Another necessary condition that scholars have found is that collective action repertoires are intentional. That is, social movements act strategically with the conscious intention to produce or prevent change. In a related vein, Della Porta and Diani (1999 as cited in Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, p. 269) have formulated what they have called "the logic of numbers" which means that even when groups are small, they try to convey numerical strength through mass events since their ultimate goal is to intentionally influence decision-makers. The third component of collective action repertoires according to Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) is the construction of a collective identity that allows for developing an oppositional consciousness about common injustices. In that sense, social movements internally express solidarity that leads to the external embodying of shared values and practices in order to influence the system of authority that is responsible for those injustices (Doherty & Hayes, 2019; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004).

Beyond protest events, scholars examining the general strategic repertoires of social movements have developed two criteria to distinguish different types of movements. On that basis, the distinction between *instrumental* and *expressive* tactics is used in order to generate a classification of social movements. This dichotomy reflects the differentiation between *strategy-oriented* and *identity-oriented* types of movements, whereby the former is externally oriented, and the latter is internally oriented (Kriesi et al., 1995).

Another set of criteria to classify types of strategies is based on the type of interaction that takes place between the movement and the institution it seeks to influence. By *persuasion* movements try to appeal to the values of the target. With the means of *facilitation,* movements assist the institution they reach out for in acquiring knowledge and resources to in turn support the movement. When movements exchange electoral cooperation with its target in order gain

its support, one speaks of *bargaining.* The most extreme case is *coercion,* when the target gets punished for support of the movement (Kriesi, 1995; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004).

3.3. The Influence of External Political Factors on Strategic Repertoires: Tactical Innovation

As already indicated above, strategies and tactics of social movements are embedded in the context that movements operate in. More specifically, findings of social movement scholarship suggest a correlation between the ability of social movements to adapt their strategies in the face of their opponents' response and the level of protest success. Hence, the extent to which movements are "tactically flexible" (McCammon, 2012, p. 30) determines their success. Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) find that tactical innovation is necessary in order to avoid that protest tactics become commonplace and thus easily controlled by opponents. There are two main approaches that are used in order to explain tactical innovations and the group's selection of tactics: the first focuses on external (political) factors and the second deals with how internal movement processes promote innovation (Wang & Soule, 2016). For this thesis, only the external factors represented by the political opportunity structures are of interest.

The line of scholarly work that correlates changes in tactics and external factors have sought to explain innovation by linking it to the larger sociopolitical environment. As mentioned in Chapter 3.2, the tactical repertoire of social movements is exposed to the influence of changes in the political and societal structures and is bound by the political regime during a given period (Doherty & Hayes, 2019). Thus, the political level, be it the nation-state or any other institution in whose structures social movements are embedded in, is therefore central to the strategic repertoire of social movements. The "contentious politics approach" (McAdam, Tilly & Tarrow, 2007 as cited in Doherty & Hayes, 2019, p. 273) holds that major strategic decisions for social movements are shaped by the political opportunities available to them. In a related vein, McAdam (1983) argues that tactical innovation is rooted in movement-opponent dynamics. Ergo, the argument goes that movements would innovate their strategies when they a) experience defeat or b) their tactics become neutralized by the authorities they target. In order to approach a definition of the term, tactical innovation can be understood as a way for social movements to adjust to disruptive changes in the environment such as political or economic crises that generate unknown and volatile context (Wang & Soule, 2016; Zajak et al., 2021). Such adjustment can take many forms such as the development of entirely new tactics, the combination of pre-existing protest forms or new framings and resurrection of previously used tactics (Wang & Soule, 2016).

4.   Methodological Procedure

To recollect, in the first part up to here, theory on political opportunity structures and strategic repertoires of social movements in general has been presented. Having set the theoretical foundation, in the following part of this paper the analysis and results of the case study will be presented. The first part will be of a descriptive nature addressing the first sub-question concerning the general POS and strategies of FFF in Münster. For the second explanatory part, three working hypotheses are formulated:

H1: *The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted and thus changed the political opportunity structure for social movements.*

H2: *Given such modification in the POS, social movements have experienced a defeat in their strategies.*

H3: *Social movement have adapted its strategies according to the new configuration of the POS.*

In order to test these hypotheses, a case study of the Fridays for Future movement in Münster, Germany has been conducted. The study is based on three qualitative guided interviews that were held in May 2021 with five participants in total. The questions of the guidelines are understood to be quite open and flexible, allowing for narrative freedoms of the participants who are able to set their own thematic priorities (Flick, 2009). For this thesis, a guideline of thirteen individually adjustable question has been elaborated (see Appendix).

The participants were selected after what Patton (2002) describes as purposeful sampling. Hence, the cases were chosen given their theoretical yield that was presumed prior to the study. Above all, it was seen as necessary to capture the voices of the movement itself, thus the first interview has been conducted with two representatives of the local group of FFF. Intentionally, the two people selected are part of the public relations working group of the movement. Furthermore, the interviewees are in constant contact with the local politicians of the council groups and have been actively engaged in the development of the demands of the climate neutrality by 2030-goal (cf. FFF Münster, 2019; 643ff.). Since the aim of this study is to comprehend the full scope of the opportunities for movements to influence politics at the local level, it was additionally considered as crucial to include both "sides of the political coin". Therefore, all democratic parties within the council have been contacted, however, only two of them have replied and agreed to an interview. Consequently, two separate interviews with three

participants in total were conducted. For a first interview, two members of the council group of the SPD have been selected. One of them is the spokesperson for environmental and climate issues and is member of the council since 2014. The other interviewee of the party group is inter alia the spokesperson for sociopolitical issues of the party group and member of the council for over ten years. Both sit on the council committee for environmental protection, climate protection and construction. The third politician is member of the council group of the Greens, within which she is part of the executive board and shares the responsibility for transport-related policies. Within the council, she is a member of the aforementioned committee related to climate and environmental protection as well. Even though the choice of interviews with members of the council was limited given that only two parties replied, both the Greens and SPD are considered to be the most relevant actors to speak to since they form the governing coalition. To conclude on the theoretical yield of the interviewees selected, the purpose was to capture not only the mere political opportunity structures but the perceptions and interpretations of both sides.

The transcripts of such interviews serve as the material for the analysis of this paper. For that, the procedure of a qualitative content analysis according to Philipp Mayring (1983 referred to in Flick, 2002) has been selected. What characterizes this technique is the category-guided approach that can be used deductively or inductively. In the deductive approach, the transcript is analyzed using categories that have been theoretically justified in advance (Flick, 2002). In the context of this study, such categories are a) political opportunity structures, b) strategies and tactics of social movements and c) the impact of Covid-19 restrictions. By structuring the interview guideline roughly into these three parts, it was possible to assign the corresponding text passages to the pre-determined units of the analysis. For that, the questions were designed in such a way, that they verbatim asked for the pre-set categories. In a second step, the reorganized and reduced material was further analyzed by means of an inductive approach, meaning that further (sub-)categories and sense structures were derived from the answers of the participants. In general, a summarizing content analysis (Flick, 2002, p. 150) has been employed in order to paraphrase the material, to delete less relevant passages (first reduction) and to bundle similar paraphrases (second reduction). The condensed transcript material was then reviewed back to the categories offered by the theoretical framework before ultimately analyzed and interpretated in the context of the research questions. The following analysis is structured in the same way as the interviews. Thus, the first part is of a descriptive nature examining the POS that FFF faces and the strategies they employ. The second part aims to

explain the presumed impact of crisis, namely the Covid-19 pandemic on social movements and their possibility to influence politics at the local level of government.

5.   Analysis: Social Movements on the Local Political Level

5.1.   *Fridays for Future in Münster*

The following chapters aim to explain the impact of political opportunity structures on the strategies of social movements. In order to give a general overview on the political opportunity structures that FFF faces and their strategies to utilize those, the first part of the analysis deals with the descriptive sub-question (RQ1). For that the two representatives of FFF in Münster have been asked to explain their strategies and how they perceive the political system they operate in. Additionally, the interviewees of the city council have been asked to generally explain the possibilities of influencing political decision-making on the local level of government and how they perceive the actions of FFF in specific. In a second part, another factor will be added to the analysis of the POS and the strategies of social movements, namely the impact of the coronavirus crisis. In that part, the second and third research questions (RQ2 and RQ3) as well as the three hypotheses will be examined.

5.1.1.   Political Opportunities of Fridays for Future

***Formal institutional structure*.** In terms of POS, starting from the national level of government, the authors referred to above characterize Germany as having a *weak* formal institutional structure. The hypothesis of Kriesi (2004) is that the greater the territorial (vertical) decentralization, the more points of access for social movements are offered. In this case, it is the local level of government that FFF seeks to influence. In line with the hypothesis of Kriesi (2004), the representatives of FFF state that the municipal level is the one level that can be accessed (more) easily. It is the decentralized structure that allows for easy contact to the respective political authorities (797f.). In that point, both activists and politicians agree on that the municipal level serves as opportune leverage on the higher political level. Especially, since it is perceived that the higher the political level the more difficult it is to articulate societal demands (782f.). Concrete possibilities for FFF to articulate such demands to the political institutions are mainly provided by the *Einwohner*innen-Frage* [resident question] and the *Bürger*innenanregung* [citizen suggestion] pursuant to paragraph 24 of the municipal code of NRW (186ff.). The former enables FFF to directly address a question to the deputies of the council during a session. With that they manage to maintain presence and to shift the focus to their claims (908ff.) as well as that they receive concrete political statements of the council groups (255f.). The use of such instrument can be useful both in the input phase serving as an

idea provider to "*bring the topic to the table*"[2] (928f.), however, more importantly it serves as a constant wake-up call and reminder during the policy process and in the output phase. For example, the interviewed politicians report that FFF repeatedly poses the same question concerning the climate neutrality by 2030-goal. With that FFF manages to "*remind the council that the topic does not disappear from attention*" (258f.). The instrument of the *Bürger*innenanregung* is a concrete example for the accessibility of the council in the input phase. With such suggestion, the petitioner wants to induce the municipality to do or to refrain from doing something specific (Amt für Bürger- und Ratsservice [3], n.d.). However, both politicians and activists have evaluated such option as rather difficult, since a concrete suggestion needs to be supported by at least 8000 signatures (1403f.). A third option which is currently under debate for FFF, is the possibility of a permanent seat as *sachkundige Einwohner*innen* [knowledgeable residents] within the committees of the council. The politician of the Greens is currently trying to arrange such a seat which would give FFF the right to speak however, still no voting rights (1181f.). Furthermore, both political actors and FFF perceive the level they operate in as profoundly democratic allowing for the municipality to be actually effective, thus *strong* in the output phase. Functional separation of power on the local level of government is mainly characterized by the division between the executive, which is the *Verwaltung* [administration] and the legislative, which is the Stadtrat. Kriesi et al. (1995) find that it is above all the "parliamentary arena" (ibid., p. 27) that is crucial for social movements. In line with this assertion, the representatives of FFF have described that it is the parties within the council that are the most important points of contacts and hence, points of access to the institutional structures (898f.). Furthermore, the availability of an 'own' political party, one that is approximate to the social movement and its goals, is considered to be beneficial when it comes to influence of social movements (see Chapter 3.1.). For FFF in Münster, the Greens can be seen as a potential allied party (863f.) as well as the Left since they are congruent in their goals and values in many respects. However, FFF stresses that they want to remain non-partisan in general and distance themselves from any party affiliation (852f.). Furthermore, the activists emphasize that it is important for them to critically question any party, even in particular the Greens since the media portrays them as the being the party of FFF (867f.). Hence, in this case study the availability of an 'own' party does not seem to be a crucial

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[2] All quotes of the interviewees were translated subsequently since the interviews were conducted in German.

factor. Rather, it is the openness of all political parties that determines the success for FFF to reach the political level in Münster.

To conclude on the possibilities that FFF has to impact the political system and decision-making in Münster, one can deduce that the input phase of the policy cycle serves as the most important and most accessible point of contact for the group. As FFF has put it "*it is much easier to talk to the parties in advance and discuss about a certain draft resolution rather than to challenge it afterwards*" (994ff.).

Prevailing strategies of political authorities within the Stadtrat. The second pillar of POS relevant for this study, are the prevailing strategies of the political elite that social movements face (Chapter 3.1.2.). From the statements of the FFF-activists it can be inferred that within the parliamentary arena, all[3] political authorities are open for contact to social movements, although this has not been the case from the beginning (861ff.). However, according to the activists, there are "*different levels of difficulty to get in contact with them*" (856f.). Both politicians interviewed confirm that the level of contact and cooperation is dependent on the issue that is under question (318f.; 1295f.). Hence, for the political authorities it is important that the movement represents the same goals as the party they approach (356f.). Although FFF and the Greens have affinity in terms of content, FFF stresses that it is their advantage that they do activist work and mostly operate outside the established party system (874f.). What is more, contacting also occurs the other way around. That is, members of the political fractions seek contact with FFF for consultations and discussion. This is the case with for example the SPD and the Greens confirmed by both the politicians and activists (121ff.; 881ff.; 1259ff.). Furthermore, the interviewed representatives of the two fractions have both emphasized the additive value of the exchange with social movements for example for consultations within the process of submitting a request to the administration where the political authorities seek the specialized knowledge of FFF in terms of climate issues (145f.). Moreover, as one of the representatives of the SPD fraction has put it: "*It also inspires our own way of thinking*" (550f.). Based on these descriptions one might derive that the prevailing strategies of the political authorities in the council would be *integrative* according to the conceptualization outlined above. However, to the direct question for an evaluation of the openness of the political structures, the interviewees of FFF have indicated that they perceive the conduct of the political decision-makers as rather *repressive* (963ff.). They argue that "*appearances are deceptive*"

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[3] The representativeness of the political authorities will be discussed in the discussion chapter.

because "*there is a lot of talk, but not so much action*" (934ff.). They perceive politics on the local level as *Symbolpolitik* [symbol politics] and that the respective authorities would stage themselves a lot (952ff.). Such statements of both pairs of interviewees show how their perceptions diverge. While the politicians emphasize the additive value of the cooperation with FFF, which they also pro-actively approach, in contrast, the representatives of FFF appeared exhausted in the interview. They repeatedly stated that it is exhausting to always "*stay on top of things*" (967) and that they have to "*fight a lot to be heard and to be taken seriously*" (968f.). Moreover, the demand that "*politics should do its job*" (1160f.) once again underlines the impression that the political level presents itself as open in the input, however they fail to lift the concerns of the society to the next level on which they are actually processed (1173f.). FFF concludes, that the political authorities still lack the possibilities and the initiatives to textually incorporate citizens in the decision-making process.

To conclude on the prevailing strategies of the political authorities, one can recall the scheme of Kriesi et al. (1992), in which Germany is generally classified as *weak* concerning the POS and as *repressive* concerning the strategies. However, the previous results indicate that the case described here does not quite fit into that picture. On the national level, Kriesi et al. (1992) argue that Germany would represent the category of *formalistic inclusion.* However, for this case study, the credo is rather that "*institutionalized, there is little possibility of influence*" (1410f.), thus the classification of Kriesi et al. (1992) does not apply. Rather, the structures and strategies in Münster resemble the category of *informal cooptation*, however, based on the statements by the activists, it is debatable whether there are substantive concessions made by the political elite in favor of FFF. Hence, the theoretical scheme that has been proposed by Kriesi et al. (1992) may not be generally applicable to the municipal level of government.

5.1.2. Strategies of Fridays for Future

The second element that this study is concerned with is the strategic repertoire of social movements. In this section, the strategic repertoire of FFF will be put into the theoretical framework using information provided by the two interviewees of FFF which will be supplemented by their *Selbstverständnis* [self-image] in which the group has defined its principles, goals and methods (Fridays for Future Münster, n.d.).

Since the movement has its roots in Greta Thunberg who in 2018 went on strike on a Friday, the core strategy of FFF are the Friday's climate demonstrations (FFF Münster, n.d.). With such "low-threshold" (FFF Münster, 2019, p. 2) demonstrations, they aim to getting people out on the streets, to unite their voices in order to exert pressure on those holding political mandates

(821ff.). Such demonstrations which often take place in front of the city hall, are prototypical examples of *confrontational* collective action (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004). The three crucial elements that Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) name can be related to the actions of FFF in Münster as follows: they aim for *contestation* in that they directly address the Stadtrat when holding their vigils in front of the city hall. Furthermore, in line with what the authors referred to above have labelled as "dramatic and unorthodox" (Chapter 3.2.1), the group has been creative in their actions. In the summer of 2019, they have for example held two 24-hours vigils and organized an entire strike week during which they were on strike around the clock in the courtyard of the city hall (FFF Münster, 2019). FFF's action is *intentional* in that they use the number of people to demonstrate the importance of their claims concerning more climate action of the local government. The first vigil in 2018 started with fourteen participants and has steadily grown into the biggest demonstration in the history of the city on September 20th, 2019, when 25.000 participants were out on the street exerting pressure on the local political system (FFF Münster, 2019). At that time, the group's concrete intention was to bring the Stadtrat to the resolution to make Münster climate neutral by 2030 (841f.). And thirdly, regarding a *collective identity* the two interviewees have said that although the movement is very diverse, "*we meet in that one point, in which totally unite and where it is clear for us], there we] have to fight because only together, we can do it*" (720ff.). Hence, the movement is able to mobilize people from all social classes, political orientations and generations to address the injustices of climate-damaging politics for following generations. In all actions, FFF refrains from violence (FFF Münster, 2019).

Beyond forms of collective action such as protest events, FFF exerts direct influence on political decision-making processes, for example through conversations with political functionaries since they have recognized that "*it is not enough to stand in front of the city hall every Friday*" (822f.). Their general strategy to approach the Stadtrat is to make contact via the single fractions and their respective deputies. When there is a salient issue on the agenda of the council that the movement has an interest in, they make themselves familiar with the content, formulate their position to it and then contact the council groups to "*tap what their opinion is about it*" (829f.). Then there are two possible scenarios: either the conversations with the council groups reveal that the council group and FFF are on the same side concerning the decision about the issue under question. If this is the case, then FFF may simply accompany the council meeting in which the issue is discussed with a vigil in front of the town hall. The other scenario is that the conversation with the council groups makes FFF notice that there is "*a lot of work to be done to get it decided the way we would like it to be*" (833f.). Such work is to get

into substantive discussions with the council groups about the issue and to "*get pressure from outside*" (835f.). That is, they collect signatures for petitions, organize further demonstrations and vigils and offer people the possibility to write letters or emails to politicians. Hence, FFF combines both *conventional* and *confrontational* strategies when trying to *persuade* politicians of their grievances. Thus, based on the theoretical elements presented above, one can classify FFF as a *strategy-oriented* movement which applies *instrumental* strategies that are *externally oriented* rather than aiming for the internal formation of a collective identity. A prototypical example for such strategic approach was the movement's campaign to reach the goal of climate neutrality by 2030 with which FFF was able to exert sufficient public pressure in order to get the council to adopt the goal (841ff.). In general, the strategy of FFF Münster is to mobilize people in order to effectively use the opportunities they have to ultimately change the political framework that governs climate related issues rather than appealing to individual behavioral change (783f.)

To conclude, one of the representatives of FFF can be cited in that their strategies are twofold: on the one hand it clearly is the mobilization of the people on the streets to build a basis for the exertion of pressure on local politics. And on the other hand, it is the substantive work to get into discussion with the people holding mandates in the city council (1016ff.). Additionally, in terms of the utilization of the POS that FFF faces, the representatives of the city council have stated that in their perception "*it is only reasonable that accompanying to a suggestion or resident question, [...] FFF also seeks dialogue with the council fractions*" (189ff.) once their topic has been fed into the policy process in order to maintain presence so that the council groups are positive about the topic.

5.2.   Interim Summary: The Municipality as Opportune Leverage

To sum up, the strategic approach via the municipal level seems to be used by FFF in part as an opportune means of exerting pressure on higher political levels and in part for pragmatic reasons.

The municipality offers an opportunity structure that allows for FFF to influence political decision making on the local level that is actually climate relevant (1421f.). That is, the municipality has competences to decide concrete actions on site. Hence, by using the opportunity structure at the local level FFF aims to exert pressure onto higher levels of government since climate protection is a global issue. As a concrete example, FFF Münster specifically demands the city of Münster to be climate neutral by 2030 whereby the national demand is only until 2035. FFF argues that Münster can serve as a best practice case and "*take*

a pioneering role" (694) in order to demonstrate feasibility to the *Bundesregierung* [federal government]. According to the slogan "*think globally, act locally*" (576), FFF aims to change local structures in order to develop an impact beyond the municipality (582f.). Furthermore, FFF argues that for them it is important to hold all political levels accountable because it is necessary that climate issues are dealt with jointly (804f.). For pragmatic reasons, FFF addresses the municipal level since it has clearer structures that offer an easier access point for the articulation of societal demands. As the statements presented above show, it is possible to get into direct contact with the people who are responsible, and the people addressed have the capacities to take time for FFF's concerns (797ff.). Additionally, the municipal level seems to be democratically more accessible starting from the protest of movements up to a final resolution. The example of the climate-neutrality-by-2030 demand clearly shows a profoundly democratic process that has been imitated by FFF. Hence, the resonance for FFF on the local level is simply more promising.

To the question whether FFF effectively utilizes the opportunity structures to influence the Stadtrat, the politician of the Greens has answered what can be assumed as representative for all interviewees: *"I would say half-half. I think that FFF actively searches for opportunities and that in my opinion, in a very manifold and basically effective way.*" (1384ff.). From the political side of the coin, FFF engages a lot in content by exercising criticism and thus giving a "*push-effect*" (1391). However, the politician has doubts about whether FFF actually gains influence on political decision-making since she believes that this is predominantly dependent on how their engagement is received by the political parties (1387f.). What is problematic for FFF is that they do not gain much influence on those parties that do not put as much importance on the issue of climate protection as for example the Greens. Moreover, the majority ratios in the council do not change and since for her, there is no particularly strong persuasion process by FFF so far, she concludes that the overall influence of FFF is rather limited (1389ff.). However, she also criticizes that there are relatively limited formal institutional structures that allow for possibilities of influence. Ultimately, she finds that "*away from the institutions and simply in public discourse, there are possibilities, but their effects are then rather moderate.*" (1409ff.)

5.3. Protest Under Lockdown

As outlined in the background chapter (Chapter 2.1.), in March 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has put a halt to social protest. The following section of this paper deals with the two explanatory sub-questions (RQ2 and RQ3) that ask for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

on the political opportunities and strategies of FFF in Münster. To recollect, the anticipated relationship is that the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the possibilities for political influence of FFF since the restrictions related to the pandemic have modified the local POS. Hence, FFF has experienced a defeat in its strategies and therefore had to adapt its strategies (H1-H3).

5.3.1. Political Opportunity under Lockdown

In this section, the interview text passages will be examined indicating the modification of POS due to Covid-19 restriction measures in Münster (RQ2 and H1).

First and foremost, the Covid-19 pandemic has urged people to maintain distance to each other. Hence, at the beginning of the pandemic both council and committee meetings have been cancelled without replacement (103ff.). The deputies were only able to meet virtually in online meetings. However, such online council meetings were not quorum meaning that over a serious period of time, decisions have been postponed (1316ff.). Given the contact restrictions, the politicians were not able to directly get in contact with citizens resulting in that there were less *"platforms for discourse and exchange"* (1326). For FFF, this has been extreme difficult since their central target of influence being the council meetings, have been eliminated. In fact, at the time of the total lockdown, there were no formal opportunities to further advocate for their main goal of climate neutrality since any access to the formal institutional structures has been omitted. Concerning the cancelled council meetings, FFF has uttered the serious warning that "*we cannot afford to have decisions postponed […] such decisions must be made now so that we can still get our act together by 2030"* (1075ff.). When in-person council meetings have been re-introduced, FFF was still not able to demonstrate presence like they were able to do before the pandemic. They were not allowed to or at least restricted in joining the council meetings which one of the politicians has remarked in that "*the atmosphere in the room was different"* (1346). Normally, by joining the meetings even though FFF was not allowed to show any reactions, they still managed to demonstrate presence and raise awareness in the council (1344ff.). Further, especially in comparison to 2019 when FFF has been invited to many panel discussions, interviews and other public events, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has robbed them of such informal opportunities to influence politics (1057ff.). The only strand that FFF was able to hold in order to maintain informal access was that they were able to continue conversations with the council groups via online platforms of communication (1080f.). Positively remarkable is that the politicians of the SPD have found that there is now even more exchange with FFF than before the pandemic: "*I have three to four video calls with FFF per*

week. That exploded" (429f.). Since the local elections were held in September 2020, the new governing coalition came into force during the pandemic. Hence, with the Greens and the SPD in that coalition, new political opportunities have opened up for FFF which they seem to have used according to the statements of the respective politicians (431ff.). Although the direct contact to each other has been missing, both FFF and the representatives of the two council groups have positively remarked that the interaction via digital platforms has facilitated and valorized their conversations. First and foremost, the barrier for making contact has been lowered. Then, when in discussion, technical devices have supported the argumentation of the movement (520f.). However, in general, this is only advantageous for digital-affine movements (451f.). In the perception of the politicians FFF has successfully managed to maintain good conversations with them. Ergo, at least the SPD has denied that FFF has lost its presence during the time of the lockdown (476f.). Both interviewees of the SPD definitely agreed that FFF has managed to keep environmental and climate protection issues on the agenda. By comparison, regarding other social movements such as *Die Seebrücke[4],* the perception of the interviewees was unanimously contrary (479f.). The representative of the Greens has given a more reserved statement concerning the presence of FFF and the topics they advocate for (1336ff.). At the time of the elections, their influence was clearly noticeable however, already then, their outreach has been restricted due to contact restrictions. Their possibility to influence was further restricted by the absence of the demonstrations and vigils (1343f.). Since *"there were fewer people than would otherwise have been mobilized"* (1344ff.), FFF was not able to effectively use the POS to exert pressure on the decision-making process within the council as for example in 2019 regarding the climate neutrality by 2030-goal. In that point the interviewees of FFF have agreed with the politician. They perceived the period under lockdown as a *"pretty difficult phase* [during which they] *had to struggle with their presence a lot* […] *since* [their] *leverage to demonstrate on the streets* […] *has been eliminated"* (1038ff.). Hence, *"one track was closed"* (1052) so that they had to search for alternative possibilities of exerting political influence. And although the conversations with the council groups were steady and productive, they found that it was not enough to work in content, but it is crucial to exert pressure and generate external effect (1053f.). Additionally, regarding the prevailing strategies of the

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[4]*Die Seebrücke* is a social movement that advocates for a solidarity and human rights-based migration policy. They too are organized into several local groups. Since the original idea of this thesis was to conduct a comparative case study, information about *Die Seebrücke* has been gathered during the interviews. However, given the scope of this thesis, the comparative part had to be discarded.

political authorities, FFF has perceived it as if "*it was very convenient for many politicians that the topic of climate crisis was suddenly no longer so present*" (1056f.). One can infer from such statement, that the council groups for which the topic of climate protection is not such a crucial issue (1391f.), may have used the pandemic to shift the agenda.

To conclude on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the POS for FFF, it can be stated that presence has been the key struggle for the movement. Within the formal institutional structures, it is crucial for FFF to demonstrate presence in order to exert pressure on the decision-making process. They are only effective in using their opportunities within the council, when they have the crowds as their leverage. However, given the restriction of the right to assembly and the general contact restrictions, FFF has struggled to influence political decision-making during the pandemic, if there were any decision to be made. Although the representatives of FFF have summarized that the coronavirus crisis has not brought any advantage for them (1068f.), it should be remarked here that the exchange with politicians has been deepened and extended which originally, the group has described as their most important point of access.

5.3.2. Tactics and Strategies under Lockdown

The modification of POS is anticipated to have led to the defeat of the prevailing strategies of FFF which they consequently would have to adapt. Hence, this section examines the third sub-question and the corresponding hypotheses (H2 and H3) amid the theoretical part on tactical innovations (Chapter 3.3.).

Mainly restricted by the prohibition of assembly, FFF was not able to exercise their core strategy to demonstrate for climate justice every Friday. Consequently, they had to search for alternatives that were compatible with the Covid-19 related measures. They also struggled with the justification of public events, if there were any possible (1043ff.). For the activists, a conflict between staying with one's own scientific-substantiated convictions which would mean to refrain from any public mass event given the risk of infection and the urgence of demonstrating presence (1038ff.) has emerged. However, as one of the representatives of the group has said: "*If crises are already beginning to overlap, then you have to make sure that you don't disappear*" (1048ff.), the Covid-19 pandemic has even further strengthened the importance of the issue. Therefore, FFF swiftly and creatively came up with alternative protest actions that complied with the physical distancing rules (1083f.). Such alternatives were for example "activist walks" for which the group has called people to take their demonstrations signs for a walk in the public, "bike demonstrations" with which FFF was able to mobilize over 2000

people while respecting the corona measures or simply by putting up signs and posters at public spaces (1084f.). All events were heavily diffused online and accompanied by (social) media coverage in order to generate sufficient outreach. For example, in February 2021 FFF called for "snow people [snowmen]" to be built that hold the demonstrations signs that originally were painted for the cancelled vigils. FFF later posted pictures of them on their Instagram account (FFF Münster, 2021). Another example with which FFF aimed to mobilize protestors and strengthen their collective identity was the campaign "*Wir sehen Grün*" for which they called people for wearing green clothes, hang green flags out of their windows or show green lights (FFF Münster, 2021 [2]). Again, pictures of the action were shared via the group's social media profiles and additionally tagged by an own hashtag. Further online (protest) events such as discussions with local politicians and experts on several different issues were organized.

Although the movement came up with quite creative alternatives and as described earlier, managed to maintain the conversations with the politicians via online discussions, retrospective, both interviewees of FFF remain rather down-to-earth in their evaluations: "*It was all great, but not the real thing either.*" (1089f.). For them, it was a sincere challenge to stay politically active and remain present in the political sphere when "*you are thwarted like this*" (1130). Furthermore, there was a lot of frustration since especially after a successful year like 2019, the ambitions and motivations were high, however, FFF was not able to realize their ambitions the way they wanted (1131f.). Many planned activities had to be cancelled or at least scaled down which has taken a lot of energy and was challenging for the group dynamics (1135f.). And above all, even 2000 people on bicycles do not replace 25000 protesters marching through the city (1090f.). Especially during the period of the total lockdown, FFF has engaged in solidarity campaigns relating to other topics and issues beyond climate and environmental protection. Although issues such as antiracism, antisexism and global justice have been at the group's agenda before, the pandemic has once again put an emphasis to the fact that "*everything is connected*" (1105).

Referring back to the theoretical background on tactical innovations (Chapter 3.3.), mainly two of the three forms that Wang and Soule (2016) have listed can be found in the action repertoire of FFF Münster during the pandemic. First and foremost, with the hybridization of on- and offline forms of protest, FFF has combined pre-existing protest forms with newly development forms. Sticking to their core strategy "*bringing people to the street in order to exert pressure*" (821f.), protest remained their central action. However, given the ban of public protest due to the pandemic situation, FFF had to and creatively did pair their existing tactics with newer tactics such as using social media platforms for outreach more extensively than in

pre-pandemic circumstances. With such on- and offline actions, they have sought to decentralize their protest in order to comply with physical distancing rules and simultaneously maintaining visibility. The movement did not come up with "brand new tactics […] as if it has never been documented in protest before" (Wang & Soule, 2016, p. 520), however with their bicycle demonstrations, they have modified a commonplace tactic into a newer one that they have not used previously. Additionally, with their solidarity campaigns, FFF sought to innovate their action repertoires by new framings of issues. By focusing on various issues beyond climate justice, FFF has "spanned boundaries through intersectional frame bridging" (Zajak et al., 2021, p. 178) linking climate-related issues to other forms of marginalization during the crisis. In that vein, FFF has emphasized the importance of intersectionality in particular in a moment in which the Covid-19 crisis has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and additionally added new layers of vulnerability (1099ff.). However, the interviewees of the movement stress that it was not the crisis that has raised the awareness of the group but deeper learning process of the movement as a whole (1101ff.).

To conclude on the influence of the pandemic on the strategies and tactics of FFF it can be stated that FFF has indeed faced a defeat in their tactics mainly given that their strongest leverage has been eliminated. However, they came up with creative alternatives in order to proliferate mobilization and maintain visibility. In accordance with Tilly (1978) who has argued that action repertoires of movements change but do so very slowly, the findings presented above confirm how actors have responded to a changing context but equally, how these choices also mirror elements of their pre-pandemic protest repertoires.

6.   Conclusion and Discussion

This study has examined social movements on the local level of government, exemplified by a case study of Fridays for Future in Münster, Germany in a twofold manner. Firstly, building on a rich theoretical framework on political opportunity structures and strategic action repertoires of social movements, this study has contributed to the research field with a closer look at how social movements operate within a municipality. In a second step, the case study has especially been investigated under the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic that has developed in a global political and economic crisis.

The results of the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews that have been conducted indicate that the approach via the municipal level seems to be used by the movement primarily as an opportune means of exerting pressure on the higher political levels. Although FFF fights for a highly transnational issue, their strategy is adjusted to the local level for both

pragmatic and intentional reasons. From the perspective of the movement, it is crucial to address the municipality since they have decision-making authority in many climate-relevant issues and can take a pioneering role developing effect beyond the local level. Furthermore, for pragmatic reasons, the local political system is much easier to access. From the opposite perspective, the politicians interviewed have emphasized the content-related reinforcement that the cooperation with FFF would bring along. They favored the additive values, the impetus given by FFF which is very helpful for them in their work. At this point, a crucial point has to be discussed relating to the different perceptions of the activists and politicians. First and foremost, such contradiction in the perceptions has to be seen as a crucial strength of this thesis. That is, that this thesis is able to examine both the perceived opportunities of the FFF movement and additionally oppose them to the statements of the politicians. Such comparison has revealed a sincere difference in the perceptions and more importantly in the intentions of the two "sides of the political coin". Whereas FFF aims to actually make a difference by using the political opportunities they have and transforming them even more beneficially for them, the politicians seem to give less importance to the transforming character but more to the additive and helpful impetus that FFF offers to them. To put it in the theoretical frame, for FFF the aim of the interaction is *persuasion* whereas the politicians value the *facilitation* through the synergy with the social movement. To exaggerate a little, a thought that may come up is whether the political parties may instrumentalize the protest of the movement for their own purposes.

The period under scrutiny in this thesis constitutes a particular global moment, a time of unprecedented crises in modern history. The global health crisis of Covid-19 has left its marks on all parts of social life including social movements. The FFF movement globally known for their Friday demonstrations has been impacted massively by the lockdown measures and the physical distancing rules enacted by the German government from March 2020 onwards. Such measures have put a halt to the successful year of protest for climate justice and protection in 2019. In Münster, the local group of FFF has struggled a lot with their presence and visibility both in the public and political sphere. Hence, both the first (H1) and the second hypothesis (H2) have been confirmed. Nonetheless, the movement has shown great resilience by adapting to the new volatile circumstances with creative tactical innovations predominantly enhanced by the hybridization of on- and offline protest actions (H3). Although the movement itself was concerned with their presence, following the statements of the interviewed politicians, FFF seemed to be able to cut through the temporary monopoly the coronavirus had over the public's attention (cf. Zajak et al., 2021). However, once again the different intentions and thus perceptions have to be taken into account. To put it in the words of the deputy of the Greens, in

general FFF is actively searching and effectively using their political opportunities, however, for her, it is rather questionable whether their engagement is really influential and actually making a difference (1387ff.). And then, the pandemic situation has put a temporary stop to the political action of FFF. It is conceivable that "after" the pandemic, FFF has to fight a lot to once again claim their political turf.

Methods-related it has already been discussed that the incorporation of both sides of the political coin is a crucial strength of this study. However, in more general terms the representativeness of the interviews has to be taken into account. Firstly, concerning a mere quantitative representation, the participation (*n=5)* is rather low. Secondly, the selection of interviewees may be biased which poses a threat to the validity of the information obtained. Since the access to data was dependent on the willingness to participate of the contacted council groups, there is a risk that significantly dissenting assessments and perceptions are not heard. Therefore, it would have been desirable to conduct interviews with other political parties of the council which are more distant in content with FFF than the Greens who "*basically work in their direction anyway"* (1394) and the SPD who have continuously developed a stronger engagement in climate protection issues. However, it is not the claim of this study to make representative generalizations. Rather, it is the in-depth knowledge on the topic under study and the emphasis on the concrete perceptions of the interviewees. In terms of knowledge and richness of information, the selection of interviewees seems suitable since the politicians interviewed have climate-related responsibilities and hence are in contact with FFF. The respondents of FFF were intentionally chosen given their functions in the public relations department of the movement. In light of the rich information they have offered, this selection strategy has proofed itself as convenient. Additionally, the theoretical scheme of Kriesi et al. (1992) has to be discussed in terms of the applicability to this case. As indicated in the respective chapter in the analysis part, it was not possible to classify the case under study into the categories offered by the scheme. This may be related to the fact that the authors have developed such framework for the analysis of POS on the national level of government. For the same reason, the element of *configuration of power* of POS has been left unelaborated. However, what the analysis has shown is that concerning that element, a political opportunity has opened up for FFF in that the Greens, the SPD and Volt have formed the new coalition in 2020. Since all three parties are understood to have a greater affinity in content with the group, such configuration offers points of influence for the movement.

The analysis of this case study adds to the field of social movement research in that it offers insights on how social movements mobilize on the local level in order to influence politics at

their very homes. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews succeeded in finding answers to the three research questions: the political opportunities for FFF to influence the policy making of the Stadtrat have been carved out with a special focus on how the municipal level serves as an opportune leverage for social movements. Moreover, FFF's strategies to mobilize their influence both in times of "normal" protest action and in times of turmoil have been successfully analyzed. However, this early research can only be a stimulus for further research on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the society as large and especially on social movements since at the time of the writing process of this thesis, the struggle with the virus has not ended. A better understanding of the crisis and its meaning for social mobilization and protest is crucial since it may shape the global political regimes for decades to come (Pleyers, 2020). Ergo, a long-term study of social movements and their possibilities to influence politics would be of utmost societal and scientific importance. In the case of FFF, it should be further researched whether the movement is able to move the issue of climate protection back on top of the political agenda particularly on the national level of government. Furthermore, future research should take into account various actors of social protest and different types of movements since the argument of Kriesi et al. (1992) is that the possibilities of political influence and the corresponding strategies of social movements are additionally bound to the type of movement. Hence, an interesting approach would be to do a cross-case and further, a cross-country comparative study involving different types of movements and consequently yielding a higher significance regarding the impact of crisis on social movements in general. In this way, the weaknesses of this study concerning the validity and representativeness of the results could be addressed.

Referring back to the introduction of this paper, the results of this study are in line with the trend of transnationalization of social movements that inter alia Della Porta and Tarrow (2005) have described. Actually contradictorily, this study too shows how social movements contesting for transnational issues such as environmental and climate protection focus on local initiatives and decentralized actions in a multi-scalar system. To sum up, the case study of this thesis supports the phenomenon of the domestication of social movements as a prototype of transnational protest and emphasizes the potential of local protest as opportune leverage. Finally, the city serves as the arena for social movement protest that is concerned with transnational issues such as climate protection.

7. References

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Interviews conducted

All interviews were conducted online via Zoom. For each interview there is a declaration of consent by the interviewees which is presentable if needed given that all interviews have been anonymized. The template for such declarations can be found in the attachements.

Fridays for Future Münster on May 15, 2021 with two respondents.

SPD on May 18, 2021 with two respondents.

The Greens on May 24, 2021 with one respondent.

8. Attachments

See extra file in Canvas.

Attachment A: Interview transcripts

Attachment B: Declaration of Consent for Interviews

Attachment C: Interview guideline Fridays for Future

Attachment D: Interview guideline city council group